

GROWING UP WITH VIOLENT FATHERS: CONVERSATIONS WITH DAUGHTERS

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that '**GROWING UP WITH VIOLENT FATHERS: CONVERSATIONS WITH DAUGHTERS**' is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

November 2010

Thandazile G. N. Mtetwa

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This work is dedicated to women who have been affected by paternal violence.

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ABSTRACT

The effects of having witnessed their fathers' violent behaviour impacts on daughters for a long period afterwards, even in adulthood. This study explores this phenomenon by means of literature review and interviews. The literature indicates that the effects of paternal violence is linked to forced maturity, secrecy, pretending, self-blame, and negative impact on the daughter's relationships with both parents. A narrative approach was used to interview three adult participants. The conversations were analysed using thematic analysis and hermeneutics. Themes that emerged include avoidance, ambivalence towards the parents, aggression, assertiveness, and over-responsibility. There is a tendency to avoid intense, emotionally-laden, ambiguous and unpredictable situations through the use of interpersonal vigilance, an emotionally strong poise, distancing, being agreeable and devoutness. Also, there is a fear of becoming just like their abusive father. The psychological impact of being witness to a father's violent behaviours has long-lasting effects on daughters.

Keywords: adult daughters, avoidance, child abuse and neglect, coping, developmental impact, hyper-vigilance, interpersonal styles, narratives, paternal violence, witnessing violence

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Paternal violence exposes children to family violence at a vulnerable age when they are dependent on their parents or caregivers for physical, psychological and spiritual growth (Johnson & Lieberman, 2007). Children are formed by these experiences and the climate at home, and this informs who they become in future. Thus their experiences have an impact beyond their childhood, which is carried on to their adult lives and relationships (Kernsmith, 2006).

The effects of child exposure to paternal violence have been studied and documented, but not in great depth (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002). A limitation of some of the studies is that they look at the effects of domestic violence linearly, without factoring in 'how broader social, cultural and economic factors influence family life' (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 80). It is important to note that the risk factors related to domestic violence and child abuse do not perfectly explain or predict what the exposed child becomes as an adult (Murrell, Christoff & Henning, 2006). In part, this implies that one should look at the experiences of individuals; how they attribute meaning to events; and how they adjust their behavioural repertoire in an ongoing process. The past is continuously reframed and re-interpreted by our subjectivity, and is not historically frozen or static (Bruwer, 1983). The meanings that we continuously interpret inform and guide the lives that we lead and the behaviours that we exhibit. In this regard, Cater (2007) calls for further exploration of the perceptions that children have of their abusive fathers and how these perceptions affect self-perceptions and relational expectancies.

A lot of research focuses on the male child as being at greater risk of being an abuser if he grew up exposed to domestic violence (Kernsmith, 2006; Murrell *et al.*, 2006). Some studies report that girls mostly identify with the abused adult, thus having a greater risk of being victimised in adult relationships, but a growing body of literature shows that girls can grow up to be abusers themselves (Kernsmith, 2007; Murrell *et al.*, 2006; Schewe, Riger, Howard, Staggs & Mason, 2006). There is a relationship between being abused as a child and becoming an abusive parent; however, ‘the importance of this risk factor may have been overstated’ (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 68). Child abuse is also linked to other risk factors, such as: young parental age, stress, isolation, overcrowding in the home, substance abuse and poverty (Krug *et al.*, 2002). It is a phenomenon that is caused by a wide range of factors that interact in complex ways.

1.1 Aim and rationale

This study will focus on daughters who grew up with violent fathers; their journey of living with this formative history; how they continue to interpret and reinterpret the subjective meanings around these histories; and how this informs their adaptive and non-adaptive behaviours in relationship with significant others.

The first aim of the study is to acknowledge the experiences of women who grew up witnessing paternal violence and give them an opportunity to tell the stories which are otherwise not always spoken about.

Secondly, the study aims to explore, together with the participants, the continuation of journeys that followed since childhood and how they are linked to their subjective experiences and interpretations. Subjective emotions during the exposure and after, coping

skills during the exposure to paternal violence and after, as well as meanings that were generated and how they have evolved to shape their lives.

The rationale for the sample was motivated by the point that has been mentioned earlier that the general assumption is that boys tend to have overt behavioural effects of domestic violence. However, girls' responses to witnessing domestic violence are not easily linked in a direct way to domestic violence (Humphreys & Stanley, 2006). Hence, the focus is on females in order to find out the participants' perceived and experienced impact of domestic violence.

Furthermore, adult women were specifically chosen because not only will they give stories, but because their insight into their past and present and their ability to articulate their perceptions and experiences will be more extensive than those of children. Secondly, because the topic may be distressing and may evoke secondary trauma through recall for the participant, adults are in a better position to be referred to therapy if the need arises. In the next section the general research design of the study is explained.

1.2 Research design

This study was done using the paradigm of the social constructionist approach. The social constructionist approach maintains the belief that people see the world through the eyes of the values and norms of the societies we live or grew up in. Hence the researcher has no claims to neutral and distanced objectivity, but rather intersubjective agreement (Freeman, 1973). The researcher was a participant listener and interpreter of the stories due to her own subjectivity. Due to this awareness, participants were given an opportunity to comment on and validate the

articulations and interpretations made by the researcher. Also befitting the nature of the study, some of the narrative inquiry tenets were used as a guide in interviews. Josselson (2006) describes narrative inquiry as a way of conversation (telling of personal stories) through which meanings of experiences are ascribed, leading to potentially beneficial insights to the individuals' lives. Therefore, during the course of this study, participants were not confined to telling their experiences only, but had an opportunity to dialogue with their experiences in a way that could enhance growth, clarity, and also raise more generative questions and issues.

1.3 Outline of chapters

A brief outline of the contents of the different chapters is presented here.

Chapter 2: Definitions of keywords, and the body of literature that was explored is covered. Factors related to domestic violence, its prevalence and effects on children will be discussed. Previous findings of experiences of children are included.

Chapter 3: A detailed description of the research design used and motivation for its use is given.

Chapter 4: The results and findings of the interviews are described here. The experiences of participants are described and interpreted as themes.

Chapter 5: An analysis of commonly occurring themes is done and brought to bear on the relevant literature that was discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6: This chapter concludes the study through the discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study, the researcher's experience of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter the phenomenon of paternal violence was briefly introduced. The effects of girl children exposed to paternal violence have not been widely studied. The aims of this study are to acknowledge the daughters' experiences, to explore the meanings that they attached to their experiences, and the subsequent adaptive and maladaptive coping skills as they experienced them. Also in this chapter the research process of this study was briefly discussed and an outline of the different chapters was provided.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section of the study a selection of the literature and research that have been conducted in relation to the topic, are reviewed. We start by defining key concepts that are frequently used in the study. In order to better understand the South African context of the topic, the domestic violence act and the prevalence of domestic violence are briefly discussed.

Following that is the discussion of factors that contribute to domestic violence. These include cultural factors, lack of coping mechanisms and theoretical explanations (inter-generational violence, social learning, feminism, and attachment theories). For the purpose of clarity, these factors and theories are discussed separately; however, they are interconnected, as we shall see. Also discussed are some of the reasons why child exposure to domestic violence has been a neglected issue. These reasons include a definition of child abuse and the ethical complexities in performing research with minors.

The discussion proceeds to previous empirical findings of the effects of child exposure to domestic violence. These are psychological and behavioural. Then, the chapter ends with a description of some of the experiences of children who witnessed domestic violence, followed by a brief discussion of possible interventions and the implications thereof. Next is the definition of key concepts, in an alphabetical order.

2.1 Definition of key concepts

Adult daughters

Adult daughters refer to the sample of this study. These are women who are now adults, and who grew up as daughters being exposed to paternal violence.

Avoidance

This refers to an attachment style where the individual is unable to trust others within a relationship, hence, emotionally pulling away (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008).

Child abuse and neglect

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, 1996, defines child abuse and neglect as 'at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of the parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm' (Berkel, 2007, p. 13).

Coping

Coping refers to the strategies that individuals use in order to manage the discomfort and pain that are caused by certain environmental factors surrounding the individual.

Developmental impact

This refers to the impact (specifically, negative impact) that paternal violence has on the emotional, physical and spiritual development of the child.

Interpersonal styles

This term refers to the pattern in which individuals interact with others.

Narrative inquiry

Josselson (2006) describes the narrative inquiry as a conversation where through the telling of one's story, growth and enrichment can be achieved.

2.2 An overview of exposure to paternal violence/domestic violence

Paternal violence refers to a part of domestic violence whereby the violent partner is the father. Therefore, to understand paternal violence, one has to refer to the description of domestic violence.

According to The Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998), domestic violence is described as occurring between the abuser and the abused in the following types of relationships and living arrangements:

- married or divorced (under custom, law or religion) men and women;
- unmarried partners who are in relationships or living with their partners, including those in same-sex relationships;
- family members who are blood relatives or related by adoption;
- those who share or have shared parental responsibility for a child;
- those who are or were involved in a romantic relationship, sexual relationship, dating or engaged; and
- those who share the same residence.

However, for the purpose of this study, only daughters who were exposed to paternal violence (violence by fathers) were the focus of the study.

The Domestic Violence Act, 1998 uses the following classification of the forms of domestic violence. All of these are taken into consideration in this study, as most of them have a direct impact on children:

- *physical abuse* involves any act or threatened act of physical violence;
- *sexual abuse* refers to a behaviour that abuses, humiliates, degrades or violates the sexual integrity of the abused;
- *emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse* refers to a recurring pattern of degrading or humiliating the abused through insults or name-calling, threats to cause emotional pain, obsessive possessiveness which invades the privacy and integrity of the abused;
- *economic abuse* may consist of unreasonable withholding of financial resources which the abused is entitled to;
- *intimidation* refers to inducing fear in the abused by uttering or conveying a threat;
- *harassment* refers to acts that induce fear of harm to the abused; these may include loitering or watching outside of or near the building or place where the abused resides, works, does business, studies or happens to be; making unwelcome phone calls;
- *stalking* involves repeatedly following or pursuing the abused; and
- *damaging or destroying property* that is of value to the abused.

It is these kinds of behaviours that characterise interactions between some children's parents. Unfortunately, domestic violence has a high prevalence in South Africa. In the face of poor recording of domestic violence reports, as well as many cases going unreported, according to SpeakOut (2008) it is estimated that one in four South African women are survivors of domestic violence. People Opposing Women Abuse state that one in every six women who

die in Gauteng are killed by an intimate partner. They state that 25%, or one in every four women in South Africa are abused by their partners.

As we shall see in the subsequent discussions, domestic violence is self-perpetuating, not only through physical violence but through other forms of interaction which are passed on from victims to their children (Cunningham & Baker, 2004), There is a relationship between being abused as a child and becoming an abusive parent; however, as stated earlier, this risk factor may have been overstated (Krug *et al.*, 2002). Child abuse is linked to various risk factors that interact in complex ways. Hence, these high statistics show the high risk of that South African families run of reproducing and transmitting family violence to their descendants. It also gives an indication of the large numbers of children that are affected by family violence. In the following section some contributions to domestic violence are explored.

2.3 Factors contributing to domestic violence

2.3.1 Culture

Culture, social practices and psychological aspects of individuals and families contribute to the repetition of abuse going from one generation to the next. Many cultural practices privilege male dominance and are accepted by women as a way of living. Ramokobala (2008) mentions the issue of tribal chiefs in Southern Africa taking many wives, who are made to be dependent on their husbands for survival, thus entrenching male dominance. According to Mr S. Sithole (personal communication, February 19, 2009), who is a counsellor at Men as Partners, some of the men report that they promised themselves that they would never abuse their women, yet ended up being abusive. He believes that this may be caused by the fact that

some of the violent men grew up in violent environments. While they were aware that this is not a way to treat their partner, they did not know any other way to resolve problems except by violence. Males have been acculturated into patriarchy and this encourages male domination, with men seeing themselves as owners and competitors in a hostile world (Bregman, Bregman, Du Toit & Londt, 2009).

Another aspect of South African culture is the history of politically related violence that was at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s (Simpson & Kraak, 1998). Men tend to assert themselves and their masculine identity through violence, and this was expressed in gang-related violence, taxi-wars, street committees, violence by government agencies, and violence that used to take place among migrant workers in the hostels. During this time, extreme forms of violence were used in the struggle for freedom, and people became desensitised to violence, including violence against their female partners (Engender Health, 2007).

2.3.2 Lack of coping mechanisms

Men are taught the above-mentioned kind of superiority over women; however, women are becoming more powerful and emancipated [Mr S. Sithole (personal communication, February 19, 2009)]. New legislations and social practices emphasise women's and children's rights. As a result, this possibly brings frustration to men, who do not know how to redefine themselves when what they were taught to be and the reality is not congruent [Mr S. Sithole (personal communication, February 19, 2009)].

Simpson and Kraak (1998) speak about male emasculation. For example, males have been partially removed from a place of high authority and dominance in society. In general, women are taking control of their lives, seemingly not needing men for survival. This would

cause a man who does not have the necessary coping skills, to try and enforce his masculinity in some way – by using aggression.

It seems that men are faced with a lot of challenges that they were not prepared for by their cultural and familial contexts. Men have been taught to be emotionally controlled and restricted, and as the pressures mount, aggression can seem like the only appropriate option (Bregman *et al.*, 2009). Men are raised to be emotionally disconnected, and emotional connection and vulnerability is taken as a sign of weakness. This puts men in a difficult position and they need to keep things on the inside. So maybe it is no wonder that domestic violence is most often kept a secret within the family (Bregman *et al.*, 2009).

Factors such as strain on the family's finances, unemployment, sexual problems, and the need for control and power tend to fuel issues of lack of productive coping skills and low self-esteem, (Flowers, 2003). The combination then of low self-esteem, lack of productive coping skills, and the need for control and power as assigned by patriarchy, combined with no or little positive non-violent modelling, could lead to the occurrence of domestic violence [Mr S. Sithole (personal communication, February 19, 2009)]. A brief discussion of theoretical perspectives provides further explanations of this phenomenon in the next section.

2.4 Theoretical approaches to paternal violence

There are a number of theories that are used to explain the occurrence of domestic violence. Although described separately, these theories are interwoven and interdependent. Most of them seem to be rooted in the idea of modelling. Children are exposed to violence and an abusive manner of interaction, they are exposed to their mothers' coping mechanisms and are

affected by the coping strategies that their mothers use, and they learn from one or all of these.

2.5.1 Feminist theory

The Feminist theory considers violence to be based on patterns of socialisation that are patriarchal in nature (Kernsmith, 2006). According to this theory, domestic violence is justified by the society as a means for a man to enforce and maintain order in the house (Kernsmith, 2006). It views flaws in social structure in the form of patriarchy and male dominance as the cause of domestic violence (Bograd, 2001; Loue 2001). Their view is that society devalues women, their experiences and views are taken as inferior and secondary due to the fact that male domination affects all aspects of life.

According to the Black Feminist theory, which focuses on all forms of oppression including race and class, one of the ways to deal with domestic violence is to educate women and alter their perception about themselves. This theory also claims that there is a need to change the political and social domains and functioning, as it plays a role in perceptions of gender roles (Berkel, 2007).

2.4.2 Social learning theory

Social learning theory maintains that abusive and violent behaviour is learnt through witnessing violence as children (observational learning) at home or in the community, through being rewarded in some way for being violent, for example, a little boy being praised for slapping someone who stole from him (instrumental learning), (Baron & Byrne, 2000).

This theory is supported by Flowers (2003), who states that about eight in ten perpetrators of domestic violence have been abused as children or come from violent homes. Murphy and Eckhardt (2005) and Mr S. Sithole (personal communication, February 19, 2009) also found the violent family background to be the main theme in their treatment of abusive men. However, there have been studies that showed that some of the abusive men had grown up in harmonious, or what may be referred to as normal homes (Nelson & Thomas, 2007).

2.4.3 Theory of inter-generational transmission of violence

Murrell *et al.* (2007) hypothesised that inter-generational transmission of violence is due to modelling. According to them, there is generalised modelling, where aggression is generally accepted within families. Then there is specific modelling where specific modes of violence are used. The latter is said to be the most dangerous, because children who are exposed to multiple or severe forms of violence are more likely to learn and use them.

Research by Holt *et al.* (2008) found that inter-generational transmission of violence happens because a child who has been exposed to paternal violence either learns to use violence or becomes tolerant to abuse directed at her as an adult.

2.4.4 Attachment theory

This theory is closely linked with inter-generational transmission of domestic violence. According to Corvol (2006), in the families where there is domestic violence, crucial attachment aspects suffer. These aspects include emotional bonding, proximity to and

responsiveness of the caregiver. The negative impact on these aspects contributes to the emotional vulnerability of the individual. Corvol (2006, p. 118) states that:

Threats to the bond arouse extreme anxiety and anger. The loss of the bond gives rise to anger, sorrow, and grief. The emotional development of the individual and their ability to successfully establish relational bonds is powerfully impacted by the context of their attachment processes in the early development. Being raised by unavailable or erratic caregivers creates a pattern of attachment in intimate relationships that is characterized by hypersensitivity to separation; insecure, anxious emotional postures; and difficulty in differentiating and responding to care-seeking and caregiving behaviour. The emotional consequences of disturbed attachment ... create a deficit in the individual's ability to respond appropriately and flexibly to the demands and tasks required in their contemporary intimate relationships.

This theory emphasises the importance of the primary attachment figure. Therefore, when that figure is compromised due to family violence, the development of the child's emotional adaptive skills is compromised. And as mentioned earlier, lack of proper emotional strength can lead to parents' aggression, making it difficult for their children to have a secure attachment to them.

2.5 The neglect of children in abusive domestic contexts

For quite a long time, children that witnessed domestic violence in their homes were not considered to have been much affected by it (Hart, 2008). This is ironic considering that some of the explanations that are given for the occurrence of domestic violence is that some of the batterers had been exposed to family violence as children.

To illustrate how children have not been considered to be affected by witnessing domestic abuse, Geffner, Jaffe and Suderman (2000) discuss the fact that it is only recently that the Department of Social Welfare in the United Kingdom started considering the trauma of children who witness family violence, as opposed to treating the matter as only between the husband and wife. In the past, unless children were directly abused, there was little government reaction to what children experienced in their living environment. Similarly, in South Africa, the Child Protection Act only came into being in the past few years.

The following factors have played a role in delaying the effective assistance of children who witness domestic violence.

2.5.1 Ethical factors in research

The neglect of children when it comes to domestic violence is, among other factors, enforced by the ethics of research. According to Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos and Regan (2002), while research ethics are there to protect the participants, especially the vulnerable ones, from being exploited, they may cause barriers in reaching stories of children and thereby obstructing the affording of children an opportunity to much needed help. As a result, some or most researchers would rather do studies that do not involve much 'red-tape' and costly therapeutic intervention when it comes to participants.

2.5.2 Defining child abuse

Historically, descriptions of child abuse did not include cases of a child witnessing domestic violence. Child abuse, from a legal perspective, means any infliction of physical and psychological injuries, sexual maltreatment, and using the child for financial gain (as in child

labour), as well as neglect. According to Cicchetti and Barnett (1991) ‘...broader legal definitions of child abuse included emotional injury, neglect, lack of provision of medical services by parents, and factors damaging children’s moral development, in addition to physical abuse.’ (Feerick, Knutson, Trickett, & Flanzer, 2006, p. 37),

According to Childline (2006), there are four types of child abuse. There is sexual abuse, which includes acts of forcing or persuading a child into sexual acts, pornography, sexual suggestions or comments and or sexual intercourse. Then there is physical abuse, which involves harming the child physically by beating, burning, or other acts that may result in serious bodily harm. The third type of abuse is emotional abuse where the child is ridiculed, told how worthless he or she is, and generally tearing the child’s self-esteem down. The fourth and last one is neglect whereby the child’s needs (educational, clothing, food and shelter) are deliberately not taken care of by the parent.

According to the World Health Organization (Krug *et al.*, 2002), child abuse is described as all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, development or dignity (Dancey, 2002).

The aforementioned definitions are vague with regard to the *witnessing* of domestic violence. This is despite the understanding that most children who witness domestic violence are actually abused according to part or all of the above definitions (Childline, 2006). Some children become aware of sexual degrading happening to their mothers; some, in an attempt to help their mothers, are physically harmed. Also, where there is financial abuse, children

may suffer because their needs are not being met as a result of the father trying to control the mother's financial independence.

Moreover, according to Neighborhood Support – New Zealand (2008), 'Violence is committed "against a child" if the child is abused or even allowed to witness abuse of a person with whom they share a domestic relationship. Threats or intimidation of the child's mother qualify as violence against the child, if the child witnesses those threats.'

In recent years, child exposure to domestic violence is increasingly becoming a priority and is recognised by law as a child protection issue. Below is a discussion of empirical findings on the effects of child exposure to domestic violence.

2.6 The psychological effects of child exposure to paternal violence

The following possible effects on children show that witnessing domestic violence does form part of child abuse or neglect. In various studies, the amount of behavioural and emotional problems that children who witnessed family violence experienced, was equivalent to those experienced by children who were directly physically abused (Geffner *et al.*, 2000; Sternberg, Baradaran, Abbott, Lamb & Gutterman, 2006). Children who are exposed to domestic violence are prone to develop both internalising and externalising problems (Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, Von-Eye & Levendosky, 2009).

The potential psychological problems that children who witness domestic violence may suffer are vast and depend mainly on the circumstances of the child in terms of support available, the child's emotional and intellectual maturity, as well as the personality of the

child (Humphreys & Stanley, 2006). However, Martinez-Torteya *et al.* (2009) mention that some of the children function adequately despite being exposed to domestic violence. The invisible inner processes of these children may not be observed but play a part in self-perceptions and decision-making (Cater, 2007).

Boys who grew up in abusive homes were three times more likely to also be aggressive towards their partners (Strauss, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1991). It appears that the violent home environment normalises the violence to such an extent that they tend to grow up to be abusers; whereas girls are more likely to accept and tolerate abusive partners (Dowd, Singer & Wilson, 2006). Witnessing violence at home desensitises boys to violence and they become more prone to being involved in violent crimes (Schewe *et al.*, 2006).

Geffner *et al.* (2000) state that children who witness domestic abuse often develop behavioural problems. Depending on the child's developmental age, children may have temper tantrums, be irritable or restless. Other children present with internalised reactions such as somatic symptoms (e.g. stomach aches), withdrawal, fear of separation and general anxiety. At the extremes, some children present symptoms that are severe enough to warrant a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In fact, Geffner *et al.* (2000) compare the trauma of children who witnessed family violence with the trauma of children who experienced war, with the difference that the former group experienced trauma that was inflicted by their caregivers, often over prolonged periods of time.

The most common characteristic of children who witness domestic violence is difficulties at school. These may present as withdrawal, poor academic performance, and an inability to

behave properly in social situations at school (Dowd *et al.*, 2006; Humphreys & Stanley, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

2.7 Summary

In this section, definitions of key concepts were provided. This focus has been on paternal violence as part of domestic violence; hence, domestic violence was discussed in terms of the Domestic Violence Act of 1998. The description of the Act provides a picture of what is involved in cases of paternal violence. Factors that contribute to domestic violence include culture, especially cultures where male dominance is acceptable (Ramokobala, 2008), and patriarchy. Another factor is lack of coping mechanisms. Theoretical approaches to domestic violence include the feminist theory, which challenges male dominance and social structures that support it. In social learning theory, Baron and Byrne (2000) write about the effect of observational learning. Another theory is inter-generational transmission whereby authors like Holt *et al.* (2008) explain that, through exposure to violence as a child, one may grow up to be tolerant of violence or be violent oneself. The attachment theory addresses the importance of attachment to the primary caregiver as a lack of attachment has a negative developmental impact, may lead to frustration, and consequently to an abusive way of being.

The neglect of children in violent domestic contexts was also discussed. The first reason for this neglect has been the fact that domestic violence has been viewed as a matter only between the parents involved. The second reason has been that ethical factors have to be taken into consideration when doing research with children. The last mentioned factor is the unclear inclusion of domestic violence as a form of child abuse. This section was concluded

by discussing previous findings of the impact of domestic violence on children, both boys and girls.

In the following section of this chapter some of the recorded experiences of children experiencing paternal violence are discussed.

2.8 Paternal violence – experiences of children

2.8.1 Altered family and social relations

Experiences of domestic violence differ from child to child. This is because children are different from each other even when they are from the same family. There are, however, certain issues that seem to be common.

2.8.1.1 Emotional insecurity

Children usually struggle with the normalcy of domestic violence. There is a great deal of confusion that occurs especially with children who are born into such an existing situation of violence. They are usually unaware that this is abuse. And the confusion comes in dealing with the contradiction that something that causes them so much pain and sadness can be normal (Geffner *et al.*, 2000). For children who had not known violence in their home before, it comes as a shock, and they find themselves having to suddenly make sense of the new status quo (Geffner *et al.*, 2000; Mullender *et al.*, 2002):

I just thought that my mum and dad didn't love each other anymore. I knew my mom wasn't doing anything wrong. I had no idea that it was going to be this bad ... Up until then I really was – I sided with my dad most of the time. (13-year-old African girl) (p. 95).

According to Freeman (2008), children living in and witnessing domestic violence experience a tremendous amount of fear most of the time, because they do not know when the next episode will be. This fear impacts negatively on their emotional security.

2.8.1.2 Forced maturity

One of the issues that come up for children who witness family violence is that of assuming the role of a parent. This usually happens with older children. In violent homes, the mother is usually preoccupied with making sure that she does not offend her partner, and may in the process neglect the needs of the children, which is where the older child may take the role of parenting the younger siblings (Geffner *et al.*, 2000; Humphreys & Stanley, 2006; Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Some children, because of their circumstances may even have strained sibling relationships, because, in addition to being immobilised by fear and the unpredictability of their environment, they then have to be unduly responsible for their siblings (Geffner *et al.*, 2000). According to Childline (2006), many children call the Gauteng centre because of domestic violence. This points to their attempts to take responsibility to try and address the situation.

2.8.1.3 Secrecy and pretending

Witt (1987) states that abuse remains within the boundaries of the family because it is 'normal violence', and because of the social definition of a family as a 'private grouping' (Witt, 1987, p. 122). This makes it difficult for the child to tell others outside the family about what is happening. Most of the time this violence is not announced to the outside world. The child in this situation, has to carry the burden of secrecy and pretend that everything is well. The child not only covers up because it is the norm to keep things quiet

(Mullender *et al.*, 2002), but also because of the shame and stigma that is attached to families who are living with violence (Geffner *et al.*, 2000).

2.8.1.4 Self-blame

One child when interviewed, said: ‘One day I got him so mad that he hit my mom’ (cited in Freeman, 2008, p. 497). Most children blame themselves for what is happening, as some of the incidents of violence may begin after arguments about issues that concern the children; some internally blame their mothers for not leaving the abusive partner. And it is with openness between the mother and child that a better understanding can be enhanced; by letting the child understand that it is not their fault, and by talking about the fact that some mothers actually stay in the abusive relationships for the sake of their children – to provide them with a home. Girls are more prone to feeling guilty and blaming themselves about the situation (Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008; Humphreys & Stanley, 2006).

2.8.1.5 Mother-child relationships

As mentioned briefly in the preceding section, the mother-child relationship is crucial, and even more so in a domestic violence situation. Actually, Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, Wilson and Zak (cited in Freeman, 2008, p. 498) state that:

The impact on the child of witnessing wife battering may be partially a function of his or her mother’s degree of impairment following such events, as well as the concomitant disruption and uncertainty that the child typically feels.

Unfortunately, it is almost inevitable that domestic violence will have an adverse effect on the relationship between mother and child. Tradition usually puts the mother in a role of caring in the family, the one that serves as the emotional ‘shock absorber’ at home when

things are not going well, and the comforter, letting her children know that things will be okay. So much emphasis is put on the mother's ability to take care of her children that that in itself puts much strain on a mother, because in this situation she is expected to perform her motherhood duties normally in addition to the fear-provoking uncertainty of her life.

In a study by Mullender *et al.* (2002), some of the mothers reported that because of the violence they had lost their confidence in themselves as being capable of being good mothers. They also felt that they were failures as they could not protect their children from the life of violence. Some of them became emotionally withdrawn and found that the emotional, social, and academic demands of their children became too much for them. As a result, some mothers show inconsistent amounts of aggressiveness and warmth towards their children (Holt *et al.*, 2008).

Emotional numbness may also become a factor resulting from the emotional pain and confusion that the mother feels (Geffner *et al.*, 2000). These situations are likely to result in the child learning to distance herself from the mother. One would then wonder what happens to the young daughter, because according to social norms, children learn from and identify more with the same-sex parent.

Abusers usually demean their partners in front of children. Verbal, physical, and even sexual violence in some cases happen in the presence of the children. This undermines and strips the mother of the authority and respect that she needs for parenting (Humphreys & Stanley, 2006).

Furthermore, the mother's ability to parent is stripped by the unpredictability of the situation. The violent partner's behaviour evokes so much anxiety that the mother has to be almost constantly on guard not to 'provoke' her partner. This puts the children at the margins of her attention – even if it is unintentional on her part (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001).

The other equally unfair and painful position that the child is put in, is when the abusive partner uses the child to abuse the mother, as in the following examples from Mullender *et al.* (2002, p. 163):

I haven't been able to see my son for three months because, the last time, I got a beating from my husband. And if I meet my son, I'm frightened he will tell his father where I am because he will get it out of him. So, at the moment, I am not able to contact my son. (A mother's story).

One night he were proper bugging me, asking me all these questions about her: 'Was she this?', 'Did she that?' And he got really angry and jumped out of bed and slapped my mum really bad. I was crying and crying. He beat her up with me crying my eyes out! (A teenage boy's story).

These are some of the examples of the strain that paternal violence may cause in the mother-child relationship. The child is put in a difficult position because the violent partner may make it look like it is the information that he got from the child that caused him to beat his partner – at least in the child's eyes. In one of the interviews, a particular girl felt that, no matter what she did, she just made things worse, so she stayed away from home as much as she could (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, the time that could have been spent

strengthening the bond between the mother and her child is spent worrying about how they can avoid ‘incriminating’ the mother which could lead to further violence. This shows the self-blame that was mentioned earlier and how it impacts on the mother-child relationship. Geffner *et al.* (2000) state that witnessing the family violence undermines the child’s emotional security – which most of the time is rooted in the mother.

2.8.1.6 Father-child relationships

This is one of the most difficult relationships for many children, and may be characterised by emotional confusion and ambivalence towards the father. Children find themselves in a double-bind situation even with their own feelings, harbouring adoring as well as negative feelings towards their abusive father (Burman & Duffy-Feins, 2007).

Some of the children feared losing the father’s love and support should they openly show affection for their mother (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). This means that they did not feel that their father would love them unconditionally; that it is their actions that would determine whether they are accepted or not.

To further illustrate the emotional ambivalence, Mullender *et al.* (2002) and Freeman (2008) state that even though for some children there is a notable emotional distance between them and their fathers, there is a desire to be close to them. Some children referred to their own fathers as ‘that man’, and yet acted in ways so that their fathers would notice them.

Such a distant relationship characterised by constant authoritarian discipline, which seems to characterise abusive fathers, further drives the wedge between the child and father (Mullender *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, Freeman (2008) states that too often the child is also

verbally and physically abused by the father during disciplining. Sometimes the father may also be jealous of the child's closeness to the mother, or of the child's achievements and things that the mother buys for the child (the latter may fit in with the financial part of the abuse). According to Freeman (2008), this jealousy sometimes goes on to sexual jealousy where the father suspects the daughter (usually teenage) of sleeping around. This means that some children are likely to experience their abusive fathers almost exactly how their mothers experience them.

2.8.2 Coping strategies

As we shall see later, children can be resilient and develop functional coping strategies. To only consider the evidence of pathology and maladaptation is to overlook the emotional health of the children who have, through their resilient spirit, held themselves 'together' even in the face of ongoing family violence.

In the above discussions it was shown how family violence negatively affects children who witness it. It is also important to acknowledge the strength, courage and resilience that most of these children show in order to carry on, while still in the violent home situation, and even how they manage to pick up the pieces of their lives afterwards and still carry on. According to Humphreys and Stanley (2006), most children thrive once they are out of the abusive home environment.

... the protective factors and behaviours that contribute to coping mechanisms include positive self-esteem, personality factors (being easy-going and humorous, for instance),

secure attachment to non-abusive parent or carer, the existence of networks of personal support, and supportive community and social networks (Rutter, 2006).

This reveals two categories of children's strategies to cope with family violence. The first one is dependent on the internal aspects of the child; and the second one has to do with the support system.

In one study, children who were exposed to paternal violence showed more competence academically than the control group (Humphreys & Stanley, 2006). This behaviour could be seen as an attempt to compensate for the family life that the child has no control over. Also, the striving for achievement at school, for example, could be because that child has told herself that she needs to work hard in order to work her way out of her situation. It could also be means by which she draws positive attention to herself, for example, teachers' attention; and thereby, inadvertently attracting the support system she needs.

One other coping strategy that is very active and head-on in coping with domestic violence is that some children reported finding someone they could talk to, instead of bottling everything inside and dealing with the pain alone (Mullender *et al.*, 2002).

Kelly and Radford (1998) and Koos and Burkhart (1989) identified two mechanisms when dealing with sexual abuse, which research has found to be evident in children who had to deal with domestic violence. The first mechanism is that of protecting oneself by constantly adapting to what is going on, in a way, eliminating the element of shock and novelty of each incident. The second mechanism is found in children who had been out of the abusive environment for some time. This mechanism is called reframing. With this stage, the child or

individual finds a way to come to terms with what has happened, makes sense of it, and actually successfully deals with its negative effects and finds the courage to move on with life.

As mentioned earlier, the other important factor in coping with family violence is for the child to have support, whether from the non-abusive parent (which in this case will be the mother), from teachers, extended family members, siblings, friends, and so forth. Actually, the presence of these support systems can play a very significant role in building up enough self-esteem and courage in the child for her to self-sustain when the need arises (Kim-Cohen, Moffit, Caspi & Taylor, 2004). The personal factors and environmental factors are interrelated in enabling the child to cope and at a later stage to deal with having witnessed domestic violence.

2.8.3 Summary

In this section of this chapter the already recorded experiences of children exposed to paternal violence were explored. First in discussion was the altered family and social relations. Some of the children exposed to paternal violence experience emotional insecurity due to the double-bind situation they have to witness. Others are forced into maturity as they take on parenting roles in order to help the abused parent. A life of secrecy and pretending is also experienced as domestic violence is viewed as a private family matter. There is also shame associated with coming from a home with paternal violence. Most of the time, children blame themselves for what is happening in their home. Mother-child relationships are affected and proper attachment is not easy because the mother would be preoccupied about the next attack, is emotionally too drained to deal with children's needs, feels depressed or even abusive

toward her children due to her frustration. Father-child relationships are also affected. The child holds affection for the father but feels embarrassed, angered, and most probably fearful of the father.

Despite the adverse experiences, children who are or have been exposed to domestic violence have been found to be quite resilient. Their personality, self-esteem, secure attachment to the non-abusive parent, and external support from other adults have been found to be factors that have a bearing on their ability to cope. The other two mechanisms of coping are reframing and ongoing adaptation.

2.9 Interventions and their possible implications for the child

One of the challenging issues is the issue of what is in ‘the best interest’ of the child (Hart, 2008, p. 96). So far attempts are being made to protect the child from an abusive environment, and unfortunately, none of such attempts are completely without some negative implications for the child concerned.

The most common option to finding help is to involve law enforcement by calling for the police to intervene or laying a criminal charge against the abuser. However, research shows that a lot of women are killed by their spouses while trying to get out of the relationship (Maguire, Morgan & Reiner, 2007), sometimes even after the court interdict has been obtained. Also, according to Geffner *et al.* (2000), some children identify with the seemingly stronger parent which is the abuser, and removing him this way may cause other problems if the situation is not properly dealt with. Lastly, but equally important, Hart (2008) reports on numerous instances where the justice enforcers do not have a clear idea of the impact that

paternal violence has on the child, thus making rulings that further jeopardise the child's well-being. Interventions form part of what sometimes becomes an important aspect in domestic violence situations. However, this does not form part of this study.

2.10 Summary

This chapter was introduced by defining some key concepts, and giving a fuller understanding of domestic violence in general.

In this chapter we have discussed how patriarchy, cultural practices, and lack of coping mechanisms all interact and perpetuate and maintain the occurrence of domestic violence. It was explained in terms of the social learning theory, attachment theory, theory of inter-generational transmission of violence, feminist theory, and social stress theory. The emphasis in this discussion was on societal contributions and the disruption of the emotional development of the child.

Given these effects of child exposure to domestic violence, it is clear that this topic has not been given enough attention. Until recent years, ethical practices in research and the legal definition of child abuse have contributed to children suffering abuse through witnessing domestic violence, not being protected and having their pain and trauma acknowledged, and not being dealt with as with all other forms of child abuse.

Researchers have identified a number of observable effects of child witnessing of domestic violence. These range from behavioural problems to social, educational, and emotional problems. In addition, there are the effects that children have themselves reported to

experience when they had a chance to tell their stories, as well as what the researchers deduced from these stories. These include emotional insecurity, self-blame, and difficult relationships socially, as well as with siblings and with either of or both of the parents.

With all of these experiences, children have to have ways of coping with the domestic violence. Not all the coping strategies are effective. However, for some children, in their desperation they are the best way to cope.

There are, then, structures that are put in place in order to assist women and children who are living with domestic violence. However, so far, all the options to solutions present with some or other challenge which still impacts on the child.

The discussion was general in terms of the children who were used as examples.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter explains and motivates the paradigm, methodology, and process that were used in the study. The discussion begins with social constructionism as a paradigm or stance that the researcher took in approaching the study. The narrative inquiry discussion is included as it informed the manner in which interviews were conducted. Then the procedure that was followed, from sampling, data collection, to interpretation and reporting, is discussed. Also included in this chapter is the discussion of ethical considerations.

3.1 Research paradigm

3.1.1 *Social constructionism*

The social constructionist approach maintains the belief that people see the world through the eyes of the values and norms of the societies they live or grew up in. Through language, as people interact in different contexts, meanings of experiences are created and are embedded in that particular society's way of thinking. Through interactions, in a particular context or society, normative narratives are created and operate as dominant discourses; for example, there is the dominant discourse that men have ownership of their wives and children. This is one of the dominant discourses that pathologises and deems individuals' views that do not subscribe to these discourses as invalid; because when a man treats his family with love and respect, he is said to be not man enough (Ramokobala, 2008)

Social constructionism aims to challenge and reconstruct those dominant discourses that pathologise certain individuals (Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996). This links to therapeutic endeavours, as Coale (1994) states, in therapy the dominating discourses that are problematic are co-constructed by the therapist and client to create new working meanings. In social constructionist research, the researcher and the participant co-construct discourses for the betterment of the client. Seen from this angle, the study is closely aligned to therapeutic principles.

The acknowledgement of these constructions enables the researcher to understand and contextualise the participants' views, and not be judgemental, as society, culture, and even schools of thought, play a role in the way in which the participants describe their truth or history. The Social constructionist approach is relevant for this study because it assists in the exploration of meanings which are partly influenced by the social interactions and discourses.

3.1.2 Narrative inquiry

While this study was not conducted purely as a narrative inquiry, the researcher was informed by and used some ideas based on the narrative approach, especially in conducting the interviews.

Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that, as human beings, we interpret everything that happens in our lives and that the meanings that people attach to their experiences have a certain impact in their lives (White, 1995). According to White (1995), human beings live their lives according to the meanings that they hold about their past experiences; thus no two stories can be exactly the same. The meanings result from interactions and negotiations. This

puts certain responsibilities upon the inquirer because he or she at the time of the interview also forms interactions (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009).

White (1995) states that it is important for the inquirer to find the person's preferred ways of living, rather than using the socially prescribed ways to elicit stories and generally held meanings. He also states that it is important to facilitate the telling of the previously ignored experiences.

The purpose of narrative inquiry is not to solve problems, but to engage in interaction where new meanings can be created. Stories told, with their characteristic contradictions, moving to-and-fro between the past, future, and present, and discrepancies between actions and thoughts, all bring to the consciousness the new awareness of how people have managed their lives, how they have been influenced, and how they choose to tell their stories (White, 1995).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), narrative inquiry has specific characteristics (which they call 'lenses') that distinguish it from the rest of the qualitative forms.

Narrative is retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience.

Narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 656).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also state that the story of the narrative is very much about the importance of the story to the participant. It also includes emotions, thoughts, interpretations, and the general view of the narrative as the narrator sees it.

Narratives are also distinguished by their oral culture, as the research is done through talking. 'Among other things, narrators explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain, and confirm or challenge the status quo,' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 657). This means that the narrator is given opportunity to redefine and reconstruct her experiences according to the position from which she is looking at the experiences. The researcher respects the narration of the participant and considers it to be true. This is important as it emphasises the research as focused on and about the participant. Chase (2005, p. 665) mentions the importance of "creating a self-reflective and respectful distance between researchers' and narrators' voices".

Another lens that is used by researchers in narrative inquiry is that of the definitions of self by the narrator. The researcher looks at these descriptions in terms of the narrator's social context.

The fourth lens acknowledges the role of the researcher. It acknowledges that the way that the experiences are narrated by the participants will also depend on how the researcher interacts with the participant. Therefore, the researcher ought to be positively involved and be aware that she is not a passive listener, but actually contributes a lot to the extent to which the participant feels free. Fox (2006) and Trahar (2006) echo this, and point out that self-awareness and reflexivity are crucial for the inquirer who engages in narrative inquiry.

Then the last lens is that which is about the researcher being the narrator herself because she narrates the experiences during, and after the interviews, and narrates the results in a form of writing the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In the interest of creating a context that is non-pathologising, that is respectful to the participant and where oppressive practices can be positively challenged, Zimmerman and Dickerson (1996, p. 303) suggest the following guidelines for narrative interviews:

Problem construction and externalising questions. This means that the researcher asks questions in a way that separates the participant from the ‘problem’, for example by looking at the role of culture in the formation of the problem.

- *‘Effects’ questioning.* These give the participant a chance to reflect how she experiences the ‘problem’ and how it affects the various aspects of her life.
- *Deconstructing question.* These questions reveal the implicit effects of experiences, thus revealing hidden or overlooked ways of beings.
- *Re-storying questions: Entry points.* These questions connect the past, the present and possible future.
- *Re-storying questions: Landscape of action.* These questions bring forth the awareness of how the participant has acted, how the actions were influenced by what.
- *Re-storying questions: Landscape of consciousness.* These have to do with the thought process, beliefs and values of participants. It is about meta-experiences (what they experienced during and after the experience). These questions are used in conjunction with the latter categories of questions.
- *Re-authoring context: Reflexivity and circulation.* These include the legacies that participants have created for themselves.

The narrative inquiry was the most suitable for this study because it allowed the participants to formulate and reconstruct their own experiences.

As mentioned in the previous section, the researcher was guided by the social constructionist approach. The social constructionist approach acknowledges that the way we describe our truth has to do with our society, culture and language. A social constructionist also agrees with the narrative inquiry stance which is multidirectional and phenomenal, as opposed to unidimensional and factual, because social constructionism acknowledges the different facets (culture, society, and language) that construct a person's way of thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.2 Research process

3.2.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. Adler & Clark (2008), describes purposive sampling as a process whereby the researcher subjectively selects participants who will fit with the purpose of the study. Although this method is less scientific, it usually fits well with qualitative studies, (Adler & Clark, 2008).

Hence, for the purpose of this study, three women aged between 21 and 50 were asked to participate. Prospective participants were approached personally or via email. The first criterion for the participants was that they should be adult. Also, they had to have grown up in homes where family violence was perpetrated by their biological fathers. Biological fathers were chosen as opposed to step-fathers, so as to focus on the experiences of daughters with blood-ties to their fathers. At the time of the interviews the participants had to be no longer living with their abusive parent. This was guided by the consideration that if the daughter was still living at home with her paternal father this could introduce intrusive dynamics that would prohibit an open and frank exploration of their experiences.

As I mentioned in the rationale for this study, the reason that adult participants were preferred was not only because they would be able to narrate their stories, but also because their insight into their past and present would be deeper than that of children. Secondly, because the topic may be distressing to the participant, it would be possible to refer her for therapy if the need arises, whereas, children may not follow through with going to therapy, or may not be allowed to go to therapy – such that the research ends up doing more harm than good.

Other equally important reasons are that there are delicate ethical issues when doing interviews with children; and secondly, because of the time frame for this study there would not have been enough time to develop rapport with children such that they would feel comfortable enough to talk to a virtual stranger about such a sensitive area of their life.

Three participants who qualified according to the previously stated criteria were interviewed. These were in-depth interviews, which is why only three participants were interviewed. Interviews took place in areas where the participants felt comfortable. The interviews were an average of one and a quarter hour long, and the second interview sessions with each participant took place about one week after the first session.

3.2.2 Ethical considerations

The following codes of ethics as stipulated by Christians (2001) were adhered to when conducting this study:

- Voluntary, non-coerced, informed consent was obtained from the participants after they had been fully informed about the purpose of the study, and what it hopes to achieve.

- No deception was used.
- The participants clearly understood the purpose of the study.
- Confidentiality and privacy, in terms of using pseudonyms, was guaranteed. The interviews were tape-recorded and the participants were informed prior to the interviews that the contents thereof – in fact, any information that the participants decided to divulge – would be highly private and confidential.

An informed consent form was drafted and duly signed by all the participants.

Audio-recording ensures that all the data is accurate and not fraudulent in any way. While engaging in this study, the researcher steered clear of any potentially harmful and derogatory behaviour towards the participants or to the members of the families that were referred to during the interview. Once the themes were generated from the research material, the researcher checked with the respondents to ascertain that what was written reflected what they had said during the interview.

As an ethical precaution, care was taken as much as possible not to re-traumatise the participants.

This study tapped into significant parts of the life history of the participants, and not just any life history but a potentially traumatic history. Therefore, as part of the ethical considerations, it was fitting to approach the participants with an attitude that is appropriate. This included being caring, empathic, having unconditional warmth and acceptance. These interviews were, therefore, in a sense akin to what is called ‘therapeutic conversations’ (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 286). When doing this kind of research, where research and therapy lines may be

blurred, it is important for the researcher to guard against and to manage any ambivalence with regard to roles. The negotiating, contracting and interviewing was done from a research perspective. These are generic experiences with all the human unpredictability and ambivalence – but problematic when uncontained and allowed to become uncontrollable and overwhelming.

3.3 Research method

3.3.1 Interviews

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2005), the interview is ...

... a contextually based, mutually accomplished story that is reached between the researcher and the respondent. Thus, just to tell what happened (the what) is not enough because the what depends greatly on the ways, the negotiations, and other interactive elements that take place between the researcher and the respondent (the how).

Since this study was inquisitive in nature, interviews were used because they allow space for clarifications should a question or response be unclear (Walsh, 2001); thus promoting understanding of the world according to the participant (Patton, 1990). Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) mention the idea is of reaching to the interviewee in a deep and emotionally engaging way in order to get to the interviewee's 'well of emotions' (p. 717) and related cognitions. This was the idea and approach used in this study.

According to Gubrium and Holstein (2003), the contexts where interviews take place have a lot of impact on how the participant responds and what information they do decide to reveal and in what manner. Hence, the researcher had pre-interview sessions with the participants to

create a context of safety for the participant and to get to know the person behind the participant (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

Since it is almost impossible to capture a person's reflections on an extended time period in their lives in one interview, a follow-up meeting was required. This aided in case there were things that the participant wished to add, as well as insights from the previous interview.

The questions in the interview followed to a certain degree the guidelines that are mentioned in the narrative inquiry section.

3.3.2 Information analysis

3.3.2.1 Interpretive thematic analysis and hermeneutics

According to Breakwell, Hammond, Smith and Fife-Schaw (2006), interpretive thematic analysis entails unravelling 'meaningful patterns and processes of action, interaction, and identity...' (p. 345). In this type of analysis, the researcher uses the information that is collected from the most natural and daily-life-descriptions of individuals' life to describe complex and symbolical social roles that are designed by discourses, as they manifest in the participant-researcher interaction.

Hermeneutics were used to achieve what has been described above. This is a method whereby meaning is re-constructed from the content of the text to elicit themes that arise from the text (Addison, 1992). The following technique by Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999), and Wilson and Hutchison (1991) was used:

Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion

This step refers to the process whereby the researcher gets familiar with and immerses herself in the data by reading the text over and over. Through this practice the researcher gets the overall meaning of the text.

Step 2: Thematising

During this step, the researcher unpacks themes and principles that occur in the text. A list of emerging themes, sub-themes and clusters is drawn. The researcher continues to look at the text with a distant eye.

Step 3: Coding

Coding means breaking the text down further to make it more meaningful. Clusters and themes that have some relation to each other are grouped together. Attention should be paid to information that does not particularly fit with the identified themes as it may give further insight into the meanings in the text.

Step 4: Elaboration

In this stage the researcher brings more of herself into the analysis of the text. Dialoguing with the text allows the researcher to bring in her own understandings, values, prejudices, and assumptions. 'The researcher maintains a constantly questioning attitude, looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper meanings, alternative meanings and changes over time, as she moves back and forth between individual elements of the text in many cycles, called the hermeneutic spiral' (Netshishivhe, 2006, p. 58).

Step 5: Interpretation and checking

In this step, themes that have been identified are put together. The researcher checks whether the aims and questions of the research have been answered. Also the researcher checks whether the interpretation matches the material that had been collected. By the end of this step the researcher should have looked at every area of the text and exhausted every meaning that could come out of it.

Step 6: Interpretation: The final report

This is the final stage where everything that has been done in previous steps needs to be reported in a coherent manner. The report reflects the stories of the participants as well as the integration of the researcher's interpretation.

3.4 Summary

The researcher and participant are both social beings, so it made sense to use social constructionism in approaching this research. This research is about people's experiences and, according to social constructionism, social norms and practices influence how people give meanings to their experiences.

Narrative inquiry was used because it is an approach that not only empowers participants to tell their stories, but also to tell them in an empowering way. In this form of inquiry, participants can redefine their experiences and construct meanings from their viewpoint. The role of the researcher is also acknowledged as an active listener, thus drawing attention to the importance of focusing on the participant's voice.

Beneficence, as opposed to malevolence, as well as respect for participants were mostly taken into consideration in approaching the interviews.

The research process was discussed. This included sampling and ethical considerations. Interviewing was discussed as a form of data collection that was used. Interpretive thematic analysis and hermeneutics were used to analyse the information.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

Introduction

In this chapter, themes that emanated from the interviews are discussed. Each participant's experiences are discussed separately. The discussion of experiences is an integration of the past and the present struggles and triumphs. Quotes from the transcribed interviews are used to illustrate the themes. Interpretive thematic analysis was used in this study. The transcribed interviews of each patient were carefully read repeatedly to elicit themes that recurred in the text. These themes were then arranged in a chronological order, where appropriate, to give a flowing understanding of the participants' experiences. Only their views are discussed in this chapter.

The real names of the participants and other individuals' names that were mentioned by participants have not been used. 'Samantha', 'Litha' and 'Palesa' are pseudonyms that are used here to protect their right to privacy. Next are the experiences of participants.

4.1 Samantha's experiences

Background information

Samantha (a pseudonym) is an Indian female in her late twenties. She is the only female child among three children. Her older brother is four years older than her, and she is four years older than her younger brother. Samantha did not live with her parents when she was younger. She lived with her paternal grandmother during the week and went to visit her maternal grandparents on weekends.

Samantha's paternal grandmother was her source of strength. Samantha was around 11 years old when this grandmother passed on. The death of her grandmother shattered her. What was even worse for her was that her aunts mistreated her. When her parents moved to live with her, she thought she was then going to have a normal family life. Instead, she realised that her parents' marriage was not so good. The fighting and violence became more and more clear and it became part of their daily life and more and more unbearable.

In an attempt to escape the situation, Samantha got married at the age of 19, only to get into an abusive relationship herself. She eventually divorced her husband, and six years later, she got married to her current husband, who she says is good to her. At the time of the interview she had no children of her own.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Denial

When Samantha started noticing what was happening at home, she was living with her aunts, who were abusive towards her. She would find comfort when her parents came home. She viewed her parents' relationship as perfect, and could not bear to think of this relationship as otherwise. In the situation that she was in with her aunts, her parents were a symbol, an assurance that everything will be alright. So then, even when she started suspecting that something uncomfortable was going on between her parents, she could not bring herself to acknowledge this, yet, as acknowledging it would mean dissipating the very reality that she was holding on to for her survival.

So then I started noticing that my parents were not in a good relationship, but I never accepted it. I started noticing these problems but I never really understood it, and I never really accepted it. I was in great denial 'cause I thought in my mind that when my parents are here I'm comfortable, and when they go away, I'm uncomfortable. And I was living with my father's sisters and they were the ones putting me down. So that's what obscured my entire vision of what was going on.

... I denied the whole situation and I suppressed the feelings. I used to wish it would go away. It made me uncomfortable, and I wouldn't accept it in myself that my parents were arguing so much.

It seems that by denying what was happening between her parents she remained protected her from the painful feelings that would be opened up should she accept that, indeed, there was abuse in her parents' marriage. Therefore, turning a blind eye, so to speak, became a buffer for her at that time.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Neglect

When the abusive situation continued between Samantha's parents, her needs as a child were neglected and were no longer a priority for her parents. Her emotional needs were neglected. When asked about the times when she and her mother spent together, she replied:

No, she wouldn't (spend time with her). Maybe sometimes she would take us shopping. It was never for quality time. It was always to do some work or getting things done for my father. She was like, always doing things for him, like, her whole life revolved around him.

She never really paid attention to us at all. We could have been dying in front of her and she wouldn't notice. It happened so many times, having fallen down, bleeding, feeling hot, having been cut by glass; some days I would not eat hoping my mother would say, 'Come and eat with us,' but she would not even notice. She would not even care.

Even when I was turning 13, she didn't even notice I was going through this stage in my life. She'd say I'm moody, but it never occurred to her that I was an adolescent, that maybe that's what I was going through. She never really took the time and sat down with me, to ask what the matter is and what really bothers me, you know, if there's something she's doing wrong, or something I want her to do. She never really took the time.

Samantha yearned deeply for her mother's attention, yet with almost every one of her attempts, she was denied this attention. Samantha also mentioned that because of what was happening at home, her scholastic performance started dropping; and when her performance at school dropped, her parents did not even notice that that was happening. Her financial and physical needs were poorly met as well. She stated that:

*In terms of like financial support I've never had that support. They've always held back. I found myself having to fend for myself. Like having to work during school holidays because **sometimes they would be so involved in their own problems that they would forget about our needs.** Sometimes at school I even sold sweets for pocket money. Sometimes even in winter I wouldn't have enough clothing and I would always rely on hand-me-downs.*

Samantha reports that she was part of this household in name only; and if her parents were not meeting her needs, somebody had to. She had to do something, parent herself, take care

of her own needs, yet having both parents living with her and capable of taking care of her and her siblings. However, her parents' problems blinded them to the fact that she was there; she was not noticed.

4.1.3 Theme 3: Childhood lost

The themes discussed above reveal how adulthood and maturity were forced upon Samantha's life. Even though the skills she learnt at that time could come in handy in her present life and in future, still, no matter how valuable these are, they cannot replace Samantha's lost childhood. I, the researcher feels that being robbed of a chance to be a child when you are a child, is the saddest robbery there could be because nothing can replace it no matter how hard one tries. Samantha describes the sadness of this experience when asked about the impact that domestic violence has had on her life:

It's stolen so much of time which could've been spent positively. And I guess that's the greatest thing that it impacts on my life. Day to day I think to myself, so much could've come of it and yet this held me back instead of seeing my life progress. Because the trauma of seeing them fighting it out, day in and day out ... it's actually made me feel like I'm at a standstill in my life.

Like last night when I was looking at the pictures of my husband's childhood. He needed to show me this album; he had such lovely photographs; I don't remember my childhood, I don't even remember if I have pictures of myself as a child, or having fun, going out, doing things. And he asked me why he has never seen my pictures as a child. I said I don't even know if I have any.

I can't even remember having one thing or enjoying the thing that we did because there was constant trauma. When we went on an outing and there was an argument, then we had to get back. Instead of going on the trip that we had planned, we would spend the weekend brooding over them, cooped up in a room, playing TV games, doing idle things and we were completely depressed about that.

Growing up witnessing domestic violence robbed Samantha of irreplaceable childhood memories that could have been created, and her heart bleeds about this. When asked what it is that looking back she wishes she could change, she responded by saying:

I would not hold myself back, keep myself quiet. Every time, everything was happening with my parents, I would go into a shell. I didn't realise that it was not my problem. If they wanted to live a miserable life with each other, then that was their problem. Yes, they are my parents and I'll always have affection for them, but it doesn't mean my life had to stop. I locked myself up and kept myself from so many things, so many experiences, so many times I could have laughed but I cried. I would've educated myself definitely, and carried on.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Premature adulthood

Circumstances forced Samantha to 'toughen up' and grow up quickly. With her basic needs not being met by her parents, she was put in a situation where she had to fend for herself, and think like an adult in order to survive. Her survival was not only about taking care of her emotional, physical, educational, and financial needs, but it meant going a mile of attempting to ensure that her need for safety and security was met. Her need for safety and security was threatened by her parents' unhealthy relationship.

Otherwise, I had this feeling that I had to be strong, I've got to make things right with them, guide them and ask them to stop this. The minute they reconciled I'd think now I can sit back. So I think I stepped into the role of being an adult, as a child, I started stepping into that role. I mean every child wants to see their parents happy.

Like when my parents would argue then my mother would go home to stay the weekend. I would stay with my father to show her that 'although I'm your child, I'll stay with my father' because I wanted her to know that even though you had an argument I still want you to be together.

Samantha took on the role that was assigned by the circumstances, the role of a peacemaker, reconciler, and the 'glue' that would hopefully keep her parents' marriage together. When she should have been carefree and worrying only about growing up issues, she was concerned about trying to keep the peace between her parents.

4.1.5 Theme 5: Ambivalent and distant relationship with parents

Samantha seemed ambivalent in relation to her parents as their daughter. Much ambivalence that seemed consistent throughout the interviews was due to the issue of assignment of responsibility for the abuse. Towards her mother, Samantha seemed to be bearing a mixture of anger and resentment for putting their father first and ignoring them as children – as illustrated in the following quote:

Maybe sometimes she would take us shopping. It was never for quality time. It was always to do some work or getting things done for my father. She was like, always doing things for him, like, her whole life revolved around him. She never really paid attention to us at all.

Samantha also seemed to possess a feeling of frustration towards her mother for not taking action to stop the abuse. She felt that if she as a child could understand the wrongness or inappropriateness of her father's abusive behaviour, why was her mother not seeing it and standing up against it. The following extracts relay a sense that too much responsibility was put on the mother's shoulders.

Giving up herself altogether is something that I can never really understand.

If my father abuses her, isn't it for her to sit down with my father, you know, 'What have I done wrong? You can't go on like this. You need to discuss it with me. We are a couple; you don't abuse a person like that.'

Since she could not understand her mother's position in this, she seemed to have a feeling of irritation with her mother. She could not help her out, yet the situation was affecting her as a child. There seemed to be a feeling of irritation as well as exasperation, as illustrated in the following extracts.

But now all of us are married and she's living with my father and my younger brother and he's not at home most of the time, it's just her and my father. So now who can she blame? And now she's making her problems the world's problems, when it's got nothing to do with anybody, it's got to do with her and my father.

And at the end of it all, I looked back and I felt in myself that my mother is looking for so much sympathy because she doesn't wanna rectify the situation. She wants to remain in this relationship because she loves my father so much. But she's accepted the abuse to the point where she is enjoying the abuse because she's getting so much attention from it.

My mother's looking for attention. And I've noticed that very often when she and my father argue, whenever they are having that physical ... she'll retaliate and start now arguing back to a point where he feels now like choking her because she's constantly chatting back and she always wants to be right.

These are some of the emotions that Samantha still has to work through, because her response when she was asked about the feelings that she held toward her mother and the accountability that she seemingly held her to, her answer was:

... I was always thinking my mother should do this, my mother should do that. And I was not taking the role of a child but of a parent. I had to remind myself that I was never responsible for their relationship. However they wanted to live their lives was entirely up to them.

With regard to Samantha's father, she was probably in an even more difficult situation. She stated that she and her father had been very close. Then when she discovered about the abuse, she withdrew from him. She mentioned feeling embarrassed by mere association with him, let alone being seen with him.

Somehow, no matter how wrong he was, I still loved him. And I would think that maybe that's all that he knows, maybe he doesn't know any better. Maybe he behaves the way that he does because it is his nature. ... I've accepted him but I will not let him violate my rights.....Beyond that I would love to have a relationship with him ... How he wants to live his life is something I have to accept. I can't make him to be the way that I want him to be.

At the moment, Samantha is trying to build a relationship with both her parents as a child this time, and not as an adult. However, she mentioned the discomfort that still exists should they spend a lengthy time together. Samantha is still in that struggle to protect herself and her mother by denying what she felt and chooses to view it in a manner that is potentially safe and comforting for her. Samantha revealed that the relationship with her mother was not good, that for a long time her mother took out her frustrations on her. Yet she 'chooses' to see even the hugs that she received from her apologising mother as her mother's way of showing affection.

*And 'til today she regrets it so much. Then I'd tell her it doesn't matter. You know, I said to her, 'You never really paid much attention to us, but at the time when you would hug us, if I can look back, I'm grateful that you at least took that time to spend with me even though you were upset.' **I'd like to think that at that moment she was with us, it was her way of showing love.***

In the preceding sentence it seems that with all the disappointments and resentment that Samantha felt, or maybe still feels towards her mother, she cannot bring herself to think that her mother just completely did not care about them.

4.1.6 Theme 6: Emotional guardedness and hyper-vigilance

In addition to Samantha's uneasy relationship with her parents is the difficulty to drop her guard in other relationships. Samantha tends to expect the worst from people. However, this is one of the areas that she has identified as needing attention from her side. The extracts below illustrates this:

I'm at that point where I'm trying to let myself accept help. Even when someone offers to help I always have to think, okay, what is it that they want? Even with my husband I still have a problem when he wants to do things for me. With my parents I've always felt if they love me there's always a motive. It can never be unconditional. Now I try to just accept the affection that they are giving me.

Although you think you're being very strong, actually you come across as being very cowardly. You know I used to not let people close to me because I'd say I know what you're capable of, so just stay far from me.

I do want to come to a point where I can trust people, but then I always fear that they'll put me down. I'm so used to not accepting help. I taught myself that the more you give the more you get back, and the more you share your feelings the more you're gonna receive. If that's not the purpose of life then what is. It is about sharing.

Samantha witnessed hostility between people that she had expected to love each other. This has violated her ability to trust people. She expects people to behave in unpredictable and potentially hurtful ways – hence the importance to keep them at a distance, where they cannot

hurt her. However, a part of her wishes to be able to let other people in without being suspicious of their motives.

4.1.7 Theme 7: Learning from the worst examples

Ironically, Samantha is using her father's behaviour to protect herself. The behaviour that once caused her much pain, she uses to keep 'potential harm' at bay. She is aware of this and it makes her uncomfortable to see that she has become like her father herself, in a different way.

***Samantha:** So it's like, a child looks at its father as a role model and thinks that his behaviour is correct, and so in the same manner I would realise that whatever my father was doing I think he would do something right. It was only at a certain point that I realised that this is not right and I have to change my ways, 'cause my father would act irrationally, on a spur of the moment, if he felt like hitting someone, he would go and hit that person. I may have done it another way. If I felt like insulting the other person or felt like being straightforward I'd do it. In my mind I'd feel I'm being honest about how I feel, but in the meantime you can't go on to the point where you are hurting other persons' feelings, though my intentions were not to hurt the other person.*

***Researcher:** So you feel like even though you have not been physically violent, you have been in other ways.*

***Samantha:** In other ways, and in such a subtle manner that I'd feel I'm justified to be like that. I'd feel they violated my rights, they've oppressed me, and so I must be. I wouldn't do*

it with the intention to hurt that person. I would do it so that ... I also just didn't want to be like my father, so I would say let me change my ways. So I noticed that the more I was trying not to be like my father, the more I was like him.

Samantha did not only learn to be abusive herself, but she also learnt to a certain degree, to accept abuse as normal. She spoke about her marriage through which she was trying to run away from an unbearable home situation. Then she discovered that she had jumped from a hot frying pan into a fire. Samantha said that she ...

... just accepted it, that you know maybe it's my fault. My mother also had been through the same thing, so maybe it's okay, I can deal with it. And I was getting so strong about it, blaming myself, taking the abuse and blaming myself. Despite everything I did, he treated me in this manner.

This shows that, although Samantha had despised her mother's reaction to the abuse, when she was in a similar situation, she used that very same reaction as a blueprint to deal with her own abuse.

4.1.8 Theme 8: Rescued by religion

While Samantha was in the abusive marriage, one of her friends started involving her in the teachings of Islam. Although Samantha was Muslim, she was not aware of what it taught. Amongst the teachings that he taught her, was one that empowered her. She realised it was not right for a man to mistreat or abuse his wife. She then left and got divorced from her abusive husband.

Samantha found strength in studying Islam. By knowing its values, she found the confidence to stand up for what she feels is right for her. She remained single for about five years. At the time of the interview, she had been married to her new husband for six months. Her new husband and her mother-in-law are also her pillars of strength. She is treated with tremendous respect by these people in her life. At the time of the interview, she voiced her unease about having children and her fear of ending up exposing them to a painful life. However, she promised herself that of all the things she will tolerate, she will never tolerate abuse, not from her husband, or anyone else.

4.1.9 Summary

Eight themes were elicited from Samantha's experiences. The first theme is denial. When Samantha realised what was happening between her parents, she could not accept it. The second theme is neglect. Samantha reported that her physical needs were not met. She was also deprived of emotional nurturing, was not given attention, and went through life stages basically alone with no guidance from any of her parents.

The neglect was closely related to the third and fourth themes: a childhood lost and premature adulthood. Circumstances robbed Samantha of happy childhood memories. Her parents were entangled in their problems to such a degree that Samantha and her siblings could not enjoy a normal childhood. Samantha also had to very rapidly grow up mentally in order to be able to provide for herself where her parents were failing to.

The fifth theme is an ambivalent and distant relationship with parents. Samantha got to a point where she was ashamed to even be associated with her father. But even so, she loves him and desires to have a relationship with him. Also toward her mother, she felt resentment, blame, and anger for not doing what she (Samantha) thought was necessary to do. Samantha was angry that her mother did not make them a priority; that after the fights between her parents, her mother would take out her frustrations upon her. However painful that was, Samantha rationalises this as her mother's way of showing them love at that time. Samantha and her parents try to get along, but the distance is still there.

Theme six is emotional guardedness and hyper-vigilance. This is the way of being that Samantha developed. She reported that she could not trust people, that she felt people were capable of hurting her. Therefore she needed to be hyper-vigilant.

The seventh theme concerns the lessons that Samantha learnt from the behaviours of both her parents. She became aware that she was sometimes abusive toward others. This was not physical abuse as such, but she mentioned that she could be hurtful verbally. This aggressiveness, together with the emotional guardedness, are issues that she felt she had to keep working on. When Samantha was 19 years old, she got into a marriage which also turned out to be abusive. According to her, she continued in this marriage because she thought she could handle it, just like her mother had.

The eighth and final theme is how Samantha was rescued by religion. It highlights how Samantha's learning and devotion to the Islam religion helped her to gain strength to leave her abusive marriage, and to know her rights as a woman and wife. For this reason, Samantha is adamant that she will not allow anyone to abuse her again.

4.2 Litha's experiences

Background information

Litha (a pseudonym) is a single Xhosa woman and is in her late twenties. She is the eldest of four children. She is a mother of three children, a daughter and two sons. Her mother takes care of the children back at home. Litha is also a breadwinner at home. Litha's younger sister is still at school and Litha pays for her fees. She spent her early years living with her maternal grandmother, together with most of her cousins, but she did not grow up together with her other siblings. She visited her parents at times.

At her grandmother's place she did not get the attention she longed for because there were too many other children that were staying with the grandmother, and the grandmother was the only adult there. At the age of 11 she moved to stay with her parents. This was when she started knowing the life she was about to live for many years. Litha's father passed away in 2008. She was working away from home during that time.

The interview was conducted in Zulu, Xhosa, and English. It was translated into English by the researcher.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Shattering of young dreams

When Litha was staying at her grandmother's house, she had a picture of what it would be like to live with her parents. At the grandmother's house she did not receive the attention she wanted as a child, and her older cousins scolded her and gave her chores that she felt were not suitable for her age. So, she envisioned a life with her parents as peaceful, loving, and a life where she could just be a child. However, she soon found out that the situation at home

was far from what she believed and would have loved it to be. She recalled the first of the many shattering incidents after she moved to stay with her parents:

There was this day; I was actually scared as my mother was not back from work. I was scared 'cause I could see that my father was actually restless. He was standing outside, and I knew he was gonna hit my mother. I don't know what told me he was going to hit her. But my mother was not back from work and I was starting to feel worried, just wanting her to come back, maybe because it was getting dark ...

When my mother came back, they fought, in front of people. I don't know what my father did, but I think she took a brick and my father ran. I remember I was sitting on the chair inside the house. My father fell, I don't know how, but I held him and covered his face with my hand, and the brick hit my hand. That was the first thing that I remember that happened, and that was the life I was about to live.

Immediately after relating this experience, Litha said, 'But it didn't matter 'cause I would be with my mother.' It seemed that Litha's main need at this time was just to be close to her parents, especially her mother. Then no matter what happened, she would be able to handle it.

Litha's hope of being taken care of was not just shattered by the situation that her parents were caught up in, but she had to put aside her needs as a child. When she came to live with her parents, it was also for the reason of protecting her mother and not the other way around. She had witnessed an interaction that told her that if she would be around more often, her presence would prevent her parents from fighting.

I remember this one time, I think I was around eight when I visited and went home. They were arguing and fighting about something. I woke up – it was at night – I woke up and I cried. I really, really cried. And I remember my mom saying, ‘You can’t do this in front of the child.’

They were loud, they were loud! It’s just that I couldn’t pick up what they were saying. But to me it was unusual, to hear my mother and father fighting. This is the place I considered more loving. You know where I was living there was a lot of us. When you get home, you want to be treated like an egg, and you want to find that everybody is laughing all the time. And it really broke me.

When she heard all of this, she felt like she needed to return home and take care of her mother. At the same time she knew that she wanted her parents to love her and protect her. All she needed to do was just to be there. Litha said that when she heard her mother saying, ‘You can’t do this in front of a child’, she knew that at least if she was there then they would not fight. Therefore for her, her presence would serve to prevent her parents from fighting and so would protect her mother.

The situation was not as simple as she thought. She soon found out that not only did she forfeit her emotional needs, but her physical needs too.

We never struggled, we were okay. But somehow their money was never enough. When I was in Cape Town (grandmother’s place) I couldn’t even ask for shoes. I would go to school with torn shoes and I wouldn’t be able to ask from my grandmother ... So even at home I felt

like I couldn't ask for things because I'd be making the situation worse, even though we were okay.

Litha was faced with a situation of 'who is taking care of me?' Her envisioned dreams were shattered. She needed to be taken care of, but in the process realised that she had to put her needs aside in order to attempt to keep the peace between her parents. She felt that she needed to put her needs aside lest they be another reason for her parents to fight.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Unable to make sense of it all

Litha entered into a situation that was quite difficult for her to understand. The home she thought existed did not exist. Her parents behaved differently from how she thought they would. She had many unanswered questions. These questions were paralleled by the behaviours of each parent, which only widened the scope of possibilities as to why her home was this way. Following are some of the ideas that Litha used to try and make sense of what was happening; some of the ideas only left her with more unanswered questions.

4.2.2.1 Alcohol abuse

Litha stated that her father used to drink so heavily she wondered why he was never fired. She linked her father's drinking to the fights that would occur at home, because of the demands that her father would make when he was drunk.

... At home where we were staying, my father would come back late, drunk, every day. I can count the times that my father was sober. Sometimes I wonder why he was not fired from that company. He was always drunk, always fighting ...

I think he was just an alcoholic. He was just an alcoholic. That's just it.

The alcohol explanation did not seem to be enough, since Litha recalled fond memories with her father even in the presence of his drinking.

He used to spoil me when I was younger, 'cause on Saturdays I would sometimes be left with him, and he would take me with him to the tavern where he went. There, it was a spaza shop and a tavern, so I would get anything I wanted.

Furthermore, Litha mentioned that her father loved her. It was only later, when she started showing anger towards her father that her disrespect made him angry towards her. This means then that alcohol abuse alone could not explain the way that he was towards Litha's mother.

4.2.2.2 Mother's indiscretions

Litha knew her mother as a strong woman, emotionally and physically. She therefore could not understand why she would allow her husband to treat her this way. Litha recalled an incident where her mother had actually beaten up Litha's aunt's boyfriend. This boyfriend, apparently, used to beat Litha's aunt. So Litha's mother physically intervened in protection of her sister.

I knew she was capable of protecting herself. I knew she was capable of protecting herself from my father. I remember asking her, 'Why are you putting up with this, why can't you just hit back?' and she would say, 'I can't hit your father back.'

Another factor was that Litha's father used to accuse Litha's mother of cheating on him. Although Litha did not believe that there was something that was happening at that particular time, she suspected that sometime earlier there might have been. She also suspected that her father may have hit her mother before they were married. Litha's mother's choices puzzled Litha. When she looked at how much her father was drinking, she could not understand why her mother had married him in the first place. To illustrate the confusion in Litha's mind about all these events, she said:

... 'cause I even asked my mother when I was older, 'How could you marry someone like this?' But apparently, before they got married he was not like this. He was not ... I remember, you know, when they used to fight sometimes ... he was always suspecting her to be dating whoever and whoever. I think there is something that went down somewhere. And so they fought even then. And I think the way he sounded to me at the time, he sounded like he might have hit her before. Uhm, but I think it was one of those things where other people take it lightly. Maybe it was the only time, maybe it didn't even happen. But when a person is violent, I mean, really! I think there were signs before. I think she just didn't pay attention to them. But I think there were signs. One doesn't just wake up and he's violent.

From this text it is clear that although Litha may have thought that some of her father's behaviour was due to her mother's infidelity, what did not make sense to her was why her mother did not stop the relationship at the first signs of abuse.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Torn between ...

4.2.3.1... *Conflicting feelings towards father*

Litha struggled placing her father in her emotional world. This was evident in how she spoke about her father. Initially, she mentioned having blocked her father out of her mind. She could not remember much of him as a child visiting her parents when she was still living with her grandmother. When she moved to stay with her parents, she attributed her lack of memories of her father to the fact that he left home early every day to go to work, and returned late.

However, the following passage shows that this ‘blocking-out’ of the father in Litha’s mind was an attempt to escape and keep the situation as normal as possible in her mind.

On a Saturday my mother was going to work, and you could see that something was happening. My father wanted money. Money to do what? Money for drinking! And you know, you give somebody money and they go and drink alcohol and they come back and fight with you ... So I realised I was blocking a lot of things about my father for a long time.

When blocking-out was not working for Litha anymore, since she was then in that environment constantly, she started to despise her father in a way that was confusing for her, because she knew she loved her father and hated him at the same time. It was difficult for Litha to know who her father really was. She also hated the fact that her father was a totally different person with the neighbours and a different person with her mother. Speaking about the embarrassing incidents when her parents were fighting inside the house, she said:

But there were times when I wished I could just run out and call the neighbours because my father was this sweet person to everybody else. He was a joker, everybody liked him, he was funny, he was ... you know ... and partly the reason why I would have called the neighbours was because I would have wanted them to see the real person that he was, because to me that's the real person that he was.

One cannot begin to imagine the difficulty of this relationship between Litha and her father because according to her, her father would not fight with her. She only started to be on the receiving end of her father's anger when she was older and had started to overtly disrespect her father. The animosity that Litha felt towards her father was so intense that when she described the reason why she would not finish some of her house chores, she said:

... and I couldn't tell her that I was running away from this monster that I live with during the day. Even though my father wouldn't, yes, we would fight because of the attitude that I had towards him; but even though he wasn't gonna do or say anything, I just couldn't bear him. I couldn't stand him. I couldn't bear being in the same house as him. Hence I say to you, when he came in I'd go out.

As intense as the animosity was, so intense was the confusion, because while Litha was describing all these things, she said; '*I know I loved my father, but ...* (long silence)'.

4.2.3.2 ... Miscommunication and 'betrayal' by mother

In the first theme it was reported that Litha felt the greatest connection towards her mother. She needed to protect her mother and was hoping for the same from her mother. But things did not turn out as she had expected. She had come from her grandmother's house where she

was working more than she felt she should have, and when she came to stay with her mother she found herself in almost the same situation.

I wasn't doing things I was supposed to do, of which some of them were just too soon. They expected me to take care of the house when I came to live with them at the age of eleven. There was a baby that had come, and you are expected to clean the house and help with the baby. I had to go with this child when I wanted to play.

Not only was Litha laden with tasks for which she was punished if she did not do them, there was so much of her emotional needs that she felt that her mother did not understand nor catered for. Quoted from different parts of the text, Litha said:

To my mother, I was this angry child and she didn't understand why. I also didn't understand.

Although my mother was there for me, emotionally, I was alone.

I was fighting for myself 'cause I realised that my mother is not protecting me against all this.

4.2.3.3 ... Being a good or bad child

As mentioned before, Litha got to a point where she could not stand her father. What followed were behaviours that made her parents, especially her mother, to describe her as a bad and naughty child. According to Litha she had to find ways to relieve herself from the unbearable home situation, which for the worst part involved being in the same house as her

father. So instead of being at home doing her house chores and doing her school work like a 'good girl' should have done, she started joining anything (choirs, etc.) that would keep her away from home. She started dating early because at least she would have someone to spend time with and an excuse not go home.

However, Litha was caught up in a position that when she tried to save herself, her mother would be in trouble, yet nobody was willing to save her from this situation.

He was just blaming her for all the things I did, for me having boyfriends. But things in the house were just too much, I needed to save myself.

... the thing is I was doing everything wrong. It was so confusing 'cause I did everything that was wrong at home and yet I knew I'd be shouted at, I'd be beaten.

Litha failed her matric the first time around. During the second year, she was helped by the presence of a study group. So she spent time away from home and studied as well. She later left home to look for a job since she had children of her own. Her father passed away in 2008.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Life after and searching for closure

Litha said that she grew up afraid of hurting other people. She feels that one of the things she struggled with is that she needed people to accept her. She then used to be nice to people, not because she likes them, but just so they would accept her. She is, however, at a point where she feels that she accepts that not everyone will accept her, and so she enjoys being herself and not pretending to be something that she is not.

Litha has also grown to be very independent. She has grown to be independent to the extent that it is hard for her to ask for help. She stated that, *'Crying out for help is not something good, my mother didn't. If something happens, I should be able to get myself out of that.'*

The most difficult situation that is still unresolved in Litha's life is having to make peace with her father's death, which happened before she experienced him differently other than an abuser. The following quote captures the essence of this:

Towards my father it was, I love him because he's my father, but he's this monster that I don't want to live with because you know ... And I think another thing that ticked me was talking about his passing because that thing as well gave me such mixed feelings in my life because, I don't know, I didn't really know how I felt about it. But it felt so sad now because he's gone. He's not there, and I'd really love for him to be there. I'd love him to be there. I'd love him to see me grow, to see me being responsible, you know, taking responsibility for all my mistakes and all the actions I have taken. But at the same time trying to think that I wish that he would come back, but he shouldn't be what he was. So I guess I really needed him to be the father who loved me. I couldn't experience that because of whatever that was happening at home. But somehow I knew that he loved me, but I just didn't feel it. I also didn't know if I loved him or not. I think my heart was just too quiet towards him.

Litha carries the same kind of ambivalence towards her surviving mother.

... Towards my mother, I would feel like she doesn't care or she doesn't love me enough, but at the same time I'd feel that she's been there for me, trying to protect me in different ways.

4.2.5 Theme 5: Survival

Litha has survived by changing certain of her perceptions about life. She has told herself that she will not have a marriage that is the same as her mother's. She has also told herself that she will not sacrifice the happiness of her children.

For the questions that she cannot answer, for the love she could not receive from her father, she said:

I have God by my side. I am not alone. From the very beginning, my life was planned by God. So I can't question why my life went the way it did. Whatever comes may be of God's accord. God is playing a father role in my life and it is not easy. But because I've seen Him as a Deliverer, I'm able to trust Him because He's shown that He loves me as a parent.

I am my own family. I need to develop my own cultures.

4.3.6 Summary

Litha's experiences are summarised in four themes, three of which have sub-themes. The theme that featured in Litha's early life was the shattering of her young dreams. After leaving her grandmother's home, she had hoped that she would be taken care of by her parents. She hoped to receive attention, which she did not receive at her grandmother's house. However, she got into the situation where her parents were involved in an abusive relationship, and she

had to put her needs aside in order to avoid exacerbating the situation. Her physical and emotional needs were not taken care of by her parents, especially not by her mother.

The second theme is Litha not being able to make sense of it all. She tried linking her father's abusive behaviour to alcohol abuse, but this explanation was not enough because she could recall her father being pleasant towards her even in the context of his drinking. The other factor that did not make sense to Litha was that of possible infidelity by her mother in earlier years. However, for Litha this did not justify her father's violence. What also created confusion for Litha was why her mother had not ended the relationship or even stood up for herself. According to Litha, her mother was very well able to do either of these.

The third theme is Litha's torn state, first between conflicting feelings towards her father. Litha reported that her father was usually loving towards her, but because of his actions she could not stand him. Litha was also torn between the miscommunication and what seemed like betrayal from her mother. Litha felt that her mother did not understand her. In addition to that, Litha needed her mother to protect her from the situation that prevailed at home, but she did not. Instead, Litha was given responsibilities that were disproportionate for her age. Because of the situation Litha had to find ways to protect herself. This tore her between being a good or a bad child. Her parents considered her good if she did everything that was required of her. But being good was coupled by a sense of failure to cope, especially being around her father. Another option was spending more time away from home, which was bad according to her parents but liberating for her. Certain events took place in Litha's life, including having children and the death of her father. These lead to the fourth and last theme.

At the time of the interview, Litha was still feeling ambivalent towards her father. Her father had been deceased and she had still not made peace with not having had a normal father-daughter relationship. She was at a point where she acknowledged her love for her father and her hatred for his violent behaviour. The ambivalence was also extended to her surviving mother. Litha did not feel the emotional support of her mother even though she reported that she had otherwise supported her.

Litha finds peace in having a relationship with God, who she feels can give her love that her parents never gave her.

4.3 Palesa's experiences

Background information

Palesa (a pseudonym) is a Zulu-speaking woman in her mid-thirties. She is the fourth child of five, the last of the four older daughters. She grew up in Soweto in a home that was warm and loving for many years of her childhood. However, her parents ended up separating due to the domestic violence. Palesa's mother and siblings ended up living with different maternal relatives. However, Palesa returned to stay with her father because she felt unwelcome with the other relatives. Although her father continued being verbally abusive towards her, she felt that it was better than living with her aunts.

Both Palesa's parents are still alive. Palesa's father lives with Palesa's brother, the youngest child of the family. The way that Palesa's father treats her brother is a constant reminder of her own experiences, since he treats him exactly the way that he treated her. Palesa has always had a good relationship with her mother, and this relationship was not disturbed by the domestic violence or the separation. She also maintains a good relationship with her

siblings. She is also still in contact with her father. Palesa is currently happily married and has one child.

The interview was conducted in both Zulu and English, and translated to English by the researcher.

4.3.1 Theme 1: A life disrupted

Before it started, the environment was good. It was a good family. My dad was working, my mother was working. Actually, in our street they thought we had everything. You know how it's like in the township, they thought we were rich. But it was because of how our parents were with us, and dad providing for us. Even though they didn't earn much with mom, they were able to provide for us. We were able to get whatever we wanted.

Until Standard..., I think I was doing Standard 8. That's when the problem started. I think my father lost his job. When he lost his job, that's when things started to change. It started with verbal abuse. Then the verbal abuse went down to us as children. And then physical abuse, abusing my mother, and, ya ... And then extra-marital affairs. Dad started having affairs, and that's where we started seeing a lot of changes.

The domestic violence that had invaded Palesa's family came with dynamics that they had not known before. Soon the once well-provided for family had to scrape for food, and alliances and enemy lines were subtly drawn.

She (Palesa's mother) is a very strong woman. We never went to bed without food even though there was really no food, because during the abuse thing he was no longer providing

for the family. He would spend his money somewhere else. So she made sure that we did not sleep on empty stomachs. Sometimes it would be pap and tea, but it was something. Sometimes grandmother (maternal) would give us food. We'd cook, eat, and finish it up. When dad came back, we'd pretend that we didn't eat.

Moreover, Palesa's family could not keep a façade where neighbours were concerned. Because the disruption could not be contained within the family, the envied image that the family had become tainted.

In the community the people who knew were close neighbours. They saw, because when we ran from home we would run to them. So we couldn't hide it. We couldn't hide it because he would chase her in front of them, you know, with a knife maybe. So it wasn't something we were able to hide and try to protect the family that 'no we are living a good life'.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Watching from the side, protected by siblings

Palesa was around 16 years old when the situation at home started to change. Since she was the second youngest child of five, Palesa stated that she could see the changes unravelling before her eyes, but nothing was ever discussed with her. When she was asked about her experiences around the time when she started noticing changes at home and between her parents, she said:

I was much younger. It's my sisters who used to talk about it. They used to say that there was someone who used to phone at home. That person was the person that my father had an affair with. So every time my mother would be crying, they would say that that person had called. So I don't really know. I think I found out after two years 'cause they were

trying to protect me, they did not want to tell me that my father was having an affair, even though I could see.

I couldn't speak to him. I was young. But my sisters would be able to talk to him and tell him that what he was doing was not right and could get him arrested. But me, there was nothing that I said. I was only able to speak to him when it was the two of us living together.

Palesa's older sisters did what they could and knew best to protect their younger sister. However, it seems like even though Palesa had protection from her sisters, she needed a place where she could speak, where she could say what she wanted to say, and talk about what she was experiencing. As Palesa was describing the impact of the change in their life, she said:

Me, personally, it affected me to the extent that I failed the grade I was doing that year. I failed, and I started changing. I was not keen on boyfriends at that time but I started having a boyfriend just so I could have someone to talk to. And he was there for me. With my sisters, we really didn't talk about stuff like 'It will be okay'. We didn't talk like that.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Where did it go wrong...?

As I mentioned right at the beginning of discussing Palesa's experiences, the abusive situation at her home started when she was a teenager; hence, she was bound to try and find answers in order to make sense of the situation, or maybe in certain cases find someone who could carry the responsibility for this.

He (her father) had lost his parents at the age of two years. At the age of two he started living with his aunts, who were physically and verbally abusive. So now, as adults, we think it comes from there. Maybe it comes from experiencing that. But we ask ourselves, why did he not grow up to be like that? That he was not abusive right from the outset? Why did it come at a certain stage in our family if his childhood contributed?

Just like she said in her thinking out loud, this explanation did not hold with her. Hence the other possible explanation was her father's newly found bad company.

According to my own understanding I would say bad company because my father had friends who were okay, but there were these two who when they started coming, you would see that these guys were not good.

However, as shall be discussed in the next theme, these are some of the questions that have been left unanswered, which Palesa has just decided to 'let go' trying to find answers.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Ambivalence and discomfort with her own feelings

One thing I want to know, maybe you can tell me, is if there is something wrong with me. I thought I had dealt with this and moved on with my life. As far as I know this was no longer affecting me. But the reaction that I had actually worried me. Does this mean that this is still bothering me, that it's still affecting me?

This confusion was expressed by Palesa during the second interview. During the first interview Palesa had talked about her experiences and how her younger brother was in a

similar situation with their father. Talking about this was quite emotional for her and her expression of her emotions in this way made her uncomfortable and she started questioning herself. It was difficult for her during the follow-up session. She was so concerned that something was wrong with her since the feelings that she experienced during the first interview were a surprise to her. She did not know that the whole situation could still upset her so much.

One thing was clear right from the outset at the first interview, and that was that Palesa intended narrating the incidents relating to the domestic violence in her home of origin, and yet remaining as emotionally distant from it as possible. She was not intending to talk about her felt experiences, and when she did, it was not easy. Somehow the interview ended up swerving to this area of ambivalence, and this is how it went:

***Palesa:** Even when I'm hurting, I don't show it. Some of the things I keep them here (points to heart) ... some of the insignificant things I discuss with my sister or someone. But most of the time I keep them within myself.*

***Researcher:** How is this working for you?*

***Palesa:** At the end of the day, I can't say I've found the solution, but they don't affect me. They don't affect me. Ya, you won't find me saying let's talk about it, you know, so that it will go away. I keep quiet and keep that thing in me until it goes away. Maybe sometimes I think about it and it doesn't affect me. Sometimes it affects me at that particular time. Sometimes I cry. But when I cry, I cry alone.*

Researcher: *Would you say that you numb yourself?*

Palesa: *I think so. (Pause) I think so.*

From the previous theme and connecting to the next one, it seems that the discomfort that Palesa has concerning her emotions has to do with the uncertainty that the situation carried, which had and has the potential to hurt her. As said proverbially, what you don't know can't hurt you.

I have a lot of questions that are unanswered. I've made peace with this because I've realised that I won't get answers, and if I get them, what if they unveil certain things that I may not want to know?

This she said after speaking about some of the reasons why her father ended up the way he is now. Although she had stated that she made peace with not knowing, the next theme seems to suggest otherwise.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Ambivalence towards father

The most difficult part of Palesa's experiences has to do with relating to her father. Palesa had watched the family being turned upside down by her father's behaviour when she had known him to be a wonderful father. Probably, the worst part for her was the fact that he was her biological father. At some point she even went to the extent of denying within her that this was her real father. What made the situation more intense was the fact that they as

children were also abused by their father; although it was mainly verbal, it was still painful and heartbreaking.

Me, personally, I hated him. I did not start hating him right away because I thought maybe it would stop. But then it didn't stop. Then I decided that this is not my father, not the one who does these things! Then I decided that I hated him. And again the thing that made me to hate him was the verbal abuse. He had just changed; I don't know what happened ... You know he would call us by names ... some of them I can't even utter. So I don't know how you love someone like that.

Palesa's struggle with her ambivalent feelings towards her father is an ongoing one. Once again, though not overtly said, the next extracts show Palesa's deep love towards her father, her biological father, and the difficult position that she is in because she cannot erase the painful memories she has of him. The intensity of this ambivalence cannot be properly expressed in words, below are the extracts from Palesa's expression of her process:

You know, right now he's not working, he's on pension ... and I had told myself that he'd never get my money no matter how much he would need it. But I can't let him starve ...

There are times when he asks for money and you can see that he really needs it; sometimes I ignore him, but I can't sleep you know. Sometimes I want to punish him for the things that he did ...

Sometimes I feel sorry for him, but there are times when I feel like this month I won't do anything for him and feel like he's irritating me. I don't know where that feeling comes from

... I don't know if ... (Pause). I can't say I haven't forgiven him, I have. And every time when I talk about this, the forgiveness issue comes up. I don't know if I've forgiven him, but I think I have. But if I've forgiven him, why do I not want to help him sometimes? Why do I sometimes feel irritation towards him? Why do I not want to hear his name sometimes? Why do I not want to see him sometimes? Sometimes I miss him, I go to him, buy him this and that ... and just feel like doing that.

Dad is 72 years old and still has the same impact that he had; you'd think he is 32. He won't change. I know I'm not God, but he won't change. He's been like this for how long? Do you think there's hope? I don't think there's hope. I don't think so.

Palesa seems to be in a painful situation where she cannot change her father, and cannot control how she feels about him. She knows that he is her father, and his behaviour does not make it easy for Palesa to deal with the emotions involved.

4.3.6 Theme 6: The role of Christianity

Christianity featured much in Palesa's life as a safe place for her. When Palesa's father started being abusive, Palesa was a teenager who was already struggling with her self-image as she was quite a tomboy compared to her friends. Before Palesa became a Christian herself, it was her sister who provided the Christian-based support for Palesa.

The person who really helped me was Zola (a pseudonym), my sister, she was there for me. She is a prayerful woman and she loves the Lord plus she got saved (became a Christian) before I did. So when I spoke to her, I spoke to her a lot. I would ask her if I'm ugly, or if

I'm this or that. So from an early age she would tell me that I need to tell myself that I'm beautiful. She would say, 'Even when dad says this and that to you, you must tell yourself that you are not that.' So when my father called me names, I would confess and negate whatever he said.

However, there were times when she struggled to reconcile her feelings because of the situation to what is expected of her as a Christian.

Until when I was doing Matric, I got saved at school. When I got saved, it became better. Even though it did not become a good relationship, I had this thing that sometimes I love him, sometimes I don't. I think it was because of salvation you know, that sometimes you have to love. But sometimes the situation does not allow you to love.

As one has seen in previous themes in Palesa's experiences, there is a general theme of 'letting go'; she has found a place in God where even issues that she cannot talk to anyone about, she can bring before Him. Palesa stated that she did not like discussing her problems with other people, let alone being seen crying because something was bothering her. Hence even the pain that she sometimes experiences as a result of the conflict that is still going on between her father and brother, she can only *pour* her heart out to God in prayer.

It seems that for Palesa, God through Christianity provides a context where she can unreservedly face her ambivalences and fears.

4.3.7 Theme 7: Standing strong but being very cautious

Palesa picked herself up by her boot straps. She had experienced hurt and a great deal of uncertainty at home. However, she did what she felt she needed to do, and still does it in order to live her life to the full, shaking off her past and preventing it from affecting her life.

I had told myself that I won't get married, if this is how marriage is. Because a man that I know and live with did things that my father did to my mother. I thought, no I won't get married. But because of salvation you know ...

And my sisters as well, all of them except for one, are married. We talked about this and decided that we were not going to let this stop us from living our lives.

I've decided that I'm a strong woman, to love my children no matter what. And I've told myself that I won't stay in a situation that is not right for me, just for the kids, or just to please the husband, you know. And I'll work hard for my family.

Palesa has managed to create a life that she is proud of; however, on the inside, there are still some of the battles that have not been won yet. Some of these struggles she had even before her home situation changed. However, the situation seems to have escalated this, because when asked if some of the struggles that are narrated below relate how her father made her feel, she said that it does feel like that, like somewhere she is still reacting to her father's voice even though he is not physically with her anymore.

One thing that I'm afraid of is challenges. I'm afraid of failing. You know when I register (to study), I register one course because I want to make sure that I pass it properly ...

I think, I think I struggle with self-esteem, scared to speak out, scared to express myself ...

I also fear embarrassment; I fear what other people think of me.

The above quote shows in a nutshell the struggles that Palesa still faces. And as mentioned previously, these fears were in part exacerbated by her experiences of her father's abusive behaviour.

4.3.8 Summary

Seven themes have been extracted from Palesa's story. The first one is a disrupted life/poverty and losing respect. In the theme it is described how Palesa's family lost the peace and stability they had as a family when the paternal violence started. They started struggling with even the most basic necessities. Palesa's family also lost respect in the neighbourhood because of the changes that had occurred in the family.

The second theme reveals Palesa's position in what was happening in the family: watching from the side, protected by siblings. Palesa knew something was happening when her father started having an extra-marital affair; however, her older siblings tried to shield her from what was happening. As the situation carried on, the third theme emanated, namely trying to figure out where it went wrong. One explanation that she thought of was her father's unpleasant childhood. This did not make sense though, because her father had not been abusive from the outset. The other explanation she could think of was the bad company that her father had started keeping.

Palesa's many unanswered questions brought us to the fourth theme, ambivalence and discomfort with her own feelings. In the face of her questions and the feelings that were

evoked by telling her experiences, the discomfort and ambivalence about her feelings surfaced. This linked to the fifth theme, that of ambivalence towards her father. Palesa holds feelings of love, sympathy, and repulsion towards her father. These hold a dilemma for her as she cannot explain what is happening.

In the sixth theme is the role of Christianity. This is where Palesa finds strength to face her past. During the time that she was staying with her father, it gave her the ability to bear him. This links to the seventh and final theme, that of standing strong but being very cautious. Palesa has promised herself that she will not let her past keep her from enjoying a marriage life. In the same breath she acknowledges the struggles that she still lives with.

In this chapter the experiences of the participants were discussed in the form of themes that recurred in their stories. In the next chapter is a comparison of the common themes and the themes unique to each participant. Some of the themes discussed in the next chapter are deduced from the themes in this chapter. The discussion of themes is juxtaposed to the relevant literature.

CHAPTER 5

AN INTEGRATIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In this chapter, meta-themes that have emanated from the themes in the previous chapter , and the experiences of the participants are discussed in comparison to one another, and also viewed in light of already existing literature.

5.1 Role of extended families

One of the characterising behaviours of the abusive partner is to isolate the family from the rest of the relatives. Although the theme of the role of extended families was not discussed in detail, it did form part of the participants' experiences. Grandmothers in particular – whether paternal or maternal – tended to be buffers in their experiencing of domestic violence. In Samantha's life, her paternal grandmother was her pillar of strength. Samantha had been protected from the dynamics of her family, and thrived as a little girl under the upbringing of her grandmother. It was only after her death when Samantha's parents had to stay with her, that she got immersed into the family life that left her scared in many ways. Even so, Samantha's maternal grandparents continued to show support towards her mother, even though it was from a distance

In Palesa's story one finds that grandmother-buffer-effect as well. When the abuse started in Palesa's home, and her father was not providing for them anymore, it was her grandmother who would sometimes give them food to eat. It was her grandmother who was also there to provide a place to stay for Palesa's mother when she left her husband.

However, in Litha's life, staying with the grandmother was abusive in itself. She was emotionally and physically neglected. Even so, she was for the time being spared from the trauma and ambivalence that was brought about by witnessing violence between her parents. Due to the focus of this study, we will not discuss the implications that may have been, had Litha continued to stay with her grandmother.

However, in this regard, Cox, Kotch and Everson (2003) and Levendosky and Graham-Bermann (2001) found that having an adult family or community member who is actively involved with the child, could provide the support and guidance that the child needs. And as evident in the lives of Samantha and Palesa, having a strong extended family support system helped them cope to extent. On the other hand, as discussed in chapter 2 that one of the factors that play a role in the occurrence of domestic violence is the culture with its patriarchal acceptance (Loue, 2001), one may ask to what degree were the grandmothers' involvement still had to be within the confines of patriarchal rules.

Even though some or other involvement is evident, the relatives' role in intervening is unclear or not strong enough. The abused partner is still left with the primary task to fend for herself and her children. Of the three participants' mothers, only one (Palesa's) left the abusive husband and sought help from her family of origin. It is to be noted as well that it was this mother who had constant, visible support from her mother in the form of basic necessities.

5.2 Neglect

Another theme that runs through the participants' experiences is that of neglect. The neglect was presented mainly in the physical and emotional spheres. Samantha was so neglected that

even when her school work deteriorated, nobody even noticed. Her clothing needs were not paid attention to and she had to wear hand-me-downs most of the time. Her need to spend time with her parents, especially her mother, was also ignored.

Litha experienced neglect as well. She had to hold back from asking something from her parents lest it be the cause of another conflict. Her emotional needs were also not taken into consideration by her parents. Palesa too had even basic things like food not provided for by her father. This lack of provision only started after the abusive behaviour started.

Participants mentioned both implicitly and explicitly how their needs were neglected by their parents. Mentioned in the earlier chapter are Geffner *et al.* (2000); Holt *et al.* (2008); and Humphreys and Stanley (2006), who found that abused parents, especially mothers, find themselves in a context where paying attention to their children's needs is not a top priority. Unfortunately, as unintentional as it may have been, the scenarios mentioned contribute toward a direct form of child abuse, according to Feerick and Silverman (2006). This means, witnessing domestic violence is child abuse in more ways than one.

5.3 Denial

From the stories of all three participants, it is evident how they all went through the phase of denial. For Samantha, the situation was right before her eyes. She saw and heard the fights, yet she could just not bring herself to accept that her parents' relationship was characterised by violence, intimidation and fear.

Another form of denial was experienced by Litha. She had 'blocked' off from her mind some of her father's memories. She could remember some of the times that she had come to visit her parents but could actually not remember her father in those memories.

On the other hand, Palesa had thought that the abusive situation was something that was just going to pass. When it did not, she even went to the extent of convincing herself that her father was not her father.

From this, it is clear that they needed to protect themselves from the reality that was staring them in the face, from the reality that was too far from what they wanted, thus the denial of the situation, one way or another.

In chapter 2 and Geffner, *et al.*, (2000) speaks about how it is sometimes an emotionally unsettling experience when violence begins to be visible in a home where children had never perceived it. As a manner of coping with this emotional insecurity, the participants denied it.

Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003 uses the term 'denial' to describe a situation where the existing perceived truth is not congruent with what the person believes; thus the individual behaves in a manner that denies the existence of the threat.

According to Becvar and Becvar (2006), systems are homeostatic. This means that a system would find a way to maintain its equilibrium where there is a perceived threat to its state of stability. One would perceive denial as the participants' primary way of dealing with their perceived threat.

5.4 Feelings of love and hate for parents

Dowd *et al.* (2006) state that witnessing domestic violence puts children in a paradox where they feel loyalty to parents, but also experience fear because of the violence. Engel (2005) also identifies some reactions that children who witnessed abuse or were abused tend to have towards their parents. She states that some children grow up to identify with the aggressor. Some children become passive and readily become victims out of habit.

There are overlaps of differences, similarities and ambivalences amongst the participants, especially, in the relationships with mothers. Palesa's relationship with her mother continued to be strong and close as it was before the abuse started. However, there is no open communication. They normally talk about every other non-important issue. Somehow, she also identified with her mother, considering the passive, victim-like manner in which she reacts to situations. However, her relationship with her father took some strain. At first she was not sure who he was anymore, then came feelings of hatred towards him. She is currently at the point where she has strong conflicting emotions towards him. On the one hand, she loves him deeply, and on the other hand she sometimes cannot even stand hearing his name. There is a part of her that even feels like punishing him for what he has put them through.

Samantha's case differs from Palesa's. Samantha was consumed by conflicting feelings towards her mother. There was a part of her that wanted to reach out to her mother and have a relationship with her mother as a daughter. There was also a part of her that was irritated by her mother's passiveness in the situation. Where Samantha's father was concerned, she was ashamed of her father and did not want to be associated with him, even though they had been close. However, Samantha identified more with her father. When her mother visited her

grandparents, she chose to stay with her father. She also stated herself that she tried so hard not to be like her father, but she actually found herself being more like him.

Litha was consumed with feelings of protectiveness towards her mother. She almost could feel her mother's pain. However, there were mixed feelings of confusion and uncertainty about her mother's love towards her. She could not understand why her mother would not protect her. At the time of the abuse, she was filled with such resentment, anger and disgust towards her father. When she reflects on it now, she realises how much she loved and still loves her father. She yearns for him as a father, not as an abuser.

It seems the enmeshed and sometimes pathological relationships from which children find it difficult to escape, that Dowd *et al.* (2006) and Engel (2005) wrote about, have characterised the experiences of all three participants.

As for the relationships with their mothers, in the earlier chapters Mullender *et al.* (2002) were cited as stating that one of the useful ways for the child and mother to get an understanding of each other's viewpoint and what they were both going through, why they did what they did and did not do some of the things that they expected from each other, is to be open with one another. Somehow, there is a possibility that some of the 'stuck-ness' and ambivalence that the participants feel is due to the fact that none of the mothers – not even Palesa's – are willing to talk to their daughters about their experience of abuse.

From the above discussion most of the literature that was discussed in the literature review chapter corresponds. One view needs an extension according to the experiences of the participants, especially Samantha. It is apparent that Social learning theory (Baron & Bryne,

2000) and the Intergenerational transmission of violence model (Murrell *et al.*, 2006) that explain the causes of violence in men as due to modelling is not exclusive to males or sons that grow up with violence. But there is a possibility of violent daughters as well, through other means as Murrell *et al.* (2006) stated.

5.5 Role of religion

Religion seems to have played a major role in the unfolding of all three participants' lives. For Samantha, religion gave her the courage to face the abuse and it taught her that nobody should treat her in a demeaning and abusive way. It was when she immersed herself in the Islamic faith that she realised that she could not accept abuse in her life; but not only that; she also does not have a right to abuse others.

For Litha, religion gave her Someone she could hold on to. She realised that she could not change the past. However, she could believe that she can go on; she will be able to stand because God is with her. For Palesa, the same was true. In God she found the one person with whom she does not hold back. However, in Palesa's story there was an element of closing down and denying her feelings because she perceived religion to be prescribing as such. It seems that she used it to hide, and hence it did not benefit her to the full. Nason-Clark (2007) points out that most of the time religiously abused women and their children's voices are silenced on account of the scriptures being used or maybe even misquoted. This seems to have been the case with Palesa.

5.6 Dealing with fears

In earlier chapters it was pointed out how witnessing domestic violence forms part of child abuse. Also through the participants' experiences we learnt that as children, they did not remain unaffected; in fact, they were abused themselves, in one way or another. According to Engel (2005), such abuse may lead to the fear of retaliation, which comes from their having been punished for standing up for themselves; the fear of rejection, which is mostly experienced by those who have been rejected when they stood up for themselves; the fear of hurting another person, which is strong in those who have hurt someone while standing up for themselves; the fear of becoming like those who abused you; the fear of losing control and of being irrational when expressing anger.

In Samantha's life the most prominent fear is that of becoming like her father (the abuser). The fear is so real such that she is not even comfortable thinking about having children, as she fears that she might be abusive towards them. For Litha, the fear of retaliation is real. When she tried to stand up in protection of herself against her mother or father, she was scolded or beaten. She also has a fear of hurting other people. This fear seems to be the strong one. Litha watched her mother being blamed for her (Litha's) behaviours, which were directed at preserving herself and removing herself from the situation. She was also labelled a bad child because of the same. Hence, she finds herself having developed a character that she is much aware of, and that is of being 'nice'. She mentioned that she was aware that she was not nice, because she really likes the people to whom she is being nice, but just so that they can accept her. This also serves to distance herself emotionally from others. Her niceness hides her true feelings so that she will not be labelled as bad. Also, according to Engel (2005), those who fear becoming like their abusers tend to 'submerge their anger, taking a passive stance allowing others to treat them unfairly' (p. 144).

Although Palesa's fears were not so overtly spoken about, the above statement appears true for her as well. One also deduces from her communication about how she prefers to keep things on the inside, that she fears losing control should she express her anger amongst other feelings. Her discomfort with her own feelings surfaced in the interview, in some way indicating her fear. While Freeman (2008) in chapter 2 refers to the fear that is normally experienced by children who witness domestic violence because of the uncertainty of the context, it seems that this fear carries on to adulthood. This time it is the fear that they may not be able to predict their own reactions and behaviours.

5.7 Emotional and interpersonal regulation

According to Martinez-Torteya *et al.* (2009), the childhood trauma of being exposed to domestic violence is 'likely to disrupt the development of basic competencies, threatening the child's ability to process and manage emotions effectively and increasing internalizing and externalizing behaviours' (p. 562). Also Corvol (2006) in the discussion of the Attachment theory puts it clear that the lack of proper or adequate attachment with the primary caregiver places the child in a position where his or her emotional growth is stunted, thus making it difficult to deal with interpersonal relationships in a healthy way. In view of the participants' stories, all three of them have developed certain traits and skills, especially in interpersonal relationships. These skills seem different, but a closer look shows that these have a common purpose, which is to create interpersonal distance in order to protect themselves. Samantha has taken the route of emotional guardedness or hyper-vigilance. She also believes strongly in independence and not putting herself in a position where she has to rely on someone else – lest they abuse her trust in them.

It is almost the same with Litha when it comes to independence. She feels that being independent will protect her from being abused just because she is relying on someone else. Palesa decided that she is going to be a strong woman. Even though she has chosen to be this, she has a deep seated fear of failure, a fear of embarrassment, and low self-esteem. Hence being strong, she will most likely maintain a distance from people who would care for her.

Engel (2005) once again discusses children who grew up with abuse, growing up to be hyper-vigilant adults who are constantly suspicious of abuse, and thus tending to misinterpret actions and motives of others. The latter part of the statement resonates true for Samantha who finds it difficult to accept courtesy from others, even from her own husband. All three participants are hyper-vigilant and on guard against emotional hurt; and they all spoke about what they would do should they come across abuse in their lives. Their protective attitude towards themselves also keeps them in hope that 'not all men are abusive'. This logic protects them from living a constantly and overtly fearful life.

All the participants in this study have one goal: to live a life that is as normal as possible considering their past, and to live a life free of abuse. Their approach to life and relationships is an indication of that not all defences are negative, or worse, pathological. But it is the intactness of the defence mechanisms that enables the individual to live as healthily as possible. Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (2003) state that malfunctioning emanates when defences that were used to protect the individual are generalised. This causes the individual to only perceive the threat as reduced, and not necessarily that the threat is reduced. This subsequently puts the individual in a position where they have to be increasingly defensive to cover the scope of the perceived threat.

5.8 Summary

In this chapter the results of the participants were integrated and discussed. Further themes were extracted from the findings in the previous chapter and discussed in view of existing literature. Some of the experiences were shared amongst the participants, yet certain experiences were specific and unique. Their experiences, interpretations and behaviours are in line with the findings reported in the literature section.

The theme of the role of extended families surfaced in the form of positive grandparents' involvement in the lives of Samantha and Palesa. However, it did not seem enough since the grandparents could only provide support, but could not completely intervene.

The second theme was that of neglect. All three participants experienced neglect of their emotional and physical needs. The literature also reported that neglect of children in domestic violence contexts is almost inevitable.

The third theme also ran throughout all three participants' experiences. This was the theme of denial. At some point in their experiences, all the participants could not accept the reality of their experiences. This reaction is congruent with the literature, which suggests that individuals or systems will use strategies to maintain the status quo when they feel that their reality is under threat.

Feelings of love and hate for their parents were also a theme common to all three participants. Palesa was different in this case because she maintained a positive attitude and feelings towards her mother. The literature showed this ambivalence to be evoked in contexts of paternal violence.

One of the coping skills that participants used to empower themselves was religion. In Palesa's life religion played a dual role; that of empowering her, but also played a part in hiding her true feelings.

A variety of fears are also experienced by the participants. The fear of being abusive themselves, of hurting others, and of standing up for oneself. Another theme was that of emotional regulation. The experiences of the participants confirmed research findings that exposure of children and adolescents to domestic violence impairs the healthy development of their capacity to deal with emotions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter brings this study to close, on paper, as the journeys continue, taking different forms and directions. It includes the reflections of the researcher, possible strengths and limitations, and recommendations for future studies.

6.1 Reflecting on the study

The aim of this study was to explore with participants their experiences of witnessing domestic violence in their own homes, how the experiences and meanings they created shaped their stories, and the life journeys that emanated from these experiences.

The study took an open approach that based its understanding in social constructionism and narrative approaches. The meanings of the experiences that were told by the participants were co-created with the researcher, hence no claims to objectivity; on the contrary. In approaching the interviews, the researcher took care not to retraumatise unnecessarily or to pathologise the participants' experiences. They were also given an opportunity to reflect on the conversation with the researcher and give feedback on this.

Also, although, the researcher had reviewed literature on experiences of other individuals, an effort was made to treat experiences as unique and different as they are. Like White (1995) said, the phenomenon may be the same but the experience of the same phenomenon differs considerably from one person to the next.

To ensure the correct representation of the participants' experiences, participants were given an opportunity to go through the themes extracted and interpreted by the researcher in order to verify or clarify the text.

After the thematic analysis, a comparison of participants' themes was done, and brought into relation with the literature. Some of the prominent themes were not addressed in detail in the literature discussion.

6.2 Conclusions

It should be noted that the aim of the study was not to prove or disprove any theoretical view or previous studies on adult women who grow up witnessing paternal violence. However, based on this study, the following themes can be highlighted as being prominent in this study: denial, neglect, avoidance of emotionally-laden situations, ambivalence towards the parents, aggression, and assertiveness.

One of the prominent childhood experiences was that of denial. All three participants strongly highlighted their difficulty in accepting the violence by their fathers. The violence of their fathers was not an easy reality. This is supported by literature.

The other childhood experience was neglect. Their emotional, and physical needs were neglected. This put them in a position where they had to take care of, and protect themselves. The essence of these two themes give a clear picture of domestic violence as a form of child abuse.

Participants showed a tendency to avoid emotionally-laden and unpredictable situations. They used different methods, such as presenting as 'strong' and independent and being 'nice'. These were spoken about during the interview sessions, and the participants showed insight into these patterns and possible ways of addressing them. Another way of avoidance was the manner in which some of them spoke in brief and unemotional ways about their past. Palesa for instance managed to summarise her journey in approximately ten minutes. As the interview went on it became apparent that the emotions that come with the story were being avoided.

One of the difficult issues was the participants' experiences with regard to their biological father. There was a common theme that the participants had no effective way of distancing themselves from their fathers. The ambiguity, the ambivalence, the confusion, and the enmeshment versus breaking away from the abusive father were perpetuated by that factor, that THIS IS MY FATHER!

In this study, it was found that, just as much as boys, when girls witness intimate partner violence at home, they are also likely to identify with the abusive parent, even if it is the father. Although they may not be physically violent towards others, they can be equally vicious emotionally. In this study, the reality of girls' or females' proneness to abusive behaviour is illustrated by their fears, namely the fear of losing control should they express anger, and the fear of becoming like their abusers.

Witnessing domestic violence left the participants with a considerable amount of interpersonal fear. Yet, they have developed in a way that one would judge according to general societal norms, as healthy. They strive for independence, value working hard, and

have promised themselves that they will not let anyone abuse them. However, beneath that, is still the fear of being abused, losing emotional control, and becoming abusive themselves.

The participants in this study strongly used religion as a coping strategy. Religion seemed to have brought a better meaning to their lives and given them strength to face the reality of their family of origin and to deal with the pain. However, religion was not only used in a positive manner. It was also used to move away or cover undesirable and threatening emotions and ambivalences.

The theme of aggression was strong in only one of the participants. However, it is strong enough as it gives a different view of daughters that grow up witnessing paternal violence. In addition to that, this is an area which was still posing a challenge for Samantha at the time of the interview.

Another form of dealing with their situation which all the participants used, was intimate relationships. At some point in their lives, intimate partners were used either to get out of the home situation or as a form of support.

All the participants in this study seemed to have one goal: to live a life that is as normal as possible considering their past, and to live a life free of abuse. Having discussed their struggles and how they are dealing with them, it is not for me to say whether they have the necessary resilience to achieve this or not. But I choose to agree with Rutter (2006), who states that resilience is a dynamic process because an individual may be resilient to certain situations and not to others, or at certain periods but not at others.

6.3 Shortcomings of the study

The study focused on three participants as individuals. The crucial aspect of the previous generations and intergenerational transmission was left out. However, the extent to which the extended families were involved in rescuing their daughters from abusive marriages brought to question the issue of inter-generational and inter-familial legacy of domestic violence, which when left undealt with, it continues to the next generation. In this study these issues could not be explored, as they would have broadened the scope for the dissertation, yet disadvantaged the participants. The fears that the participants have are real and valid, as research shows that because of their experiences they are capable of passing on the abuse to their partners and children (Engel, 2005; Evans *et al.*, 2008; Holt *et al.*, 2008).

The topic opened up uncomfortable areas for the participants. Two sessions were not always enough to discuss and process all the emotions of the past and the present. And although they had been referred to a counsellor to carry on with the process, the idea of carrying on with somebody that they had not started with was not appealing. Previous researchers in this field report similar experiences (Kemp, 2004; Themistocleous, 2008). Their participants were somewhat upset by the study, as it raised troublesome issues and memories, and expressed disinterest in being part of any other similar study. However, an open door invitation was extended to the participants to contact the researcher if they felt a need to do so.

6.4 Strengths of the study

The most important part of the study was that participants received an opportunity to tell their stories and reflect on where they were in their journeys. For Samantha who had already started a self-reflective process, this was a continuation of her process of inquiry for a short

time period. For Litha, it was a beginning of healing that seemed to have come at the right time. Talking about her inner processes started a journey of becoming more aware of her actions and her feelings. For Palesa, this study opened up more questions. She seemed to deal with her own emotions' confrontations by avoiding them. This was painful for her, but it brought to her attention some crucial and silenced aspects.

Another strength of the study was that more than one interview was conducted. Although I still feel that they were not enough; the time space between the first and the second interview sessions gave the participants an opportunity for further reflection (without the pressure of the presence of the researcher). Secondly, the second interview session allowed for temporary closure of the topic, thus not leaving the participants with completely raw concerns and emotions.

6.5 Researcher's final remarks – a learning experience

This study was a very difficult process for me, yet it was a very rewarding experience. Having chosen a topic that is very close to my heart, I had to deal with myself more than I would otherwise have had to in any other research context. The main challenge was to engage the participants' intense stories without being clouded by my beliefs and background, yet not denying these in the process (Fox, 2006; Trahar, 2006). In listening to the stories, there was a great challenge of listening to the participants' voices (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009) especially since most parts of their stories resonated deeply with me.

The other challenge was that, having been exposed to a systems way of thinking, I was aware that how I was with the participants would affect how they were with me, and the other way

around. The challenge then that was faced was that the participants and I brought to the interview sessions our usual ways of interaction. And as discussed earlier, for the participants, these included hyper-vigilance, avoidance and the distancing assertiveness and emotionally strong poise. I needed to reflect on whether what I felt during the sessions was my own ‘stuff’ or was it related to where the participants were at that time. In short, this research study tapped into my being as a person and as a developing therapist. I believe that I grew both professionally and personally as a result of this experience.

Lastly, my gratitude for I have been privileged to be part of three remarkable women’s experiences. They have known so much pain and conflict within them, yet they walk tall. They could have kept their silence, but they did an act of bravery, of reaching to those places that only they know exist, and share with me and everyone who will read this, their deepest feelings and fears. Their journeys were in different posts and that posed a challenge for me to adjust myself to each participant’s state. Their experiences, pains, hurts, struggles and victories were a catalyst to my own growth and introspection. As this study added to their experiences I hope it will be an experience from which they may draw strength.

The experience of this study evoked questions about what it is to be healthy, *and* happy.

Strengths, fears, vulnerabilities, and courage are part of the journey. What is done with these things is a study for another day ... The journey continues.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, the reflection on the study was discussed. The study’s shortcomings and strengths were also discussed. This study’s aim was to acknowledge the experiences of women who grew up witnessing paternal violence and to give them an opportunity to tell

their stories. It was also to explore together with them the continuation of their journeys that followed since childhood, and how they are linked to their subjective experiences and interpretations. We explored their subjective emotions and cognitions during exposure to paternal violence, and afterwards. Also, we explored their coping skills, as well as meanings that were generated and how these have evolved and shaped their lives.

From the interviews and analysis, the findings were that these daughters who were exposed to paternal violence journey through a sense of denial and feelings of ambivalence towards their parents. Their experiences as adults are marked by interpersonal styles of avoidance and hyper-vigilance. The two dominant coping skills were denial (at the time that paternal violence started) and religion.

Even in the face of all their experiences, they are hopeful of living a life devoid of violence, whether by themselves or by their significant others.

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