

**MARRIAGE, COHABITATION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MPUMALANGA**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Domestic violence is a pressing issue in South Africa and has been the subject of much debate, activism and academic research. It is commonly argued that violence between intimate partners remains largely hidden and that women in marital and cohabiting unions endure much physical, emotional and sexual abuse. This qualitative study focuses on the experiences of a small group of women living in KwaMhlanga, in Mpumalanga. Although the women had been fearful of reporting their abuse and had spent years suffering silently, all had finally displayed much urgency in reporting the actions of their abusers. In reflecting on their circumstances, the women refer to the primary factors influencing their partners to become abusers: unemployment, financial hardships and poverty, alcohol and drugs, and factors such as immature attitudes, cultural beliefs and jealousy. It is also argued that the institutions of ‘marriage’ and ‘cohabitation’, whilst similar, introduce slightly different constraints and expectations. Married women suffered more abuse and were controlled than their cohabitant counterparts. The study makes no policy recommendations but emphasises the importance of doing substantive work to probe women’s experiences of abuse in intimate unions in all parts of South Africa.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Violence in the domestic domain is a serious problem that affects many South African women, irrespective of class or ethnicity. It is a sad reality that many women fear being violated and abused at the hands of men with whom they have (had) close, intimate relationships. Husbands, partners and ex-boyfriends are common culprits in cases of domestic violence. Since spousal violence and wife battery have been traditionally hidden within the private home, there has been, until quite recently, a general lack of awareness of the seriousness and extent of the problem. Violence against women takes many different forms affecting the South African nation at large. Anecdotal and statistical evidence suggests that South African women experience inordinately high levels of physical abuse (such as beating), as well as psychological and sexual abuse in intimate relationships (Malley-Morrison, 2004:247; Vetten & Ludsin, 2005:19; Park, Fedler & Spence, 2000:28). Wife abuse has been on the public agenda for many years but the phenomenon is still not studied sufficiently, nor are there effective measures in place to deal with the scale of the problem. Instead, claims of battery on the part of women are often viewed with suspicion and contempt; sympathy for the perpetrator is common and questions are sometimes raised about whether women ‘asked for it’ or whether they enjoyed being violated. In addition, questions are raised about why, if women are abused, they don’t leave their partners (Gelles, 1987; Mooney, 2000; Bornman, van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998; Vetten & Ludsin; 2005 Malley-Morrison, 2004; Gutteridge & Spence, 1997).

#### **1.2 Violence Against Women: General Issues and Research Concerns**

The fact that women are most at risk of violence from men with whom they have a heterosexual relationship is a matter of great personal, political, policy and theoretical concern (Fawcett, Featherstone, Hearn & Toft 1996:22). Violence has been pervasive in South African society for generations. In the apartheid era a culture of violence in response to state



violence shaped the social fabric of South African society. With the demise of apartheid, poverty, social disarray and fragmentation are broader forces that keep men and women stressed and socially dysfunctional. Given the intactness of patriarchal institutions, people's stress and powerlessness are channelled into the sphere of gender and family relations. Gender-based violence has a clear sociological basis and has become a subject of heated debate in popular terrains: on the streets, in the media and places of learning (Common Wealth Secretariat, 1993; Barnam, van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998).

It would seem from media reports that domestic violence is growing unabated and is becoming more damaging to women's physical and psychological states. Violence at the hands of loved ones is highly destructive and usually more violent and common than street attacks. Given the lack of good data and police statistics the true extent of domestic violence is not known. Nonetheless, traditional and functionalist views about the family as a safe haven have been consistently challenged by the growing recognition of domestic violence within families exhibiting power-imbalances, non-egalitarianism and non-cooperation amongst spouses. Men still enjoy significant authority in marital and other romantic relationships. When violence occurs, family members who lack power may hesitate to confront the perpetrator; they consequently find themselves in an even worse situation (Kendall-Tackett, 2004:21).

Crime and politics in South Africa have been closely intertwined. Instability promoted a growing number of South Africans to acquire weapons, especially guns, which are all too often used to settle personal and family disputes. The result is a society in which the use of violence to achieve power and personal aims has become endemic, given the levels of inequality and personal conflict (Mark Shaw in Gutteridge & Spence, 1997:125).

Women who are beaten by their husbands cannot use their full potential for the benefit of their family, their community and their country. Domestic violence is not just a private matter or a woman's problem. We all have a responsibility to try and reduce or prevent it. The experience of women has shown that in South Africa, as in other countries, beating or the threat of beating is used to keep women at home, away from work. Often they have been used to keep women away from work when the husband and the family desperately need her earnings. This happens because the husband is afraid that he will lose his superior status and privilege in the home as a result of the increased financial and other independence that his wife's job gives her. The trouble with violence is that it does more than keep women in their

place. It is actually making them fearful, angry and preoccupied with their own safety. Media debates have made it clear that there are no good grounds for defending violence against women as ‘traditional’ behaviour. The rape and sexual abuse of women and children occur in the context of a range of social attitudes and ways of dealing with such offences. Society’s reaction to rape ranges from treating it as a joke to demanding punishment of offenders. Rape is an ugly crime of violence; it is often committed against defenceless children (Mooney 2006, Roberts, 2002, Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000).

Family violence is a complex and multifaceted issue; it is more than female, child, sibling, parent or elder abuse. It is gendered; most abuse victims are female and most perpetrators are male. Family violence is a consequence of social inequality and is socially constructed. Family violence affects the victim’s social well-being, physical and psychological health. Sexual crimes have increased in 2009 and more services have become urgent for abused women in all nine South African provinces (<http://www.esr.org.za/gender/directory/intro.htm>). Although shelters are not the ultimate solution, they do provide abused women with some temporary accommodation and support.

The present mini-dissertation focuses on women’s experiences of abuse in Kwamhlanga, an underdeveloped and predominantly ‘informal settlement’ in Mpumalanga. Abused women in this area represent a highly marginalised sector of South African society. The fact that women, both married and cohabiting, are most at risk of violence from partners is a matter of great personal, policy and political concern (Mooney 2006:3). Gender-based violence is not simply a ‘women’s problem’. Both men and women today ought to be concerned about family violence. There is a great deal of historical evidence to show that women have always suffered violence at the hands of their husbands and partners. Women are usually very ashamed of having suffered abuse and often find it difficult to talk about or discuss their suffering. Thus, whilst there is a great urgency for work on domestic violence, it is a sensitive area and requires researchers to be genuinely empathetic and patient.

The primary aims of the present study are to help women who find themselves in violent relationships. Thus:

- (1) build understandings of abused women’s perceptions of what perpetuates domestic violence in marriages and cohabiting unions;
- (2) examine women’s coping strategies within abusive relationships.

A secondary aim can also be highlighted. The study seeks to consider whether the states of ‘marriage’ and ‘cohabitation’ create different conditions inhibiting or encouraging domestic violence. Popular ‘market model’ exchange theories suggest that where women are not formally married, their devalued statuses could invite violent controlling actions towards them on the part of partners. Married women might be treated more respectfully, and therefore not subjected to as much violence as cohabiters (Douglas, 2004:68; & Rowthorn, 2002:120; Stadley, 2006, 25). Alternatively, it could be argued that the historical legacy of men’s legal ownership of their wives, along with the laws that specifically gave men the right to abuse or punish them has been undermined in recent times by the recognition of women’s rights and their abilities to protect themselves, as well as more effective prosecution of their perpetrators (Vetten in Park, Fedler & Dangor 2000; 57).

In general I set out to examine women’s experiences of violence in order to explore and understand how women perceive and define such behaviour; to identify the obstacles that the women feel made it difficult for them and other abused women to seek help or leave such relationships; to identify resources for improving community responses and for eliminating violence and abuse in Mpumalanga. The violence women endure arises within and out of particular kinds of relationships, where the exercise of power and control by one partner against the other has become routine, and even legitimated.

Harwin, Hague and Malos (1999:23; 86) argue that for more than twenty years in the more developed countries, groups offered support as part of a range of services to women and children experiencing violence and other kinds of family abuse. Many of the groups were informed by the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As women came together, the issue of violence in the home as well as other forms of sexual and interpersonal violence against women became highlighted. In those early years, there were very few options available to women seeking alternatives to living with violent men. In time resistance became more popularised not just in the West, but in Southern Africa as well (Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000:30). The criminal justice and social welfare systems deal more speedily with family violence today than they did in the past and whilst there are uncertainties as to the effectiveness of public institutions and services, community initiatives such as the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence has gained momentum in South Africa.

Domestic violence causes individuals and families emotional pain and suffering. It violates the love and trust that are central to a close, deep relationship. The victim, usually the woman, is powerless to control the violence since she is not responsible for it. No matter what form the abuse takes, women and children live in constant fear of the abuse. Women who are physically, sexually, verbally or emotionally abused by their partners often tell no one about their abuse. When they do reveal their abuse, they could be ignored, or told it was their fault; in cases where officials believe them they could be told that it's a family matter and outsiders cannot intervene (Vetten & Ludsin, 2005:22). In the South African context, cultural interpretations of discipline suggest parents have controlling rights over children and men greater power over wives and partners. This obviously comes into conflict with the constitutional rights of women and children.

The 1992-1993 National Crime Victimization Survey in the USA reported that 29% of all violence perpetrated against women is committed within an intimate partner relationship (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993). In South Africa a large number of women are seriously harmed by male violence. The victims get trapped in an abusive relationship which gets worse and worse. It is for this reason that the Government of National Unity together with the Department of Justice introduced protection orders in the early post-apartheid society that could be used to attempt to control the violence of perpetrators (Domestic Violence Act of 1999, SA).

### **1.3 The meaning of 'domestic violence'**

The common-sense definition of violence would probably emphasise physical force but violence can be constructed in different ways. The word 'violence' is defined as behaviour designed to inflict injury to people or damage to property (Rider, 2005: 492). The Domestic Violence Act (No.116 of 1998) defines 'domestic violence' as physical, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking, damage to property, any other abusive behaviour or controlling behaviour and entry into a person's property without their consent. Gelles and Straus (1979) define violence as an act carried out with the intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person. The problem of violence against women is frequently characterised as one of coercive control that is maintained by tactics such as physical, psychological, sexual abuse and denial of resources. Violence should be understood as any action that diminishes another human being. Violence might also be seen as that which violates or causes violation.

Domestic violence can imply any form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse which takes place within the context of a close relationship between adults, and is thought to be more widespread than is commonly believed. It is often regarded as a private matter to be resolved by the individuals concerned. Thus, domestic abuse can be popularly perceived to be something that does not warrant reporting by the victim. Although both men and women are victimised and violence occurs in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, evidence suggests that women in heterosexual relationships suffer far more, than others. Reflecting that viewpoint, this mini-dissertation will focus on abuse of women by their male partners and ex-partners. Domestic violence commonly involves criminal assaults or harassment (Herring, 2001:78).

As already suggested, domestic violence can be identified through many types of abuse (the following can now be listed as a range of domestic violence acts):

- (i) Physical abuse is the most identifiable and may include: punches, shoves, kicks, use of weapons, slapping, bites.
- (ii) Sexual abuse includes any time a woman is an unwilling participant, and may include rape and indecent assault (whether you are married to the other person or not).
- (iii) Verbal and emotional abuse includes yelling, swearing or giving a woman the silent treatment. Emotional control is used to isolate and intimidate a person.
- (iv) Damage to property or anything you value.
- (v) Stalking; when the other person follows or approaches you or your children repeatedly.
- (vi) Economic abuse occurs when the other person keeps money to which one is legally entitled in an unreasonable manner by:-
  - refusing to pay or share the rent or;
  - mortgage bond for the home you share, or
  - disposing of any property (household goods) in which you have interest, without your permission.
  - emotional abuse (that is, degrading or humiliating behaviour including repeated insults, belittling, cursing and threats);

- any other controlling or abusive behaviour which poses a threat to your safety, health or well being (Bornman, van Eden & Wentzel, 1998).

Much concern is with the complex behaviours that are used to dominate, manipulate and violate women. Domestic violence is different in many ways from other forms of crime because it incorporates the need to provide safety to those who experienced domestic violence, most commonly women and children (Heather and Braithwaite 2002: 45). When locked in a situation of violence and abuse, women's attempts to modify their partner's behaviour are usually met with failure. As already stated, they are often blamed for their own abuse. They are sometimes warned primarily by the man's family that she will not cope if the marriage were to end, thus causing an underlying feeling of failure and or renewed sense of responsibility on the part of the woman to make the marriage work. In many societies it is part of the norm for parents to hit children, and husbands to hit wives. These are not recognised as problematic behaviours. Much of the violence is hidden as many women may not define their experiences as violent and may not report incidents of abuse. Generally the victims see domestic violence incidents as quite serious and difficult to bear. They might call the police or ask a neighbour for help. When help arrives it brings into conflict cultural norms shaping what goes on in the private context: whilst police ought to arrest the perpetrators, they are often undermined by notions of a man's right to control his wife, thus making the victim's interests secondary.

Abuse takes a wide variety of forms and both the victim and offender are often reluctant to share information. Domestic violence is the most underreported crime in South Africa. Offenders typically try to minimize the extent of abuse out of shame and fear of punishment. Victims, who are sometimes blamed for their victimisation, also may feel shame. They may be reluctant to talk about the abuse because they fear retaliation, have a sense of loyalty to the abuser, or want to avoid painful memories. The view of the family as a 'haven in a heartless world' has been tempered by the knowledge that all too often it is a place of great cruelty. Domestic violence affects over millions of marriages in South Africa every year and a high rate of dating and cohabiting couples. Violence frequently continues after separation. The violence can range from a few slaps to threats with lethal weapons. Its frequency can range from a single occurrence to weekly (Bornman, Eeden & Wentzel, 1998: 400; Hague, Mullender & Aris, 2003: 19).

There is less consensus on the extent to which women's violence is in self-defence, although it is clear that when women kill they are much likely to do so in self-defence. The focus is on female abuse because existing evidence shows that women and children are more likely to be victims. The vast majority of battering and violence cases until recently, were not viewed as a serious problem. The family members in general, believed that abuse was part of family matters. Sexist attitudes such as a 'man's home is his castle', further kept the problem hidden behind closed doors.

In most countries concerned about human rights, domestic violence is regarded as a serious offence and has been classified as a criminal offence. It is viewed as more serious than other assaults because of the emotional ties between victim and offender. Physical abuse often occurs with sexual and psychological abuse. Sexual and psychological abuses have long-term damaging emotional effects. Sexual abuse is usually the most difficult form of abuse for offenders and victims to reveal. It remains underreported for many reasons; including the historical stigma attached to intimate perpetrated violence, fear of retaliation from their perpetrators, and other safety concerns (Bornman, Eeden & Wentzel; 1998).

A battered woman and her abuser do not have equal power. Gendered power relations in society and the power gained from sustained patterns of coercion, intimidation and violence, give the perpetrator power over the victim. They make the victim vulnerable to pressure, intimidation and retaliation by the offender. Domestic violence has also been viewed as having an impact on children in the short term and long term (Harwin, Hague & Malos; 1999:48).

#### **1.4 The research problem: Domestic Violence in a Patriarchal Society**

The South African statistics on marriage show that cohabitation has been growing in significance over recent decades and marriage rates are falling (Amoateng & Richter, 2003). Cohabitation occurs when a man and woman live together as though married but without completing any recognized marriage ceremony or meeting the requirements for common law marriage (Dries & Rowthorn, 2002:19). The legal system treats cohabitants in the same way as those legally married, both when they have children and when they have been together for a sufficient amount of time. In most countries cohabitants report comparable levels of satisfaction and closeness as well as similar conflicts and problems. Both marriage and

cohabitation require the parties to exchange promises of mutual support as partners age and experience illness or go through other life changes (Dries and Rowthorn, 2002:122; Standley 2006:50; Bird, 2006:6).

Women in South Africa, irrespective of race and class, have been victims of a deep patriarchal system that teaches men to view women as possessions. The term 'patriarchy' was first used in 1946 by the Greeks to describe a specific type of male dominated family, now it is used more generally to refer to male domination, to the power of relationships by which men dominate women. It also characterises a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. Patriarchies imply that men control, own and determine women's lives, thus laying the basis for immense struggle in the domestic environment. The subordination that women experience at a daily level takes various forms (as physical and mental beating, within urban and rural contexts, and within early or later stages of life).

Within the family a hierarchy exists in which 'man' is superior or dominant and 'woman' is inferior and subordinate. The family is also important for socialising the next generation in patriarchal values. The extent and nature of male control may differ in different families, but is never absent. In many societies women do not have freedom to decide how many children they want, when to have them, whether they can use birth control methods and whether women can abort unwanted children. Apart from male control, male dominated institutions like the church and the state (religion and politics) also lay down rules regarding women's reproductive capacity. For example, in the Catholic Church the male religious hierarchy decides whether men and women can use birth control methods. In modern times, the patriarchal state tries to control women's labour power and access to property through a range of measures. This is because men hold power and wish to retain their authority in almost all societies and cultures. In most South African rural areas and informal settlements women's role as producers of children and of labour power is not considered as economic contribution at all. These sorts of realities undermine women's status relegating them to 'minor' and 'dependent' positions (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002:5).

Although the indications are that domestic violence is on the increase, it is not clear which forms of family violence are most acute, since many of the violent acts are not reported. Victims are often reluctant to report the crime, especially when they feel the whole community will know their sad stories. Previously there was a widely shared belief that domestic incidents should be kept secret, for fear that they undermine a family's image of



public responsibility. These dominant beliefs served to isolate and further oppress abused women; many societies also condone the discipline of wives and tend to ignore even severe incidents of domestic violence (Vetten & Ludsin, 2005:24).

Understandably we are caught in the middle of a dilemma in which we are angered by the level of violence, frustrated by perceived ineffectiveness of the courts and increasingly unsympathetic responses to underlying social causes of violence. Some women cannot cope with their normal functioning as regular victims of physical attacks. Traditional cultural systems can be argued to have had exacted suffering and hardship on the part of the women and their negative consequences range from family disorganisation leading to separation and divorce, a lack of a sense of belonging or family cohesiveness on the part of family members. Such occurrences exacerbate abusive situations (Malley-Morrison, 2004:245; Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000:62).

Recent research on domestic violence shows that domestic violence is still the order of the day in South Africa (Vetten & Ludsin, 2005). Mpumalanga cannot be excluded from the statistics of regions with rising rates of crime or violence. In this study, an effort has been made to illuminate and build analysis of domestic crime or violence. The mini-dissertation considers violence in KwaMhlanga in Mpumalanga. It is a site faced with serious problems such as unemployment, a high rate of illiteracy, poverty, limited health facilities and a high crime rate. The region is inhabited by a mass of people belonging to more than one ethnic group. The predominant lifestyle of the people is a combination of both traditional African and Western ways of living; thus, both Western and African traditional notions of marriage are blended. There are people who are still clinging to their cultural beliefs, for instance worshipping ancestors and there are those with strong Christian beliefs. Beliefs and practices vary from one ethnic group to the other. I have experienced that in general, women in marital and cohabiting unions suffer years of abuse from their partners before they finally report the incident. My informal learning taught me that many abused women are trapped within intimate unions, whether marital and cohabiting, and this study therefore sought to explore this problem.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Violence can affect any member of a family and community. The media reminds us virtually on a daily basis of the existence, prevalence and the consequences of violent behaviour. It is evident that the most vulnerable members of society: the poor, the young, the women, have

been the most adversely affected. Violence has devastating effects on virtually all of the core social institutions of society. Domestic violence in unions (both marital and cohabiting) has been the focus of many individuals, organisations and scholars concerned with improving relationships and the positions of women. In South Africa, patriarchy, apartheid and particular cultural norms of African ethnic groups come together to shape high levels of domestic violence in which women are commonly ‘victims’. The researcher, in this study, set out to ascertain possible differences between women in different kinds of unions, but aimed to move broadly to highlight the sociological and cultural factors that create the conditions for violence and the dissolution of partnerships. Above all, the study aimed to focus on women’s perceptions of what aggravates and drives violence and how they contend with it.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORY, ARGUMENTS AND THEORY: SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Millions of women throughout the world face abuse such as physical, sexual, mental and psychological abuse. These kinds of abuse have been historically silenced or treated lightly. I would argue that incidences of domestic violence could be reduced, eliminated or dealt with more vigorously if all women reported such violations and become more active in speaking out against it. South Africa, as a third world country, is faced with the problem of large numbers of women, especially in the rural areas and informal settlements, enduring high levels of violence. How can this state of affairs be explained?

#### **2.2 Historical roots of family violence**

History is replete with customs and laws allowing women to be beaten, tortured and killed by their spouse. Pagelow (1984) argues that throughout the ages, violence against wives has been accepted and promoted as normal behaviour. This is important in understanding how such violence has been accepted, condoned, normalised and ignored by both individuals and institutions. It has been seen as a 'private matter'. The history of South African society is one in which women have been subjected to unspeakable cruelty. Women's relative powerlessness in the home was deeply entrenched across a variety of cultures and communities in South Africa. It was reinforced by the laws and rituals surrounding marriage whereby the man was head of the family. There are myths surrounding the abuse of women. It is often believed that wife beating is neither common nor widespread. This assumption is made because wife beating is hidden and occurs at night behind closed bars. The perception is reinforced by the lack of official statistics. The myth that battered women provoke their men remains popular; this myth denies men responsibility for their own actions and allows them to justify their violent behaviour.

The recent increase in recognition of the problem by state agencies has arisen from the action of the women's organisations in South Africa. Men's day to day domination was routinely reinforced by the state, for example, in the avoidance of intervention in marital disputes by the police. The position of women was also generally weak. She had no right to leave her husband without his permission and if she did he could physically restrain her. What emerges from research is a commonly held belief that domestic violence is a crime only in the most serious of cases. Legal and other state constructions of violence initially served to play down its significance and to constrain its definition, but there has been gradual increased awareness and recognition of the problem in law, policy statements and policy implementations (United Nations, 1989; Crowell and Burgess, 1996; Richardson and Robinson, 1993).

Women's views of violence are wide ranging and include emotional, sexual and physical elements, including threat and women's experience of being unable to control the initiation of the behaviour of men (Stanko, 1994). Features of physical violence that are often excluded include pushing, holding, blocking, throwing things (like furniture), and damaging property (like doors). Physical violence is reduced to the use of a relatively fleeting part of the man's body, or an object (weapon) held by the hand, onto a part of the woman's body. Sexuality figures strongly in men's accounts of violence against women; usually it is a reason for their violence. Suspected or known infidelity is often seen as a justification for violence to the woman herself or towards the other man (Kudchedkar and Ai-Isa, 1998).

The root impetus of violence in South Africa has to be located within its history of oppression, poverty and exploitation in the country. Apartheid was by definition a violent system that dehumanised black people and treated them as second class citizens. Men were emasculated and then sought to gain power through dominating and violating women (Simpson, 1992). Violence today is present in our everyday lives in South Africa. Violence is not just highlighted and popularised by the media. It is more likely that movies, television and magazines are merely reflecting some idealized image of what is socially acceptable. Previously certain forms of violence have been tolerated and condoned by our religions, schools and governments. Women thus have been oppressed in the home in South Africa for generations. For example in traditional African homes the woman knew that she was not equal to her husband and refrained from exchanging words with him.

In such households intimate partner violence or spouse abuse often went unreported to the police or other authorities. It is difficult to estimate its true incidence. Battering is when a

woman is hurt and violated by the man she knows intimately and shares her life with. Although wife beating was condoned in the past, it is beginning to carry a social stigma, so most men would be reluctant to admit the extent of violence they inflict on their wives. The manifestations of violence against women in the family are many and varied. Women may become the target for abuse in their roles of wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister, lover, and ex-wife. Research indicates that violence against women in the home takes various forms. It consists of physical violence or aggressive behaviour towards the victim's body. It can include pushing, pinching, spitting, kicking, pulling the woman's hair, hitting, punching, choking, burning, stabbing, throwing an object. It can range from minor bruising to murder, often beginning with what could be regarded as trivial contacts and then escalating into more frequent and serious attacks. Physical attack is often accompanied by sexual violence wherein the victim is forced to have sexual intercourse with her assailant (United Nations, 1989: 13-15).

Violence against women in the home may be manifested by psychological or mental violence that includes constant verbal abuse, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolation and deprivation of physical and economic resources. However, husbands who beat their wives might be eager to admit that their wives had also assaulted them because this would serve to justify their own violent actions. Crimes such as woman battering were a function of the secrets of sex and sexuality. Sexuality has been identified as an obstacle to historical investigations of violent behaviour. One aspect of family life that was conducive to the occurrence of family violence and has received little attention was the dichotomy between public and private life. Thus, a crime of violence committed in the home was seen as a different sort of crime to violence against a stranger in a public place. The right to privacy was more easily defended by some members of society than by others. The differential right to privacy was an important explanation of the invisibility of wife abuse in most societies and in most periods of history (Denmark, Krauss, Happen and Escher, 2006).

Violence in South Africa has erupted over money, drink and authority. These and other characteristics of violent relationships such as provocation by the women are considered causes of domestic violence and have lingered to the present time (Roberts, Hearty and Feeder 2006:6-7).

Some researchers, in South Africa and elsewhere, (for example Coltrane and Collins, 2001, Vetten, 1994 & Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1995) have argued that unequal status is an

important component of the profile of the battering husband. An example of an unequal status occurs when a man's educational level is much higher than his occupational attainment. Husbands can be more threatened when their wives work and have an independent source of income and prestige than when they are home and dependent. Conflict and verbal aggression are frequent occurrences in the wife beater's home. The battering man feels inadequate and sees violence as a culturally acceptable way to be both dominant and powerful. There is a great tendency to blame the victim in cases of family violence. Battered women have frequently been described as masochistic. In general, though, the vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and unemployment affects relations between men and women keeping relationships filled with conflict and competition. This has been a strong characteristic of our recent history.

## **2.2 Conceptualising Domestic Violence**

Some attempt to explore the concepts associated with domestic violence was made earlier. Early researchers used terms like wife abuse and domestic violence. This reflected the initial focus on the physical violence experienced by married and heterosexual women. The silence about battering is progressively becoming undermined. Additional victims have since been identified (including lesbians and gay men, and women in the process of separation and divorce). Terms such as wife abuse and wife battering are not inclusive enough to cover all these experiences. Many battered women are battered by intimates in non-marital relationships.

Today researchers do not agree on what to call this phenomenon: this reflects differences in their conceptualization of partner violence. Debates about definitions and labels are struggles about conceptualization and ideology (Mc Hugh, Livingston and Ford, 2005). For example, it is argued that some researchers prefer to use terms like "domestic violence", "family violence" and "spouse abuse" – rather than "wife abuse" or "women battering". Alternative approaches generally view violence and abuse as gender symmetrical, that is, equally likely to be perpetrated by men and women. Feminist researchers prefer terms such as women battering and contend that generic terms such as domestic and spouse abuse do not distinguish between battering and mutually combative relationships. They ignore the nature and consequences of violence and obscure the dimensions of gender and power that are fundamental to understanding the abuse of women (Breines and Gorden, 1983).

The emergence of new terms such as dating violence and lesbian battering reflects that women other than wives experience violence in their relationship. The term intimate partner violence has been used to refer to physical, psychological and / or sexual coercion perpetrated in the context of an intimate relationship. In the past decade researchers have come to realise that violence is as prevalent among cohabiting and dating couples as it is among married couples. Cohabitation refers to residence of a couple in a shared household, with mutual sexual access, but without legal sanction; essentially an informal marriage (Coltrane and Collins, 2001: 590).

Other researchers have suggested that social factors such as a loss of social status, disapproval of family and friends, and feelings of failure or guilt for abandoning the relationship limit her options for leaving (Dobash and Dobash 1979, Walker; 1979). Abused women's perceptions of alternatives may be influenced by societal expectations related to gender and role relationships that encourage women to be self-sacrificing, adaptive and to care for and protect those close to them regardless of the cost (Walker, 1984 and Browne, 1989).

Researchers have also emphasized psychological factors underlying women's decisions not to leave. Walker (1979, 1983, and 1984) suggested that battered women have learned to be helpless. Women have developed motivational, cognitive and behavioural deficits as a result of battering. Other researcher's perspectives emphasize the emotional bonds that battered women form with their abusers (Browne, 1989; Dutton and Painter, 1981; Walker, 1984).

Some researchers have presented a view of battered women as helpless and resigned to being battered whereas others emphasize the help seeking, coping mechanisms and survival skills of battered women. The fact that women stay in relationships because they fear violent husbands focuses attention on economic, social and psychological factors. Some battered women fear that they will retaliate against them and their children if they try to leave (Rindington, 1988).

Threats of kidnapping and custody battles are common tactics used by abusive partners to keep women in violent relationships. Women who have left an abusive partner have sometimes been followed and harassed for months, or even years, and some have been killed (Browne, 1987; Pagelow, 1981). As a result, research documenting the prevalence and seriousness of intimate partner violence against women, has led to the establishment of networks of shelters in many countries. Over the years, agencies have sheltered millions of

women and have led researchers to focus on women as victims and at the same time hold women responsible for solving intimate partner violence. Men that batter their partners are more likely to have a history of violence in their family of origin. Men who have witnessed parental violence and men who have been abused as children or adolescents are more likely to become batterers than those who have not (Coleman, 1983; Sugarman and Hotaling, 1986).

Early research focused on the characteristics of women who were battered. Initially battered women were seen as causing their own suffering. Feminist research challenged misconceptions about the identity of battered women. Research documented that abuse can occur across regional, occupational, ethnic, racial and class groups. The most often asked question directed to abused women was: “Why does she stay?” This question reveals a basic premise about woman battering;” *if the women would leave, she would not get beaten*. This perspective may be both blaming and counterproductive. The batterer may continue to terrorise her after leaving or he may go on to batter someone else.

Early research focused on the logistical reasons why some women did not leave an abusive husband. To be of any help to the victims of an abusive relationship, it is important to understand why the seemingly immediate simple answer (leave) is rarely immediate and never simple looking at the situation practically. In the absence of professional intervention and counselling, many battered woman have no place to go and no means of survival outside the marriage relationship. Women often have small children to care for, whom they would fear leaving at home alone with the father, after a violent outburst. They cannot financially support themselves and the children apart from the relationship (Walker, 1979; Browne and Williams, 1989).

In the past, approaches to domestic violence evolved from viewing the problem as limited to a very few problematic marriages, disbelieving and blaming battered women, to recognising the prevalence of serious levels of physical violence and psychological abuse in many intimate relationships. It was then that the prevalence of violence against women and the characteristics and reactions of the victim have received extensive attention. There has been a shift from viewing different forms of male violence against women as separate entities toward viewing violence as a unitary phenomenon with diverse manifestations that vary depending on context. An understanding of family violence requires us to look at women and men in all spheres of their lives, such as the workplace, the domestic sphere and the civil life of the community. Race, class and gender have together structured social relationships.



### **2.3 Pattern of domestic violence**

Domestic violence, specifically the battering of women, has been constructed as a pattern of domination, intimidation and coercive control (Dutton and Goodman, 2005). The technique of control and domination can be expressed verbally, by making belittling comments about a partner in front of friends, for instance boasting about real sexual conquests and making cruel comparisons. There are a number of distinct organizational characteristics that make a family a warm, supportive, and intimate environment but which could also lead to conflict and violence. Power, power confrontations and perceived threats to domination are issues in almost all acts of family violence. When someone is blocked from doing something that he or she is both interested in and capable of doing, this can be frustrating. When inequality is socially structured and sanctioned within a society that theoretically espouses equal opportunity and egalitarianism, it can lead to intense conflict and confrontation (Rank & Kain, 1995:374).

Thus we find that the potential for conflict and violence is especially high in a democratic and egalitarian society (like South Africa) that sanctions and supports a male dominated family system. The greater the inequality, the more one person makes all the decisions and has all the power, the greater the risk of violence.

### **2.4 Perspectives on violence**

#### **2.4.1 Violence against women**

Sexual and other forms of violence against women is underreported for obvious reasons (for example stigmatization) and in most countries, there is not considerable research into its incidence; it is widespread. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some countries nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner.

In the past it was acceptable for a man to beat his wife if she disobeyed him, refused him sex, did not complete her housework, was unfaithful or was suspected of being unfaithful or asked him about his involvement with other women. Violence is culturally determined. Some people mean to harm others but based upon their cultural backgrounds and beliefs do not perceive their act as violent. Certain behaviours such as hitting a spouse may be regarded by some people as acceptable cultural practices, but are considered violent acts with important health implications for the individual by most people today (Rank & Kain, 1995).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, and deprivation (WHO, 1996). The inclusion of the word ‘power’ in addition to the use of physical force broadens the nature of a violent act and expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts that result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation.

The various theoretical perspectives on violence explain different sources, approaches and interaction between various individual, interpersonal and environmental factors (Borman, Eeden, Wentzel, 1998:9). Some contributions reflect on the nature and dynamics of structural violence and others on the micro- processes associated with interpersonal violence. Additionally, the relationship between people and their group membership influences their behaviour (ethnicity, nationalism, race and class) and can also impact on social and political processes. The use of force or power to harm another should be understood to include neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

#### **2.4.2 Cultural beliefs and domestic violence**

Cultural beliefs play an important role for women who are operating within diverse cultural frameworks and experiencing domestic violence worldwide. Walker (1999) argues that gender overrides cultural influences against woman and is a powerful risk for becoming a victim of violence. The levels of violence against women are shocking. Estimates of violence against women within the family context are more difficult to obtain due to conventional perceptions often held by the women themselves that violence within the family context is not considered violence and should not be discussed outside of the family. These perceptions reflect beliefs that are embedded within a cultural perspective (Kulwicki, 2002; Yoshihama, 2002). The importance of culture and its influence on how male or female relationships are structured is well established. Cultural influences extend to domestic violence resulting in a wide range of experiences and a wide range of approaches that affect women’s responses. Culture is significant since gender perceptions are culturally embedded. Literature on culture and the context of domestic violence has been limited until recently (Kulwicki, 2002).

Culture is defined as the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices and social institutions, including language and behaviour. Whilst these appear to be set, many social, economic, legal and political institutional responses that sustain domestic

violence or maltreatment of women in various cultural groups have undergone changes that ultimately have decreased the incidence of domestic violence against women. There has been much global advocacy for changes in the economic, legal and political systems that oppress women. Often the assimilation of these changes is met with resistance within some communities as they are incompatible with the existing cultural framework. For example laws may be introduced to grant protection orders for victims of domestic violence but the police officers' and judges' responses as well as the execution of these new laws may not necessarily reflect the introduced changes (Sagot, 2007).

The lack of consistency may reflect the disconnection between the changes proposed and the cultural beliefs held by the society in question. The women who are intended beneficiaries of these institutional changes often are disappointed when they attempt to seek the protections and sanctions promised. The collective understandings of the behaviours that are associated with domestic violence and the driving forces underlying those behaviours reflect considerable variation across cultures (Malley-Morrison, 2004). The term "culture of violence" was used to describe the conflict that enveloped South African society in the struggle against apartheid. The pervasive nature of violence undermined the moral, interpersonal and social fabric. This culture of violence persists in a gendered fashion in present day South Africa with large numbers of women abused by men.

Theories of why violence occurs are many and various. Theories have attempted to explain violence through individual pathology, stress, frustration and blocked goals, socialization and learning theory, societal structures, feminist and non-feminist theories. Scholars attempt to explain family or interpersonal violence on two levels that include micro and macro levels. The micro level of analysis studies a social problem on an individual level, thus analyzing the behaviour of the individuals involved. The macro level of analysis views social problems in terms of the larger societal structures and organizations that affect violence (Gelles, 1983).

During the struggle for and against apartheid, social, political and structural violence dominated in South Africa. Other forms of violence such as family violence, interpersonal violence continued. The end of apartheid era and the advent of democracy did not result in a significant decrease of violence in South Africa. Criminal violence has increased, political and other forms of collective violence continue in some parts of the country. Very few people in South Africa have not been touched by some form of violence. Some are still

suffering from the effect of stress as a result of such violence. In this sense, systemic violence (at the macro level) reproduces interpersonal violence (at the micro level) (Simpson, 1992).

The theme of dramatic increase in all types of crime, particularly violent crime, has dominated media headlines. In September 2009, Minister Nathi Mthethwa, announced that sexual crimes, including domestic violence had gone up substantially (Pretoria News, September 23, 2009). Many observers blamed the police and government for not doing enough to stem the increasing levels of crime and domestic strife. The wave of crime was blamed for making international investors hesitant to invest in the new South Africa. As already suggested, the origins of interpersonal violence can often be related to the fact that all members of a social unit (family, organization, society) do not have equal access to the decision making process within that unit. For example, men rate themselves as having more power than women and consequently work in the interests of sustaining male domination. In fact, some members of the unit take it upon themselves to decide for others, who can only accept or reject the decisions. The origin of family violence is therefore often to be found in the unequal distribution of power. Power refers to the ability to persuade people to do what one wants them to do within the power structure of the unit of analysis (Bornman, Van Eden and Wetzel 1998: 63).

## **2.5. Various arguments and social explanations**

In attempts to explain the issues of sexual, gender-based and domestic violence, key arguments on the possible causes of the violence and their significance for South African society are raised. Whilst there are numerous explanatory tools that can be highlighted, I focus on nine perspectives that have particular value for my study. Hence, my approach is a selective one.

### **(a) Violence is the result of cultural conditioning**

This perspective is based on the premise that violence is acquired and nurtured behaviour. The assumption is that violence is part of a culture and members or groups belonging to the culture adhere to that culture's values and customs. Violence is a product of the social environment. Chislehurst (1973) lists cultural factors that cause violence, and refers specifically to interpersonal relationships where violence is presented as being part of human

interaction, and the mass media ( newspapers, radio and television) that may overemphasize violence to the extent that it may be interpreted as essential for survival, and a normal feature of life. As in the earlier discussion of violence in the context of South Africa, violence has roots embedded in the past, and are being perpetuated at present by cultural conditioning and socio-cultural traditions.

### **(b) Violence is the result of psychological factors**

In this perspective, the root of what happens in the family is most often found in the personalities of the family members. Those who subscribe to this perspective look at the cause of woman battering from the viewpoint of individual pathology as expressions of a psychological problem in the men, women and the family. Theories and perspectives of domestic violence have inferred that battering is the result of childhood experiences (being abused as a child), personality traits (high need for power), personality disturbances (borderline personality disorder), psychopathology (antisocial personality disorder) and other psychological disorders or problems such as posttraumatic disorder or poor impulse control, poor self esteem (Roberts, 2002:26).

A number of studies have found a high incidence of psychological disorders and personality impairments in populations exhibiting much physical assaults ('assaultive' populations). Studies have found incidence rates of personality disorders to be 80-90 percent in both court referred and self referred assaulters (Saunders, 1996 and Dutton, 1995). As the violence becomes more severe and chronic, the likelihood of psychopathology in these men approaches 100 percent. Across several studies, implemented by independent studies, the prevalence of personality disorder in wife assaults has been found to be extremely high. There is frequently antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality or posttraumatic stress syndrome among men who assault their wives (Dutton, 1995).

### **© Violence is the result of power**

This theory is based on the premise that power is used as the sole means of controlling others. Hence violence becomes logically related to some individuals who are made powerless by the powerful ones. The ability (power) and right (authority) adds a dimension to the understanding of violence. The concept "violence" is sometimes equated with force, power and coercion. Force is the use of physical energy to accomplish a task. Its connotation may be

either positive or negative. Force and violence are used interchangeably to refer to the basically similar behaviour of law enforcement agents and upholders of order, whereas violence also refers to the conduct of people opposed to the state and the status quo. Violence can be defined as the capacity to impose one's will upon another and force, on the other hand, is the capacity to impose one's will upon another.

Power grants privileges to certain groups of people while denying them to others. Privileged groups such as men and heterosexuals can discriminate and perpetrate violence against non-privileged groups. The roles of social conditioning perpetuate violence such as the gender roles, in our culture that encourage men to be aggressive and women to be passive. As suggested earlier, violence need not be confined to physical violence against life and property, it can also be verbal. Additionally, it was also maintained that the apartheid system as a whole exemplified structural violence with severe effects on the South African population, for example, widespread unemployment, infant mortality and malnutrition. South Africa is described as a heterogeneous and divided society with immense discrepancy noted in terms of who has 'power' and who not.

In this perspective, personality disorders are common and lead to unhealthy families. Here, they look at the cause of woman battering from the viewpoint of individual pathology, as expressions of a psychological problem in most of the men, and sometimes women and the family (Roberts, 2002:26). These personality disorders have to be treated and individuals counselled to stop the problem from recurring (Dutton, 1995).

#### **(d) Intergenerational transmission of violence**

Similar to the idea of 'culture' is the notion of violence being reproduced within families across the generations. The intergenerational transmission of violence is firmly established in the public consciousness, and there is strong scientific evidence to support that. Richard Gelles, confirms that one of the consistent conclusions of domestic-violence research is that individuals who have experienced violent and abusive childhoods are more likely to grow up and become child and spouse abusers than those with no experience of violence, though it is witnessing violent attacks on their mothers, rather than being physically abused themselves as children, that is more generally associated with boys becoming spouse abusers in adulthood.

In some studies as many as two thirds of men who hit their partners had witnessed their father's violence towards their mothers (Stammers, 1996).

A modelling process takes place in which boys learn to express themselves by lashing out and girls develop a tolerance to violence which inhibits them from resisting it. Not all children who grow up in violent homes become violent themselves, however. Straus (1983, 1994) shows that violence is contagious in a number of ways. A woman who was abused by her own parents is more likely to stay in a violent relationship with her husband or boyfriend. She tends to perceive violence as normal or because she has low self esteem and little sense that she can improve the situation. The more violent a husband is to his wife, the more likely she is to use violent punishment on her children. Violent husbands are also more violent to their children.

#### **(e) Sexual property rights**

Sexual violence is defined as any physical, visual or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl as a threat or assault that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and takes away her ability to control intimate contact (Kelly 1988(a):41). The various forms of violence are directed at women largely because their bodies are socially constructed as 'sexual'. The overwhelmingly male acts of aggression against women and girls mean that sex is used as means of exercising power and domination.

Sexual assault is a function of a certain kind of society which historically and traditionally defines women as the property and possessions of men, and men as patriarchs, breadwinners and rulers. People are accorded status, authority, control and power in part according to their gender. As with any social value system, the ideology it represents becomes entrenched in the day to day functioning of the society. It becomes accepted as reality. Moreover, it becomes internalised by both women and men, and consequently shapes their beliefs and attitudes. Sexual assault behaviour arises from the sexualisation of aggression, dominance and misogyny. Pornography plays a crucial role in the socialization of normally violent men, as it encourages males to perpetuate sexual and non sexual violence against women, and teaches women to feel responsible for such crimes (Thorne- Finch, 1992).

The traditional patriarchal attitude is that married women are the property of their husbands, economically, sexually and emotionally. South Africa is liberal in the African context regarding the status of women, but arguably women have a subordinate status and restricted autonomy in society. The majority of African women are influenced by a system of

customary law. For example, the practice of lobola (bride price) is a traditional arrangement between two families, in which the woman essentially becomes the property of her husband. Women who violate the male prerogative are felt to have broken a social tradition.

Dobash and Dobash (1979, 1992) state that men who beat their wives regard their actions as proper and justify those actions as a defence of their traditional rights. The status of women as property can be seen in the development of laws concerning rape. Rape within marriage, however, was, by definition impossible. Marriage laws traditionally assumed implied consent to sexual relations by wives and allowed husbands to use force to gain compliance (Fagan and Browne, 1994). It has only been in recent years that laws have begun to recognise marital rape as a serious problem.

Expectations about dating and intimate relationships are conveyed by culturally transmitted scripts. Scripts support violence when they encourage men to feel superior, entitled and licensed as sexual aggressors with women as their prey, while holding women responsible for controlling the extent of sexual involvement. Parents socialise daughters' to resist sexual advances and sons to initiate sexual activity and to view relationships in terms of 'property'.

#### **(f) Economic strain**

Domestic violence tends to increase during times of economic strain. Lower class families are prone to violence, have a traditional conception of gender roles, in which the husband is supposed to be the provider and head of the household. When he fails to provide, he loses his standing both in his wife's eyes and his own. Economic strain also plays a role in keeping some battered women trapped in their marriages. Most battered women leave their husbands, many stay because they can't afford to leave (Coltrane and Collins, 2001).

Poverty, bad and overcrowded housing, limited educational resources, unemployment and poor job opportunities create a sense of frustration and repression which predispose families to abusive behaviour. Violence is viewed as a strategy through which men, who have little educational resources, low job prestige, low incomes and limited interpersonal skills, maintain a position of dominance in family life. Violent and or exploitative behaviour and the moral justifications for such behaviour are accepted as elements in lower class cultures and are learned by young children growing in these cultures and are culturally transmitted over the generations. The social defects are thus associated with low income levels, the prevalence of woman headed families and involvement of mothers with young children in the labour



force and high residential turnover. The abusive families are heavily concentrated in the poorest social group.

### **(g) Structural explanations**

Structural explanations view physical and sexual abuse in family relationships in terms of the social, economic and ideological structures of the society as a whole e.g. physical abuse as a lived reality – within the framework of economic deprivation - limits the developmental opportunities of children and structures their lives. The position of families in the social structure is a key determinant of the degree of stress and frustration they experience. Poverty and deprivation represent structured obstacles to development and evoke reactive personal violence by individuals against individuals. The concentrations of poverty and child maltreatment in particular subgroups of a society are to be explained in terms of class inequalities in the control and distribution of resources, which produce deprived groups and social policies which fail to take account of their needs.

Family violence is located in cultural values, the structural organization of family life, blocked opportunities and social learning (Straus & Gelles, 1985:162). Family life exists within a cultural context in which certain forms of violence are tolerated and mandated. The widespread acceptance of physical punishment as a means of disciplining children represents permission for family members to use forms of violence on each other that would not be allowed in the public spaces of society. Physical punishment is regarded as normal in family life. Children are socialised into the acceptability of violence under certain conditions. Children learn within the family that it is acceptable to hit people you love, for powerful people to hit less powerful people, and to use hitting to achieve some end.

Straus, Gilles and their colleagues on the Family Violence Research Program at the University of New Hampshire maintain that the structures of family life breed stress and conflict. They argue that the family is a social institution in which interaction is intense and wide ranging. Structural conditions make family life stressful and therefore vulnerable to violence. The private nature of modern family life reduces the likelihood of intervention by neighbours, the police and the courts and makes it possible for family to get away with levels of violence not acceptable. Men are abusive because they ‘want to control women’ and

prevailing structures create the conditions for this to happen (Leibrich, Pauline and Ransom, 1995).

#### **(h) Social and political issues**

The family has become an object of politics and public controversy. This has happened even though families are private and most people want them to be private. Issues of employment discrimination against women affect families. The effect is indirect but powerful because the outcome determines how much financial independence women have and thus their desire to get married and their power within marriage. Laws about marriage and regulations regarding welfare support for dependent children affect families too; where there is poverty single-headed households are reliant on state welfare and support (Collins and Coltrane, 2001: 31).

The family is constantly being reshaped by public, political and private decisions. The sociological perspectives give us insight into how and why families are different and help us see the pressures they will face in the future. There was a time when women struggling for some autonomous roles in a male dominated system were diagnosed as having psychiatric problems. A sociological perspective gives better insight into the causes of their situation and possible courses of social and political action. The growing importance of political issues affecting the family makes it relevant for all of us to know what aspects of the surrounding world shape the internal dynamics of the family, and how the family influences political priorities.

Many issues surrounding families are connected to patterns of stratification, including the dimensions of economic class, power and status. These affect the position of men and women both inside and outside families. Because of economic discrimination, black men have unusual difficulties in getting steady or well paying jobs and black families have tended to rely on women's incomes as well as children's incomes.

Sociological studies provide a large body of evidence suggesting that the major causes of physical violence in the family are to be found in the society as a whole. Among these features are male dominance in the family and society, which can be inhibited or facilitated by prevailing social and political interventions.

### **(i) Feminist explanations**

Feminist theories identify and criticise male domination in the family, economy, or other spheres of the social and cultural world (Coltrane and Collins, 2001: 591). Feminists demonstrate the extent of men's violence against women and focus on men's power and domination (Fawcett, Featherstone, Hearn and Toft: 1996: 23). The issue of power, control and domination permeate people's lives, thus, gendered power relations are basic to the study of violence. All agencies are argued to be gendered and present gendered understandings of violence which are directly related to policies and practice. Feminist explanations go beyond simple analysis based on psychological or individual causes; they note the pervasiveness and embeddedness of violence against women both within the home and within the structure of society itself.

Feminism emphasises that violence by husbands against wives arises out of the socio-cultural belief that women are less important and less valuable than men and are not entitled to equal respect. A domestic violence culture is seen as a component of the total social context that tolerates the subordination of women and the use of violence against them. In this analysis, wife abuse is seen as the product of an interrelated and complex set of values wherein women are regarded as inferior to men, suffering discrimination in employment and education and grossly underrepresented in all areas of social and political life. Early radical feminist analyses tended to focus on the subject of rape (Griffin, 1971; Media and Thompson, 1974). Rape was described in terms of deliberate, hostile and violent acts of degradation and control on the part of the perpetrator.

Women's inferiority is seen particularly within intimate relationships where men assert their power and women are often legally and financially dependent. Feminist analysis suggests that the subordination of women within relationships is a norm and is transhistorical and reflective of all cultures. Domestic violence is condoned by cultural values that emphasize the privacy and autonomy of the family. Further in addition to making this violence, its perpetrators, and its victims visible, feminists concern themselves with strategies to alleviate violence and challenge the patriarchal foundations of society. Aggression is a culturally valued and accepted facet of masculinity in Western culture and that violence has to be understood in the context of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a key element in maintaining male power and control over women at a structural as well as an individual level. Feminists throughout the world have made significant progress in putting men's violence against

women, on political, legislative agendas and in providing services for women victims and survivors (Benedict, 1992).

Radical feminist theory has highlighted spouse abuse and shown that violence against women is the result of patriarchy and the institutionalisation of male privilege that is maintained by the legally and socially supported right of men to use violence to enforce the subordination of women (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). Walker's (1978) patriarchy theory also explains that repeated exposure to violence results in a condition of depression and incapacity to act self-defensively called "learned helplessness".

Anecdotal evidence, as already suggested, shows that men usually have more power in intimate relationships than women. Men generally give the orders while their wives obey them. Most marriages exhibit male authority and in rural and semi-rural environments young women tend to accept the validity of patriarchal norms and customs in their relationships. The effect of these patriarchal attitudes leads to the underreporting of violent crimes against women and children. Domestic or family violence cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account. Whilst feminism has been immensely powerful and strategic in its criticisms of patriarchy and in highlighting the causes of gender-based violence, it has tended to focus on women as a victimised class. This focus has obscured the diversity among women as well as among the men who perpetrate the violence (Loseke, Gilles and Cavanaugh, 2005: 20).

Feminist analysis has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of wife abuse and women's lives under oppressive conditions and connects these experiences to the pervasive sexism in our norms, values and institutions. They assert that when a man rapes his wife because he feels that he owns her and that it is a wife's duty to submit, this conflict is deeply gendered and the husband's perceived entitlement has strong institutional support. When a man with a personality disorder batters his wife because she has ignored him or her household duties, feminists point out that the abuse happens not just because of personality defects but because of men's 'legitimate control' and assertion of power given societal rules and expectations. They further argue that male domination within families is a part of a wider system of male power, neither natural nor inevitable, and occurs at women's costs. Feminist further explore and articulate the ways in which violence against women in the home is a critical component of the system of male power. Violence grows out of inequality within relationships and marriages, and reinforces male dominance and female subordination within

the home and outside it. Thus, violence against women is part of everyday gender politics (Dobash and Dobash, 1998).

The feminist perspective emphasizes that being a woman places one in the highest risk category for becoming a victim of a man's violence. Victimization together with inequality in society can cause mental health distress. Women's socio- economic and psychological dependency makes it difficult for them to leave situations of domestic violence or sexual harassment. Often in semi-rural or less developed settings it is physically impossible, women literally have no place to go or the means to get away and there are no services available to them. This dependency is frequently economic and results from various layers of sexist discrimination. Much of women's work is unpaid labour at home. Women work longer hours for lower pay, with fewer benefits and less security than men. Yet, women are still blamed for causing or deserving the abuse of men towards them. Liberal feminists have suggested that the portrayal of women and violence by the media directly relates to the cultural acceptance of violence against women and the many societal myths concerning domestic violence (Carl, 1999: 164).

Feminism has been a powerful force exposing such negative portrayals and building a social movement to emancipate women. In this regard, their contemporary (perhaps post-modern) accounts go beyond emphasising women's victimhood and explore women's resistances and agency – women do indeed run away, report abusers to the police and, in many cases, fight back.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The battering of women within a marriage is an age-old phenomenon. The female experience of male violence constitutes a substantial part of women's history. The problem of domestic violence can be analysed by various theories. Different approaches emphasize contrasting aspects of the phenomenon and identify the central issues differently. For example, those working within the individual psychology perspective locate the causes of the violent events in the personality characteristics of the victim or perpetrator. According to the feminist perspective, the root of male violence is an unambiguous and brutal manifestation of male dominance and female subordination and they focus consequently on the effects that woman battering has on its victim in patriarchal society.

Sociological research concentrates on the scope of domestic violence and on the relationship of the violence to other variables such as stress, poverty and class. Violence and abuse are

defined by the values and concerns of a particular group at a particular time. The feminist perspective has broadened our understanding of violence, depicted rape, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, pornography and the physical abuse of women and children as interconnected rather than discrete issues. The sociological approach presupposes conflicts within a family. In extreme situations unjustifiable means such as violence are used in the struggle to influence a situation in the desired direction.

Violence against women in the general population is widely regarded as a serious problem that affects large numbers of adults and children across the life span. It has historical roots, particularly in South Africa, is culturally defined, transmitted intergenerationally, and has social, economic, legal and political dimensions. Estimates of the scope of the problem vary. Although the extent of maltreatment, violence and abuse are frequently disputed, conservative estimates suggest that these problems affect millions of people in South Africa. Feminism has been in a unique place in that it has offered highly persuasive and valuable arguments that have to be taken account of if domestic violence is to be properly addressed.

## CHAPTER 3

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN AND MPUMALANGA CONTEXT

### 3.1 Introduction

A perusal of daily newspapers in South Africa can be quite alarming for outsiders to the country. New stories about cases of domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse and child abuse are constantly in the news. What is disturbing, of course, is that most of the abuse is attributable to the violent acts of men against women. As already suggested, the violence happens between people who were previously lovers or family members, or intimate partners that remain attached. In the South African context, it is commonly conceded that violence happens when the husband feels undermined, particularly if he fears that he will lose his superior status and privilege at home because of the increased financial independence that his wife's job gives her (Simpson, 1992). Gender-based-violence has been and remains prevalent in traditional societies, in South Africa and elsewhere. Violence against women in particular is a global problem, in the home, in neighbourhoods and at work, with rape, assault, wife beating and sexual harassment being amongst the most obvious manifestations.

Although there has recently been a dramatic increase in awareness of domestic violence in South Africa, we can only guess at the exact incidence of domestic abuse. This is the case because the offences are reported very infrequently (Human Rights Watch 1995:44). In South Africa, it is estimated that one in every four women are abused daily and that once every six days a woman is murdered by her partner (Park, Fedler and Dangor 2000; Vetten, 1995). These shocking statistics are just the reported cases, many more go unreported. Children and other members of the family are also seriously affected in most cases. Domestic violence has devastating physical and emotional effects including loss of self-esteem, guilt, shame, isolation, anger and hostility. The problem becomes a spreading social evil afflicting millions of people. In South Africa, the situation is compounded by the politics and tensions of a South African society in transition. Many males have a tendency of treating their wives badly and disrespectfully; this treatment comes from the way perpetrators were raised as children and beliefs that men are the head of the households.

In the past, males used to be heads or breadwinners and discouraged their partners or women from employment opportunities. Nowadays, South African women are employed, independent and may choose whether to marry or not. Thus, gender empowerment and the increasing number of women who enter the employment arena challenge the role of the male breadwinner. This reality creates conflict between what might be preached at home and what is practiced outside the home. Women often begin to see their partners as oppressive and the urge to be free becomes an increasing necessity. Given high levels of poverty, however, female dependency on male incomes is common. Thus, many South African women in violent relationships find themselves trapped or are unable to develop to their maximum potential because they are inhibited from engaging in activities outside of the home. Violence is cited as the cause of divorce or separation in one third of all divorce applications in South Africa. Records of file loads from Mpumalanga Social Services show that 80 percent of all women receiving professional services have been battered.

### **3.2 Violence in South Africa**

The apartheid regime's control over the economy, employment, housing and education led to poor socioeconomic conditions and reduced high status work opportunities especially for the black population. Most blacks suffered poverty, homelessness, high unemployment and other social problems such as alcoholism and drug abuse in the past. Poverty is characterised by a lack of assets and inability to accumulate wealth and the lack of means to achieve them. This is the case in Mpumalanga where people currently are unable to devise appropriate coping strategies in the face of a series of serious problems. The lack of infrastructural services, e.g. telecommunications and transportation, makes access to limited services like health, welfare and policing extremely difficult. Lacking access to such support, the semi-rural poor are the least able to deal with the impact of crime. Incidentally, most of the women I interviewed indicated that they lived some distance from their nearest police station. Minibus taxis are the most common means of transport to reach the SAPS (South African Police Services). It cost between five rand and ten rand to reach their nearest police station. For many in the semi-rural areas, seeking help from the police can sometimes be a long and relatively expensive experience.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was established to allow people from all backgrounds to come forward to speak about the hurts and discrepancies of the past (Mally-Mornison, 2004:246). The true nature and extent of violence perpetrated against ordinary



citizens became apparent during the TRC's time. At the level of gender-based violence, however, no similar structure is in place to monitor the violence women have experienced (and continue to experience) and how perpetrators as a group ought to be dealt with.

### **3.2.1 The South African Macro system**

Reference to the historical context has already been made. Apartheid was established in 1948. Racial segregation and discrimination resulted in significant disparities between whites and blacks. Racial tension gained momentum in the 1960s, intensifying political unrest. In 1991, Parliament formally scrapped the Apartheid laws, and a process of transformation started. The first democratic elections were held in 1994, after which a new Constitution was adopted. However, South Africa still faces many problems. Blacks suffer from poverty due to unemployment. High levels of crime are predominant. The HIV epidemic is growing, leaving child headed households. Thus, our difficult history has laid the foundation for the continuation of violence.

The status of women differs within the country and is shaped by race, class, religion, culture and traditional values. As a group and despite a changed Constitution, South African women generally have a subordinate status and restricted autonomy in society. Black women are most disadvantaged by poverty, discrimination, fewer opportunities, and low literacy rates. Stereotypical representations of women as inferior to men and belonging in domesticated roles as wives and mothers are common. The majority of African women are influenced by a system of customary law, for example the practice of lobola, which is a traditional agreement between two families in which the women become the property of husbands. The status of women is further influenced by income. Men are more likely to earn more money than their wives and have more control over money. This makes women dependent on husbands and likely to stay with their husbands despite abuse. Thus, in short, the South African macro-system, in historical terms, is patriarchal despite the acquisition of women's rights and freedoms in post-apartheid society.

### **3.2.2 The South African Micro system**

At the micro level of families the father tends to be recognised as the head of the family and women are ultimately responsible for child upbringing. Social, economic and cultural differences characterise South Africa and shape family structure and stability. There are stable middle class communities in which abuse occurs, but arguably not to the same degree

as what one finds in semi-rural communities enduring poverty and stress, and social services are not well developed. The macro-policies of the previous regime has contributed to the structural disparities and macro framework in which subcultures of violence are now thriving. The majority of families in which violence occurs live in unsafe and unhealthy conditions with shortage of housing and basic services and inadequate resources to provide for the needs of their children. The migration of parents, who often leave children in the care of grandparents in rural areas, has led to family disorganisation, shrinking the roles of father and mother. Some migrant workers have lost contact with their families. Further pressure is put on family life by problems such as alcoholism, drugs, parenting difficulties and violence in the community. The micro-system draws attention to power dynamics, household relational, decision- making, and power differentials that affect the day-to-day functioning of families. To explore the nature and dynamics of domestic violence both the macro- and micro-systems need to be taken account of.

### **3.2.3 Family violence in South Africa**

Researchers have begun to study family violence in a more comprehensive fashion and frequently reveal the multiple layers of abusive behaviors, with rape being evident in virtually all kinds of abusive contexts in South Africa (Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000, Malley-Morrison 2004). In the past, our law provided that a man could not be convicted of rape if he had intercourse with his wife without her consent. This unfortunate position changed in 1993 when the Prevention of Family Violence Act abolished the exemption of marital rape. Marital rape is a serious offence today. Social service mechanisms have been established to create a safe environment for the complainants away from their abusers. The Social Welfare Department, together with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), regularly assists citizens with problems such as abuse. An appropriate system to deal with the problem of domestic violence has been a problem. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is severely hindered by understaffing and an overload of serious crimes such as murder, rape and robbery. Victims often withdraw cases out of fear of the abuser. The judiciary system is overloaded with trials waiting to go through the courts. Prosecution efforts are usually slow and unsuccessful because police do not have the resources to apply the laws (Malley-Morrison 2004: 249).

The types of abuse that South African women face in the home are the same as those faced by women all over the world. They include verbal abuse, in which they are degraded verbally by

their partners, and emotional abuse, in which they are threatened, for example, with physical violence. Living in fear of violence is sometimes as demeaning and dehumanising as the physical assaults themselves. Anecdotal evidence shows that most women who come to court to report domestic violence have usually been severely beaten and have sustained serious injuries, ranging from cuts to bruises. Most of them endure their abuse until it becomes severe; they then require treatment and counselling because of the stabbings and beatings. For example, the Human Rights Watch (1995) found in their study in Alexandra Township that physical injuries had been inflicted on women from fists to weapons such as knives and bricks. In my study, women often developed pelvic pain, headaches, black eye, and swollen faces.

Violence against women in South Africa resulting from male desires to dominate and subjugate them is being challenged. The problem of abuse against women has long remained hidden because of tacit approval given to men to chastise their families and control their members through whatever means deemed necessary. Domestic abuse is devastating for women when perpetrated by someone close to them. What aggravates a woman's sense of being devastated in such cases is the nature of the relationship with the perpetrator. Abuse is the last thing the woman might have expected from the perpetrator, as the woman could have admired the perpetrator (i.e. before the abuse) or looked up to the perpetrator for protection. Where an abuser has been an intimate partner, the women might normally experience the first sexual act as love, but when it repeated – perhaps violently, the women develops feelings of confusion. In South Africa, many women reportedly are unclear about the boundary between coercive and non-coercive sex; often they are coerced into sexual relations and experience violation but see it as part of what intimate relations entail i.e. the man as aggressor and the woman as passive recipient at the mercy of the man (Benett, 2005).

In the South African context, African 'culture' gives credence to the idea that parents have limited rights over children and that violence, like sex, is fine between consenting adults in private. Today, younger women are no longer accepting such cultural norms and have become less willing to tolerate abuse or transgression of rights. 'Culture' offers a yardstick through which acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour can be measured. Definitions of abuse thus vary from society to society. Culture itself is closely related to the idea of 'ethnicity', a term used by sociologists to denote the sharing of cultural resources such as language, customs and institutions. The culture of a society is the way of life of its members i.e. the collection of its ideas and habits, which they learn, share and transmit from

generation to generation. Without a shared culture, members of society would be unable to communicate, and cooperate and confusion and disorder would result.

Thus, when locked in a situation of violence and abuse, women's attempt to modify their partner's habits and behaviour are usually met with failure. There is a perception of the problem as 'ordinary' and normal in a marital relationship – thus it has to be settled mainly by the couple themselves. The police could themselves cause trouble in the way they handle a domestic dispute; they might favour the man's position which could lead the wife to withdraw charges. Given the prevailing norms and institutions, the state, the police and the court become active in intervening in domestic disputes that involve abuse usually when the problem has grown quite out of proportion e.g. when there has been serious debilitation or death of a spouse (Brownridge & Douglas, 2001). In other words, in South Africa, it is only when abuse becomes 'serious' that there is external and state intrusion.

The foregoing reminds us that women in South Africa irrespective of race and class have been victims of a deep patriarchal system that teaches men to view women as possessions or property that they can use and abuse. The term 'patriarchy' was first used to describe a specific type of male dominated family, now it is used more generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. The subordination that women experience at a daily level, regardless of the class we might belong to, takes various forms such as control, disregard, insult, exploitation and discrimination (Bhasin, 1994:3).

### **3.2.4 The situation in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga<sup>1</sup>**

I am particularly interested in the situation in rural, semi-rural and informal settlement areas. These areas form a large part of South Africa's population: approximately 3, 643 435 million people in South Africa live in such areas ([www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)). Semi-rural people and those in informal settlements live in overcrowded conditions, which may include sharing houses with extended families in order to reduce living expenses.

Resources are limited and women frequently find themselves unprotected in unsafe neighbourhoods. The disintegration of families, coupled with poverty, unemployment and

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<sup>1</sup> KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, is a semi-rural area but is sometimes referred to as 'rural'. Thus, the literature and insights I draw on that refer to both 'semi-rural' and 'rural' are relevant to my particular fieldwork site.

overcrowding leads some men to abuse their wives. Rural people have limited means to satisfy even the basic of needs such as adequate health care, education, reasonable housing and opportunities, and have little say in how they would like their needs to be met. The apathy prevalent amongst rural people could be ascribed to their powerlessness to influence the power structures meant to represent them.

The paying of lobola is prevalent in rural areas and regarded as part of culture as it is a necessity for the bride's family to fulfill this demand. This sometimes creates problems for the daughter with her husband's family; it perpetuates abuse, because the family including the husband, usually view her as the asset that has been bought to be used. Because of this, many women face domestic violence. She cannot disclose her problems to her parents as it is seen as taboo. The parents also believe that a married daughter should not complain about her in-laws or her husband. The average age at which young women are married in rural areas is 18-25 years. According to tradition, a daughter must be married. It is also believed that a girl child is not supposed to be highly educated; many of them remain unemployed, dependent, illiterate and are naïve about matters of sex and reproduction (Sudbury, 2005:190). This leads to the continued under-education of girls, who are then more vulnerable to injustices and exploitation as young women. This is very much the trend in KwaMhlanga. Within two or three years of marriage women often escape to their parent's home as the man starts to beat and harass them. This then becomes a vicious cycle. Women leave (with their children) because of the mistreatment or abuse that they receive at the hands of their husbands. When back at their parental homes, they receive no sympathy from family, and are often forced to return to abusive husbands. Mostly the families view the return to home as an insult or even an embarrassment to them.

It is often the case that women in rural and semi-rural areas accept polygamy as a natural phenomenon of the male lifestyle and entitlement and do not object to a second marriage – but I would argue that one of those two (or more) women in a polygamous union would then suffer all her life. They often live separately all their lives wearing the symbol of married women. If the husband dies, both wives attend the funeral and all rituals of widowhood are followed. In rural areas, 50% of the married and cohabiting women have to earn their daily wages, but they do not have the right to spend their money.

What can be said about KwaMhlanga's background? KwaMhlanga is a semi-rural, informal settlement situated in the far east of Pretoria. Its location lures entrepreneurs to the area

because of the nearby shopping complex, as well as a large taxi rank, which provides customers for the hawkers. These people arrive in KwaMhlanga to be near the city of Pretoria and are therefore not able to afford housing in Pretoria and to join the endless numbers of people making a living there. Because of this, they make use of public transport, e.g. Putco buses and taxis, to get to their places of work. The population has a high concentration of women (about 60%) and is made up of infants as young as (0) zero months to adults as old as (65) sixty-five years of age. Most of the population is young and then followed by the middle-aged population (especially women). The women who dominate the population are single, divorced, married and in cohabiting unions. Many are parenting outside of marriage – these women were once in marriages but marital violence broke up their unions. Thus, violence in KwaMhlanga is a frequent and common occurrence. All this suggests shifts in the role of marriage in family life. It would seem that their partners, boyfriends, ex-husbands and ex-boyfriends are abusing many women and do not report the violence, and these acts lay the foundations for further violence<sup>2</sup>.

The KwaMhlanga population, like most other rural and semi-rural areas, is also enduring much unemployment and poverty. The problems of sexual and physical abuse are raising great concerns about gender-based violence, thus, numerous preventative projects are now being run at the community level informing people about what abuse entails, and empowering them to protect themselves against perpetrators. This has created awareness, but with the high rate of illiteracy and apathy, I do not see people becoming all that aware of their situation, or significantly moved to do something about. Reporting the violence however may prevent further violence. Many women feel very inferior about their education level and have no courage to go out and talk to people. Generally, the people see themselves as having a very low level of education because most of them come from rural areas where they had no chance to go to school. On average, 75% of the older population is illiterate. There are also truants and this leads to the younger generation also being illiterate; running away from school leads inevitably to high rates of pregnancy, early marriages and poverty. Most South African cities have some sort of gender desk, but few have initiated crime prevention programs specifically aimed at reducing levels of victimisation among women.

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<sup>2</sup> This information was furnished by the KwaMhlanga court office.

What additional information can be offered about the Kwamhlanga community? This population is made up of mainly big families or big households. The average household is ten (10) per family and few families consist of less than six (6) people.

In KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, over hundreds of women are battered each day. Here, wife beating is a man's way of teaching the wife a lesson, and even women have shown less sympathy for victims of wife beating who according to custom, should learn to be cautious and calm. As already suggested, although there are cultural mechanisms for intervening in battering situations in marriage, men as heads of families are still expected to use some form of discipline if they need to bring order into their households. The hierarchical systems of power granted privileges to certain groups of people while denying others the same. Privileged groups such as men can discriminate and perpetrate violence against non-privileged groups, as was seen in South Africa when men raped women. Women are therefore socialised to accept physical and emotional chastisement as a husband's marital prerogative. The subordinate position of women within African culture has largely been shaped by the people's traditional beliefs.

The local police have not been sensitive in their handling of male violence against women - often victims become ridiculed and frustrated, as they are encouraged to make an out-of-court settlement. In the past, the term "family violence" initially was not a legal term and consequently it had no legal meaning. There was no system of legal rules, which applied to this phenomenon. Family violence was considered a particular manifestation of violence; attempts were made to prevent it through those rules of criminal law, which are usually employed when other offences of a violent nature are committed. My impression is that people in KwaMhlanga subscribe to the view that African culture dictates that women be treated as inferiors who can be used and battered at will. Children are frequently exposed to domestic violence, usually as witness to the violence against their mother. The batterer parent poses significant risks to his children before and after separation.

This traditional cultural system has exacted suffering and hardship for women, and their negative effects will continue to exist for quite some time. These kinds of negative consequences in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, range from family disorganisation, leading to separation and divorce, lack of sense of belonging, sexual and physical abuse eventually resulting in the phenomenon of continuing domestic violence. Recent research on domestic violence concurs that domestic violence is still the order of the day in South Africa (Vetten &

Ludsin, 2005, and Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000). The KwaMhlanga area cannot be excluded from the statistics of regions with the highest rates of crime or violence.

Young women in KwaMhlanga are at greater risk of violence in the private sphere from their husbands or boyfriends, followed by acquaintances and the unknown men (strangers). Perpetrators, who victims know well, disturb and confuse women. Most often in this area they do not understand exactly whether they are abused or not. Sometimes they reflect on the experiences with a sense of disbelief. To offer a snippet of my data in advance: One of the women I interviewed described her experiences as, *‘I cannot believe what happened; I did not know that this would happen to me, ‘uuhh...’ My little wage went on things for the house. When I brought something home, he would say to me “where did you get the money”? “He would start name calling... bitch or prostitute, useless”, “I wonder why I married you”... “I am not expected to visit friends, parents or to smile with neighbours”*. Victims in the area are typically silent about their victimisations for many reasons: internalised shame, economic dependence, isolation, complications with children, and fear of retaliation, familial pressure to keep the family relationship intact, unresponsiveness and even disbelief from police and other members of the criminal justice system. Problems of invisibility and lack of support and resources may lead to the victims becoming reluctant to confess what is happening to social service agencies.

It appears that police in Mpumalanga’s rural Tonga area are beginning to address the issue of domestic violence. Newspapers claim that they are doing a good job. “Tonga police station registered one hundred and forty nine cases of rape between April 2007 and July 2007” (Daily Sun, 8 August 2008). Police in the Mpumalanga rural Tonga area organised a string of anti-crime marches, specifically against the abuse of women and children to mark the Women’s Month (August) in Magwenu village, near the Mozambican and Swaziland borders. The first march was held in February at Sibayeni and a second one at Mzinti in May 2008. Here, people are still quite traditional. As a result, many cases of rape go unreported despite the good work done by other villages. Life for women is harder in rural areas: they lack money for schooling, they can’t qualify for stable employment, and even with qualifications there are no jobs. Women’s safety is not protected. “In some cases women find it difficult to cope with the abuse and resort to committing suicide and murdering their children too” (Pretoria News, September 12 2008). However, it is possible, I believe, for KwaMhlanga to become as active as Tonga has in addressing domestic violence.



Research on assaults by men against their wives indicates that the most violent incidents often include sexual as well as physical attacks. Both men and women can be verbally or physically aggressive (Bornman, van Eeden and Wentzel, 1998; Malley-Morrison, 2004). However, the potential for severe bodily harm when being punched with a fist, kicked and beaten up by an unarmed woman, is most often not that high. Men are larger and muscularly stronger than women are, so if they choose to strike back they can do greater physical harm than is done to them. Women in Dobash and Dobash's (1992) study lived with men who perpetrated a considerable amount of injuries, aggressive and intimidating acts (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Cavanaugh & Lewis, and 2000:93). Half of the women in the study were married and others were cohabiting. Fewer couples were together for five years and about quarter were over ten years. The majority of the women had either two or three children. Conflicts and arguments were recurring features of these relationships. The women indicated that arguments were recurrent aspects of their ordinary lives, often occurring on a monthly basis. The usual sources of arguments and conflict were money, alcohol, jealousy, children and issues regarding domestic life, for example extra marital affairs, power and control. These arguments usually ended in violence. All the women spoke of the fear of violence and aggression. Persistent violence, injuries and controlling acts were common features of the vast majority of these relationships.

In this excellent study, all the women reported that on at least one occasion their partners pushed or grabbed them, slapped them on the face, punched and kicked them on the body. The men also threatened to kill them if the abuse was disclosed. The men frequently forced them to have sex even if they did not feel like it. A quarter of the women reported face burns, bruised body and being knocked unconscious on one occasion. Furthermore, two women reported that once the violence started their clothes were burned. None of the women reported miscarriages, though one woman reported abdominal pains. The women pointed out that the violence they experienced throughout the relationship was intolerable and very serious. I mention this study because it struck me as being very, very, similar to the situation in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga.

The patterns of control became increasingly coercive over time. The batterer found his controlling behaviour justified and therefore saw his partner's reluctance to be controlled as a sign of rudeness or of the woman's need to control him. As a result, men resorted to violence due to the smallest of domestic quarrels. The relationship aspects that abusers may attempt to dominate are aspects such as arguments and decision-making, household responsibilities,

emotional caretaking and attention, sexual relations, childrearing and outside social contacts. Sex and jealousy, each suspecting the other of having affairs, is almost one of the highly destructive aspects of marriage today (Jha, 2002:22).

The batterer may coerce decisions about when and whether to have children. After children are born a range of decisions about how they are to be treated, trained and educated may fall under the abusers control, even though he is less involved or he is typically active in only a small portion of the labour of child rearing. Harsh and frequent criticisms of the mother's parenting undermine her authority and incite children's disrespect of her (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002:6). Individuals resort to violence under the pressure and frustration of a family quarrel, which they are unable to deal with. Verbal attacks can be critical attacks, which focus on a particular part of the person's behaviour or personality. Certain actions of the victims in marital or cohabiting unions always produce a violent response. The dissatisfaction with each other might continue for weeks and months when finally one of them cannot control his emotions anymore and resorts to violence. The constant fighting and arguments in which the spouses are often engaged leads to separation and divorce (Bunch, 1990 & Carrion, 1991:15; Vetten, 2005: 18). These descriptions, according to officers at the KwaMhlanga court are quite relevant to what is happening within households in the area. In the sections that follow, I give a more structured account of the main factors contributing to abuse in the domestic domain in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga.

### **3.2.5 Factors contributing to spousal abuse in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga**

There is no single profile of abusers in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga. The individual life circumstances of a batterer cannot on its own explain the existence of such a complex issue. The intricate interplay of structural, family and individual factors combine to impact on the lives of many batterers who are abusive. They can be men who are aggressive and domineering in all situations or only at home. Research has sought to find causal factors at various levels of analysis, including individual, institutional and social. Past research on the causes of abuse is contradictory because of a lack of agreement amongst researchers regarding causes of the phenomenon (Walker, 1984; Gelles, 1993; Carderelli, 1978). I refer to three factors common in the literature that arguably have importance for the Mpumalanga KwaMhlanga case study.

### **3.2.5.1 Poverty and ethnicity**

Ethnicity derives from the way in which groups of people define themselves in terms of their common descent, customs and cultural traditions (Ake, 1993; Bantom, 1988). Growing awareness of ethnicity has caused people to identify in terms of 'cultural group'. Ethnically diverse women and men living in poverty are at high risk for all types of violence, for severe and life threatening assaults. In KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, poverty coupled with cultural group, seems to impact on women's response to abuse. People in the area talk about some groups being socialised to accept violence, whilst other groups might be more resistant. This needs to be examined more carefully in further studies.

### **3.2.5.2 Alcohol and other drugs**

Walker (1984) suggests that women with violent partners tend to believe that the violence is more related to internal factors in the man rather than to events in the external environment. Descriptions of male violence often include reports of heavy drinking or the use of drugs on the part of the abuser. Women often believe that without the use of alcohol or drugs such assaults would not occur. Consequently, most abused women believe that the violence will cease if their partners stop drinking (Jordan, Nietzel, Walker, Logan, 2004: 55). In KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, men's violence against women seems to indicate a strong association between substance abuse and the perpetration of violence by intimate partners. Men who are violent towards their women partners are more likely to abuse alcohol or other drugs than non-abusive men are. Episodes of violence do not necessarily occur only when a batterer has been drinking. In an in-depth study of 532 relationships in which men were violent toward their wives, Walker found that only 20 percent of the batterers were consistently intoxicated when violent. More than half of all the assaults were perpetrated by a batterer who was sober all the time (Walker, 1984).

Under the Domestic Violence Act 2007 in South Africa, a breach of a non- molestation order is now a criminal offence and not dealt with in the civil courts. The Domestic Violence Act of 2007 is primarily meant to provide protection to the wife from domestic violence at the hands of the husband. Domestic violence under the act includes actual abuse whether physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic. The introduction of the new laws is working because more women are now reporting domestic violence. The new legislation is helping women. One of the basic principles that apply in our society is that every person has the right to be protected from violence. This principle is also entrenched in our constitution. The

constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom and security of his or her person, which includes the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources. Despite new laws that have been implemented many women still underreport the incidence of domestic violence in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga. The reasons usually raised are feelings of humiliation and degradation. The system's failure to respond immediately also lead to distress and disappointment for women.

### **3.2.5.3 Family Disruption**

Family factors that are antecedents of violence include prior exposure to physical punishment, alcoholic or criminal parents and disharmonious parents who are likely to separate or divorce. Other features of the family, like episodes of neglect, lack of nurturing, absence of adult supervision and extreme parental conflict are also risk factors for violence (Levine & Rosich, 1996:22). In environments with high densities of disorganised families, like in KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, where family conflict and disruption is high and where quality of parenting is minimal, domestic violence is commonplace. Family violence is not confined to the poorest household. Studies have shown that it is related to factors such as disruption, disorganisation and social isolation. These factors are particularly prevalent in informal settlements and semi-rural contexts that are enduring stress and tension.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Domestic violence in South African communities endures over a considerable period. Women's reactions to experiencing domestic violence and their decisions about whether to stay or leave a violent relationship are the result of the many social, economic, psychological and physical factors. One effective way that abused women can protect themselves is by getting protection orders. A protection order aims to prevent the re-occurrence of a domestic violence incident. Protection orders can be applied for at a Magistrate's Office. A criminal charge can also be laid at the police station. The order seeks to ensure the safety of the complainant, free from fear of pain and humiliation that a perpetrator may cause to the complainant. Such orders stipulate what a perpetrator (or respondent in legal language) must refrain from doing. The police should be encouraged to investigate criminal cases like assault, rape and indecent assaults. If the abuser disobeys a protection order, corrective treatment should be put into place.

Studies have shown that domestic violence is related to factors such as community or familial disruption, social disorganisation and social isolation. Studies are ambiguous on the question

of women's compliance. There have been debates about domestic violence and the point at which women challenge their perpetrators. Numerous researchers have shown an interest in domestic violence in the world, including South Africa. Poverty and ethnicity, alcohol and other drugs or family disruption amongst other factors might affect women in marital and cohabiting unions. A number of macro-factors make domestic violence particularly acute in South Africa. This mini dissertation set out to probe these alongside the micro-dimensions of households and intimate relationships.

This chapter demonstrated that violent behavior or domestic abuse is a serious problem in South Africa and in the rural, semi-rural and informal settlements surrounding the main cities. Domestic violence is usually part of an attempt to subjugate and silence women – to bring them under the control of their partners and male domination in South Africa. Whilst a progressive Constitution offers women rights and recourse to state agencies that can bring perpetrators to book, many women are constrained by culturally defined gender norms and expectations of how women should act and respond to the challenges that face them

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the qualitative approach of the study. The study adopts an interpretive paradigm to maximise efforts at deriving meaning and insight. In-depth interviews with selected women were used to gain an understanding of women's experience of abuse and why men turned to violence against their loved ones. The chapter also reflects on the selection of the site and the ethical dilemmas encountered in the field.

#### **4.2 The Interpretive Approach**

Why the interpretive paradigm? Interpretivism is used to emphasise and focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the social world. An interpretive qualitative approach can be defined as an approach to knowledge production that is 'logical' and 'systematic' and that seeks to gather multiple layers of social existence. In a typical research study of this nature, the researcher collects data from several individuals and depicts their experience of something, for example, domestic violence, in as nuanced a fashion as possible. The data are usually collected through in-depth interviews. Using the interview data, the researcher attempts to reduce the statements to the common core of the experience as described by the research participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

Research methods in the human sciences have followed two basic traditions. One emphasises facts and hard data and makes a distinction between natural and human sciences (Neuman, 1997). The quantitative research approach focuses on the deductive component of the scientific method. The focus is generally on hypothesis testing and theory testing. On the other hand, qualitative research relies more on the inductive component of the scientific method and is used to come up with or generate new hypotheses and theories. Quantitative and qualitative researches are also distinguished by different views of human behaviour. It is generally assumed in quantitative research that behaviour is highly predictable, whereas this is not the case with qualitative research. Positivist and humanist researchers are limited to a choice between a quantitative and qualitative research methodology. The positivist perspective continues to be overwhelmingly dominant. Most scholars today adopt a

quantitative paradigm, even when using narrative, videotaped, or self-reported data (Hendrick and Hendrick, 2000: 24).

The assumption of determinism was traditionally made, which means that all events have a cause. The point is that most quantitative researchers try to identify cause-and-effect relationships that enable them to make probabilistic predictions and generalisations. Qualitative researchers often focus on the fluid and dynamic dimensions of behaviour. Behaviour is seen to be more situational and context bound than generalisable. Quantitative research focuses on how results vary according to the characteristics of the participants. Qualitative researchers often try to develop explanations of behaviour (theories), conversations and expressions (Johnson & Christensen; 2004; Patton, 2002; Best & Kahn 1993; Hedrick, 2000).

The quantitative approach mainly uses numbers to express and handle information in carrying out the research, while qualitative approaches entails in-depth investigation of domestic violence that is explained with reference to the information or data obtained. The qualitative approach strives to understand reality. The objective here is to gain knowledge of women's experiences of abuse in intimate partner relationships and to capture some of their reflections. The quantitative or positivist approach concerns itself with measuring social reality. The object of practising science is to arrive at generally valid explanations of phenomena. The quantitative research strategy seeks out constant factors while the qualitative research strategy looks for the unique content of events. The quantitative approach entails generalisation to a universe with the aid of, for example, a representative sample, while the qualitative approach is more contextual in orientation in the sense that it endeavours to give an in-depth description of a phenomenon, or group in the context of its unique sphere of existence and meaning (Hagan, 1997; Neumann, 2006; Descombe, 2007; Rubin and Barbie et al; Newman 1997).

The quantitative approach attempts to find universally valid regularities that are numerically measurable, while in the qualitative approach observation is used in an 'in-depth' fashion. For example, if research on crime or violence is conducted among members of a particular population the quantitative researcher will resort to sampling, questionnaires, and the like, to gather information which she or he will then have to process statistically in order to arrive at a reliable findings. By contrast, the qualitative researcher would choose a small sample of victims of abuse from the same population and conduct an in-depth interview with each of

them in order to determine their experiences of abuse. The researcher analyses the first hand information about how women experience abuse, after which a research report is compiled. The research style of the quantitative approach to methodology is to a large extent structured and controlled and the context of the research is typically generalised. The assumptions governing research are that natural and social reality can be observed in exactly the same way, the research process can produce value-free knowledge and scientific knowledge must be based on facts in the sense that they can be observed and measured (Rubin & Barbie, 1993:358).

Interpretive social scientists emphasise that human beings are conscious, powerful and self-directing. This can be evidenced by the way women act and seek help, since they can see that abuse is not a desirable phenomenon. The qualitative social scientists observe action in terms of validity and sufficiency. Harold Garfinkel views ethno-methodology as a valid method of studying people. He emphasises how people make sense of their situations and maintain orderly day to day realities to give meaning to their social context. In short, the qualitative designs offer research tools that aim to draw out depth and understanding. In comparing and carefully considering the quantitative with the qualitative (as I have done above), the latter was judged to be most appropriate for my study. The current study set out to explore women's experiences of abuse. The various factors contributing to intimate partner abuse are studied from the point of view of the victims involved.

### **4.3 Conducting the study**

The purpose of my research was to hear women's points of view and to understand their thoughts, opinions, needs, wants and aspirations; to get significant information from women unknown to me. Constraints and rules are imposed through actions and involvement of people. After much consideration and reviewing of other comparable qualitative projects, twenty women who had experienced abuse were invited to participate in the study. The women were selected randomly, as they came to report cases of domestic violence at the KwaMhlanga Mpumalanga court, that is also a state social services facility. All the women selected for interviews had experienced abuse, including battering and had been seeking help or were in contact with the social work services. Women's love and trust had been shattered and they had nowhere and nobody to immediately turn to. Thus, the target group was women who had suffered abuse and who had recently applied for interdicts against the perpetrators.



All the women identified as willing to talk and who represented a cross section in terms of age (that is, ‘younger’ and ‘older’) were invited to be interviewed. Interviews are specialised patterns of verbal interaction, arranged for a specific purpose i.e. to focus on some specific content area with the consequent elimination of irrelevant issues. An informal conversational interview approach was helpful in that questions emerged from the immediate context and were asked in the natural course of things. I conducted interviews to develop understandings of women’s social life and to discover how people construct meanings in their natural settings to learn what is meaningful to the women and how women experience and have handled daily life, and their requisite challenges.

Each interview started by encouraging the women to tell their stories, and express their needs and experiences. I asked them questions regarding the length of time they had been living in a violent relationship, the nature of abuse, family history, number of children, occupation and opinions (In this regard I followed the style of Patton, 2001). Women were further asked to define abuse or family violence, how it was hidden, the specific factors that led to them living in an abusive relationship and what can be done to help other women from semi-rural or less developed areas in similar situations. Most women had been the victims of domestic violence for at least the past seven years. Common themes and insight emerged from the interviews. Although each woman interviewed had unique experiences, similarities surfaced relating to experiences and opinions. Common themes were also noted.

Gender issues emerged such as sex role beliefs and views that men and women should live according to traditionally defined sex roles. Often it was accepted that a woman could be employed, but marriage and family should come first. Many women felt that being in this relationship made them feel empty; they were also uncertain as to whether the decision they made to be involved in an intimate relationship was a wise one or not.

Social life is based on social interactions and socially constructed meanings. The interviewing process helps the interviewer learn to think and see the world in certain ways. Interpretative social science sees social reality as consisting of people who construct meanings and create interpretations through their daily social construction. People create meanings and share meanings in different ways, people have their own reasons for their actions, and it is essential to learn the reasons people use. Individual motives are crucial to consider even if they are irrational, carry deep emotions, and contain false prejudices. People use common sense to guide them in daily living. I was keen to draw out women’s regular

understandings, motivations and experiences. Some of the advantages and characteristics of the interpretive approach are outlined below:

#### **4.3.1 Advantages of the interpretive approach**

- . Interpretive social science describes and interprets how people conduct their daily lives.
- . It is idiographic and inductive.
- . Idiographic means the approach provides a rich description of something else.
- . It is rich in detailed description and limited in abstractions.
- . It integrates a feel for another social reality by revealing the meanings, values, and rules of living used by the people in their daily lives.
- . It outlines a social world and describes local customs and informal norms.
- . An interpretive explanation documents the actor's point of view and translates it into a form that is intelligible to readers.
- . Facts are fluid and embedded within a meaning system.
- . Focuses on how people manage their practical affairs in everyday life and treats social knowledge as a pragmatic accomplishment.
- . Researchers should reflect on, examine and analyse personal points of view and feelings as part of the process of studying others.
- . Interpretivism trains one to empathise with and share in the social and political commitments or values of those she or he studies.
- . This approach questions the possibility of values and meanings are infused everywhere (Neuman, 1997; Best & Kahn, 1993).

These advantages prompted me to consider the value of the interpretive paradigm. Overall, a qualitative research design was used. See key issues of qualitative research noted below.

#### 4.3.2. Characteristics of qualitative research

- . Qualitative research tends to occur in settings where people's lives unfold such as schools, homes, neighbourhoods and public institutions. It is sensitive to the context in which individual behaviour and social action takes place.
- . Qualitative research is descriptive, expressed most often in words (e.g. transcripts, narratives), pictures (e.g., videotapes, photographs), and personal or public documents (e.g. letters, diaries, court records and autobiographies).
- . Qualitative research is concerned with process, with how people negotiate meaning, and with how concepts or ideas come to be accepted as common sense in a particular cultural context.
- . Qualitative research is concerned with participants' own perspectives and how participants make sense of their lives.
- . Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery and inductive logic. Inductive logic begins with specific observations and builds toward general patterns. The strategy of inductive designs is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the case under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be. Qualitative research starts with observations in the real world; theoretical abstractions are generated upwards from empirical evidence. Theory is relevant at all stages of the research process. The focus is on hypothesis generation. A qualitative approach is marked by the integration of theory and data (Neuman, 1997; Best & Kahn, 1993).

Additional points are that qualitative research uses a wide and deep angle lens, examining behaviour often as it occurs (naturalistically) in all of its detail. In many situations, qualitative researchers do not want to intervene in the natural flow of behaviour because they believe that this intervention would change the behaviour.

Rubin and Babbie (1993:374) argue that qualitative inquiry can include the use of interviews, which are planned in advance and which are structured rather than informal conversational interviews. The qualitative interview is open-ended and allows respondents to express their own perspectives in their own words. Theory or arguments emerge from the data and are thus

grounded in the data. Argument is developed by entering the woman's world phase, listening to the woman's points of view, allowing her to describe events, observations and experiences. The best way to learn from women is merely by being attentive to what is going on, what is being said, and what the nonverbal cues are during the interview. Rathus, Eva and Feindler (2004:22) argue that from the qualitative research tradition, questions focus on the interpretive experience of women whose lives are affected by male partner violence. This approach creates a space through which women can describe their relationship and problems from their own points of view.

### **4.3.3 Notes on Qualitative Interviews**

Qualitative interviews consist of open-ended questions and provide qualitative data. Qualitative interviews are also called depth interviews because they can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a topic. My qualitative interviews lasted for approximately an hour and were followed by a second and third interview in most cases. There are three different types of qualitative interviews: the informal conversational interview, the interview guide approach and the standardised open-ended interview. The informal conversational interview is the most spontaneous, loosely structured interview. This is the approach that I chose to use. Notes were taken during the interview and the interviews were tape-recorded. Immediately afterwards the notes were written up and the transcription process initiated. In the course of interviewing, I tried to keep the interviews on track, often bringing the respondent back when she went off on a topic that was not relevant to the research purpose. Many questions not originally anticipated were asked and responded to in the course of the study. The interviewer however posed the set questions in the interview schedule in virtually the same order to all interviewees.

Qualitative researchers use a language of cases and contexts, and look for interpretations of meaning in specific settings. They look at social life from multiple perspectives and explain how people construct identities.

Qualitative research places parts of social life into a larger whole. It is hard to understand women's experiences without listening to their whole stories. It requires one to develop an ability to draw on a variety of skills, such as listening, non verbal interaction materials and approaches as they may be needed. Many abused interviewees are dissatisfied, isolated,

scared and confused. It is important to attend to their messages and the meanings attached. Qualitative researchers look at the sequence of events and pay attention to what happens first, second and so on. Researchers note what is occurring at different points in time and recognize that when something occurs it is often important. The data are in the form of words, including quotes or descriptions of particular events. A qualitative researcher gives data meaning and makes them understandable. The researcher begins with the point of view of the women, and then finds out how the women see the world, how they define the situation or what it means for them. The first step in qualitative interpretation is to learn about its meaning for the people being studied (Neuman, 2006:160). There are some common elements to these approaches which begin to give some sense to qualitative research. I was particularly concerned with meanings and the way people understood things. Human activity is seen as a product of symbols and meanings that are used by members of social groups to make sense of things and are concerned with patterns of behaviour. I was very concerned to establish activities of the group such as rituals, traditions and relationships, and the way they are expressed as patterns of behaviour. Cultural norms and types of language used were also important issues for me.

#### **4.3.4 Conducting interviews**

Although I have touched on this already, additional points can be elucidated. A site is the context in which events or activities occur, a socially defined territory with shifting boundaries (Neumann, 2006:385). I chose the KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, semi-rural area/informal settlement as a site and selected women from that place. The women were keen to talk about their experiences because they needed someone to listen to their stories. In the course of conducting individual interviews I observed the women and their surroundings. Observing means paying close attention, watching and listening carefully, noticing “what is seen, heard and touched, what is going on” through careful listening and watching nonverbal communication. These skills help one assign meanings, understand women’s experiences and why an event occurred.

The qualitative interviews began with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit. The purpose is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind and to gather individual’s stories, particularly about domestic violence (Patton, 2002:341).

My interviews were set up as conversation in which I used open-ended questions to encourage the women to relate their words, experiences, interpretations and attitudes so that the meanings and contexts of particular actions and experiences can be explored (Skinner, Hester and Malos, 2005; Dobash et al 1996). The interview involved asking questions, listening, expressing interest, and recording what was said. The members were active participants in the research process – their insights, feelings, and cooperation were essential parts of a discussion process that revealed subjective meanings. The interview at points involved a common sharing of experiences, whereby members expressed themselves in the form in which they normally speak, think and organise reality and events. The focus was on the member's perspective and questions. For example “Could you tell me things that led up to the fighting?”, “Was he drunk”? “In what ways were you hurt”? “Did you report the abuse to the police? “Who holds most power in the relationship?” “What do you plan to do now”?

After at least two meetings I was able to probe more deeply into sensitive issues and seek clarification of sensitive issues e.g. “can culture be used to explain the abuse?”. In later interviews, I returned to topics and checked past answers by restating them in a non-judgemental attitude and asking for verification; “I would like to check whether I understood you properly, you mentioned that things started after the birth of your third son. Is that right?” The field interviews include repetition as I often asked interviewees to elaborate on the same issues so that I could ‘verify’ their claims and gain further content. .

#### **4.3.5 Ethical dilemmas in field research**

The protection of rights of all human subjects is the obligation of every researcher. The most important concern for human subjects comes in the area of informed consent. All people who participate in a study must clearly understand its purpose, procedures, the researchers' expectations of them as study participants, the length of the experiment and projected use of data. Researchers must further provide adequate referral mechanisms for participants. The researcher must avoid an invasion of participant's privacy, and inform them of plans for publishing findings of the study without identification of individual participants (Silva, 1995, Armiger, 1977). I informed all participants of their rights when gaining their consent. They were free to withdraw at any stage.

In many cases the family and friends know nothing of the abuse and the women could not tell a single person about their troubles since there is so much gossip in the informal settlement; “it is hard to trust anyone with one’s private life”, said one woman. Some are still involved in a violent relationship. There are many difficulties and contradictions in trying to conduct qualitative research which involves women’s pain and difficulties to disclose. The roles of women were examined focusing on issues of rights and consent. The researcher was sensitive to the women’s sense of safety and security, and if they felt unhappy about the time and location of the interview, it was rearranged. The women were not very powerful in their positions as married and cohabiting women. The researcher identified with the women and considered them to have ‘grounded’ and expert knowledge on domestic violence (Skinner, Hester and Malos, 2005:87). I was concerned to treat them with respect and kindness - and to view all that was said with careful consideration.

#### **4.3.6 Conclusion**

Qualitative research enhances knowledge and understanding of private, complex and meaningful social connections. Qualitative research differs from the traditional positivist, quantitative research in a variety of ways. In qualitative research the focus is on in-depth interviews, observations and conversations. Qualitative research places emphasis on interpretation of data obtained from the interviews. This chapter highlighted the general approach of the researcher and her intention to treat participants with respect as well as derive meaningful data. An interpretive approach required that in-depth interviews would be conducted that would develop reflective insights and a substantive picture of women’s experiences of domestic violence in KwaMhlanga.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA AND CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter pays particular attention to the women's voices and their views on domestic violence. The women's experiences of different forms of abuse at the hands of husbands, boyfriends and ex-partners are also drawn out. I focus primarily on trying to elicit the causes of domestic violence, why and how it emerges, its gender implications and the multiple interpretations one can offer for its perpetuation. Finally ways of alleviating and addressing domestic violence will be elucidated.

#### **5.2 Beginning Fieldwork**

##### **5.2.1 How the research was carried out**

I will start by explaining how I entered the site, state who my target group was, and also offer added insights on the community. The information gathered can be seen in terms of a case study of KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga. I selected participants from married and cohabiting unions within communally shared contexts. The women were selected purposively as they came to report domestic violence at the KwaMhlanga Mpumalanga social agency.

##### **5.2.2 How I entered the community**

I entered the community and started by walking around to get a picture of the layout of the neighbourhood. While busy with preliminary observations I also started to have informal conversations with the person in the charge office (Mr. Komape) who referred me to the relevant office so as to get a brief description and historical background of the area, all of which happened spontaneously. I then negotiated access to a select number of abused women through Mr. Komape and it was agreed that I could conduct my study using his office as a starting point. I introduced myself as a researcher to the respondents, and explained the purpose of my study. I started by explaining the importance of conducting such a research initiative and then made it clear that whilst I could not offer material benefits, the research could have empowering outcomes. I would give subjects an opportunity to participate in the process and to learn to understand their situation much better and try to understand it from their own frame of reference. I entered into the community with three goals in mind: to get to know the community, to allow the women to get to know me and to get to understand their social and domestic experiences.



Henderson and Thomas (1989: 57-68) state that when one enters a community one has to gather the data during contact making and summarise that as a community profile. So when I entered the community I had those three goals in mind and therefore spent time clarifying my own position on key value issues because the researcher does not appear in a community out of a vacuum. I had to strive to be neutral at all times during data gathering in order to know and better understand the women and the community from which they come. Suspending my own feelings and values was an enormously difficult exercise.

Twenty women verbalised their preparedness to be respondents during the research process. The interview was done individually in individual contact sessions. The participants' responses were open-ended and not restricted to fixed choices. This made the process flow quite naturally. I had detailed individual interviews with the women. It was important to record the answers exactly as given, and no attempt was made initially to summarise or paraphrase.

## **5.1 Description of respondents**

Table 1 offers a brief collated overview of the twenty respondents. An indication of age, number of marriages/cohabiting unions, number of children, types of violence exposed to, years spent in cohabiting unions/marriage, family size and occupation is offered. I present this to allow the reader to get a rapid, 'bird's eye' view of the respondent's experiences. Mapping it in this fashion was also helpful to me – for the purposes of analysis.

The category 'exposure to violence' shows severe and brutal assaults and forms of abuse, the category 'family type' reveals that 12 of the women lived in extended family forms and 9 in nuclear families. Thus, the presence of other kin as is assumed in extended families does not seem to have made a big difference in protecting women. Many of the women reported that this was not their first 'marriage' and the abuse, on average, seems to have been reported after long periods of living with the present partner.



**Table 1: Profile of Respondents and Their Experiences of Violence**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>No. of marriages/ cohabiting unions</b>	<b>No. of children</b>	<b>Exposure to violence</b>	<b>Years of marriage/ cohabiting</b>	<b>Family type</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
<b>Mrs. A</b>	30	2nd	3; 1 outside marriage	Swearing, name calling, check movements	8 years	Extended family	House wife
<b>Ms K</b>	24	2nd	1 child from 1st marriage	Kicked, pushed, beaten with fists, hair pulled, forced sex	2 years	Nuclear family	House wife
<b>Mrs. B</b>	22	1st	2	Threatened with sharp objects, insufficient finance, stabbed	3 years	Extended family	Part time
<b>Ms L</b>	25	1st	2	Pushed, kicked in the stomach, threatened with death, forced sex	6 years	Extended family	Admin clerk
<b>Mrs. C</b>	35	3rd	3	Persistent nagging, ignored and neglected	13 years	Nuclear family	Cashier



<b>Ms. M</b>	26	1st	2 outside marriage	Cut out of communication, intimidated, neglected her and her children.	4 years	Extended family	House wife
<b>Mrs. D</b>	35	1st	3	Cheating spouse, punched, kicked, criticised	13 years	Nuclear family	House wife
<b>Mrs. E</b>	30	1st	3	Damaged property, forced sex, shouted, smeared with vaseline	7 years	Extended family	Part time
<b>Ms N</b>	23	1st	2	Beaten-up, clothes torn off, forced sex	5 years	Extended family	Crèche educator
<b>Ms O</b>	28	2nd	3	Cheating spouse, punched, criticised her and her family and friends.	10 years	Extended family	House wife
<b>Mrs. F</b>	23	1st	1	Kicked, forced sex, ignores her completely	3 years	Extended family	Part time
<b>Ms P</b>	32	1st	2	Physical and verbal abuse	12 years	Nuclear family	Cleaner
<b>Mrs. G</b>	35	2nd	4	Bruises on the body, black eyes, threatened with death	13 years	Nuclear family	House wife



<b>Ms Q</b>	30	2nd	none	Hair pulled, punched on the face, forced sex	8 years	Nuclear family	House wife
<b>Mrs. H</b>	20	1st	2	Throwing objects, kicked, slapped with fists	2 years	Extended family	Hair dresser
<b>Ms R</b>	23	1st	1	Shaking uncontrollably, put down in public, shouted at, belittled	4 years	Extended family	House wife
<b>Ms S</b>	25	2nd	2	Blocked movements, forcibly kept awake when he is drunk	7 years	Nuclear family	Hawker
<b>Mrs. I</b>	25	1st	3 1 step child	Provokes an argument, slapped	3 years	Extended family	Part time
<b>Ms T</b>	33	2nd	3	Burnt with cigarettes, bitten, deprived of financial, physical and personal resources	10 years	Nuclear family	House wife
<b>Mrs. J</b>	27	2nd	none	Locked in the house, pushed	8 years	Extended family	Hawker

During the in-depth interviews I kept focused and paid full attention to the women and communicated that I was listening to what was being said and also probed into important issues. I tried as far as possible to familiarise myself with their circumstances so that the interview could be pleasant and comfortable. I wrote additional notes immediately after each interviewing session. It was important that while gathering data I knew about people and their

living conditions, lifestyle, history of the community, family ties, friendships, leaders and authority figures, socio-economic data, norms, traditions, resources, physical and psychological characteristics of the people in the community. I got the impression that women felt empowered by sharing their stories. Women learned that it was not their fault that they are abused. The interviews were time consuming because women were interviewed individually, which could be one of the “disadvantages” for the researcher even though it resulted in the researcher obtaining valuable data. A number of feelings surfaced in the course of the interviews including frustration, anger and hatred as I listened to their points of views. As informative as I found them, the stories of abuse left me at times feeling drained, disturbed and depressed.

### **5.3.1 Women’s Understanding of domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is the term used to describe a variety of actions that occur in family relationships. While opinions may differ as to what violence is, what its causes and effects may be, the reality is that the problem simply will not go away and is getting progressively worse. Various Government departments, parastatal bodies, non-Governmental organisations and agencies are attempting to address the problem. However, the question remains, are they actually helping the victims at all?

Attempts to bring the awareness of intimate partner violence or abuse to the fore, was emphasised by women’s organisations (such as the Women’s Coalition in 1992) and feminist networks in South Africa. Feminism illustrated and re-emphasised the seriousness of the situation. Needless to say, violence is an issue which continues to demand our urgent attention. We are all affected by it, either directly or indirectly. In South Africa women see much of violence and have been seriously affected.

Unemployment for example often results in hardship and suffering, not only for those who are unemployed, but also for their families. People who are unable to find employment turn to violence. I make this point because ‘unemployment’ emerged as the dominant theme in conversation with my study participants. Men’s insecurity and unemployment leads to them behaving in abusive ways, it was argued. Initially, sympathy for the perpetrator because of his unemployment status was felt, but later this sympathy was eroded as the violence persisted.

In my study women were asked what actions they would name as violence between husband and wife in intimate partner relationships. Domestic violence, they said, in summary:

1. includes *threats of physical violence*, even if actual assaults were not experienced;
2. includes *physical aggression* for example, squeezing, pushing and shaking;
3. includes *physical assaults that damage the body*, for example bruising, black eyes, broken teeth or bones, and forced sex (rape).
4. It also includes *verbal abuse (using languages)*, for example, belittling in front of children and in front of one's family.

Women who had been subjected to domestic violence reported in the interviews that, at the time, they found it difficult to define their experiences as 'violence'. For example women felt that they had started it, and this confused them, they didn't see it as violence. Wife beating, for some, thus was at first regarded as a family problem to be settled in the privacy of the home. Many of the women believed that the wife is subordinate to her husband. Some emphasised that wife beating, they believed, was part of the norm. For this reason, their families tended not to interfere. This reality was noted earlier in the literature reviewed.

At the time of the interviews, several women had bad bruises on their faces, necks and hands (*Mrs. G, Ms S, Ms K, and Ms L*). Despite this, the women had the tendency to forgive and thought that their partners would not do it again (he would change). Domestic violence is typically not an isolated event but arises through strategies that attempt to implement gender ideologies. The women hoped their men would change, and some undertook to charge themselves to meet these gendered social expectations.

Braithwaite and Heather (2002) state that domestic violence includes a range of behaviors and coercive tactics; it is often repetitive, meaningful and strategic, reflecting deeply held attitudes and beliefs rather than an isolated incident, and there are social and cultural dimensions that give meaning to the violence. Women suffer violence at the hands of husbands and male family heads. This is because these males have been brought up to feel superior to their female counterparts. There should be no excuse for domestic violence. Some of the women seemed at points to make excuses for domestic violence, and suggested that it was not really the man's fault because he was "suffering and stressed". Although this is unpleasant, it is still wrong to make a woman suffer because of this problem.

Although both men and women in intimate relationships have been shown to be victims of their partners' violence, this research has been limited to female victims since women usually bear the brunt of immense suffering. Men relative to women have the potential to cause more

physical damage and to escape an abusive attack more easily because of their size and strength advantages. Women's greater social and economic dependence often prevents them from escaping abusive relationships; this was evident in this study since most women took a long time before seeking intervention.

The term 'violence' was conceptualised as any attack by one person on another carried out with the intention of causing physical pain and injury to the other person. Wife beating in the context of this study's focus on domestic violence would be defined as any act of aggression directed by a husband against his wife. It is used specifically to cover incidents of physical attacks and sexual violations such as punching, beating, choking, slapping, stabbing, throwing, forced sex, which all causes physical injury and or death. It also includes psychological violence which consists of repeated verbal abuse, harassment, denigration, confinement, deprivation of physical, financial and personal resources. Such violence also takes place in the home, usually behind closed doors, but it may become public when the women's screams are heard by neighbours or when the abuse is reported to the police, courts and social departments. In the end some of the women believed that by reporting the abuse they were helping the community and thus reducing further violence.

Interlocking behaviours of control and domination can be physical, sexual, emotional and economic as with the cases of *Ms A, Mrs. B, Ms L, Mrs. C, Ms M, Mrs. D, Mrs. E*. Husbands or boyfriends can exert economic control so that a woman has no access to money, or she may not be allowed to work outside the home as in the cases of *Ms M, Ms R, Ms S*. Food can be restricted so that women may fear starvation and a woman may be forced to find others to feed her and the children. This can be family, friends or public agencies or social welfare agencies. Lack of adequate control over money needed for survival of the household is widespread among those who are being abused in other ways. These may include forced sexual intercourse following physical violence. Furthermore, women may be required to engage in unwanted sexual practices more frequently than desired. Emotional abuse exists with these more physical forms of abusive which further undermine women's sense of personal growth and competence. The forms of violence and abuse suffuse every aspect of these women's lives, making it difficult for them to live functional lives.

### **5.3.2 Incidence and Prevalence**

The earlier references to South Africa in the literature revealed that domestic violence occurs frequently in our society. In the KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, case study the respondents

reported that they were being abused, and that they knew other women who were currently victims of physical and sexual abuse. The respondents estimated that most men had physically abused their wives or girlfriends at one time or another. It was a regular occurrence. Women respondents reported that they had been physically abused, insulted or threatened with physical abuse over a long period. Thirteen women experienced physical abuse and seven had been threatened with physical abuse. Women felt free to talk about domestic violence and their experiences with it. They defined what counts as domestic violence in terms of repeated physical, sexual, verbal, economic and emotional abuse.

The most typical definition was 'physical fighting when drunk,' swearing and hitting at each other. Mainly it was between adults, but sometimes between adults and children. Physical abuse involved the use of any physical act in order to harm, frighten and gain control over another person. It included not only the obviously severe physical abuse that causes injuries requiring emergency medical care, but also any physical contact that aimed to frighten and control, for example, shoving, pushing her down the stairs, smashing objects around the victim. These forms of abuse are life threatening and scary. The forms of physical abuse I noted included blocking movements, locking in a room, denying sleep by forcibly keeping awake, throwing objects at or near her, pushing, hitting, slapping, pulling hair, punching, burning, kicking, throwing down stairs, and using a weapon against a women.

Emotional abuse is the use of a coercive method to exercise control over another person. It humiliates and demeans through continuous verbal manipulation, unpredictable erratic behaviour, game playing and fear that keep the victim always off balance. Emotional abuse includes making her believe she is losing her mind and can no longer identify reality, intimidation, isolation, threats and economic control as in the cases of *Mrs. A*, *Mrs. B*, *Ms L*, *Mrs. E*, *Ms O* and *Mrs. G*. Where there is physical abuse, there is often also sexual act against her will, treating the victim like a sex object (Goodman and Fallon, 1995:27-29). The use of control or power is the ability of some people to assert their own interests violently even in the face of opposition from others. Women in the study who had been abused once or twice in this manner sought agency services.

### **5.3.3 Marriage and Cohabitation: similar constraints?**

Marriage is the state of being married; the relationship between husband and wife, or any close union (Visser & Potgieter, 1994). Marriage is a contract between two parties (Dnes & Rowthorn, 2002). It is argued that marriage may refer either to the ceremony by which a



marriage comes into existence (the wedding), or the marriage relationship which results from ceremony. Cohabitation refers to a situation whereby two persons may decide to live together as ‘husband and wife’ without the existence of a legally valid marriage between them (Bird, 2006:6). What was interesting in this study was that women in married and cohabiting unions’ described similar problems in their marriage. Marital status did not make a huge difference. Both groups of respondents said their relationship was not good; some slept in separate bedrooms because they were not getting along. Two of the twenty women laid assault charges against their husbands and got a protection order fairly quickly because of the severity of the assaults (one was married and one was a cohabitant). The sad thing is that the charges were dropped without any conviction. Both the women who dropped the charges felt sorry for their partners. In general many of the women stayed together for the sake of the children. Some of the women tried in vain for many years to sort out their problematic relationships. Respondents reported that they were always fighting and the fights were very physical as in the cases of *Ms K, Ms L, Mrs. D, Ms N, Ms O, Mrs. F, Ms P, Ms Q, Mrs. H, Ms S, and Mrs. J.*

Women reported that they had been physically abused, that they had been hurt or injured in the abuse, and half reported that it occurred frequently once a week or more often. Physically abused women believed that the abuse is an attempt on the part of the man to control and intimidate them with violence. The beating happens occasionally and causes the woman serious and permanent injury, as reported by *Mrs. G and Ms S.*

Mrs. G and Ms N hated to go near their partners. Women sometimes fought back and often regretted their actions: *“I feel so stupid. I don’t understand why I stayed with him and why I still feel I love him,”* Mrs G said. She added: *“Married women are more likely than cohabiting women to be injured.”* Indeed, as I probed further, it became apparent that married women were less likely than cohabiting women to seek help. Married women expressed beliefs that change was possible. Cohabiting women seemed more likely to identify rape as wrong whereas married women thought they could not be ‘raped’ by their husbands. In my study I found cohabiting couples to be more unconventional in their roles, to hold slightly more liberal attitudes and to view themselves as less restricted by traditional sex roles than their married counterparts. Women who sought to redress relationship difficulties by focusing on fighting back and blaming their partners had more often experienced violence.

Violence occurs in all aspects of shared residence and life. For the married and cohabiting women, the major themes were money, housing, sex, abortion and reproduction, employment, divorce and remarriage, domestic cleaning, the women's' behaviour, her independence, husbands' behaviour and (in)fidelity. It was apparent that women's vulnerability to violence and risk of being treated violently increased with pregnancy and children. Women bore children, and assumed responsibility for them, despite the domestic violence they encountered.

Women from any culture may be treated violently because their husbands wish to be rid of them. Violence to women can begin with marriage, with pregnancy, the birth of children, and can include violence against children. It can continue with emotional attacks. There are many immediate effects of violence on women and children. *"I was frightened of him, I would shake,"* said Mrs B.

All twenty respondents have been disturbed and scarred by domestic violence. Many women who experience abuse as adults have also been hurt or injured by domestic violence at one or more times in their earlier life as in the cases of *Mrs. L, Ms K, Mrs. D and Ms N*. The women argued that outside intervention is required if a man hits his wife even if she is not injured. Women who are physically and sexually abused are more likely than other women to experience stress and depression that is difficult to overcome. The respondents felt that most people need to find out more about how to handle domestic violence. Respondents also felt that it is hard to confront an argument in another couple's home but it is one's business to interfere especially when a husband physically abuses his wife during an argument inside the couple's own home. Some of the women claimed that they would be concerned about their own safety if they tried to help someone else in a specific situation of domestic violence. They feared that they might be sworn at or physically hurt. In addition to this, they maintained that they lacked knowledge about what to do when faced with a threatening situation. Some strongly believed the police won't do anything if they reported a situation of domestic violence. The woman's position is made much worse, when police do not take account of events seriously. Failure by the police to intervene earnestly demonstrates a total lack of regard for the individual women and their particular problems (see Hammer & Saunders, 1993:219).

Two women reported on instances when their partners violated a protection order. The men were not arrested; no follow up had been done. This might be the key reason for

underreporting. The women felt helpless, disrespected and discouraged and hence chose to remain silent. Even when advice and help enabled a woman to end a violent relationship, acute problems continued. Another classic pattern is for women to continue to have problems with men after divorce or separation. When there are children involved they fear for their safety. Repeated violence from the same man was the most difficult to cope with for some women. Maintenance is problematic and even though the sums involved are often small, men usually do not pay. Even though many women seek help from doctors and nurses, there is still considerable reluctance to use medical staff and many women seeking assistance are under threat from the man should they reveal the source of the injuries.

#### **5.3.4 The range of domestic violence experienced by women**

The qualitative data showed that women had been burnt with cigarettes, bitten, pushed against the walls and on stairs. Some women described their experiences: *“I have been abused verbally and physically which has resulted in black eyes, bleeding wounds and swollen joints. My phone is listened to” (Mrs. A).*

*“He beats me, stole my money and accuses me of seeing other men. He would always threaten me for example, he would say “If you don’t do as I say I’ll finish you off” (Ms K).*

*“I was subjected to threats of violence, he referred to me with my private parts, stopped me from seeing or visiting friends and relatives, except to work” (Ms P).*

*“I was pushed, shaken, punched and slapped, had clothes torn off my body and burnt. I was criticised in public, for example, told that I am stupid, useless, cold and he regretted why he married me. I had my hair pulled; I have been forced to have sexual intercourse without my consent” (Mrs. E).*

Abused women said that emotional abuse is intensely cruel and that it hurts far more than physical abuse, leaving deeper wounds that take much longer to heal and cannot be forgiven.

*“I was forced to have sex, if I tried to refuse; he insults me, called me all terrible names and assaults me with a knife. I had bruises all over my body. He fights me when he is drunk. My in-laws do not intervene, saying I’ve provoked him” (Ms L).*

*“I am deeply hurt by these insults and screaming. I am embarrassed, ashamed and harassed” (Mrs. M).*

*“I have been involved for four years. Our relationship took an ugly turn and nearly ended in death. My husband stabbed me, after a heated argument at our home. I found out he was cheating on me. When I confronted him, things got worse that I nearly lost my life”, when I told him that I could no longer trust him. “He makes me angry, hurt my feelings, and put me down” (Mrs. R).*

*“He drinks too much. Most of our fights start with me getting impatient with his drinking. He stays up and parties all night. And he spends a lot of money. Our fights are often about money. He still thinks that women should keep their mouth shut. When he’s upset, he’s allowed to scream and threaten. When he drinks he gets provocative. You know, he insists on telling me how wrong I really am. He started swearing and screaming and kicking the wall” (Ms Q).*

*“It probably was all wrong from the beginning. He was in full command over me. ‘Do this, do that. It was so humiliating, that feeling of someone else always telling me what to do. When I met him, I was impressed by him, he was educated and he was very calm. But he’s starting to irritate me more and more... When things are calm, we are able to say ‘we have to talk, the two of us, we can’t keep holding it in’. But nothing happens. Then we have an argument. He claims I do not respect him. Right in the middle of our argument, he left and came home the next day. I was very upset when he came back, but he only said he was ‘very sorry’. He had nothing more to say about it, and then said nothing for weeks...” (Mrs. I)*

The women’s interviews revealed that violence may result from a single argument or dispute, or it may result from a series of arguments, extending sometimes over a period of months or years, between husband and wife or between other family members with whom there is mutual interaction.

The position of women in society is closely related to their role within the family. Women, particularly married and cohabiting, have to be ‘good’ housewives; if they do not carry out their duties they are ‘bad’ housewives. There are a large number of older married and cohabiting women who undertake paid employment outside the home. A lot of women still do paid employment from home. In my study, many of the respondents were housewives. Housework is work without limits, with no clear beginning and end points, with no time for leisure. In our society which is patriarchal, where black women are likely to have the worst paid and the least-satisfying jobs, family life may be highly valued as a source of more positive identities and relationships.

Compared to the married women, cohabiting women seemed to be more autonomous and had better jobs. Their physical health was better and they consulted professional agencies more easily. More married women than cohabiting women expressed marital frustration and dissatisfaction, and considered their marriages unhappy. Compared to their cohabitants, married women suffer considerably more stress, anxiety and depression. A women's self-image deteriorates as she accommodates her husband rather than fulfilling herself as a person in her own right. A battered woman and her abuser do not have equal power. Gendered power relations in society and the power-gained from a sustained pattern of coercion and violence generally give the perpetrator more power over the victim (Harwin, Hague & Malos, 1999: 153).

### **The Social Construction of Domestic Violence : Influential Factors**

At the beginning of this mini-dissertation I set out to:

1. Build understandings of what perpetuates domestic violence and
2. Consider women's coping mechanisms.

There are, of course, many factors that perpetuate domestic violence. One needs to draw on cultural, social and psychological factors, as well as notions of sexual property rights, in order to explain wife beating and violence in the home. My study reveals that domestic violence is an extreme expression of male domination, aggravated by psychological stress, social disarray, and beliefs about the naturalness of men's control over women. Dynes (1994) argues that in societies where men are expected to be dominant, men may respond to any perceived threat to their superior position by using force and violence. For example, in times of rapid social change and development, men may feel stressed and insecure and may beat their wives more. In the present study there was evidence that wives, whose husbands face unemployment, were particularly subjected to violence. Men felt threatened by the potential independence of their working wives, so they retained control through physical dominance.

A number of stressful life events such as alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, financial hardships and poverty, presence of big families, extra-marital affairs and immaturity have been identified as possibly related to violence. These conditions put pressure on family life, and lead to high levels of distress.

#### **5.4.1 The problem of alcohol and drug abuse**

There is a link between substance abuse and battering. Substance use can impair decision making and inhibition or increase impulsive behavior. The key to the argument that alcohol causes violent behavior is that alcohol acts as a dis-inhibitor to release violent tendencies. Loseke, Gelles & Cavanaugh (2005:166) argue that this lack of inhibition can cause the drug abusing person to do things that he would not do when not abusing alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drugs cause an individual to misbehave and lose control. Intoxication might make a man brutal. These findings confirm the views of, for example, Dutton (1992) and Walker (1984). The respondents in my study said that their husbands got drunk at the weekend and started to shout, swear, beat and kick them for no reason. Jordan, Nietzel, Walker and Logan (2004) state that substance abuse has been strongly associated with the development of antisocial and aggressive traits in child development. Alcohol and drugs do not automatically cause perpetrators of domestic violence to abuse their partners, though it is frequently used as an excuse. Most batterers are neither alcoholics nor drug addicts but tend to use a sufficient amount of drink or drugs to make them loud and aggressive (Herman, 1988; Gelles & Cornell, 1985).

Thus, men who wish to carry out a violent act may become drunk in order to perform the act. After the violence has occurred, both the man and his wife may excuse his behavior on the ground that he was drunk and therefore didn't mean it, allowing the perpetrator to avoid taking responsibility for his actions. Possibly for this reason, many of the women 'felt sorry' for their abusers – excusing their behaviours and withstanding the abuse for a long while.

Women often believed that without the use of alcohol and drugs the assaults would not occur. However, the episodes of violence do not necessarily occur only when an abuser has been drinking. In my study women knew of alcoholics who are not prone to be abusive in the family. In an in-depth study of 532 relationships in which men were violent toward their wives, only 20 percent of the abusers were consistently intoxicated when violent (Walker, 1984). A history of substance abuse plays a vital role determining the severity of abuse the partner will suffer. Abusive men with alcohol or drug problems attack their wives more frequently. Roberts (1998) has found empirical proof of the association between alcohol intoxication and violent behaviour.

#### **5.4.2 Unemployment, financial hardship or poverty**

As suggested repeatedly in the international literature, unemployment contributes to marital violence especially when the male partner is unemployed. I found this to be the case in this study. The women suggested that the unemployed men were immensely tense and unhappy with themselves and their lives. Unemployment brings not only poverty, dependence and powerlessness, it leaves the unemployed and their families with on-going social problems. Male unemployment deprives families of their primary means of economic support that results in long-term disadvantaging effects on family life (Elliot, 1996: 84). The material hardship experienced during unemployment varies with the number of dependants and availability of supportive kin networks. Thus, without employment men feel disoriented, reduced in status and wounded in self-respect. Unemployment causes low self-esteem, financial worries and frustration. Frustration leads to loss of control of anger. Poverty and unemployment reduce the ability of men to provide for their families, which leads them to lash out at women. The end result of the tensions and stress associated with men's unemployment may be marital breakdown. Unemployment effects lead to children performing badly at school, truancy and absence from school because of concentration difficulties and also children appear to be at increased risk of physical abuse (Elliot, 1996:88).

Unemployed and under-employed individuals engage in violence because of their limited opportunities for occupational attainment. Thus, when these opportunities are blocked, stress and frustration will result, which in turn leads to abusive behavior. Some studies e.g. Schwartz (1990) show that employment status is unrelated to intimate violence. My qualitative findings, however, reiterate that unemployment leads to social and psychological distress, which create the basis for domestic violence. In my study, men's economic insecurities and inability to provide adequately for their families were key reasons for them turning to violence.

#### **5.4.3 Presence of big families and or overcrowding**

Black families tend to be extended not only because of cultural values but also because of poverty. The father is most often the head of the family (whether or not he is physically present at all time) and women are responsible for child rearing and socialisation. Thus, men control women's lives and often see them as sexual property; here the struggle for control and domination becomes a major source of uneasiness, conflict and tension. In KwaMhlanga,

Mpumalanga, the women are expected to listen, obey and adhere to the family instructions. Women are expected to be quiet and do the entire cooking, washing etcetera. However, the violence that my women respondents experienced suggest that men might be constantly challenged by women, which leaves them (the men) feeling like the women are breaking expectations and cultural norms.

#### **5.4.4 Other factors: infidelity, immaturity, cultural and jealousy**

The sexual relationship between husband and wife is an important aspect of the marital relationship. The promiscuous behavior of one spouse might become the main source of marital disappointment leading to maladjustment and friction in married life. Extra marital relationships are rarely tolerated in any society. The husband's unfaithfulness often becomes the focal point of the quarrel in the family. Thus, the woman feels hurt, disappointed and cheated. Accusations and counter-accusations were commonplace in the KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, interviews. One can also refer to immaturity. Couples getting married at a young age, marrying for reasons other than love, (rural women traditionally and culturally are groomed to get married before they are ready). The expectations of the culture that require women to cook for him, wash and iron his clothes and also to give him children because their mothers had done the same, put women under pressure.

In a number of societies, local customs are used to explain the existence of wife abuse. In some African contexts wife abuse occurs because a beating shows that the man loves the woman - and that wives need beating. Social norms and customary law tolerate some use of physical force as a means of disciplining family members in certain circumstances. The man is afforded a right to sanction what is regarded as undesirable behavior. Some of the women interviewed suggested that their husbands saw wife beating as their 'cultural right'. Jealousy was the most commonly cited cause of violence (see also Dobash & Dobash, 2000: 25). Jealousy is associated with the men's fear of the women's sexual infidelity which would not at all be tolerated in the African cultural micro-system

#### **5.5 How do women cope with the violence?**

Violence within the home is usually associated with a range of controlling and intimidating behaviors. *"My husband checks up on me and wants to know where I am all the time... He calls me bad names, makes fun of me in front of others... He damages property..."* said one woman. The women in my study reported a wide range of intimidating and coercive acts, and most of these occurred on a frequent basis in their relationships. Almost all women



mentioned that their partner had regularly shouted at them. Few of the women reported these acts initially. Aggressive and intimidating acts are a recurring feature of these relationships. Feminists argue that the use of violence for control in marriage is perpetuated through the norms about a man's rights in marriage and through women's continued economic dependence on their husbands. This view is supported by Walker (1979), who explains that battered women develop a mentality of helplessness which increases because of financial dependency and responsibility for children. Bunch (1992) also admits that women's socioeconomic and psychological dependency makes it difficult for them to leave situations of domestic violence. Thus women 'cope' by enduring their violence – they do not leave because they see their situations as that of the typical woman (often, married woman) in a subservient relationship with a man.

The respondents, largely the wives in my study, suffered in silence for the greater part of their relationships because of the following:

1. They were conditioned to obey their husbands and were afraid to act independently.
2. Many held cultural beliefs that the wife must silently bear the assaults.
3. Close family and relatives refused to accept them back and bear the burden of supporting them and their children.

The women talked about being overwhelmed by a sense of shame and failure. Given their long-suffering experiences, the decision to disclose the abuse was complex and the women might never have done it if they did not feel safe to do so at the KwaMhlanga court and social agency. The majority of women who were being abused by their partners did not readily disclose the abuse to health professionals. This is because they, as a pattern, tended to deny that the husband was responsible for the initial battering and bruises. Establishing a pattern of denial i.e. not admitting to doctors and nurses that their partners had violated them, makes it difficult to open up to health officials later on. Almost all the women turned to families and friends first, although their abusive partner may have isolated them from potential sources of support. However, many women who experience partner abuse do not tell anyone about the abuse for months or years (Roberts, Hegarty & Feder, 2006:81). As the violence and abuse persist especially in times of crisis, they might seek help from social work professionals.

Women who experienced repeated combined physical, emotional and sexual abuse during their life-time are afraid of their partners. The women in my study who described themselves as fearful and anxious displayed much agency in turning to the law for help. Some sought protection orders, and others hoped that their abusive partners would be punished. How did they transcend their personal inhibitions and cultural constraints?

In the final analysis, the women began to believe that they had the right to a life without violence particularly in this democratic era when social and political changes have occurred. The abused women also realised that they were not alone; they had seen too many women like themselves on television talk shows and in their own community talk about the effects of domestic violence and what they could do. At such moments the decision was taken to report abuse – and the women felt spurred on by what they believed was the larger number of women also reporting abuse. Wife beating has become a common topic for public debate in South Africa. Some of the women in my study (astutely) argued that violence against women is increasing because, ironically, women's positions in society are improving and men are becoming threatened. Expressed differently, the more that women try and improve their situations, the more violence they face.

Klein & Campbell (1997:137) argue that the beating-up of women is often learned in the home. Some people learn to be violent because when they were young, they were beaten or witnessed violence in their home. Men do it to humiliate women. As long as women are economically dependent on men, they will be potential victims of violence. Violence against women is more than a physical assault, it's a cultural and ideological one too. Men who beat up their wives use physical force to get their way; they are also acting out cultural images that dictate that men need to be aggressive and women submissive. Women, however, might reach a stage where they become aware of how harmful their passivity is for their health and wellbeing. Additionally, many in my study were prompted to seek help when they felt that their abuse was affecting their children and that their children could also be violated. The literature suggests too that this is often a critical turning point for abused women.

A secondary question at the outset was whether the state of being married or a cohabitant raises implications for domestic violence. Contrary to the expectation that married women would be more 'respected' and therefore less vulnerable to abuse, the interviews showed that the married women were more dependent and subject to greater violation and beating. Women in living together unions had more freedom (although slightly more) and were able to

break their unions more easily. This gives much credence to feminist conceptions of the oppressiveness of marriage in which patriarchal dominance structures relationships and power imbalances.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Domestic violence is a subject not openly discussed, in part because of the hurt and shame felt by the women affected and those close to them. In South Africa, we see a disturbing trend of increasing domestic violence cases, sometimes resulting in the demise of entire families. And we also read about unfortunate cases that end up in suicide, divorce and separation when this pressure is too much to bear. It may seem inconceivable to others that some women stay in abusive relationships. The women in this study explained why it was difficult.

Men as partners and fathers are supposed to protect their wives and children, not abuse or torture them. The men accused their partners of not doing their duties and of having affairs amongst other things, and then treated them badly. The women talked about alcohol overuse and substance abuse. Unemployment creates a lot of uncertainty in the minds of many people. Poverty has affected post-apartheid society. Together these macro dimension social factors create the foundation for violence and degradation. Other micro-level factors include: infidelity, jealousy, immaturity and cultural factors.

My study findings show that married women were in a slightly more difficult space than cohabitants. Many respondents had been sexually abused by partners and referred to 'forced sex'. The crime also seems to be helped or encouraged by the myth that married or cohabiting women cannot realistically sexually assaulted or raped by the partners, and this discourages them from reporting it. There were slight differences between relationships, with married women suffering more emotional and physical abuse than the cohabiting women. There were also differences in behaviour between cohabiting and married women. I would argue on reflection that cohabiting women tended to be more assertive, whereas married women hoped for change and therefore compromised their potential for independence.

It hurts men to know that wives/partners laid rape and assault charges against them and obtained protection orders. Respondents admitted that there were constantly fighting but could not state specific reasons why they were constantly fighting. In KwaMhanga, Mpumalanga, many marriages and cohabiting relationships don't last and the ones that do

aren't always happy or fulfilling. Women stay for the sake of the children, and in doing so they remain afraid that they might be permanently disabled or killed, given their partner's capacities for violence.

Heise (1994) states that in many countries between twenty five and fifty percent of women report being abused by a current or former partner. In KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga, the researcher argues that most women live in a violent relationship. The consequence of domestic violence affects the victims and their families and the entire South African society. There is thus an urgent need for intervention, at the macro and micro levels, and in all spheres of society to eradicate this enormous problem of domestic violence.

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