

**EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF BLACK MIDDLE
CLASS WOMEN WHO REMAIN IN ABUSIVE MARITAL
RELATIONSHIPS**

BY

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**MINI-DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

MA (COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY)

IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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SUBMITTED: MARCH 2010

“The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised”.

- Luke 4: 18

“All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated. Without courage we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency”.

-Maya Angelou

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to God almighty. Without him, it would not have been possible to complete the study. I would also like to express my gratitude to the following people, institutions for helping with the research project:

- My lovely parents Mr and Mrs Mlombo for giving me financial support and encouraging me to study. They believed in my capabilities from the day I was born. When I wanted to give up on my studies, they pushed me in the right direction.
- Ms Neli Mathebula, a Manager at the Social Services Department, as well as all the brave women who participated in the study, who were willing to share their personal experiences with me.
- Busisiwe Mlombo and my other five siblings for loving and supporting me.
- Finally, I would like to thank the person who gave me guidance and support on how to go about executing the project plans. If it were not for Mrs Rebone Gcabo, I would not have been able to complete the study.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. The study also aimed to explore the reasons black women attach towards remaining in marital abusive relationships. Even though our current democratic Government has put efforts towards fighting against domestic abuse, South Africa is still characterised by high rates of domestic abuse. In South Africa a woman has about one in three chances of being violated in her life time, which puts it amongst the highest statistics of violence in the world, with one in six women standing a chance of being abused by her intimate partner in her lifetime (People Opposing Women Abuse, 2005). Domestic abuse does not just involve minor forms of physical assault, but, frequently, serious injury and even death. According to statistics from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation at Wits University, one woman is murdered by her partner every six days in the Gauteng province in South Africa.

Qualitative approach, as well as literature review and in-depth interviews have been used in order to study the experiences of abused women in the Mpumalanga province at KwaMhlanga. The theoretical approach used was (i) Social Learning Theories which focused on the mechanisms whereby family members influences each other through modelling, reinforcement and coercion to behave violently, (ii) The feminist theory in which the origins of abuse included stereotyping and patriarchal values, (iii) the General Systems Theory which demonstrates that abuse cannot be explained by focusing on an individual level, but rather that systems interact and as they interact, they influence the reaction of others. General System's theory was used as the backdrop of the study because it provided a broader understanding of how abuse occurs within a family system and hence allowed the researcher to explore the experiences and coping mechanisms of women who remain in abusive marital relationships.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The criteria included that the participants were currently in abusive marital relationships and had at least a tertiary qualification and were employed in middle management job position. Nine participants were interviewed using individual in depth interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and field notes were taken. Data was analysed qualitatively. Five broad categories formed a framework for the analysis. (i) The Experiences of abused women, (ii) the Impact of remaining in an abusive

relationship, (iii) the Meaning attached to staying, (iv) the Coping mechanisms used by abused women, (v) and Social support. The themes were coded in form of numbers, counting the number of times the theme occurs in an interview, data was collected until a level of saturation was reached. The themes were then compared and integrated with the literature. The study concludes that abuse occurs in all social groups and that a complexity of factors contribute towards black middle class women resorting to remaining in marital abusive relationships, for example, culture and societal beliefs and structures, personality factors, and lack of support.

KEY WORDS

Coping mechanisms, Marital abuse, Physical abuse, Emotional abuse, Sexual abuse,
Domestic violence, Marital relationship

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND

South Africa has a young democracy. It has only been sixteen years since South Africa received its freedom from the past apartheid Government. Despite it being post-apartheid and having had three general elections since 1994, the stability of the country is questionable due to the level of domestic violence that still occurs in various South African communities, households, cultures and ethnic groups. Despite being in the majority, South African women are still trapped in domestic violence. Recent research on domestic violence indicates that violence in the home is still accepted as seemingly normal behaviour in South Africa (Spiegel, 1997). In their research report, the People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA, 2005) indicates that they handled a total number of 2284 cases of reported domestic violence annually. It was shown that 87% of their clients were black; 90% of which were females; the majority of which were married (42%), and 31% of which were formally employed. A large number of the women (41%) indicated that they were abused by their husbands. Data from categories of abuses reflect domestic violence, at 76.8%, to be the highest in terms of clients' problems they experienced. The forms of abuse include emotional abuse (797 cases), physical abuse (705 cases), financial abuse (223 cases), death threats (144 cases), and sexual abuse (705 cases). The statistics also indicate that one in six South African women is abused by her partner. The Women's Bureau (2005) also estimates that South African males in domestic relationships abuse approximately one in four women (People Opposing Women Abuse, 2005).

South Africa is currently faced with the challenge of redressing issues relating to gender inequality, with special reference to the patriarchy and gender roles. Since the introduction of democracy in 1994, the new government has declared its intention of striving towards a non-sexist and non-violent society as part of its fight against the previous apartheid regime (Booyesen, 1999). In addition to this, in its effort to eradicate apartheid and implement equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation, the new government has made strong, legally binding commitments to uphold and promote gender equality in public spheres (Booyesen, 1999; Steyn, 1997). The Domestic Violence Act of 1993 was introduced to deal effectively

with domestic violence, and more specifically, woman abuse. The act outlines the procedures that abused women can follow, as well as where to go and who to talk to, for example, the SAPS female personnel dedicated towards dealing with cases of abuse. But this act had its flaws, for example, it did not accommodate homosexual people and thus a new act had to be designed. In 1994 (post-apartheid South Africa), the government designed policies and invested in efforts to design the constitution and introduce gender sensitive and protective legislative measures and institutions to help attend to the problem of wife abuse. For example, the Commission of Gender Equality, the Office on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Commission and the Public Protector were established in 1997 by the new democratic government with efforts to eradicate spousal abuse and improve female representation. The purpose was to provide protection to women in abusive relationships. Despite these efforts, most South African women are still in abusive relationships, as indicated by the People Opposing Women Abuse. This study aims to explore the reasons why women remain in abusive relationships, despite efforts from the government to protect them.

This chapter introduces the study by making a brief deliberation of what pattern the study will follow. It explores the motivation for the choice of subject, the problem formulation, the aims and objectives of the study, the assumptions made, and the research methodology, which includes the type of research, the research design, the research procedures, the method of data collection, the description of the research participants, sampling and the definition of concepts.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR CHOICE OF STUDY

From the literature reviewed, the researcher found that there has been little to no research done on woman abuse in relationships in South Africa (Makofane, 1999). Much of the existing theory related to the topic comes from Western literature, which may not have any direct relevance to understanding the South African culture and domestic environment. These observations prompted the researcher to investigate this sensitive area, which, as has been shown, is less studied in South Africa. Research on domestic abuse indicates that “more information is needed on the prevalence, incidence of partner violence and the nature and characteristics of abuse” as cases of domestic abuse are less reported (Williams, cited in Makofane, 1999, p.9).

When the researcher was doing the Masters Internship Programme at one of Military Hospital in South Africa in 2006, she was confronted with various challenges during counselling therapy sessions, in which abused women who came to the hospital would share their stories about being in abusive marital relationships. Some of the women who were willing to open up to the researcher during the therapeutic sessions held senior positions at their workplace and had high educational qualifications. The researcher then decided to start a support group for women who are financially independent and in abusive relationships. Initially, the support group had five members, but within two months 15 more women had joined the group. This growth encouraged the researcher to further investigate the reasons why women remain in abusive marital relationships.

Initially, working with women in abusive relationships was intriguing for the researcher. Despite the abuse taking place at home, victims still remained in the relationship. The women who remained married to their abusive husbands reported that they were unable to leave their husbands because of four main reasons: children, financial stability, religious convictions and culture.

The print media indicates that, in South Africa, there are high levels of marital abuse. South African statistics from People Opposing Women Abuse (2005) indicate that one woman out of every six is in an abusive relationship. However, incidences of abuse are not always reported because the matter of domestic abuse is still treated with secrecy in most South African communities (People Opposing Women Abuse, 2005). For example, on 16 February 2004, the Daily Sun, a local newspaper, reported on a woman who had been killed by her husband after having been battered for 9 years. This woman did not even report a single incident of violence to the police or any other social service provider. The children, unfortunately, only broke their silence when it was too late, reporting that the father used to beat their mother every evening. This woman was declared dead after staying in a comma for three days. Dobash & Dobash (1979) maintain that “history is replete with laws, customs and legends that show that women have been beaten, tortured and killed by their spouses....If abusers were not commended for their actions, their acts were, at the least, ignored” (p.427).

According to Gelles and Loseke (1993) the criminal justice system has been ineffective in dealing with domestic violence. In addition, the problem of domestic violence is still treated as a minor domestic spat. In support to that, Ammerman and Herson (1990) stated that the

problem of wife abuse has existed over the centuries, but it was only recently that more cases are reported to professionals like the police, lawyers and social workers. The problem of wife abuse has often been treated with secrecy and it is frequently under reported. According to Gelles and Loseke (1993), the social stigma associated with reporting marital abuse and pressure, for example, from the family makes it difficult for abused women to contact the police and judicial authorities when they need help or need to report abuse, hence more cases of domestic abuse are not reported to the police.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The study aims to explore the reasons why women tend to remain in abusive marital relationships, despite the risk of being hurt, both physically and psychologically, during abusive episode as well as the coping mechanisms abused women use to cope with the abuse.

In South Africa, particularly within the black communities, violence against married women by their partners is still treated as a secret. Frederick & Davids (cited in Makofane, 1999) confirm that, in South Africa, as in other countries such as the United States of America and England, wife abuse is one of the most underestimated and under-reported crimes (p.472). In the South African black communities, women are generally socialized to keep their marital problems a secret by their culture. Abused women are afraid to break that silence for a range of reasons, such as poor self esteem (Dutton, 1993), a lack of confidence to challenge the long held belief systems, fear of reprisal from their partners, or finding themselves in coercive relationships (Jack, 1991, p. 94).

According to Dobash and Dobash (1992), most men find it difficult to accept a confident and assertive woman at home. This type of woman is usually viewed as problematic and as challenging the man's authority and may also be viewed as being disrespectful. Consequently, men could perceive women who hold high positions at work as threats. If a woman earns more money, in terms of salaries, it is directly associated with power and control. The husband may resort to using abuse as a means to assert himself and maintain dominance and control within the marriage (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

Previously, most people viewed violence as a problem restricted to the working class, certain ethnic groups, or social classes, for example, black women from poor socio-economic groups.

However, research shows that abuse cuts across race, class and status (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Given the study's problem statement, the aims of the study were:

- To explore the experiences of black, middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships,
- To determine the impact of marital abuse on the abused woman's psychological well being, and
- To explore how abused women cope with abuse in their marital relationships.

In the next paragraph the objectives of the study are discussed.

1.4.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To determine the type of abuse that black middle class women in abusive marriages endure,
- To explore the reasons women remain in abusive marital relationships,
- To understand how women construct their stay in abusive relationship
- To determine if black middle class women remain in abusive relationships,
- To examine if abused women understand the cyclic nature of their relationships ,
- To determine the impact of abuse on women in abusive relationships,
- To investigate where abused women in abusive marital relationships have access to support, and
- To establish the coping strategies women in abusive relationships use to cope within the marriage.

In the next paragraph the assumptions of the study are discussed.

1.5 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The basic assumptions of the study are:

- Married women from the middle social classes, who maintain adequate economic situations and have educational backgrounds, may also be victims of abuse.
- These women have experienced some form of abuse in their relationships.
- Abused women choose to stay married.
- Victims of marital abuse report their situation to someone they know or do not know.
- Women who remain in abusive relationships have children.

In the next paragraph the methodology of the study is discussed.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The concept ‘methodology’ refers to the philosophy of a research process or the science of finding out (Bailey, 1994; Rubin & Babbie, 1997). Bailey (1994) mentions that, “It includes the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards of criteria the researcher uses for interpreting data and reaching conclusions” (p. 33). Rubin and Babbie (1997) define methodology as “a section that delineates in precise terms the design of the study, including logical arrangements, sampling and data collection procedures, and the measurement approach used” (p 94). There are different types of research designs for the social sciences, which may be used to investigate certain phenomena. For the purpose of this study, however, a qualitative approach will be used because the study is exploratory. In the next paragraph the type of research used in the study is discussed.

1.6.1 Type of research

This study is qualitative in nature, as it explores the experiences and coping mechanisms used by women who remain in marital abusive relationships. Qualitative research stems from an anti-positivistic, interpretive approach, is ideographic and thus holistic in nature, and mainly aims to understand life. For example, social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life. The qualitative research paradigm, in its broadest sense, refers to research that elicits participant’s accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions. It also produces descriptive data in the participant’s own written or spoken words. It thus involves identifying

the participant's beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena (De Vos, 1998). The qualitative researcher is therefore concerned with understanding rather than explaining; with naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement; and with the subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an outsider (De Vos, 1998). The qualitative method was best suited for the study as it also involves interacting with participants directly. The next paragraph explores the characteristics of qualitative research.

1.6.1.1 The following are the characteristics and/or strong points of qualitative research

The qualitative research design is based on studying the subjective experiences of participants. The purpose of the design is to construct a detailed description of social reality. This method is suitable for the study of a relatively unknown terrain and hence it seeks to understand phenomena (De Vos, 1998). The participant's natural language is used in order to come to a genuine understanding of their world. This research approach is flexible and unique and evolves throughout the research process. Data sources are determined by the information richness of settings, for instance, types of observations are modified to enrich understanding. The unit of analysis is holistic, concentrating on the relationships between elements and contexts. According to this approach, the whole is always more than the sum (De Vos, 1998).

1.6.2 Research design

Strother in Grinnell (1990) states that: "A research design is a plan which includes every aspect of a proposed research study from conceptualisation of the problem through to the dissemination of the findings" (p. 219). On the contrary, De Vos (1998) came out with the following steps that need to be followed in the choice of research design. Firstly, the researcher needs to define the research problem. Secondly, the researcher should collect basic data on how previous studies were performed, including their research methodology (De Vos, 1998). While collecting the data, the researcher must take the context of the participants into consideration, such as the organisation (Neuman, 1997). It is advisable to compile a list of alternative designs, in case the chosen design does not work. Practical considerations such as the cost of the study, personnel and other research facilities should also be studied. After that, the decision of what design will be used may be made. The researcher should then decide on a strategy for the collection of data and ensure adequate implementation, thus indicating the advantages and disadvantages of the design (De Vos, 1998).

1.6.2.1 Choice of research design for the study

According to Arkava and Lane (1983), choosing a particular research design depends on the purpose of the research. Exploratory research design was chosen as the ideal design for the purpose of this study as little is known about the experiences and coping mechanisms of black, South African middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships (Grinnel & Williams, 1990). When taking into consideration that there is not much information available on the experiences and coping mechanisms of black, South African middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships, the research design considered appropriate for the study is exploratory. As Grinnell & Williams (1990) state, "...if very little is known about our field of study, we will need an exploratory research design whose purpose is just to explore, that is, to gather data..." (p. 140). Gathering data on the topic will help by bringing about new insight, and for developing further research and accomplishing the aim of the study by employing several procedures like literature reviews and getting information from victims of abuse.

1.6.3 Sampling method

A snowball technique was used for purposeful sampling. The support group manager identified one woman from the support group. This woman was then interviewed and after the interview, the woman was asked to recommend another candidate, preferably from the same support group. Women who did not attend the support group were not denied permission to take part in the study. However, all the women who were interviewed were part of the support group. The researcher chose this method because she had a purpose to interview participants who are in abusive relationships. Hence, she chose to work with women who formed part of a support group for abused women. Before proceeding with the interview, the women were screened, using a standard preliminary questionnaire (see appendix B) to determine if they met the necessary criteria to participate in the study. Participants who did not qualify to participate in the study were thanked for their time. In the next paragraph, the researcher will discuss the inclusion criteria used for participation in the study.

1.6.4 Inclusion criteria

Nine married women, aged between 30 and 55, who experienced physical, emotional or sexual abuse within their marriages, were interviewed for the study. Abuse cuts across all racial groups, but for the purpose of this study, only black women were interviewed. The participants who took part in the study also had children. Women taking part in the study were required to have a post matriculation qualification or at least a diploma and be in at least middle management position at work.

1.6.5 Interviewing

According to Kumar (2005), an interview is defined as an attempt to understand the participant's world from the participant's point of view, to unfold the meaning of the participant's experiences and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation. Conducting an interview is a more natural form of interacting with people than making them fill out a questionnaire, do a test or perform some experimental task. The interview, as a strategy for research, thus fits in well with the interpretive approach to research.

1.6.5.1 Individual/in-depth interviews

This strategy was chosen, since it may be useful in understanding why certain women choose to remain in marital abusive relationships. An interview guide was used to make sure that all relevant topics were covered during the interview. The interview guide included questions that helped in achieving the research goals. The main themes covered by the interview guide were, the experiences of abused victims, the impact of abuse, the meaning attached to staying in an abusive relationship, the coping mechanisms of women in abusive relationships and social supported, these broad themes were relevant towards achieving the aims and the objectives of the study.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms were defined in accordance to the purpose of the study to help the reader understand the content of the study.

1.7.1 Violence

Different authors define the term ‘violence’ in various ways. According to Barker (1991), the term ‘violence’ refers to “a severe and intense exercise of force of power, usually resulting in injury or destruction. Furthermore, the term ‘crimes of violence’ pertain to those crimes in which physical harm occurs or is threatened, such as murder, rape, or assault or battery” (p. 248). A perpetrator can use violence in order to enhance their power over their victim. According to Edleson & Tolman (1992), violence is demonstrated as “...an intentional behaviour that serves to systematically enhance the perpetrator’s coercive control over others in his world” (p. 22).

1.7.2 Marital abuse

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on physical, emotional and sexual abuse among black, middle class women in abusive marital relationships. Victims of abuse come from different educational backgrounds, class, occupations, ages and social groups. Easy access to private health care and legal resources are among the reasons why woman abuse is kept hidden by the upper classes of society. Marital abuse may be more frequently recorded among the poor, as women in this social-economic stratum are more likely to be known by social service agencies (Stewart, cited in Ngoma, 2005).

‘Abuse’ can be defined as a pattern of control that physically harms, induces fear, prevents another from doing what they wish, or forces them to perform in ways with which they are not comfortable (Padayachee, cited in Makofane 1999). Abuse can be found among married and unmarried heterosexuals, gays and lesbians. It cuts across geographic, religious, economic and racial barriers. The term ‘abuse’ is more inclusive than ‘violence’ as it encompasses physical attacks and emotional, verbal, sexual and economic abuse (Padayachee, cited in Makofane 1999).

1.7.3 Physical abuse

‘Physical abuse’ is any behaviour that involves the intentional use of one’s body or object against the body of another person in such a way that there is risk of physical injury. Physical abuse involves pushing, scratching, slapping, hitting, punching, choking, kicking, holding,

biting, or throwing. Physical abuse also includes locking someone out of the house, driving recklessly with someone else in the car, throwing objects at someone, threatening to hurt someone with a weapon, abandoning someone in dangerous places, refusing to help someone when they are pregnant, injured, or sick (Reader on domestic violence, 2004). The term was defined to help the reader understand what the researcher is referring to, when discussing physical abuse.

1.7.4 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can also be defined as ignoring someone's feelings, ridiculing someone's beliefs, withholding approval, threatening to take someone's children, telling a wife about her husband's affairs with other women, manipulating through lying, threatening to end a relationship, taking car keys or money, keeping someone from going to work or school, humiliating someone in public or in private, abusing someone's pets or children and calling someone names or driving someone's family or friends away (Reader on domestic violence, 2004). Emotional abuse is also any use of words, voice, action, or lack of action meant to control, hurt, or demean another person. At some time in their relationship, all couples shout at each other or scream things that they later regret. Emotionally abusive relationships, however, are defined as involving repeated exchanges with a complete disregard for a partner's feelings (Wilson, 1997, p. 10).

These are a few experiences which are common examples of psychological abuse that most victims tend to suppress and regard as not important enough to take any action. The abusive partners usually do the following:

- The abuser may refuse to socialize with their partners,
- The abuser humiliates their partners either in private or in public,
- The abuser may criticize their partners continually, calling them names and yelling at them,
- The abuser may withhold approval, appreciation, or affection as punishment,
- The abuser can humiliate or insult their partner's valued beliefs, religion, race, heritage or class,
- The abuser might insult or humiliate women as a group,
- The abuser may ignore the feelings of their partner,

- The abuser can keep their partner from working, control their money and make all decisions,
- The abuser could refuse to work or to share income,
- The abuser can take car keys or money away from their partners,
- The abuser may regularly threaten their partner with leaving or with telling the partner to leave,
- The abuser may threaten to hurt the woman or their families,
- The abuser may punish or deprive the children when angry with the woman,
- The abuser may threaten to kidnap the children if the woman decides to leave,
- The abuser may threaten the woman with weapons,
- The abuser can destroy the furniture or any valuables at home,
- The abuser can manipulate the woman with lies and contradiction,
- The abuser may harass the woman about affairs they imagine she might be having, and
- The abuser may physically abuse, torture or kill pets to hurt the other partner. (Reader on domestic violence, 2004)

1.7.5 Sexual abuse

The term 'sexual abuse' focuses on the man's desire for power, domination and control. The patriarchal family structure characterised by husband/father dominance represents one view of the nature of marital rape as representing the male/female difference with the dominance/submission dynamic at work overall" (Makofane, 1999). In this case, sexual violence is viewed in the context of the overall domination of men in a patriarchal society. Sexual abuse is also explained in terms of any sexual behaviour meant to control, manipulate, humiliate, or demean another person (Wilson, 1997, p. 12). According to Wilson (1997) sexual violence is common in abusive relationships. Within these relationships, sex is usually used as a means of exerting power over the female partner and of further shaming and humiliating her. Most women are raped after a beating. The term was defined in order to help the reader understand what the researcher means when referring to sexual abuse (Wilson, 1997).

1.7.6 Black person

The term 'black' refers to the racial group in which members have a darker skin colour. In South Africa, particularly, the term is used to refer to an African group who speak Bantu languages such as Zulu or Xhosa (Encyclopaedia, 2001). The researcher decided to focus on black women only for the purpose of the study.

1.7.7 Coping mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are generally viewed as ways of responding that transcend different situations. Coping is not thought of as a single act but as a constellation of thoughts and acts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals should not be seen in terms of coping and non-coping, but as demonstrating varying degrees of distress and coping over time as they are faced with different situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Efforts to change the stressful situation, thus controlling distress, are usually differentiated from responses that alter the cognitive appraisal of stress (Pearlin & Scholar cited in Holahan & Moos, 1987).

Lazarus & Folkman (cited in Essau & Trommsdorf, 1996) identify two major functions of coping, namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. Problem focused coping involves taking direct action with the purpose of changing the situation through, among other things, decision making, creating a plan of action and fighting for what one believes in (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion focused coping is usually used in situations that are viewed as not changeable. It serves as an emotional and arousal oriented coping style with the purpose of reducing negative emotions regarding a situation and preventing further emotional pain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion focused strategies include behaviours such as being optimistic, accepting sympathy and understanding from others, and trying to forget about the problem. Examples are denial, avoidance, religious faith, acceptance and social support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Most abused women use emotion focused to coping with the abuse in their relationships, as they view the situation as unchangeable.

1.8 The study will contribute to the advancement of science in the following ways:

- It will contribute towards the development of policies within governmental structures. If policy designers have knowledge with regard to the dynamics within a marital

abusive relationship, they might be able to design policies that will accommodate abused women, such as creating organizations, like a place of safety, funded by the Government.

- It will contribute to the sensitivity towards individual cultural groups in South Africa. People should be studied in their context since they construct their own beliefs, morals, values and culture. This is then transmitted through language from one generation to the next.
- Many studies have been done in first world countries like the USA, which tend to generalize or claim to be universally applicable, but this might not be necessarily true for all cases. This study will contribute to the knowledge of abuse in the local situation, specifically within the black community.
- This study may also contribute to the empowerment of women with information regarding the nature of abusive relationships, to enable them to have more options, if faced with a similar situation at some stage in their developments.

1.9 DELINEATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

- The problem of wife abuse is still treated with secrecy, which could limit the participants from honestly answering some of the questions during the study.
- The study will include black, female victims of abusive marital relationships.
- The study will only include married women with children, who choose to remain in abusive relationships.
- The study will not include women who do not have a tertiary education.

1.10 STUDY LAYOUT

The study is organized as follows:

Chapter 1

Introduction: The introduction will examine the experiences and coping mechanisms of black, middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. This study has introduced the topic by outlining the motivation for the choice of study, problem statement, aims and objectives, assumptions, and the study layout.

Chapter 2

The researcher will review the theoretical approaches necessary for understanding the experiences and coping mechanisms of black, middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. The study will also make use of a general literature review. Theories integrated include systems theory, feminist theory, and social learning theory.

Chapter 3

This chapter focuses on the research design and methods that the researcher used in the study.

Chapter 4

This chapter will cover data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 5

This chapter covers the discussion of the results, the wider questions of the research and the conclusion. It will further make recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL AND LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the historical and literature overview of the experiences and coping mechanisms of black, middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships.

2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

According to Moore (cited in Barkhuizen, 2004) the history of Roman law may have contributed to the high levels of wife abuse in European and American countries, while British Common law permitted husbands to beat their wives. Moore (cited in Barkhuizen, 2004) states that “[i]n 1824 the Supreme court of Mississippi acknowledged the husband’s right to beat his wife” (p. 8). Furthermore, Moore (in Barkhuizen, 2004) points out that, in 1974, North Carolina modified this position by indicating that: “The husband has no right to chastise his wife, under any circumstances..., however, if no permanent injury has been inflicted, nor malice, cruelty, nor dangerous violence shown by a husband, it is better to draw the curtain, shut out the public gaze, and leave the parties to forget and forgive” (p. 9). These laws were maintained until the late 1800s when a few states, like the state of Maryland, rescinded this right.

In 1880, the British Parliament, through a series of legal reforms, began to deal with the plight of married women. The law permitted a woman, who had been repeatedly beaten by her husband to the point of “endangering her life”, to separate from him, but not to divorce him (Martin, cited in Barkhuizen 2004, p. 9). It appears that such a law was passed by men who wanted to make it easier for themselves to access their wives and demand the return of their wives, who were not provided with any means of protection by legal institutions (Martin, cited in Barkhuizen, 2004).

In the United States of America the law which permitted a husband to beat his wife was repealed at the end of the 19th Century (Dickstein 1986, p. 612; Martin, 1976, p. 113). The

State of Maryland was the first state to outlaw wife beating in 1883, after the courts of Alabama and Massachusetts had overturned the right to chastise wives in 1871 (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Moore, 1979). Many states have since re-evaluated their laws to confront the violent sexual victimization of women by their husbands (Peacock, in Ngoma, 2005).

The exploitation of women has been a problem in Chinese societies for many centuries too. The Chinese culture has been heavily influenced by Confucian philosophy that advocates patriarchal beliefs and values (Tang, 1997, p. 456). In order to understand wife abuse in contemporary society, it is important to understand and recognize the legacy of women as the “appropriate” victims of family violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 31; Gelles & Cornell, 1990, p. 64). Family violence is most common in Western, industrialised and developed nations such as Britain, Germany and France (Gelles & Cornell, 1990, p. 29).

Men who abuse their wives are actually living up to the cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society, namely aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination, and they use physical force to inflict their dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This statement indicates that socialization, tradition and culture may encourage and promote the abuse of women. The History of Apartheid may have contributed to the problem of woman abuse in South Africa as police personnel did not have training on how to handle cases of abused women (Levy, 2002).

The current South African constitution and the criminal justice system are guided by the European model, which is based on human rights. The Democratic Republic of South Africa has assumed a position of economic, social and political stability (South African Human Rights commission [SAHRC], 1999). On the other hand, the African literature and theories of domestic violence based on the assertion of individual human rights is uncommon (Levy, 2002). If gender equality is based on human rights theory, with its notion of individual autonomy, there could be a clash, as Africans study women’s lived experiences as relational. Hence, most African women experience themselves as embedded in relationships and tradition which is not based on individualism. Family interests in Africa are given primary consideration before the individual, hence a woman’s status is a subservient one (Bowman in Levy, 2002).

2.2.1 WOMAN ABUSE AND THE PATRIARCHY

Dobash & Dobash (1979) state that there are several legal and political ideologies supporting the idea that husbands have authority over their wives. The legal right of a man to use physical force against his wife is no longer explicitly recognised in most Western countries, but the legacy of the patriarchy continues to generate the conditions and relationships that lead to a husband's use of force against his wife (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Patriarchal dominance is still supported by a moral order which reinforces the marital hierarchy, making it difficult for women to struggle against it, and other forms of domination and control. This is because a woman's struggles are considered by most as wrong, immoral and a violation of the respect and loyalty a wife is supposed to give her husband. The fact that wife abuse is a form of patriarchal dominance is irrefutable in light of historical evidence. Legal, historical, literacy and religious writings all contribute to understanding the status of women. This status encompasses the core explanations of why women have become victims of marital violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979), women rarely had an identity apart from that given to them as wives, mothers, and daughters (p. 34). To venture from that identity, was discouraged and often punished. According to British law, to be a wife meant becoming the property of one's husband and taking a secondary position in the marital hierarchy consisting of power and worth. To be a wife also meant being legally and morally bound to obey the will and wishes of one's husband, and thus, being subjected to his control, even to the point of physical punishment or murder. Dobash & Dobash (1979) conclude that this depicted relationship between women and men has been institutionalised in the form of the patriarchal family and is supported by economic and political institutions, as well as by belief systems, which include religious beliefs that make such relationships seem natural, moral and sacred (p. 34). This structure and ideology can be seen in the records of early Christianity.

For man did not originally spring from woman, but woman was made out of man; and man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the sake of man; and therefore it is a woman's duty to have a sign of authority on her head, out of regards for the angels. But, I wish you to understand that, while every man has Christ for his Head, woman's head is man, (a woman reflects her husbands glory), as Christ's Head is God (1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

A woman must be a learner, listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over man; she should be quiet (Timothy 2: 11-12).

Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord; for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ also is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5: 22-23).

These Christian scriptures have had the most profound influence upon the cultural beliefs and social institutions of Western society. It was the principles of the patriarchy and not equality that were taken up by Christians and that have largely prevailed (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 40). Man was regarded as the head of the household, being referred to as the “Godhead” and his wife and children as the “flock”. The man had responsibility over his family, had authority over them, and was ultimately able to control them and keep them subjugated. The law of God provided a sacred and moral ideology to uphold the existing patriarchal structure of the family (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

According to Mama (cited in Ngoma, 2005), religion, like custom, can also be a vehicle for gender ideologies that oppress women. Some religious groups, like Christians, emphasize the importance of a family unit. Women are often encouraged to submit to their husbands and are also often expected to forgive their husbands. Christianity will be used as an example for the purposes of this study. It has been observed that Christianity contributes directly and indirectly to the way in which people conduct themselves and how they treat people around them. More men are in powerful positions in our society and in the Church; hence they are influential and have the opportunity to interpret the Bible in a way that will suit their interests (Ngoma, 2005).

There is a tendency of preachers in the church to misinterpret the scriptures of the Bible as supporting the subordination of women. This misconception often serves as a rationalization for abuser’s actions, while simultaneously contributes to women’s guilt, self-blame and suffering (Ngoma, 2005). In church, women are encouraged to sit down and listen to men preaching. In most churches, it is unlikely that one will find a woman preaching. Church doctrine has always affirmed men’s right to control women. As stated above, Ephesians 5:22-24 states:

[w]ives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Most churches comply with this (Ngoma, 2005).

It has also been noted that some churches condemn divorce and have negative views of remarriage after divorce, since divorce is regarded as a sin. Women are encouraged to remain in marital relationships and endure any abuse in order for them to gain social acceptance and respect. According to the Bible, in Mathew 19:9, whoever divorces his wife and remarry commits adultery.

2.2.2 CULTURE AND PATRIARCHY

In South African culture, such as the Swazi culture, men are encouraged to dominate their women, while women are encouraged to respect and submit to men, particularly to their husbands. Women are encouraged to take their husband's word as final and not question their husband's authority (Richardson & Robinson, 1994).

Most abusers feel that their own behaviour is justified by society, since African cultural beliefs support male domination. Most men think they have the right to discipline their wives (Shepard, cited in Ngoma, 2005). Men who abuse their wives are actually living up to the cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society, namely aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination, and they use physical force to inflict their dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This statement indicates that socialization, tradition and culture may encourage and promote the abuse of women. According to Walker (1979), battering occurs more frequently in marital relationships than among strangers.

Straus (cited in Walker, 1992) indicates that “[t]he existence of wife abuse reflects the cultural norms which implicitly make the marriage licence a hitting licence in the sexist organization of both society and the family system” (p. 79). Cultural norms seem to be encouraging violence towards women in marriage.

Straus (cited in Walker, 1993) continues to demonstrate that sexism also contributes to the frequency of wife abuse (p. 80). He indicates that men who lack superiority in personal

resources are inclined to use violence to maintain a superior power position. He goes on to say that the antagonism between the sexes is engendered by sex role differentiation and inequality. Finally, the male-oriented organization of the criminal justice system makes it difficult or even impossible for women to secure legal protection from assault by their husbands.

Dobash and Dobash (1979) support this statement by saying that: “it is in their capacity as wives that the risk is the highest and the danger the greatest” (p. 437). This statement confirms the assumption that marriage itself, based as it is on a hierarchy of power vested in the patriarchy that legitimizes wife beating, sets the stage for violence. Walker (1979) also confirms this assumption by indicating that the frequency of abusive relationships among married couples makes the marriage licence seemingly a licence for violence. According to statistics from People Opposing Women Abuse, approximately 59% of the cases of abuse reported in 2005 involved married women.

The African marriage (lobola) has also been criticised as contributing to wife abuse. According to Chinkanda (1992) the system of lobola may be contributing to wife abuse (p. 234). The custom does give women certain advantages such as the possession of a kind of security for themselves if their husbands die; it sometimes exposes them to abuse which may be sanctioned by society (Chinkanda, 1992).

2.2.3 THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

During the Apartheid Era, before 1993, issues of gender were not a major concern in South Africa with the history of racial oppression and violence predominating (Vetten cited in Ngoma, 2005). The government of Nelson Mandela decided to address violence against women and therefore the issue of domestic violence has, since 1994, been receiving attention (Vetten cited in Ngoma, 2005). The democratic government has assumed a position of economic, social and economic stability (SAHRC, 1999).

In 1993, the Prevention of Family Violence Act (113 of 1993) was passed, however, it did not address the issue of cohabiting partners and same sex partners, and it therefore had to be reviewed. The act also did not cover some of the most important matters pertaining to violence, for example, gays and lesbians were not protected by the act. Reviews of the act led

to the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (116 of 1998). This act now covers most of the matters that are necessary for the protection of society, women in particular, against domestic violence. The act includes training of police in enforcing the act and fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. The act also provides an explanation of what emotional abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, etc. are (Vetten cited in Ngoma, 2005). However, Combrinck (cited in Ngoma, 2005) maintains that, although the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 is progressive, its success can only be determined by its implementation. From the statistics on wife abuse from People Opposing Women Abuse, indicating that one in six women is in an abusive relationship; it appears that the prevalence of abuse in South Africa is still high.

2.3 WHY DO WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Women stay in abusive relationships for a variety of reasons, but for the purposes of this study, the researcher chose the following reasons, which follows in the next paragraph.

2.3.1 Attachment

According to Loring cited in Barkhuizen (2004), disruption of the connection between a caregiver and a child during childhood is the core of emotional abuse, while the struggle to attach is a distinctive trait of the emotionally abused woman (p. 25). A disruption of attachment in early life arouses intense anger, grief and sorrow in relationships as an adult (Loring cited in Barkhuizen, 2004). There appear to be high correlations between spousal violence and the number of separations and loss those abusers and their families of origin experience, as well as the erratic care giving patterns of abusers' parents (Gilliland & James, 1997).

According to Pretorius (1984), victims and offenders of abusive spousal relationships come from homes where they, as children, witnessed violence between their parents. This lends some support to the Attachment Theory of spousal abuse (Pretorius, 1984). Furthermore, attachment, which denotes one individual's struggle to bond with another, is not necessarily a mutual process. A victim of emotional abuse usually continues to seek attachment with an abuser who has withdrawn affection. Hoping to regain the lost affection, the victim may hold on to their partner relentlessly. Using withdrawal as a mechanism of control is emotional

abandonment. The victim feels betrayed and isolated by the disconnection. As a victim's need for connection increases, their attempts to engage with their partner also increase in frequency and intensity, and they hold on even more. Although their efforts may fail, the trauma of pain and terror leaves the victim with no choice but to continue trying to connect with their abusive partner (Pretorius, 1984). Attachment, in this sense, is therefore different to connection, which denotes a relationship characterised by each partner's efforts to empathise with and respond to the other (Loring cited in Barkhuizen, 2004).

2.3.2 Psychological commitment

Strube & Barbour (1994) discovered that psychological commitment is significantly related to a person's decision to stay in or leave an abusive relationship. Staying in the relationship "no matter what", significantly differentiates between women who have left an abusive relationship and those who have not (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991). According to Rusbult's model of commitment (cited in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993), individuals committed to an unsatisfactory marriage remain if their investments, namely time and emotional energy, are high and their alternatives are few. Bauserman & Arias (cited in Barnette & LaViolette, 1993) demonstrate that women who are highly committed to their abusive relationships believe that they have made substantial investments. Ferraro (cited in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993) notes that, even women who are financially independent, return to violent husbands, perhaps because of loneliness. According to Barnett and Laviolette (1993), 70% of abused women return to their abusive husbands because of the fear of loneliness.

2.3.3 Negative self-concept and low self-esteem

"Self-concept" refers "to the picture, which the person has of himself or herself and the value he or she attaches to himself or herself. How I see myself, what my characteristics are, how I judge myself in the areas of appearance, ability, talents, motives, goals, ideals and social interactions and relationships" (Rogers, 1951). Most abused women feel they have nothing to offer another person. Most abusers convince their partners that they are worthless, stupid and disgusting: behind a closed door, a man calls a woman a "slut" and a "whore". He tells her that she is too fat or too sexy or too frumpy, that she is a poor excuse for a mother, a worthless piece of dirt (Goode, 1971, p. 24). Such oppression is effective because, in many cultures, a woman is often blamed for a failed marriage. Women are often willing to pay any

price to hold on to the relationship because they believe that society will not support them if they do not. In South Africa, it is generally believed that the woman has failed in her duty as a wife if the marriage disintegrates (Miller, 1996).

2.3.4 A sense of shame and guilt

Shame is common among abused wives because they know that many other women are not abused. They often feel that they have somehow brought the violence on themselves. This is particularly likely if they have seen their mothers or grandmothers suffer similar treatment (Goode, 1971). Thus, a tradition of abuse tolerance is passed on. Women feel they are responsible for preventing male abuse, and if they do not succeed, they believe that they must accept the consequences (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Moreover, because some priests, ministers, and rabbis will remind a woman that she is married “for better or for worse”, religious women may feel guilty and sinful for assuming that they have rights as human beings or for wanting to end an abusive relationship. The abused woman may come to believe that she provoked the violence. Her reasoning might not be logical because she has been psychologically abused. As abused women continue to stay in abusive relationships, they keep hoping that the abuser will change (Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

2.3.5 Staying because of the children

Most black, South African women in abusive relationships sometimes believe that they should stay in their marriages because lobola was paid for them (Volgeman & Eagle, cited in Ngoma, 2005). South African women tend to believe that keeping their marriage together will also benefit their children. The social stigma attached to a failed marriage may also encourage women to stay in an abusive marriage (Hyden cited in Ngoma, 2005). Society has long instilled the idea that, unless children are raised by both parents, their growth may be affected. Mothers may sometimes suffer prolonged abuse for what they explain as “the good of my children”. Married women stay with their abusive husbands because it is expected of them. It is believed that the woman has failed in her duty as wife, if the marriage disintegrates (Miller, 1996). Unaware of her child’s stressful ambivalence, an earnest mother may work hard to sustain her child’s relationship with the father, maintaining his shining image even in the face of abuse, all for the good of the children. When women stay in abusive relationships

for the sake of their children, not only do they not provide “the best for their children” but they also often subject them to abuse as well (Miller, 1996).

2.3.6 Fear of the abusive husband

In cases where physical abuse is present in a relationship, women sometimes remain in the relationship because of the fear of increased abuse should they leave. Since some abused women often anticipate their partner’s next abusive move, they are alert to the dangers that leaving could impose on them, especially in cases where the abusive husband has threatened to kill the wife, their wife’s relatives, and even the children. The threats an abuser holds over the victim while she is still in the relationship, makes the victim scared to leave (Miller, 1996).

Both emotional and physical abuse traps the abused woman in her home, which becomes a jail rather than a refuge, with little chance of escape. The abused wife is very much like a prisoner. Her husband is the ultimate authority and she is punished if she disagrees with him. She must follow his house rules about not leaving home or even making phone calls without his permission. In some cases, he takes the phone with him when he leaves for work. She has no control over her body, is isolated from her friends and relatives, and is watched constantly (Reader on Domestic violence, 2004). According to Strube (1988), most abused women escalate their commitment to a previously chosen and failed cause of action in order to justify or make good on prior investments. If the woman’s efforts to make the relationship work fail, and the abuse continues, the woman is likely to feel compelled to justify her efforts. The abused woman will continue trying even harder to make the relationship work with the belief that, if she tries hard enough, her efforts will succeed.

2.3.7 Lack of social support

Most abused women who leave their abusive spouses do not receive sufficient social support. Friends and family usually support abused women by encouraging them to tolerate the abuse rather than end the relationship. Lack of support, both personal and social, may discourage abused women from leaving abusive relationships (Sullivan, 1995). Abused women need social support in order to be able to leave the abusive partner (Miller, 1996). Abused women’s decisions may be affected by the fact that society offers little help to abused women

who do not have homes, jobs, etc. Abused women need resources and strong social support that will enable them to be independent and leave an abusive marriage (Miller, 1996). The next paragraph aims to explore what women who remain in abusive marital relationship usually experience.

2.4 EXPERIENCES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSED WOMEN

Women who remain in abusive marital relationships are often left emotionally and physically damaged by repeated attacks from their husbands. Some of the experiences and effects are discussed in the next paragraph.

Women in psychological or emotional abusive marital relationships often suffer from low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is usually coupled with feelings of worthlessness and having no value, and the victim may perceive herself as unimportant (De Sousa, 1991, p. 28). The negative feelings that the women experience often originate from the abusive partner's remarks, as the abuser may consistently tell the woman that she is incompetent, hysterical and frigid (Cahn, 1996, p. 15). Society also tends to let women believe that they have no value as individuals apart from their men (Martin, 1976, p. 81). According to Sikhitha (cited in Ngoma, 2005), some women in South Africa stay in abusive relationships for fear of being alone or without a partner because social and cultural norms prescribe that, at a certain age, women should be married. The social stigma attached to divorce may restrict the possibilities of leaving abusive husbands.

As abused women continue to remain in abusive relationships, their self-confidence diminishes and their self-esteem weakens. Unfortunately, when the abused woman's self-esteem is eroded and weakened, she tends to believe that she deserves to be ill-treated because she is a failure. Most battered women blame themselves for the abuse and therefore believe they deserve punishment for not obeying their husbands (Walker, 1979, p. 31). In South Africa, only 4% of women who sought help from police reported that the police responded positively and helped them (NICRO, 1993). Women's options to leave an abusive relationship are limited due to minimal social and institutional support.

Abused women can also suffer from feelings of helplessness due to the abuse experienced in their marital relationships. Repeated assault and injuries on the victim's body and cognition,

lead to a sense of entrapment and desperation (Walker, 1992). When an abused woman starts experiencing feelings of hopelessness, due to her inability to stop the abusive incidents, helplessness sets in. The victim may feel immobilized and trapped as she is unable to explore other options to either stop or leave the abusive relationship. Victims of abuse often feel helpless and so lack the confidence to reveal the violence (Giles-Sims, 1986, p. 68). Sometimes, abused wives may overemphasize their weaknesses over and above their strengths and this makes them more vulnerable to abuse. When an abused woman is overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness or has little support, and fears seeking help from the police, medical practitioners or other services, she may think about, attempt or actually commit suicide (Giles-Sims, 1986, p. 63).

Some victims of marital abuse may develop guilty feelings due to societal attitudes of marital abuse. Myths, such as believing that a woman deserves to be abused for provoking her partner, are responsible for women's feelings of guilt, and society often succumbs to "blaming the victim" syndrome (Wilson, 1997, p.14). According to De Sousa (1991, p. 30), women "often blame themselves for the abuse because they believe the myth around abuse".

Abused wives may also be afraid to show or express their anger towards the abuser for fear of aggravating the situation. Failure to express feelings of anger may lead to depression. Most women become angry at themselves for allowing the abusive partner to take advantage of them. The overwhelming feelings of anger reflect the woman's desperation to effect changes in her situation. Abused women live under much stress as a result of abuse. Most victims become depressed when their situation is perceived as hopeless and unbearable. They may start regarding themselves as failures for being unable to effect change in their lives with limited, if any, resources at their disposal. When a victim reaches this point, she might become suicidal and more vulnerable to the abuser's control and emotional abuse. According to Walker (1993), most abuse victims may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined as "...a collection of thoughts, feelings, and actions that logically follow a frightening experience that one expects could be repeated" (Walker, 1993, p. 247). According to Walker (1993), there are three major symptom clusters that are measured to determine whether or not a person who has been exposed to trauma has developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, namely cognitive disturbances, high arousal symptoms and high avoidance symptoms.

In the first symptom cluster, there are repetitive intrusive memories, with or without exposure to stimuli that serve as reminders. This cluster may also consist of loss of memory, accompanied by denial, minimization and repression of violent incidents. During the second cluster, women may become suspicious, over vigilant in being aware of any indicators of possible danger, recognize the little things that signal an imminent incident, and often appear nervous, jumpy, and highly anxious (Dutton, 1993, p. 59). Sometimes, panic attacks and phobic responses are also evidenced. Eating and sleeping disorders may accompany this set of symptoms. Finally, the cluster characterised by avoidance symptoms includes depression.

Denial and minimization are major techniques used to avoid dealing with the dangerousness of the situation. Victimization has been found to be a leading cause of depression in abused women. Sometimes, women keep themselves occupied to avoid thinking about their situations. They often suppress their feelings in order to avoid becoming too excited or too disappointed about things that used to have meaning for them (Walker, 1993).

Women who remain in physical abusive marital relationships are often exposed to severe physical injuries which may lead to occasional seizures in some victims, broken bones, concussions, facial injuries, torn ligaments, and a myriad of cuts and bruises as well as abortions (Sipe & Hall 1996, p. 41-42). Most women who have been abused by their partners are frequently found as having experience physical, emotional or sexual abuse in childhood (Cascardi, 1995, p. 617). Most abused women often deny and minimize the abuse and abused women tend to suffer from depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse (Magolin, cited in Hotaling, Frinkelhor, Kirpatic, & Straus, 1998). This leads us to the next important issue, the coping mechanisms women use when they choose to remain in abusive relationships.

2.5 COPING MECHANISMS OF WOMEN WHO REMAIN IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

According to Makofane (1999), some abused wives use denial as a mechanism to cope with the abuse in an abusive marital relationship. Denial may be precipitated by the myth that violence against married women is a private family matter. Women may remain ignorant of the games played out in their relationships because, if they cannot name them, they may start thinking they are imagining it (Makofane, 1999).

They may feel too ashamed and embarrassed to talk openly about their battering experiences and they often deny their anger at being abused. Woman abuse may diminish the quality of life or sense of meaning for a woman. Most abused women are socially isolated and withdrawn (Giles-Sims, 1986). According to Makofane (1999), society will continue to ignore or even condone family violence, and more specifically, the emotional abuse of women. Women will keep on believing that if they can just be good enough, they will overcome the problems they face (Walker, 1993). Women will continue to be powerless and will communicate their powerlessness to society, other women and their female children, if they keep their problems to themselves out of loyalty to their abuser and in avoidance of harming their family, children and friends (Walker, 1993).

Abused wives also tend to believe in traditional male-female sex roles (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986, p. 106). They tend to believe that men are the dominant decision makers and leaders of the family, while women should be submissive and obedient (Walker, 1979, p. 51). They accept responsibility for the abuser's actions, and view sex as a way to establish intimacy, while simultaneously believing that no-one will be able to help them except themselves (Walker, 1979, p. 31).

To summarise the abovementioned factors, Wilson's (1997) summary is used. The primary factors restraining women from leaving abusive relationships include the following: Abused women face a number of barriers when they try to escape an abusive relationship. They are grouped as follows: (i) personal barriers, including shame, fear, lack of personal resources and lack of emotional support, (ii) relationship barriers, such as denied access to money, transportation and the physical abuse itself, (iii) institutional barriers involving immigration policies, cultural insensitivity, a lack of services, discrimination, sexism and other forms of abuse, (iv) cultural barriers such as language differences, beliefs about marriage and the family, gender roles and religious beliefs (p. 101).

2.6 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES RELEVANT TO WOMEN IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

2.6.1 INTRODUCTION

Various theorists have suggested possible explanations for spousal abuse, however, the researcher has chosen to focus on the following theories for the purpose of the study: (i) the Social Learning Theories which focus on the mechanisms whereby family members may influence each other through modelling, reinforcement and coercion to behave violently, (ii) the Feminist Theories in which the origins of abuse include stereotyping and patriarchal values, (iii) the Family Systems Theory which demonstrates that abuse cannot be explained by focusing on an individual family member, but rather that systems interact and as they interact, they influence the reaction of others. The researcher decided to use this theory as the backbone of the study because it provides the widest and most inclusive perspective from which to understand and explain the experiences and coping mechanisms of women who remain in abusive marital relationships. The theories complement each other in the sense that they all explain that human beings tend to learn to behave in the way they do from their environment and that their thinking is influenced by their surrounding environment. However, the Systems Theory places psychological and social psychological variables within a wider explanatory framework that considers the impact of social institutions and social structures on social behaviour. The theory does not just focus on a single characteristic of social life, as opposed to the Feminist approach, which focuses only on the patriarchy, dominance, and control, and excludes other salient and important aspects of social structures and social institutions. The main problem with the Feminist approach, therefore, is that it only focuses on one variable, the patriarchy.

2.6.2 SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Before discussing the theory, let us explore the concept of socialization. Socialization is a process through which society exposes men and women, boys and girls to differential expectations as part of learning their gender identity and sex roles. Culture may implicitly or explicitly encourage male aggression. Research shows that, through observing the behaviour modelled by parents, children can learn abusive behaviour (Levinson, 1989, p. 37) and this may impact how children relate to women later in life (Ade-Ridder & Jones, 1996). Straus

(1988) argues that family socialization through violence is one of a number of socio-cultural factors that lead to frequent wife beating. The socialization of female children and women instils in them a sense of subordination, submissiveness and subservience that results in women playing inferior roles in society. Culture teaches women to invest their identities in their relationships or marriages. They are also taught to take major responsibility for the success or failure of their relationships with men (Bilinkoff, 1995, p. 98; Dutton 1985, p. 164). It is also indicated that behaviour that is reinforced by society is likely to be accepted as normal and acceptable, which leads us to the next important discussion of Social Learning as an extension of differential association and reinforcement.

Stark and Flitchart (1995) defines social learning theory as

...”an extension of differential association and reinforcement theories, holding that social sources, or people with whom one interacts, are the reinforcements that results in the learning of non-deviant and deviant behaviour. The type of behaviour that is most frequently and consistently reinforced by people will be the most often exhibited” (p. 106).

The types of behaviour that are constantly and most frequently reinforced by others are the behaviours most often exhibited (Stark & Flitchart, 1995). Research has consistently shown that childhood exposure to violence, either as a victim or as a witness, increases the likelihood of the child growing up to become a child or a spouse abuser. Childhood exposure to violence is seen as an important antecedent to adult violence by proponents of widely varying theories, especially the Social Learning Theory (Rousaville, 1978).

The Social Learning Theory contributes to the understanding of wife abuse. It helps one to understand sex role socialization and gender roles. The theory maintains that aggressive responses, such as verbal and physical abuse, are learned in similar ways to other forms of complex human behaviours (Stacey, Hazelwood, & Shupe 1994). The theory also explains that reinforced behaviours increase the possibility of the behaviours being repeating (Pagelow, 1992).

In addition to internalisation and reinforcement, modelling is another important factor for learning, especially for children. According to Wrightman (1977), modelling takes place when children observe aggressive behaviour and imitate it, particularly if a desired model has performed the acts (p. 226- 228). Goode (1971) says,

“in this process by which we transform infants into people, inculcating in them values, norms and role habits of the family and the society, or more specifically by which children come to accept as right and desirable the family patterns we approve, not only do we force or threaten to socialize our children, we also teach them thereby that force is useful, and we do in-fact train them in the use of force and violence” (p. 627- 630).

Violent behaviour is seen as a learned phenomenon in which the individual learns norms that approve the use of violence. Individuals also learn that violence is an effective method of resolving conflict and children who are beaten learn that the one who loves them has the right and responsibility to beat them (Moore, 1979). As the abused woman’s efforts to escape the abusive relationship fail, she becomes helpless. In the next paragraph, Walker (1979) explains the theory of learned helplessness.

Learned helplessness explains why women stay in relationships in which they are being beaten for long periods of time (Walker, 1979). Women learn that their voluntary attempts to change what is happening to them have no effect, thus, over time, the motivation to respond in an active way decreases. The subsequent passive behaviour is due to a motivational deficit similar to that seen in rats whose reinforcement schedules have been arranged so that they never learn to control their environment through purposeful behaviour (Walker in Giles-Sims, 1986). Secondary battering, the stage of abuse where abusive actions become habit, results from primary causative factors combined with the interaction process between the man and the woman. Some women may remain in an abusive marital relationship because of attachment factors. It has also been scientifically proven that observing modelled aggressive behaviour may lead to imitation.

According to Walkers’ theory of learned hopefulness, most women stay in violent relationships because they are seduced by the “Cinderella fantasy”. The Cinderella fantasy refers to the illusion that “a man can transform a woman’s life, erase her insecurities, protect her from her fears, save her from her problems, or all four of these factors. The woman believes that, sooner or later, the abuser will change and she and prince charming will live “happily ever after” (Walker, 1993). Most abused women deny and minimise their abuse by denying that their husbands abuse them. The victim may negate the danger that they confront.

Bandura (1973) maintains that in a variety of psychological tests, children observing aggressive behaviour not only show that they remember the aggressive acts, but they also

closely imitate them, particularly when the acts are performed by a male adult model. Thus, children who mature in violent homes can become violent adults. Stereotypical gender role socialization along extremes of masculinity and femininity is an important contributing factor to family violence, particularly wife abuse. Certain cultural norms legitimize marital violence and “compulsive masculinity”, which refers to the way in which boys and men prove to others that they are “real men”. This may also be a contributing factor (Pagelow, 1992, p. 36). As the learned helplessness theory suggests, women have learned that they are powerless against men. Women become aware of the views of society that this is how women should behave in a marriage. Then their thinking, expectations, beliefs and perceptions adjust to that gender role socialization. They therefore behave as is expected of them (Walker, 1979).

2.6.3 THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Feminism is a political discourse aimed at obtaining equal rights and legal protection for women. It involves various movements, political and sociological theories, and philosophies, all of which are concerned with issues of gender difference, advocate equality for women and campaign for women’s rights and interests. The history of feminism can be divided into three waves, namely, (i) the first wave, which lasted from the 19th to the 20th century, (ii) the second wave, which started in the 1960s and lasted until the 1970s, (iii) and the last wave, which extends from the 1990s to the present. There are different types of feminists for example, Radical Feminists, Cultural Feminists, Black Feminists, and Postcolonial Feminists etc. However, for the purposes of this study, the researcher will only focus on Radical Feminism. Radical Feminism considers male controlled capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist and as the defining feature of women’s oppression (Bograd, 1988).

Radical Feminists explore how social institutions contribute to woman abuse. Bograd (1988) maintains that the approach seeks to understand why men, in general, use physical force against their partners and what function this serves in a society in any given historical context (p. 13). Radical Feminists focus mainly on a male’s need for power in a patriarchal society. Males use violence to dominate women and control them. Woman abuse makes women dependant on men as men exert power and social control over them. To Radical Feminists, the patriarchy and patriarchal institutions contribute to wife abuse. The patriarchy consists of social systems that establish a shared vision and interdependence among men that enables, if not requires them to dominate women. Under the patriarchy, some men have more power

than others, and while all benefit from the patriarchy, privileges are sharply divided by class and race (Abramowitz, 1989, p. 25). Abusers are viewed as “normal people” who might subscribe to the social values and norms of society. In a male dominated society, women often become men’s possessions after marriage. Within patriarchal institutions, men use power as an acceptable means to control women. As Dobash and Dobash (1979) state, “men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society – aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination – and they use physical force as a means to enforce the dominance” (p. 24). Radical Feminists focus on the way in which men dominate women using cultural prescriptions. According to Hotaling, et al. (1998), “patriarchal law, religion, philosophy and morality stress the superiority of males and their consequent responsibility and right to control society and the women and children in their own families” (p. 127). Men’s social stature is linked to their ability to control those around them.

The Feminists attempt to not just interpret women’s oppression and abuse, but also strive to change women’s lives. Gelles and Loseke (1993) say that “social action is the fundamental source of feminist’s insight into domestic violence”(p. 47). Feminists urge that social expectations regarding masculinity and femininity give relationships their shape. “Our attitudes are socially constructed in life and they create and maintain male power within the family and society” (Gelles & Loseke, 1993, p. 91). Male power needs to be confronted in radical ways if a woman’s position is to change. Data on injury patterns confirm that it is women, not men, who sustain injuries in conflicts between males and females in intimate relationships. The Feminist Theory argues that the law and the criminal justice system condone violence against women (Gelles & Loseke, 1993, p. 91).

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979), marriage institutionalises the control of wives by husbands through the structures of husband-wife roles. Women are still widely expected to act as caregivers while men’s primary duty is that of provider. Men’s roles also revolve around employment, while he is also considered to have a more important status and controls the majority of decisions in the family. It is through such a system, coupled with the acceptance of physical force as a means of control, that, in the words of Dobash and Dobash (1979), the wife becomes an “appropriate victim” of physical and psychological abuse. Feminists argue further that it is the use of violence for control in a marriage and women’s continued economic dependence on their husbands that makes it difficult for wives to leave

violent relationships. Dobash and Dobash (1979) see the cause of wife beating and other forms of abuse over the powerless in the family as the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the family in the social system. Their theory on wife abuse borrows from Social Learning Theory, especially in terms of the learning of traditional roles within the context of the patriarchal structure of the family. The patriarchy demands that power be vested in men and that women are to serve in subordinate positions. Patriarchal families promote violence against females, especially wives (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

The Feminist Approach challenges the patriarchy and this is reflected by the actions of women's rights groups. While stating that men dominate women globally and in most social and economic environments, recent changes show that male dominance is now under threat. As economies are restructured to absorb women into the labour markets, men are beginning to encounter problems. Traditionally, men were expected to support their wives and children, however, in the 20th century, a number of women have been identified as being employed and financially independent. Men, who are unable to handle financially independent women, may resort to violence as a means to gain control or dominate their women. An increasing number of men are currently experiencing unemployment. According to the statistics from Statistics South Africa (2008), the total number of unemployed people in South Africa for the year 2008 was 3.873 million. When men believe that their power is threatened by working women, their response may be aggressive as a means to regain their power.

2.6.4 SYSTEMS THEORY

This theory posits that abuse is not attributable to a victim-abuser dichotomy. Rather, conjugal abuse or abusive relationships are more appropriate terms to depict spousal abuse as part of an abuse-prone system. The violence is maladaptive, but an efficient way to keep the system in homeostasis. Through learning, history and rigidly polarizing roles of both parties concerned, the system is able to maintain itself (Giles-Sims, 1986). The following paragraph broadly explains the theory.

Theorists like Straus (1988) and Giles-Sims (1986) have developed and applied a social approach to explain family violence. According to them, violence is viewed as a product of the system, rather than the result of individual pathology. The system (in this case the family) can establish, maintain, escalate, or reduce levels of violence in families. The systems

approach is based on the following assumptions: (i) wife battering is a product of an interactional context characterized by a repetitive sequence of transactional behaviours, (ii) wife battering occurs in marital systems characterized by certain relationship structures, (iii) and due to circular causality or reciprocal interactions, violence may serve a functional role in the maintenance of the marital system (Bograd, 1988, p. 560).

According to Buckley (cited in Giles-Sims, 1986), a system is a set of different parts (such as electrical components, machines, or people) that meet two requirements. Firstly, these parts are directly or indirectly related to one another in a network of reciprocal causal effects. Secondly, each component part is related to one or more of the other parts of the set in a reasonably stable way during any particular period of time (Kantor & Lehr, cited in Giles-Sims, 1986).

Ecological theory proposes that an individual's roles and environmental settings are highly interrelated. People should therefore be studied in their social context. The environment shapes people and therefore they cannot be studied in isolation. If, for example, the husband is unemployed and the woman is the soul breadwinner, the running of the family can indirectly be affected (Giles-Sims, 1986). Men are often socialised to dominate. They do so by using their powers, which include financial or material powers. If a man lacks this, he is likely to use physical abuse to gain a sense of power as a substitute for his lacking resources. Due to structural features in our society, violence is more likely to occur within the family than between strangers. Both social structural variables and interpersonal process variables influence how violence occurs (Goode cited in Giles-Sims, 1986, p. 32). According to Giles-Sims (1986) the family is a social system that is relatively well defined by rules and structured power. The personal resources of each member of the system provide a basis for the process of exchange within intimate relationships (Goode in Giles-Sims, 1986). Men who lack sufficient resources to hold the socially prescribed, dominant role in the family may use physical force to compensate for their lack of resources. For example, a husband who is unemployed and unable to support his family financially may use physical force as a means of gaining respect (Goode in Giles-Sims, 1986).

Rules within the family system define what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. Rule violations within family systems are often attributed to many factors such as, aggressiveness on the part of the rule violator (Hotaling cited in Giles-Sims, 1986). In addition, once an

attribution of aggressiveness has been made, the subsequent expectation of aggressive behaviour from that member tends to increase the probability of aggressive violence (Giles-Sims, 1986).

One incident of violence within a family system potentially changes the future pattern of interaction within the family. Once violence has occurred, the expectation of other family members that further violence will occur is increased, and this expectation itself tends to increase the likelihood of further violence (Giles-Sims, 1986).

The Cycle of Violence

Abuse in a relationship happens in the form of a cycle. Walker (1979) makes important contributions to the study of wife abuse. Walker's three stage model of learned helplessness consists of, firstly, the tense phase of conflict escalation, which then leads to the second stage, the incident phase, and then finally to the third phase, reconciliation marked by the man's contriteness and pleas for forgiveness and the woman's return to him. Walker further maintains that this third stage reinforces the woman's desire to stay in the relationship, because she tends to think that the abuse will never happen again. Women use different mechanisms to cope under these situations. One of the mechanisms, as mentioned earlier, is blame. Women blame themselves for provoking their man to beat them. During the reconciliation phase, men convince women that they did what they did because they love them (Walker, 1979)

Table 1 The Cycle of violence

1st Phase	2nd Phase	3rd Phase
<p>Tension</p> <p>Tension increases, arguments, or communication breakdown</p>	<p>Incident</p> <p>Characterised by actual violence, for example, battering or verbal abuse.</p>	<p>Reconciliation</p> <p>Abuser apologizes, gives excuses, denies the abuse, or claims it was not as bad as the abuser claims.</p>

According to Straus (1988), violence within a relationship follows a certain pattern (p. 112). Firstly, violence occurs in most families, but the victims do not initially define themselves as victims, and the family system tends to not deal with the violence as a serious problem. Most violence is either denied or not labelled as a deviance (Straus, 1988, p. 112). Secondly, the victims may unintentionally reinforce the violent behaviour. For example, violent persons may be rewarded for violent acts if those acts produce the desired results (Straus, 1988, p. 112). Lastly, abused women respond differently to the abuse, especially the first attack, which is usually unexpected.

Positive feedback helps to stabilize violence. Systems Theory predicts that behaviour that receives positive feedback will increase. If a deviation-amplifying loop occurs, violence is likely to become an established part of the ongoing interaction patterns within the system (Giles-Sims, 1986). The first acts of violence, as mentioned earlier, often receive positive feedback, making it likely they will happen again (Giles-Sims, 1986). In family violence, women are the most likely to be victimised and injured. Being victimised and injured is not an acceptable outcome for any women according to the studies done so far (Giles-Sims, 1986).

To understand this escalation, a Systems Theory approach suggests exploration of: the sequence of events, the alternatives to the escalation possible within the system, and the possibilities for morphogenesis through corrective responses. First in the sequence of events, one act of violence brings about change in the system which intensifies the conflict itself and further increases the likelihood of violence. This process has been referred to within Systems Theory as a “runaway” (Halley cited in Giles-Sims, 1986). Each act of violence is ground for anger and further conflict. An example of a runaway is feuding between families. After a while, each side forgets why the feud really started, and becomes concerned only with getting revenge for the previous acts of the other party. Some women fight back while others withdraw emotionally (Giles-Sims, 1986). Each of these responses elicits further violence. The violence in some cases appears to be related to system maintenance goals and, in other cases, to the goals of the men to maintain dominance. Most of the women do not fight back. However, they tend to give into the man in order to stop the violence. By giving in, women actually give positive feedback to the violence. The violence then becomes an established pattern (Halley cited in Giles-Sims, 1986). Once escalation has occurred, corrective action within the system often does not work. Negative feedback from outsiders to new behaviour,

such as seeking help, lessens the chance of new behaviour becoming part of the system. Over time, women's attempts to get help from formal social control agencies decreases. Change within the system after escalation has occurred, depends on finding alternative responses (Giles-Sims, 1986). If women do not receive help, they get to a state where they accept the violence and learn to be helpless.

To summarise, the most important points of the General Systems Theory are highlighted. Straus (cited in Giles-Sims, 1986) presents eight propositions which illustrate how the General Systems Theory relates to family violence. These will now be related. Violence between family members has many causes and roots, for example, normative structures, personality traits, frustrations and conflict. More family violence occurs than is reported. Most family violence is either denied or ignored. Stereotyped family violence imagery is learned in childhood from parents, siblings and other children. The family violence stereotypes are continually reaffirmed for adults and children through social interactions and the mass media. Violent acts by violent persons may generate positive feedback, for example, the acts may produce the desired results, like compliance and submission. The use of violence when it is contrary to family norms leads to additional conflicts. Persons who are labelled as violent may be encouraged to play out a violent role, either to live up to the expectations of others or to fulfil their self-concept of being violent and dangerous (Straus, cited in Giles-Sims, 1986).

2.6.5 African theory on domestic violence

Another set of causal theories in emerging African literature emphasizes the power of tradition and norms within African culture as explaining the widespread incidences of domestic violence. Most of the conflict arises in situations where the wife is seen as challenging the husband's authority and prerogatives by enquiring about his extra marital involvement (Randal, 2003). Jealousy is also found to be the cause of domestic violence centred on the husband, who does not like his wife to have contact with other men. In traditional African society, such as in South Africa, a married woman should have minimal contact with men other than her husband, although this is not always possible in the 21st century, especially if a woman is working. Traditionally-minded men feel threatened by the interaction between their wives and other men, and may act out violently because of that threat, whether imagined or real (Randal, 2003).

The main causes of arguments that often escalate to violence are: (i) disputes about the husband's economic obligation to his extended family, which is often seen as a direct threat to the economic survival of the nuclear household, (ii) anger over the wife's perceived failure to adequately fulfil the role of wife within the traditional division of household labour, (iii) when a wife talks back, that is, fails to conform to the expected behaviour of a wife to be submissive, not to question or argue with her husband, and to ask his permission for all her activities. In this way, domestic violence functions as a means of forcing women to conform to being subservient within customary society (Randal, 2003).

Viewed within a cultural context, violence is seen as emerging almost inevitably out of a society that treats women as property, socializes them to be passive and reduces their bargaining power through institutions, such as polygamy. Cultural arguments merge with those based on gender inequality (Randal, 2003). Arguments based on culture are problematic in the African context, as culture varies widely among different cultural groups and regions. Culture is not static and may be contested within the very same cultural group. Multiple interpretations of tradition exist, yet it is invariably those of the dominant males within the society that have been taken as authoritative (Randal, 2003). In the next paragraph the researcher discusses coping strategies.

2.6.6 COPING

Remaining in an abusive relationship may present numerous problems and challenges. These problems range from minor arguments to major physical assaults. Such experiences do not only cause emotional stress, but can also have long term cumulative effects on physical and psychological health. Over time, researchers have collected information on how people cope with challenges and problems. Researchers have made an effort to address questions about whether different styles of coping can be identified, whether some coping strategies are more useful for certain problems, and how people learn to cope more effectively with the challenges that confront them (Kleinke, 1991). Before discussing the theory in detail, however, let us define coping.

Coping strategies are generally viewed as ways of responding that transcend different situations. Coping is not thought of as a single act, but as a constellation of thoughts and acts.

Individuals should not be seen in terms of coping and non-coping, but as demonstrating varying degrees of distress and coping over time as they are faced with different situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Efforts to change stressful situations, thus controlling distress, are usually differentiated from responses that alter the cognitive appraisal of stress (Pearlin & Scholar cited in Holahan & Moos, 1987).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) there are two major functions of coping, namely, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. Problem focused coping is a style of coping that involves taking direct action with the purpose of changing the situation through, among other things, decision making, plans of action and fighting for what one believes in. Emotion focused coping is a style of coping that is usually used in situations which are viewed as unchangeable. It serves as an emotional and arousal oriented coping style with the purpose of reducing negative emotions regarding a situation and preventing further emotional pain. Emotion focused strategies include behaviours such as looking on the brighter side of things, accepting sympathy and understanding from others, and trying to forget about the problem. Examples are denial, avoidance, religious faith, acceptance and social support. Abused women use different coping mechanisms that may temporarily minimize the pain, but they do not necessarily take the problem away (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There is a lot of information on woman abuse, but for the purposes of this study, the researcher decided to focus only on the abovementioned literature.

The literature on coping has examined a variety of stressful experiences. According to (Mitchell & Hodson, 2004), the literature indicates several consistent findings. Firstly, coping depends on whether anything can be done. If something can be done, then problem focused coping predominates. If nothing can be done, then emotion focused coping predominates. Secondly, coping acts as a mediator of emotional outcomes. Thirdly, coping efficacy varies with the type of stressful encounter, the type of personality, and the outcome modality studied.

Folkman and Lazarus (1984) are critical of coping models that focus only on defence mechanisms, intrapsychic processes, and some small segments of the full range of behaviour in the coping process. They assert that a coping model is not complete if it does not include the many forms of overt actions which people resort to in response to a challenge or threat to their wellbeing. They then developed a more comprehensive model, which is based on

cognitive theory of stress and coping. The model identifies two processes, cognitive appraisal and coping, as important mediators of stressful person-environment relationships and their immediate and long term outcomes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984).

“Cognitive appraisal is a process through which a person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her wellbeing and, if so, in what way” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 19). According to the model, coping is seen as a person’s cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage, reduce, minimise, master, or tolerate the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are two major functions of coping, namely, to regulate emotions or distress and to manage the problem that is causing the distress. According to this model, coping lies mainly in the person’s sense of control. A person who has an internal locus of control, who has the conviction that events are contingent upon one’s own behaviour, might appraise it as controllable, whereas someone with an external locus of control, may believe that a situation is out of their control (Lazarus & Folkman, cited in Essau & Trommsdorf, 1996).

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter was a review of the literature on abuse from the Western and African (specifically the South African) perspective. The following theories were discussed: Social Learning Theory, Systems Theory, Feminist Theory, African theories and coping strategies for wife abuse. The reasons why certain women remain in abusive marital relationships include the experiences and characteristics of the abused women. The coping mechanisms used by abused women were also highlighted in this chapter.

All these factors make it logical, rather than illogical, that most women stay in abusive relationships: “staying may mean abuse and violence, but leaving may mean death. For most abused women, this is a risk they cannot take” (Englander, cited in Ngoma, 2005). In the next chapter, research methodology is discussed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the study methodology, detailing the procedure and techniques of research, data collection, and analysis used. The aim of the study was to explore the experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. In order to accomplish this, the following was done. Firstly, a literature study was undertaken in order to highlight key factors and obtain general information pertaining to wife abuse. Theories helped to guide the researcher and gave a platform on which to interpret data and also helped to validate the study. Secondly, a qualitative methodology was used, as this type of research involves the scrutiny of social phenomena. Face-to-face and in-depth interviews were used to collect data that could later be interpreted and analysed. Qualitative research implies gathering and analysis of extensive narrative data in order to gain insight into a situation of interest not possible with other types of research (Gay, 1996, p. 203). Thirdly, a connection between the literature survey and the qualitative study was sought.

3.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

According to Bailey (1994), a researcher's methodology determines factors such as how the researcher formulated hypotheses and what level of evidence is necessary to make decisions on whether or not to accept these hypotheses (p. 34). This study is qualitative, based on the experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. The number of participants interviewed was not predetermined; however, participants were interviewed until the data reached a level of saturation.

The researcher used the qualitative method because it tries to establish an empathetic understanding of the participants through detailed description, which conveys to the participants what experience itself would convey. "The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it" (Stake, 1995, p. 43). Research requires looking at a wide domain of contexts: temporal and spatial, historical,

political, economic, cultural, social and personal (Stake, 2000). According to Struwig and Stead (2001), the term qualitative research does not describe a single research method. Writers such as Creswell (1998), Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Struwig and Stead (2001) agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection. In other words, the researcher is someone who gathers words or pictures, analyses them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as a process of investigation of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex and holistic picture, analyses words, reports on detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural way.

3.3 PLANNING THE RESEARCH STUDY

Qualitative research approaches are investigative methods used to explore the nature of social phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research design seeks to gain insight by discovering the meanings attached to a given phenomenon. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research allows the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants by means of language. The researcher analyses social settings, motives and meanings, actions and reactions, organisations, culture, individuals' daily activities and negotiation of the roles within the context of everyday life (Rothe, in Makofane, 1999). This was relevant to the study as the researcher wanted to uncover the meaning attached to staying in an abusive relationship from the participant's point of view.

According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research appears to be particularly relevant to the study of life worlds, lived realities and everyday practices of people in a particular setting. This study attempts to describe life worlds and everyday experiences of the women as they are. In this study, the qualitative design gave the researcher an opportunity to have direct contact with the women, to enter into their worlds and to listen and follow as they guided the women along the journeys of their life experiences. The purpose of the researcher is to view and understand the participant's reality the same way the participants view and understand it.

Due to the nature of the research topic, which will expose the experiences of the participants, the researcher agrees with Kelly (2004), by acknowledging the importance of proper

communication and good interpersonal skills. These include the ability to build and maintain rapport, to make the participant feel relaxed and unguarded, to be open and forthright, to tolerate ambiguity and contradiction and not to be thrown by confusion and apparent chaos.

In this study, the researcher placed emphasis on the views of the women being interviewed, as well as on their experiences and the coping mechanisms used while they stayed in abusive relationships. This was done to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of wife abuse. The qualitative method is a good research technique for this study, however, the method has its advantages as well as disadvantages.

3.4 CRITICISM OF THE QUALITATIVE METHOD

Although the qualitative method is widely used in human sciences, there are some criticisms levelled against it. For example, since the researcher personally collected data, Miles and Huberman (1994) state: "...the labour-intensiveness of data collection, frequent data-overload, and distinct possibility of research bias" is definitely a problem (p. 2). The researcher therefore decided to keep a journal throughout the study in order to be able to distinguish her feelings and views from those of the participants. Qualitative studies may be costly and time consuming. The researcher's own preconceived ideas may interfere with the findings. According to Gay (1996), the results are difficult to analyse, conclusions are highly tentative, and generalizations are minimal or non-existent (p. 246). Miles and Huberman (1994) further indicate that the methods of analyzing data in qualitative research are not well formulated (p. 2). There are few guidelines for protecting the researcher against self-delusion and the presentation of unreliable and invalid conclusions. This makes it difficult to generalise on the findings and draw conclusions from qualitative research. Hence, it may be complicated to use them for making policies.

3.4.1 Advantages of the qualitative method

Although there are criticisms against the use of the qualitative approach, there are also positive aspects that need to be expanded upon. According to Gay (1996), the qualitative method yields an abundance of potentially useful data that would not have been possible using other methods (p. 246). Despite its shortcomings, qualitative research leads to a greater understanding of phenomena. That is why, irrespective of its shortcomings, the researcher

still decided to use this method for the study. In the next paragraph, the researcher explores the research technique.

3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

In qualitative studies, non-probability sampling is utilised and, in particular, purposive sampling techniques are used rather than random samples. Non-probability sampling approaches are used when the researcher lacks a sampling frame for the population in question, or where a probabilistic approach is not judged to be necessary (Neuman, 1997). For this study, the number of participants interviewed was not predetermined. Instead, participants were interviewed until the levels of data reached points of saturation or started repeating (Kumar, 2005). A method of purposive sampling was used for the study.

3.5.1 Purposive or judgemental sampling techniques

Purposive sampling is a suitable method of sampling for unique situations. It relies on the judgement of the researcher in selecting participants with a specific purpose in mind. It is used in exploratory research or in field research and it is appropriate in the following three situations. Firstly, the researcher may use it to select unique cases that are especially informative. Secondly, the researcher may use it to select members of a difficult to reach, specialised population. Thirdly, the researcher may use it if he/she wants to identify particular types of causes for in-depth investigation (Neuman, 1997, p. 206). The purpose of the sampling techniques is not to generalise according to a larger population, but to gain a deeper understanding of diverse cases. Hence, on the one hand, the researcher decided to select women who have decided to form part of a support group, knowing that entry may sometimes be denied, while on the other hand, the researcher still relied on the same participants to recommend the next candidate for the study.

3.5.2 Snowball sampling technique

The method of snowball sampling uses a crucial characteristic in that each person or unit is connected to another through direct or indirect linkage. This does not mean that each person directly knows, interacts with, or is influenced by every other person in the network. Rather, it means that, taken as a whole with direct links, most are within a connected web of linkages.

This sampling method uses the snowball analogy – the snowball begins small, but becomes larger as it rolls down a mountain. It is a multi-stage technique as it begins with one or few people and spreads out because of links to the initial cases (Neuman, 1997, p. 206). After the interview, the researcher would ask the participant to recommend another candidate.

3.5.3 Composition of sample

The sample of this study was not predetermined. Instead, the researcher decided to interview abused women until a point of saturation was reached. Participants were interviewed until data reached a level of saturation and responses were repeated, in other words, until no new information was presented. Only participants who have a minimum post-matriculation qualification, like a college diploma or a degree, were interviewed. The participants were aged between 30 and 55. The participants had children and had chosen to stay married for longer than ten years. The interview was guided by an interview schedule.

3.6 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule covered a list of themes included in the study and it was guided by the objectives of the study. An interview guide was useful for the study as the researcher used it to help keep the process on track and asked similar questions in the attempt to answer the questions of the study.

3.6.1 The general interview guide approach

The general interview guide (see appendix B) was used for the study. This approach involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins (Patton, 1986). The issues in the outline need not be dealt with in any particular order and the actual wording of questions to elicit responses about those issues is not determined in advance. The interview guide simply serves as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics are covered. The interview guide presumes that there is common information that should be obtained from each person interviewed. The interviewer is thus required to adapt both the wording and sequence of questions to specific respondents in the context of the actual interview. The interview guideline provides a framework within which

the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions and make decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth (Patton, 1986, p. 201)

3.6.2 Composition of the interview guide

The interview schedule was divided into two sections. Section A was used as a screening questionnaire to determine whether participants qualified to participate in the study. Participants were asked questions about things such as their age and length of their marriage. If they did not meet the required age, however, they were thanked for their participation, but not included in the study. Section B was the main part of the interview. The general aim of the questionnaire was to understand the form of abuse women endure, to explore the reasons why women stay in abusive marriages, to understand the meaning attached to staying, to investigate the impact of staying in an abusive marriage, to explore where these women go for support and to evaluate their coping mechanisms. The researcher used probing methods when asking the participants questions.

3.7 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Abused women from a support group located in the Mpumalanga province, which was founded and is monitored by the Health and Social Development Department, were interviewed for the study. The researcher identified the group while visiting the department and subsequently decided to write a letter to the Social Development Department asking for permission to conduct a study among the women who formed part of the support group. The Branch manager, Neli Mathebula, responded to the letter positively in September 2008 granting the researcher permission to conduct the study. A copy of the letter has been attached as Appendix C. Neli Mathebula helped the researcher gain access to the support group by informing the members that there would be someone from the University of Pretoria coming to conduct research. The support group members were requested in advance to participate in the study before the researcher came to do the interviews.

Based on the snowballing method used for the recruitment of participants, one woman was randomly picked from the support group after the interview. She was then requested to recommend another participant. The criteria for participation are stated in paragraph 3.5.3. The researcher then moved on to the next candidate and interviewed her. After the interview,

that woman was then also asked by the researcher to recommend another participant (Neuman, 1997).

A screening questionnaire was designed to determine if participants qualified to take part in the study. The screening questionnaire covered basic issues such as the age of the participants, the length of their marriage, etc. Participants who qualified for the study were interviewed and those who did not qualify were thanked for their participation.

The number of participants interviewed in the study was nine. It was decided to interview participants until the data became saturated and the information started to repeat itself. Kumar (2005) states that for the researcher to have explored the diversity of the topic, a saturation level has to be reached. That level can be reached by continuing with data collection for as long there is new information to be gathered. The number of participants interviewed depended on data saturation. For this study, the level of saturation was reached when women started answering the questions in a somewhat similar fashion, in other words, until the researcher started feeling as though there was repetition in the answers given by the participants.

3.8 PILOT STUDY

According to De Vos (1988), a pilot study gives a researcher a clear indication whether the selected research method is suitable for the purposes of the investigation. This process is defined as a small-scale try-out that is conducted before the main study on a limited number of participants from the same population as that intended for the research study. A pilot study is valuable in refining the wording, ordering and layout filtering of the interview schedule. The purpose of the pilot study is to determine whether the planned study is practical and to expose any deficiencies in the method used (De Vos, 1998). For the study, for example, two women were interviewed. The participants went through the screening questionnaire and were found to be eligible to participate in the study. Their responses were used to form part of the actual study as the interviews went well. The interviews went well in the sense that the women were relaxed during the interview and they managed to answer all the questions in a satisfactory manner.

The researcher used two respondents randomly from the support group, for the purposes of a pilot study in which the various themes of the interview guide schedule were discussed. Before participating in the study, the participants were briefed and asked to sign the consent form if they agreed to take part in the study. The interviews were conducted very successfully and thus the researcher decided to include them in the main sample as the information obtained was in-depth and appropriate for the study. The researcher protected the identity of the participants by ensuring confidentiality.

3.9 CONFIDENTIALITY

Researchers protect the privacy of participants by not disclosing participants' identity after information is gathered. This means that the participant's real names must remain unknown allowing them to stay anonymous (Neuman, 1997, p. 452). For the purpose of this study, participants were allocated pseudonyms. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher needs to protect the participant's identity from the general community.

3.10 INTERVIEWS

For the purpose of this study, face-to-face in-depth interviews were used as a data collection tool. According to Neuman (1997) the advantages of face-to-face interviews is that they have the highest response rates and permit the longest interview schedules (p. 253). Interviewers can also observe the participant as well as the surroundings and can use non-verbal communication and visual aids. It also allows interviewers to ask all types of complex questions and use extensive probes.

3.10.1 Individual/in-depth interviews

The researcher was the primary data collector for data analysing. These interviews gave rich and detailed information of each case and allowed the researcher to build up an understanding of the phenomenon of wife abuse through conversation about particular instances of the phenomena as they emerged in specific contexts, for example, what led to a specific battering episode (Kvale, 1996).

Conducting an interview with the participants was one of the more natural forms of interaction and it provided both the opportunity to interrelate with other participants while they shared their experiences (Kvale, 1996). On the one hand, Terre Blanche and Kelly (2004) recognise interviews as simple conversations, but at the same time also as highly skilled performances. Kvale (1996), on the other hand, notes that the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences and to uncover their lived world. An interview is an interchange of views between two people conversing about a theme of mutual interest. However, conducting an interview has its own disadvantages. It is time consuming and the quality of the data depends on the quality of the interview (Kumar, 2005).

3.10.2 The interview process

The researcher introduced the topic, experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships to the participants. The researcher probed the participant's answers to obtain more information and to allow the participants to express themselves where clarity was needed.

The interviews were tape-recorded, with the permission of the participants, in the context of a consulting room where privacy was respected. "The meaning of what is being said in an interview may usually only be interpreted in the context of the sentences that surround it and the conversation as a whole (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004, p. 132). In other words, the meaning of every statement cannot be separated from its context.

Open-ended questions were used during the interview to allow participants to volunteer descriptions and explanations. Open-ended questions are defined by Turney and Robb (1997) as questions where respondents have control over what they wish to say. These types of questions may result in a variety of answers. These questions may be regarded as free response questions. Open-ended questions may yield spontaneous, rich, descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenomena investigated (Kvale, 1996, p. 133). The participant could converse about her journey in a spontaneous way. To avoid being biased, the researcher also kept a journal, in which she wrote process notes which were kept throughout the interview as well as after and can be conceptualised as descriptive and reflective notes (Creswell, 1994). All the responses

were written down and field notes were made after each interview to keep track of the interview process.

The interviews were divided into two. The first questionnaire was meant for screening the participants. The researcher designed a screening questionnaire to help determine whether the participants qualified to take part in the study. During that interview, basic information, like the age of the participant, the length of their marriage and so on, was collected. Women who met the requirements went on to the second stage of the interview. The second part of the interview was the main interview, which covered the main themes of the study. During the second interview, an informed consent form was given to the participant to read and sign if they agreed to take part in the study. The consent form informed the participants about the purpose of the study, the main features of the design as well as the rights and benefits that could be gained from participation in the study. The consent form further involved obtaining voluntary participation of the subjects and gave them the right to withdraw from the study at any point to avoid undue influence and coercion. After reading the consent form, the participants were asked to sign it only if they agreed to participate in the study. The main aim of the consent form was to encourage voluntary participation. Interviews started immediately after the participants had given permission to participate in the study (see appendix A). According to Neuman (1997), a probe is a neutral request to clarify an ambiguous answer, to complete an incomplete answer, or to obtain a relevant response (p. 257). The researcher used this method to get rich answers from the participants.

3.10.3 Interviewing skills

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the abusive experiences of the participants, the researcher agreed with Kelly (2004), and acknowledged the importance of communication\interpersonal skills. These include the abilities to build and maintain rapport, to make the participant feel relaxed and unguarded, to be open and forthright, to tolerate ambiguity and contradiction and to not be thrown by confusion and apparent chaos that might be brought about by the subjective nature of the conversation with the participants.

3.11 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is crucial in the analysis aspect of the study as the researcher has to be aware of her own experiences and the impact this may have on the research process. Reflexivity ensures that the researcher accounts for the way in which she experiences both the research process and phenomena under consideration. As the researcher enters the lives of the participants, she influences the experience of the research process. Thus, it is important for the researcher to self-reflect, evaluate her own experiences and incorporate her experiences into the work rather than remain artificially outside the research process. It is also important to be sensitive to the issues of the women, since the researcher might be seen by the participants as an intruder wanting to know about their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The researcher had to avoid using direct questions and rather used open-ended questions to avoid coming across as interrogative.

3.11.1 Narrative on personal reflexivity

This section focuses on the researchers own experiences and perceptions during the research process. The discussion reviews the process notes that the researcher kept while conducting the interviews. After every interview, the researcher would make notes of important events. The researcher would also reflect on her feelings, as conducting the interview was an emotional process. The notes did not follow a particular structure or sequence. This helped during the process of data analysis as it allowed the researcher to separate herself from her own issues.

The researcher is from a Swazi culture, which is characterised by patriarchal practices, for example, the King is permitted to marry more than one wife. The researcher agrees with the radical feminists' views that the patriarchy contributes to the abuse of women in South Africa. Women are socialised to submit to their husband as their husbands are generally accepted as the heads of families, hence men's decisions in the home are usually accepted as final and go unquestioned. Most women stay in abusive marriages because their families, culture and religion encourage them to make their marriages work, irrespective of possible abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). During the study, the researcher kept a diary to help separate her views from those of the participants. While doing her Masters Counselling internship programme at one Military Hospital in 2006, the researcher dealt with 20 women

who were in abusive relationships. The researcher decided to start a support group with the aim of helping to support these women. Working with physically and emotionally abused women left the researcher with many questions as to why these women remain in abusive relationships. The reasons for conducting a study on abused women were mainly to contribute to the lives of abused women by empowering them with information and helping them better cope with the situation as well as possibly help them leave the abusive relationships.

From the notes kept, the researcher noticed that the matter of abuse is still treated with secrecy. Most women were not free to talk openly about their experiences. In some instances, the researcher was not happy with the responses gathered from the interview, but she could not force the participants to discuss anything they did not want to. At times, the participants would withhold information by misdirecting their answers, for example, when asked about the reason they remained in the abusive relationship, they would start talking about their children. The researcher would probe, but at times, it would become clear that the issue was being avoided by the participants.

Another important factor that was never explicitly stated by participants was fear. Seemingly, most women remain in abusive relationships because they fear the unknown, for example, participants would often answer with the question, “if I leave my husband, where do I go at my age?” It seems then, that these women believe that there is a prescribed age at which women are allowed to marry. It is clear that there are certain “not stated cultural rules” that prescribe that women should be married by a certain age. This affects the thinking of most abused women. They also fear that if they leave the abusive relationship, no-one will love them. However, the participants did not voice these fears directly, but rather left the researcher with incomplete sentences or statements and when probed further, change the topic.

During the interviews, the women became emotional when discussing certain issues. Different topics of discussion triggered different responses. Only one woman became too emotional that she had to be referred to the standby counsellor, who was at the centre during the interviews. It also appeared that most women were not comfortable about the tape recording of the interviews, only five out of the nine agreed to be tape recorded. Those who agreed to be tape recorded, however, kept looking at the tape recorder as if they wanted it to

be removed. The researcher mentioned this to the participants, but they maintained that they were fine with being the tape recorded.

It is also not clear as to what the reason was for most of the participants not keeping eye contact. They may have been following the norm of avoiding eye contact as a sign of respect, which occurs especially with people one is not familiar with. This worried the researcher, but was difficult to talk about as it could have been seen as disrespectful to the participant. I discussed this matter with Neli Mathebula, the manager of the centre, and she also thought it could be a sign of respect.

In general, it was emotionally challenging for both the participants and the researcher to conduct the interviews. After each interview, I felt sad. I felt sorry for the participants, but I had to go back to my interview skills training and distance myself. It is called being empathetic. I had to maintain a balance between being subjectively involved and being professionally empathetic. The participants also became emotional. They would be tearful for a few seconds and we would stop for a few minutes. I would then ask them if they were fine to continue, after which the interview proceeded. None of the participants withdrew from the study. They all persevered until the end.

3.12 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

When the process of data collection was completed, the information gathered was transcribed, organised properly and then analysed. The researcher decided to use the thematic data analysis method.

3.12.1 Analysis

According to Terre Blanche (2004), the principle of interpretative analysis needs to be respected. The researcher needs to stay close to the data and interpret it from a position of empathetic understanding. It is also important to have a good data collection tool in order to make the process of analysis uncomplicated. In this instance, the researcher had an interview guide to help her conduct the interviews properly. Patton (1986) states that the focus of analysing qualitative data collected from in-depth interviewing and field work comes from the evaluation of questions generated at the beginning of the evaluation process (during the

conceptual, question-focusing phase of the evaluation) (p. 295). The researcher followed the interview guide in order to cover all the themes formed during conceptualization.

3.12.2 Steps in data analysis

The researcher's data analysis involved reading through the data repeatedly, breaking the data up by thematisation and categorisation and then building the data up in novel ways through elaboration and interpretation (Kvale, 1996). The steps of familiarization and immersion, including themes, coding, elaboration, as well as interpretation were followed (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004).

3.12.3 Familiarization and immersion

This step involved the development of ideas and theories about the phenomenon being studied. According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (2004), "Data gathering and interpretative research is not just a mindless exercise, but involves development of ideas and theories about phenomenon being studied, even as a researcher makes contact with gate keepers and sets up interviews" (p. 141). At this stage, the researcher had a preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data and needed to immerse herself in it by listening to the tapes again and reading through the notes made during the interview, this time working with texts (interview transcripts) rather than with the lived reality.

3.12.4 Organising data

The researcher managed the data collected by reducing the data's size and scope, so that she could report upon it adequately and usefully. This process involved managing the data into themes and coding.

3.12.4.1 Identifying themes

According to Terre Blanche and Kelly (2004), this step involves moving beyond merely summarising the content as processes, functions, tensions and contradictions. An optimal level of complexity was found as well as different kinds of themes (and sub-themes) covering a broad array of issues. The following themes were identified for the study: (i) The

Experiences of abused women, (ii) the Impact of remaining in an abusive relationship, (iii) the Meaning attached to staying, (iv) the Coping mechanisms used by abused women, (v) and Social support. The themes were coded in form of numbers, counting the number of times the theme occurs in an interview. The researcher continued to identify the themes from the same questions until saturation point was reached

3.12.4.2 Coding

This step includes breaking data up in analytically relevant ways. This can be done in several ways, including counting the number of times the theme occurs in an interview. The researcher identified the theme by randomly selecting and examining responses to the open-ended questions. The researcher continued to identify the themes from the same questions until saturation point was reached. The level of saturation is reached when themes start to repeat themselves, over and over again. These themes were then written down and assigned a code using keywords or numbers (Kumar, 2005).

3.12.5 INTERPRETATION

In the final step, the researcher's interpretation was put together in a written account of the phenomena studied using thematic categories from the analysis as sub-headings. Some of the themes covered were the reasons for staying, the meaning attached to staying, the impact of staying, coping and support. Interpretation allowed the researcher to make sense of the data. The interpretation of data was within the family systems theory. When interpreting the data, the researcher took into consideration the beliefs, values and meaning attached to the views of the participants. At that point, the researcher stepped back and formed larger opinions of what was going on in the situation (Creswell, 1994). At this stage, the researcher drew back and looked at the data from an outsider's point of view, separating herself from the context.

3.13 ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY

The validity of the qualitative research relates to the credibility of the study. This is dependant on the research instrument, which in this case was the researcher's ability and efforts. For the study to be considered valid it should be credible, transferable and trustworthy (Golafshani, 2003). The correspondence between the meaning and the participant's data, in

which the researcher portrayed the final document, indicates the credibility of the research. One way of determining this will be when the researcher condenses and interprets the meaning of what the interviewee described and ‘sends’ the meaning back (Kvale, 1996). This process was done during the interview when the researcher was probing for clarity in order to ensure that the participant’s descriptions were done justice to. Credibility of the whole research process is said to be embedded in the skills and sensitivity of the researcher and on the way she uses herself as a knower and an enquirer in the study (Reason & Rowan, 1981).

3.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following ethical considerations, outlined by Brakewell (2000) and Silverman (2001) were addressed. Firstly, the protection and welfare of participants. Participants’ information that was shared during the interview was protected. The other participants as well as the community members did not know what was discussed during the interview. Secondly, the debriefing of participants. Participants who became too emotional were referred for counselling to a qualified counsellor after the interview. Thirdly, the confidentiality and anonymity of data. As mentioned above, the information given by individuals was treated with secrecy. Fourthly, the participants’ right to withdraw from participating. The researcher explained to the participants that they had the right to withdraw from participating if they started feeling uncomfortable. The above considerations were addressed during the course of the research and negotiated with all the participants.

The consent further involved obtaining the voluntary participation of the subjects with their right to withdraw from the study at any point to avoid potential undue influence and coercion. Participants were then asked to sign a written consent to give permission to participate in the study.

Confidentiality was addressed by assuring participants of anonymity and fictional names were used in all reports. Participants were also informed that if a need for debriefing arose, they would be debriefed.

3.15 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the research method used and the analysis were discussed. Data was collected through interviews and recorded on tapes which were transcribed, analysed and interpreted. The researcher's data analysis involved reading through the data repeatedly, breaking the data down by thematising and categorising it and building the data up in novel ways through the process of elaboration and interpretation. The steps of familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration as well as interpretation, were followed. The next chapter will deal with data analysis and interpretation. The data, which was collected according to the stipulated procedures and techniques, will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the results of the study and the interpretation of the data collected. The analysis that follows is based on the themes that emerged from individual in-depth interviews with participants. For qualitative research, the rich details of human experience that is uncovered must be effectively conveyed, by stating statements as the participants said them in their own words and the meaning that they attach to their statements (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Themes that were identified during the interviews are briefly defined and introduced, followed by the field notes and quotations, to provide support on the themes and the experiences of the respondents. The themes were identified through the process of coding; counting the number of times the theme occurs in an interview. The researcher continued to identify the themes from the same questions until saturation point was reached. The discussion of the themes was informed by the literature reviewed, the aims of the research which have guided the study, and the theoretical frameworks identified in chapter two. For the researcher to ensure that her subjectivity did not influence the data, a journal was kept during the study, which helped in terms of identifying personal beliefs and attitudes from those of the participants. A table indicating the biographical details of the participants has also been included.

4.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in the Mpumalanga province, at KwaMhlanga, amongst women who are part of a support group (that focuses on giving support to women in abusive relationships). The support group was established, managed, and funded by the Social Services department. The researcher received permission to interview the support group participants from the Social Services department Manager, Mrs N. Mathebula. The researcher interviewed nine women for the study. The participants were all married for at least more than ten years. They all possessed a tertiary qualification; they were employed in managerial positions at work; they had children; and they were all above the age of thirty; six participants

were Swazi speaking, two Zulu and one Ndebele. In the next paragraph a table with the participant's biographical details is presented.

Table 2 Biographical data of the participants

Participant code	Age	Home Language	Marital Status & Years married	Number of children	Educational qualification	Occupation
1.	37	SiSwati	Married 16 yrs	Two	BA Communication	Production Manager
Husband	45	SiSwati			Dip Marketing	Sales Rep
2.	39	IsiZulu	Married 17 yrs	One	PhD Chemistry	HOD
Husband	50	Venda			Information Technology	IT Manager
3.	41	SiSwati	Married 14 yrs	Two	B Accounting	Accountant
Husband	48	IsiZulu			B Economics	Financial Advisor
4.	44	SiSwati	Married 18 yrs	Three	Social worker	Deputy Director
Husband	52	SiSwati			Dip Education	School Principal
5.	40	SiSwati	Married 17 yrs	Two	Dip Nursing	Ward Manager
Husband	54	Ndebele			Dip Engineering	Constructio n Manager
6.	33	IsiZulu	Married 15 yrs	Four	D Education	Assistant Director
Husband	47	IsiZulu			B Admin	Team

						Leader
7.	55	SiSwati	Married 36	Two	Dip Education	Teacher
Husband	57	SiSwati			Dip Education	Teacher
8.	42	Ndebele	Married 23 yrs	One	BA	Personal Assistant
Husband	45	Ndebele			Dip Education	Member of Parliament
9.	51	SiSwati	Married 28 yrs	Three	Dip Nursing	Deputy Director
Husband	53	SiSwati			Dip Policing	Police officer

In the presentation of the results, the researcher makes reference to some of the important quotations drawn from the interviews. The researcher did this as a means to provide proof that the researcher is reporting on the data produced from the interviews with participants, and to report on the results with the participant's voice and language. The analysis and the interpretation of the data will be followed by the summary of the findings.

4.3 IDENTIFIED THEMES

The following broad categories formed the framework for analysis: (i) The Experiences of abused women, (ii) the Impact of remaining in an abusive relationship, (iii) the Meaning attached to staying, (iv) the Coping mechanisms used by abused women, (v) and Social support. The themes were coded in form of numbers, counting the number of times the theme occurs in an interview. The researcher continued to identify the themes from the same questions until saturation point was reached

4.3.1 THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERVIEWED PARTICIPANTS

Most participants that were interviewed indicated that the abuse started within the first two years of their marriage. Eight participants witnessed physical abuse and emotional abuse whereas one participant reported to be abused emotionally.

4.3.1.1 Battering episodes

Women who remain in physical abusive marital relationships are often exposed to severe physical injuries which may lead to occasional seizures in some victims, broken bones, concussions, facial injuries, torn ligaments, and a myriad of cuts and bruises as well as abortions (Sipe & Hall 1996, p. 41-42). Eight out of the nine participants indicated that their husbands sometimes use physical punishment when they are angry; they report that the anger usually results from arguments. Instead of talking back the husbands retaliate by using physical abuse.

“ after having been beaten up a few times by my husband, I realised I had to fight back, because I noticed no change in his physical abusive behaviour, he would keep apologising and promised never to beat me up again, I started fighting back...but still nothing changed, instead the abuse intensified” (participant 5).

“I went through my husband’s cell phone text messages and I discovered that he was having a relationship with another woman, and when I confronted him about it, he resorted to violence, I thought he was going to kill me that day.....” (participant 2).

“ My husband was beating up the children, I tried to intervene, he did not stop, instead he beat everyone up, me and the children....saying, the children are behaving the way they do because of you...and he disappeared for a number of days, I did not know where he was” (participant 6).

“ ...when I question him about his behaviour, he thinks I am being disrespectful... and he resorts to beating me up, and he will go and buy me flowers and be nice for a while..” (participant 8).

I am often away from home, on work related trips, and sometimes the meetings drag longer than initially planned, and when I come home late, it always leads to an argument, which sometimes leads to him beating me up.....(participant 9)

The general systems theory seemed relevant in understanding how battering happens in abusive relationships. General systems theory indicate that if the battering episodes produce desired behaviour they are likely to continue, this is called positive feedback, which could be

when a woman gives in, such behaviour can become an established pattern in the system (Halley in Giles-Sims, 1986). Attempts from the woman to seek help may decrease, if she does not get help, and change within the system after escalation has occurred, depends on finding alternative response, if abused women do not get the help that they want they might learn to be helpless or fight back as some of the women did in the study. All of the participants interviewed indicated that they did not fight back when their husbands physically attacked them for the first time. They thought the incident was a mistake and that it would not happen again. They did not report the incident to anyone. When their husbands asked for forgiveness, they thought the abuse would stop. However, they all reported that the abuse continued and as time went on, the abuse increased in frequency and severity.

“I don’t know how many times I have been beaten up; I have been beaten up too many times, and lately he even kicks me and pushes me against the wall” (participant 3).

I try not to keep records because it will just drive me crazy, but he beats me up now and again... (participant 1)

In order to further understand these women’s behaviour, the researcher drew insights or lessons from a social psychology theory of social learning. This theory suggests that learned helplessness contributes to the cleared understanding of women’s behaviour in abusive relationships; the victim may find herself after repeated episodes of abuse feeling powerless and hopeless. All respondents reported that they experienced the following symptoms loneliness, isolation and neglect to such an extent that they felt hopeless and became depressed.

“My husband is jealous, and he does not like it when my friends come to visit me, and because of that I spend most of my time alone and that makes me feel lonely, because he also does not spend most of his time at home and that hurts” ... (participant 2).

“He is always accusing me of cheating, in order to avoid arguments, I cut down on friends, my friends are my kids, but sometimes I feel lonely and isolated when I am alone in the house and I start crying” (participant 6).

“We usually don’t talk to each other for a few days after the fights, and during that time, my husband ignores me, and that makes me feel neglected and I start getting stressed (participant 7)

As the physical abuse intensified and continued happening, the participants went and reported the abuse to their families but they were all encouraged to stay in the relationship and try and solve the problem. Some went to their friends but the advice they could receive was that of staying and perseverance. As time went on they reported that, they started feeling they were not be able to escape the relationship. According to Walker (1979) those perceptions stem from abused women having learned to believe that they are powerless against men (p. 43).

“When I opened up to my mother about the physical abuse, she asked me to pray to God for strength and never to give up on my marriage, it is worth fighting for, it would bring shame to the whole family if I divorced”...(participant 4).

“My mother told me, she stayed with my father even when he decided to take a second wife and neglected her children’s needs, because divorce takes away respect from a woman...after that I knew that marriage was not easy”...(participant 7).

“My mother has a lot of respect for my husband, when I told her he beats me up, she said, I must have done something to make him upset”...(participant 8)

All the participants who experienced physical abuse reported that after the battering episodes their husbands asked for forgiveness and after that their relationship would be nice and enjoyable until another argument starts. Walker’s theory can be used to understand these dynamics, which is the theory on the *cycle of abuse* from *systems theory*, according to this model abuse occurs in form of a cycle, the couple start arguing about issues as they start adjusting from the life being single and independent. According to Walker’s three stage model which consists of, first, the tense period of conflict escalation, leading to the battering episode, the second stage, and then finally to a third stage of reconciliation marked by the man’s contriteness and pleas for forgiveness and the woman’s return to him. Before the second stage, which is usually characterised by tension (Walker, 1979), most participants indicated that their partners became abusive as they reached higher successes in their careers.

“I think my husband my husband is threatened by my success...” (participant 2).

“My husband has a tendency to say, “you think you’re better than everyone because you working in big offices.... (participant 3).

“My husband paid for my education and he would say things like,,...Sisi don’t forget where you come from, don’t let your friend from work fool you, I am still the head of this family, even if you are making more money than me”(participant 9).

“I earn more than my husband, and I am more educated, and sometimes when we argue, my husband thinks I don’t know my place and I have no respect for him because I have more money...”(participant 5).

“The other time, we were arguing, when my husband mentioned that, he thinks he made a mistake by marrying someone who is has no respect, like me, he said that I think I am all that because I am educated...”(participant 4).

4.3.1.2 Patriarchy and culture

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979) access to positions of power is rarely based upon individual ability in a system of patriarchy, but is institutionalised to such an extent that those who are in positions of power and privilege do so either because of some form of ascribed status. In most African cultures, like the Swazi culture, men are viewed as the head of the family, or because of institutionalised forms of advantage that give them the opportunity to achieve status. All the women interviewed indicated that their husbands had extra marital affairs at some stage while in the relationship; however their husbands and society did not allow them to have sexual relationships with other men. All the respondents indicated that they would be called names in their community if they engaged in such behaviour. None of the women mentioned that they cheated on their husbands; instead they remained faithful to their husbands.

(i) Unfaithfulness/ extra marital affairs

All the participants mentioned that their husbands were unfaithful to them. Extramarital affairs brought a variety of problems into the family, including financial problems and loss of trust. The participants stated that their husband stopped respecting them when they started having extra marital affairs.

“The thing is he is cheating on me, I know his girlfriend, I have spoken to her and she admitted to me that they are having an affair, but she promised to end the relationship.....”(participant 8).

“My husband says he only goes to his girlfriend to cool off, when we disobey him at home, he says there is other women out there who were raised well and taught to treat men with respect” (participant 7).

“ Go ahead and sleep with your mother, I don’t care, it gives me enough time to enjoy the company of my second wife, just tell me when you have decided to do things the way I want, because at the moment I can see you are not prepared to listen...” (participant 6).

“ I find messages on my husbands cell phone, and his girlfriend sometimes calls while I am with my husband, and I can tell when he is talking to his girlfriend...sometimes I just keep quite, to avoid conflict...(participant 2)

Randal (2003) states that most conflict arises in situations where the wife is seen as challenging the husband’s authority and prerogatives by enquiring about his extra marital involvement. Most abusers feel that their own behaviour is justified by society, since African cultural beliefs support male domination. Most men think they have the right to discipline their wives (Shepard, cited by Ngoma, 2005). Men who abuse their wives are actually living up to the cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western society, namely aggressiveness, male dominance and female subordination, and they use physical force to inflict their dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

(ii) Polygamy

Polygamy is respected in most African communities, particularly within the Swazi community, as it is associated with wealth. The king of Swaziland has set an example by marrying more than ten wives. It is believed that if your wealth you can afford paying lobola for more than one woman (Randal, 2003). The current President, Mr J. Zuma, has also portrayed that polygamy is acceptable and he lived by example by marrying five women. However, customary practice arguably is in conflict with the views of most modern women. Most modern educated African women no longer accept the practice of sharing their husbands (Randal, 2003). Sharing a husband might present with financial, health and other social problems. However, all the participants stated that their men like the practice of polygamy and society seems to be approving of it. The following quotations are some of the evidence from interviewed participants:

“ My husband made another woman pregnant and when I told the family, they told me that polygamy is a tradition, they told me to respect my husband and the Swazi culture....”(participant 7).

“When I realised he was having an affair, I went and told the family, but they said, men should not be treated like children, questioned about their every move, they told me to start showing respect and to behave like a good wife....”(participant 3).

“When I told my mother that my husband was having an affair, she asked if my husband was taking care of me and the kids financially, when I answered, “yes”, she advised me stay married”(participant 5).

When my husband started coming home late and sometimes, sleeping out, I went and told his family, but his family told me to stay in my house, my husband will come around, and that men do not like being questioned... ” (participant 6).

According to Randal (2003) the power of tradition and norms within the African culture explain the widespread use of domestic violence. The issue of polygamy and multiple girlfriends can only be understood within the context of African culture, like the Swazi, Zulu and Ndebele to mention just a few. This is a clear symbol of uneven distribution of power between gender and within the communities. Research on domestic abuse in Africa has

indicated that most conflicts or arguments arise in situations where the wife confronts the husband about his extramarital affairs (Randal, 2003). Patriarchy and violence marry each other because men continue to think and behave like they have control over their wives because they feel supported by the culture.

(iii) Lobola

According to Randal (2003) the payment of the bride price to the wife's family at the time of their marriage makes it difficult for women to leave abusive husbands, unless their families of origin are willing to return the amount paid. African marriages, the power of the extended family over married couple and the almost universal institution of bride price are seen as underlying the widespread abuse of wives. Most participants mentioned that the main reason they remained married to their abusive husbands, it is because lobola had been paid for them. Five out of the nine participants interviewed indicated that after the lobola negotiations and the wedding, their husbands started treating them differently as compared to when they were still dating. The following quotations indicate some evidence from the participants:

“Before he paid lobola, he used to say “thank you” when I give him food, but after paying lobola, he stopped saying thank you, he would just take the food and eat,, I asked him why? And he said “I own you now, I paid lobola for you”... (participant 1).

“I came back from work feeling very tired and I asked him to prepare dinner, and he refused, he asked me “why did I pay lobola if you can't even cook woman”...immediately after we got married he stopped helping with the household chores... (participant 5).

Since we got married he treats me like his child, it is as if he owns me, I have no say, he takes all the decisions in the house ... (participant 9)

“Before we got married, we used to go out a lot, but after the wedding my husband changed, he started going out without me...”(participant 2)

A few months after the wedding, I fell pregnant, and my husband started treating me differently, I don't know why, maybe I started looking ugly...” (participant 3)

Two participants mentioned that what makes it difficult to leave their husband, if he has paid lobola, is the fact that the matter also involves the extended family. They stated that, when they tried to leave their families would ask them to go back because lobola had been paid.

“When I first left my husband, my family called me to a meeting, and they told me, I must go back to my husband because he has paid lobola for me. They told me I should learn to respect my husband and keep the matters of my house private” (participant 5).

“ My family would be upset with me if I left my husband, they told me it’s a disgrace, a woman is supposed to keep the family together, lobola has been paid, and unlike the white wedding, divorce is not permitted in the Swazi traditional marriage” (participant 1).

In some South African communities, the cultural notions of women being treated as property of a husband result in patriarchal attitudes by men that women are owned by men. Those cultures are structured along patriarchal lines, emphasizing the gender role stereotypes of women as passive and expected to submit to their husbands (Randal, 2003). Most men think they have a right to sleep with their wives whenever they want to because they have paid lobola for them; women also view such behaviour as legitimate because their husbands have paid lobola. The family is still a major sphere in which the domination of men is secured at the expense of women (Ramphela, 1997). Hence, most women stay married to their abusive husbands.

“I decided to ask my mother to come and stay with us, because I had decided that I do not want to share the bedroom with my husband anymore. My husband told me he had decided to get another girlfriend who would sleep with him because I was no available to sleep with him. He said that to make me feel bad, I felt guilty, thinking I pushed him away to another woman’s bed.” (participant 6).

“I got married in church, and my pastor told me that I must obey my husband at all times. A day before the wedding there was a camp, all the elderly women were there, they gave me the rules, on how I should conduct myself in the marriage, they told me to cook, give birth to children, attend to my husband’s needs, respect my husband and not question his whereabouts” (participant 3).

“I was told that I should give my husband his place, he is the head of the family, and if I want my marriage to work I must follow his rules” (participant 1).

(iv) Sexual relations

Three of the participants interviewed stated that their husbands slept with them against their will at some stage in their relationships, but they never reported the incidents as they did not regard them as rape, because their husbands had paid lobola for them.

“When I discovered that my husband was cheating on me, I decided to withdraw from sex, but he would just have his way and sleep with me by force, reminding me that I am his wife...” (Participant 4).

.....I am the head of this family...you don't have respect.....You're my wife, or have you forgotten your duties as a wife..... (participant 9)

“My husband told me, you're a woman, you have no right to question my moves, and he just forced himself to me” (participant 1)

Most abused African women do not report sexual abuse because they are afraid that they will not receive support from their communities (Randal, 2003). The feminist theory helps us understand these practices. According to the radical feminists theory “men who abuse their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in society, male dominance and female subordination and they use physical force as a means to enforce the dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979, p. 24). Hataling (1998) agrees “patriarchal law, religion, philosophy and morality stress the superiority of males and their consequent responsibility and right to control society and the women and children in their families (p. 127). Martin (1976) is of the opinion that the traditional marriage contract still rests on the assumptions that, marriage represents a life time commitment, that procreation is an essential element in the marriage relationship, and that a strict division of labour should exist within a family (p. 37). The exclusiveness and permanence of marriage also means that the wife is permanently available to the husband as a sex partner and can be punished by her husband if she is unfaithful or unwilling to oblige to his sexual demands.

4.3.2 THE IMPACT OF REMAINING IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

4.3.2.1 Depression and suicide

Six out of the nine women that were interviewed indicated that the emotional abuse was affecting them emotionally. They mostly reported that when the abuse started, the husband would ask for forgiveness immediately after the battering episode, and they would forgive them. The couple would then move in to the honeymoon phase soon after the abuse episode, which may contribute to the reason to stay married to an abusive husband. The abusive husband may become nice towards his wife, to compensate for the abuse incident (Walker, 1979). Walker helps us understand how the cycle of abuse occurs, Walker's three stage model of learned helplessness consists of, firstly, the tense phase of conflict escalation, which then leads to the second stage, the incident phase, and then finally to the third phase, reconciliation marked by the man's contriteness and pleas for forgiveness and the woman's return to him. Walker maintains that this third stage reinforces the woman's desire to stay in the relationship, because she tends to think that the abuse will never happen again. When the abuse continued they started living in fear and blaming themselves and as the abuse became part of their lives, they started ignoring it and using mechanisms such as rationalization to cope with the abuse (Walker, 1979).

"before getting married, I thought my husband would continue to treat me like a queen, but a few years into the marriage, when I realised things were not the way that I wanted them, and there was nothing I could do, I became depressed" (participant 1).

"Sometimes, I ask my self, when was the last time I was happy, because I am always angry..." (participant 2).

"I do not know whether people can tell that there is something wrong with me, but I keep a strong face when I am around people at work, but deep down in my heart, I am not happy" ...(participant 3).

"When I married my husband, I could not predict things would turn out the way they did, he was so nice towards me, when he started beating me up, I thought no, it was a mistake

because he asked for forgiveness and promised never to beat me up again, but to my surprise he continued....” (participant 4).

“Initially, it felt like a dream, it was as if I’ll wake up and realize, it was just a nightmare, but unfortunately it was reality, and I am still married to the monster...”(participant 5).

“Staying in the relationship was hard, but I decided to remain there for the sake of my children and just ignore all the bad things that my husband was doing to me” (participant 7).

Abused wives may also be afraid to show or express their anger towards the abuser for fear of aggravating the situation. Failure to express feelings of anger may lead to depression. Most women become angry at themselves for allowing the abusive partner to take advantage of them. The overwhelming feelings of anger reflect the woman’s desperation to effect changes in her situation. Abused women live under much stress as a result of abuse. Most victims become depressed when their situation is perceived as hopeless and unbearable. They may start regarding themselves as failures for being unable to effect change in their lives with limited, if any, resources at their disposal (Walker, 1979). When a victim reaches this point, she might become suicidal and more vulnerable to the abuser’s control and emotional abuse. All the participants reported to be sad most of the time. The researcher probed further to determine if they were ever depressed. The research findings indicated that most of the abused women interviewed spend most of their time depressed but they often ignore their feelings. Their main focus is to fix the relationship and to be good wives.

During the interviews, seven participants mentioned statements that gave an indication to the researcher that they were depressed. Some of the statements were:

“I have a heart problem and with my blood pressure, I am on chronic treatment and the condition is under control, but when I start fighting with my husband, I relapse” (participant 9).

Sometimes, when I am feeling very down, I just lock myself for a few days at home and not go to work, (participant 1).

I am normally wear a size 40, but since I discovered that my husband is having a relationship with another woman I lost a lot of weight, I am currently a size 34 (participant 5).

“I avoid stressing because it affects my children, I avoid showing the children that I am sad to avoid making them sad” (participant 6).

“I get irritable and start shouting at the children, not all the time, only after fighting with my husband, but I avoid it...” (participant 4).

Two participants indicated that they have tried to commit suicide and they were admitted in a psychiatric hospital for attempting suicide.

“I did not want to die; I just wanted him to give me attention that is why I took an overdose...” (participant 8)

“I have been admitted three times, twice for stress, and once for attempting suicide” (participant 7).

Strube & Barbour (1994) discovered that *psychological commitment* is significantly related to a person’s decision to stay in or leave an abusive relationship. Staying in the relationship “no matter what”, significantly differentiates between women who have left an abusive relationship and those who have not (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991). When an abused woman is overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness or has little support, and fears seeking help from the police, medical practitioners or other services, she may think about, attempt or actually commit suicide (Giles-Sims, 1986, p. 63).

4.3.2.2 Low self esteem

Most of the women interviewed hold managerial positions at work and they are respected in their communities for their achievements and their financial status. However, at home they take a submissive position and they perceive their husbands as heads of the family. Abused women do not feel that they can stand on their own, instead, they feel that they need their husbands for survival, even though they all earned above average. They seem to have lost the meaning of life. Most abused women feel they have nothing to offer another person. Most abusers convince their partners that they are worthless, stupid and disgusting: behind a closed door, a man calls a woman a “slut” and a “whore” (Reader on domestic abuse, 2004). He tells her that she is too fat or too sexy or too frumpy, that she is a poor excuse for a mother, a

worthless piece of dirt (Goode, 1994, p. 24). Such oppression is effective because, in many cultures, a woman is often blamed for a failed marriage. Women are often willing to pay any price to hold on to the relationship because they believe that society will not support them if they do not. In South Africa, it is generally believed that the woman has failed in her duty as a wife if the marriage disintegrates (Miller, 1996). Financially independent women in abusive relationships seem to feel lonely and scared to face the world on their own, without their husbands. The next paragraph gives quotations that will support that most financially independent women remain in abusive relationships because of mainly fear to be alone and low self esteem.

4.3.3 MEANING/ REASONS FOR STAYING

4.3.3.1 Economic factors

Six of the women interviewed indicated that they stayed in those abusive relationships because their children were in private schools and that their lifestyles would be difficult to maintain if they left their husbands.

“ I heard rumours that my husband bought his mistress a sports car, when I decided to leave him, because he stopped being involved in household activities and contributing financially, as a result I had financial difficulties, when I confronted him about it he said he was not doing well at work” (participant 3).

“I think I would struggle on my own, because he pays for the house and other important bills, like the insurances, if I divorce, no it would be hard, I don't think I can...” (participant 4).

“We live in the suburbs, if I leave him I will not be able to afford to stay in a house like the one that I live in now”(participant 7).

My children goes to a Private school, and the father is the one paying for them, if I leave him, he might stop paying their fees...(participant 8).

“ If I leave my husband I will have to go and stay in the location where I grew up and my friends will laugh at me, it will appear as though I have failed” (participant 2).

“ I left my husband for five months and during the five months life was very hard financially, I lived in a flat in town, and my children and I could not take it anymore, we were used to the comfortable lifestyle, that is why I decided it would be better to go back to my house” (participant 5).

Seven out of the nine women interviewed indicated that their husbands were paying for the houses, whereas the other two participants indicated that they had joint bonds. Six out of the nine women interviewed indicated that their fear to leave was that it would put them in a difficult financial situation, as buying a house lately has become an expensive expenditure. The women did not feel comfortable adjusting their lifestyles, characterised by staying in expensive upmarket houses and driving expensive cars to a lower class lifestyle. However, two participants mentioned that their husbands do not contribute to the house as much as the wives expected, but the women still preferred getting the little that they were getting compared to getting nothing at all.

“ My husband earns a lot of money, he is a computer engineer, but he does not like contributing towards the household, he sends most of his money towards his family, he just pays for the house because they deduct straight from his salary” (participant 2).

My husbands goes out with his friends and he spends most of his money on his friends and towards alcohol, as a result I spend most of my money on the household and my money gets finished before the next pay day and I am left to struggle on my own financially” (participant 3).

According to Rusbult’s model of commitment (in Barnett & LaViolette, 1993), individuals committed to an unsatisfactory marriage remain if their investments, namely time and emotional energy, are high and their alternatives are few. Bauserman and Arias (in Barnette & LaViolette, 1993) demonstrate that women who are highly committed to their abusive relationships believe that they have made substantial investments. Ferraro (in Barnett & Laviolette, 1993) notes that, even women who are financially independent, return to violent husbands, perhaps because of loneliness. According to Barnett & Laviolette (1993), 70% of abused women return to their abusive husbands because of the fear of loneliness. Hence, all the participants were financially independent, but remained in the relationship, because they

believed that they needed their husbands for survival, even when sometimes they did not really benefit much from the relationship.

“We usually don’t talk to each other for a few days after the fights, and during that time, my husband ignores me, and that makes me feel neglected and I start getting stressed (participant 7. In most cases the abuser may use neglect as a form of punishment, and as the abuser pulls away, the victim becomes more and more desperate for the abusers attention.

4.3.3.2 Staying because of the children

The other theme that emerged from the interviews is that all the participants indicated that they stayed in their abusive relationships because of their children (Ngoma, 2005). All the nine respondents interviewed were earning an above average salary, however, seven of them felt that they would not be able to survive alone financially, especially with regards to their children’s needs, like schooling, as they were in private schools. The respondents stated that they were used to a certain lifestyle and they would not want to take a step down, financially. According to Walker (1979) remaining in an abusive relationship for sometime might leave the victim thinking they are trapped and they cannot do anything without their husbands.

“ when my husband is not around during the weekends, when my husband is at his girlfriend’s place, my children keep asking about him, especially the little one, they love their father and they get depressed when he is not around, that is why I cannot leave my husband, it will be like I am punishing the children” (participant 6).

“I grew up without a father myself, it was not easy, I still feel the effects even now, I don’t want to put my child through the same situation” (participant 2).

According to Miller (1996) society has instilled in most people that children must be raised by two parents otherwise they will grow up somehow deformed. Women as a result suffer prolonged abuse for what they explain as ‘the good of my children’ (Miller, 1996).

4.3.3.3 Religious convictions

Seven out of the nine women interviewed indicated that their religious beliefs were against divorce and that they pray and believe that God will change the situation around. The researcher thinks there should be some evidence from the bible that you can use to clearly and practically indicate that this is the case and hence the women slayings or goings from marriages

“I am a Christian, my church will not approve, divorce is not allowed in my church and I will be setting a bad example for my family..., I got married in church, and my pastor told me that I must obey my husband at all times. A day before the wedding there was a camp, all the elderly women were there, they gave me the rules, on how I should conduct myself in the marriage, they told me to cook, give birth to children, attend to my husband’s needs, respect my husband and not question his whereabouts” (participant 3).

“The other day my husband beat me up so bad, I wanted to leave him, but my mother and the church members discouraged me, as they disapprove divorce...”(participant 9).

“When I opened up to my mother about the physical abuse, she asked me to pray to God for strength and never to give up on my marriage, it is worth fighting for, it would bring shame to the whole family if I divorced”...(participant 4).

4.3.3.4 Shame and self blame

Five respondents reported that they were ashamed to leave the marriage because they were worried about how the society, friends and the family would perceive them. According to the African culture not succeeding at your marriage is perceived as failure (Randal, 2003). According to Loring (in Ngoma, 2005), most abuse victims are convinced that they are at fault and thus do not perceive themselves as abused, or victims of marital violence (p. 1).

“..What will people think of me...I thought about it, and I do not think it is a good idea...?” (participant 4).

The community will call me ‘Mabuyemendweni’ (which means I have failed in my marriage) (participant 3).

“...at my age who will love me” (participant 7).

“There is no perfect relationship, even if I leave my husband, the person that I am going to meet, will also have his own weak points” (participant 9).

“People will think that I am successful in my career, but I failed to keep my husband, after all what is the use of having money and be alone” (participant 1).

Women in psychological or emotional abusive marital relationships often suffer from low self-esteem. Low self-esteem is usually coupled with feelings of worthlessness and having no value, and the victim may perceive herself as unimportant (De Sousa, 1991, p. 28). The negative feelings that the women experience often originate from the abusive partner’s remarks, as the abuser may consistently tell the woman that she is incompetent, hysterical and frigid (Cahn, 1996, p. 15). Society also tends to let women believe that they have no value as individuals apart from their men (Martin, 1979, p. 81).

According to Pretorius (1984) attachment, which he describes as the woman’s struggle to bond with husband, is not necessarily a mutual process in abusive relationships. A victim of emotional abuse usually continues to seek attachment with an abuser who has withdrawn affection. Hoping to regain the lost affection, the victim may hold on to their partner relentlessly. Using withdrawal as a mechanism of control is emotional abandonment. The victim feels betrayed and isolated by the disconnection. As a victim’s need for connection increases, their attempts to engage with their partner also increase in frequency and intensity, and they hold on even more. Although their efforts may fail, the trauma of pain and terror leaves the victim with no choice but to continue trying to connect with their abusive partner (Pretorius, 1984). Attachment, in this sense, is therefore different to connection, which denotes a relationship characterised by each partner’s efforts to empathise with and respond to the other (Loring, in Ngoma, 2005). From the above quotations, one can pick up that most of the participants spend most of their time alone and feeling lonely while in the relation, however, they continue to feel the need to hold on to their relationship or to get their husbands to notice them. For example, participant no 8, indicated that she was too desperate

for her husbands attention, she had to attempt suicide, not because she wanted to die, but in order for her to gain attention from her husband.

4.3.4 COPING MECHANISMS

All the participants that were interviewed formed part of a support group that supports abused women. Different reasons brought them to the support group. Support was the least of their reasons for coming to the support group. Most of them joined the support group because a local social worker recommended that they join in order for them to get help in dealing with the stress that they experience from their marriages. The social worker met them when they were coming to the department, to consult about different social problems. Six out of the nine women mentioned that they came to the social services to enquire about child maintenance and matters of child custody should they decide to divorce their husbands, while the other two mentioned that they came to enquire about getting a protection order, to stop their husbands from beating them up. They stated that they did not know the support group existed before the social worker told them about it. They reported that they were happy to be given a platform to share their experiences with other women. They said the support they received at the support group helped them cope better with their situation. Some of the women mentioned that they consulted a professional counsellor once or twice but it did not benefit them, hence they decided to end the therapy.

4.3.4.1 Emotion focused coping

Emotion focused coping is a style of coping that is usually used in situations which are viewed as unchangeable. It serves as an emotional and arousal oriented coping style with the purpose of reducing negative emotions regarding a situation and preventing further emotional pain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion focused strategies include behaviours such as looking on the brighter side of things, accepting sympathy and understanding from others, and trying to forget about the problem. Examples are denial, avoidance, religious faith, acceptance and social support. Abused women use different coping mechanisms that may temporarily minimize the pain, but they do not necessarily take the problem away. Seemingly, most participants used emotion focused coping to cope with the abuse in their relationships. Most abused victims view their situation as helpless and unchangeable; hence they use the above mentioned coping strategies to cope with the abuse. Most of the

participants appear to be using emotion focused coping mechanisms, as they view their situation as helpless and unchangeable.

4.3.4.2 Denial

Some abused victims may use denial as a mechanism to cope with the overwhelming experience of abuse which could be perceived to be helpless. The denial may be precipitated by the myth that violence against married women is a private family matter. Women will remain ignorant of the games played out in their relationships (Loring cited in Ngoma, 2005). Denial and minimization are major techniques used to avoid dealing with the dangerousness of the situation. Victimization has been found to be a leading cause of depression in abused women. Sometimes, women keep themselves occupied to avoid thinking about their situations. They often suppress their feelings in order to avoid becoming too excited or too disappointed about things that used to have meaning for them (Walker 1993, p. 248).

Some participants ignored the emotional abuse in their relationships. It appears that they have been socialised to believe that the only form of abuse is the physical one. It also appeared that most participants did not feel comfortable about their husband's extramarital affairs, but they were hesitant to describe it as abuse. Factors such as culture and polygamy could be contributing to that belief. When their husbands started spending less time with them they blamed things on themselves, feeling they are not good enough. The participants were more concerned about what other people, such as their neighbours were thinking of them, as compared to how they were feeling. Ngoma (2005) indicates that most abused women try to understand why the abuse happens; this often is explained through rationalizations, such as self blame, externalizing the blame and denial. Abused women tend to believe in men being the dominant decision makers and leaders in the family, while thinking a woman should be submissive and obedient (Walker, 1979, p. 51).

“My husband has always been unsupportive financially and emotionally, but I just ignored those signs, I only realised he was abusive when he started beating me up” (participant 6).

The characteristics of denial are somewhat similar to those of avoidance, which leads us to the next important topic of avoidance.

4.3.4.3 Avoidance

Four out of the nine participants mentioned that they used avoidance as a strategy to minimise the violence or the arguments.

“ I just started ignoring him and focused on the children, initially I would try and talk to him, but nothing changed, instead every conversation would lead to an argument, and he says, “your always looking for a fight”you see, so I just withdraw” (participant 5).

“I am very careful what I say to my husband in order to avoid provoking him...” (participant 1).

“My mother says that men generally do not like women who talk too much, if I continue talking too much, my husband will run away. To avoid pushing my husband away, I avoid confronting him about the things that I don’t like...” (participant 2).

According to Walker (1993, p. 247), most abuse victims may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. According to Walker (1993, p. 247), there are three major symptom clusters that are measured to determine whether or not a person who has been exposed to trauma has developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, namely cognitive disturbances, high arousal symptoms and high avoidance symptoms. Some of the participants appear to be using avoidance as a strategy to cope with the trauma that they endure in their relationships.

4.3.4.4 Religion

All the women interviewed believed in God and prayer, to help them cope with their situation. Seemingly, they received a lot of comfort from believing that God will see them through. At times it felt as though they were using it as a mechanism to justify their stay rationalising the whole situation. According to Wilson (1997, p. 182) there is a tendency to misinterpret the scriptures as supporting the subordination of women. The misconception often serves as a rationalisation for the abuser’s actions while simultaneously contributing to women’s guilt self-blame and suffering. For example, Ephesians 5:22-24 states:

[w]ives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Four participants seemed to be accepting the scripture and what their pastors say, without questioning it.

“When I stress too much, I just call my Pastor and he will pray with me, because most of the time I pray on my own and I feel as relived as I do when pastor prays with me...” (participant 5).

“God knows, he does not give you problems above your strength...” (participant 4)

Pastor is anointed and he has great wisdom, he gives me good advice on how to handle my husband. The other day my husband beat me up so bad, I wanted to leave him, but my mother and the church members discouraged me, as they disapprove divorce...”(participant 9).

“I got married in church, and my pastor told me that I must obey my husband at all times. A day before the wedding there was a camp, all the elderly women were there, they gave me the rules, on how I should conduct myself in the marriage, they told me to cook, give birth to children, attend to my husband’s needs, respect my husband and not question his whereabouts. I am a Christian, my church wont approve, divorce is not allowed in my church and I will be setting a bad example for my family” (participant 3).

4.3.4.5 Isolation and withdrawal

Three out of the nine participants indicated that they use social withdrawal as another way of coping with the abuse. Most of the participants hold high employment positions and status in their communities, they are cautious about everything they do, and are often trying to live up to the societal expectations, of being perfect. Being married is part of the perfect picture. To avoid showing people that they are unhappy about certain things in their lives, they minimize interaction with other people. Women abuse may diminish the quality of life or sense of meaning for the woman, hence most abused women are isolated and withdrawn (Giles-Sims,1986).

“The family asked me to keep the family matters private, so to avoid talking about my problems, I decided to keep a distance from friends....” (participant 3).

“ most people in the community respect me, for them to discover that my husband treats me like this, they will loose the respect they have for me, I would rather spend my time in the house” (participant 4).

“The family told me that my husband is the head of the family, I can’t always argue with him, like I am looking for a fight....” (participant 6).

4.3.4.6 Lack of social support

It is mostly believed that abused women who leave their spouses may not receive sufficient social support to offset their losses (Shepered cited in Ngoma, 2005). Lack of support from the family could be encouraging the abuse in the marriages of the participants. According to Kaplan, Cassel and Gore (cited in Ngoma, 2005) individuals need social support through out their life cycle in order to be able to alleviate stress. The authors view social support as intrinsic to the human condition. Some of the participants interviewed mentioned that their families did not give them support when they mentioned that they wanted to leave their abusive husbands, instead they were encouraged to stay in their marriages. The participants reported that their families encouraged them not to question their husband’s whereabouts, and to keep their family affairs as a secret, to regard them as dirty laundry, which is not meant for everyone to see. They were constantly reminded that they should give husbands their place, which is ‘head of the family’. Five participants preferred isolating themselves in order to avoid discussing their marital problems with other people.

“I have reported my husband’s behaviour to his family but they said they can not do anything to help me because the ancestors were against the marriage from the beginning. According to them my husband is from a royal family and he was meant to marry someone that the family chose for him. The reason why things are not going well in my marriage is because the ancestors are angry” (participant 2).

“My husband was married to someone else before we got married, and when things got really tough in our marriage, I informed the family but my in-laws asked me, “what do you

expect us to do” you stole someone’s husband, you must live with it, and you are getting what you deserve...”(Participant 4).

“when I told the family, they asked me if my husband is still buying for me and the children, I said yes, they said, then you have nothing to worry about, if you want to keep your husband, you must stop asking about his whereabouts, when he comes back you must just be nice to him...”(participant 6).

“My friends and the family encouraged me to stay strong and keep my family together, as a result I decided to keep things to myself and I learned to endure the abuse, I decided to ignore what my husband was doing and focus on the children...” (participant 3).

“ my mother told me that she did not stay married to my father because it was always nice, as a woman you need to remain strong for the sake of your children” (participant 7).

Friends tend to support abused women by encouraging them to tolerate the abuse than to end the relationship. The perceived lack of social and personal support tends to impede women’s attempts to leave abusive relationships (Sullivan, Basta, Tan, & Davidson, 1995).

4.5 CONCLUSION

From the above cases the researcher wanted to observe the dynamics within the relationships and identify themes which were identified from the interviews with the participants. In the next chapter the researcher draws conclusions on the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the summary of the study, the recommendations as well as the conclusion. The study covered the experiences and coping mechanisms of women who remain in abusive marital relationships. Eight out of the nine women who were interviewed, seemed to lack the understanding of the nature of abusive relationships. According to the feminist theory, patriarchal society reinforces men's abusive behaviour, thereby depriving women of an opportunity to strive towards autonomy and self-reliance. Eight out of the nine participants indicated that they were not given the respect they deserve by their husbands, while in the abusive relationship and that they lived under stressful conditions which were detrimental to their physical and psychological well-being.

As the abused women remained in the abusive relationship, they suffered repercussions, such as loss of sense of trust and safety and intense feelings of helplessness. Abused women became confused as they attempted to absorb the impact of being hurt by someone who was thought to be caring and protective. High anxiety, passivity and/ or apathy often characterises the abused woman's response. The women who remain in abusive relationships are believed to engage in a process of rationalization which denies the reality of the situation, the options available, the truth about the abuser and the abuse, and the causes of the abuse.

The cyclic nature of abusive relationships also makes it difficult for women to consider other options, such as separation or divorce, besides being hopeful that their circumstances would soon change for the better. The emotional ties that develop over time between the abuser and the abused also make it difficult for the wife to consider living without the abusive husband. According to the Attachment Theory of spousal abuse, attachment, which denotes one individual's struggle to bond with another, is not necessarily a mutual process. A victim of emotional abuse usually continues to seek attachment with an abuser who has withdrawn affection. Hoping to regain the lost affection, the victim may hold on to their partner relentlessly. Using withdrawal as a mechanism of control is emotional abandonment. The victim feels betrayed and isolated by the disconnection. As a victim's need for connection

increases, their attempts to engage with their partner also increase in frequency and intensity, and they hold on even more

5.2 THE EXPERIENCES OF ABUSED WOMEN

The findings in this study confirm that wife abuse does occur amongst black women within the middle class social status. Previously, most people viewed violence as a problem restricted to the working class, certain ethnic groups, or social classes, for example, black women from poor socio-economic groups. However, research shows that abuse cuts across race, class and status (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p. 5). All the women who participated in the study had a tertiary qualification and had averagely good paying jobs, but still chose to stay in marital abusive relationships. This study dispels the myth that abuse is confined to a particular group of women. The available data does not indicate that the respondents had traumatic experiences during childhood, which could have motivated them to become attracted to violent men. Women do not enjoy being abused. However, their different views on marriage, serve as a reminder that the problem of wife abuse will continue to exist, since abused women have a tendency to continuously excuse undesirable behaviour.

“I am a Christian, my church won’t approve, divorce is not allowed in my church and I will be setting a bad example for my family.” (participant 3).

“The other day my husband beat me up so bad, I wanted to leave him, but my mother and the church members discouraged me, as they disapprove divorce.” (participant 9).

The African culture plays a role in influencing women to endure the abuse in silence. The women who were interviewed indicated that their marital problems were supposed to be treated as dirty laundry and should not be hang in the open for the public to see; hence their abuse was treated as a private matter. They indicated that they were socialized not to talk about their marital problems from an early age and that their own parents modelled the same behaviour. Religion also seems to be playing a role in the woman’s decision to stay, seeing that all participants in the study were religious and sought solace in prayer. All the participants indicated that their church does not approve of divorce, and they did not consider the option to divorce their abusive partners because they wanted to remain respected and accepted in the church. The participants repeatedly mentioned that God was faithful and that He would one day see them through the abusive relationships. They indicated that they

gained their strength from God through faith and prayer. All the participants prayed when they were feeling overwhelmed by their situation and they reported that they felt better after the praying sessions.

Seemingly, abused women suffer from low self-esteem resulting from the assaults and the husbands' humiliating and devaluing remarks. Having a low self-esteem makes it difficult for abused women to explore the option of leaving their abusive partners as they do not trust in their ability to take good decisions, instead they move around feeling that they are not good enough and they fear that they will not survive out there on their own. The participants have the financial capacity to sustain themselves financially; however, they feel the need to remain with their husbands for survival. Their entrapment seems more psychological, the theory of learned helplessness helps us understand that they have learned that their attempts to escape failed hence they gave up fighting and learned to accept that their situation is helpless.

5.3 THE IMPACT OF REMAINING IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

As abused women continue to stay in abusive relationships the abuse increases in frequency and severity. Abused women may experience Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. As the woman continues to stay in the abusive relationship, she begins to identify with the abuser, becomes brainwashed, may cling to her husband, and behave in irrational ways. The long term effects may also present with profound sense of betrayal of trust, depression, suicide ideations, guilt, shame, and feelings of inferiority. Abused women are more likely to attempt suicide. An abused woman may be extremely afraid for her personal safety. An abused woman may also experience feelings of self blame, for causing her husband to abuse her in order to feel as if she has control over what has happened. However, as the abuse continues abused women blame themselves for tolerating the abuse.

5.4 THE MEANING ATTACHED TO STAYING

Abused women remain in abusive relationships for a variety of reasons; some of those reasons are discussed in the next paragraph. Most abused wives attribute the failure of their marriages to their own personal inadequacies, such as thinking that their husbands abuse them because they are not good enough, and that they do not show enough respect to their husbands. In the African culture women are expected to keep their marriage together and that

if a marriage fails women are often blamed for the failed marriage. Women who have failed to keep the marriage together are called names, those names basically emphasize that they have failed. Women therefore try to fight to save the marriage no matter how difficult. Hence, should the marriage fail they blame themselves for the failed marriage, by thinking that they must have done something wrong personally to divide their family. The African cultural, societal beliefs and the Christian view, that it is the woman's responsibility to keep a marriage together and that a divorce woman is viewed as a failure discourages women from leaving abusive marital relationships. Instead abused women are encouraged to hold on to marital abusive relationships. Personality factors, such as how the woman feels about herself, self esteem, sense of shame, fear, and lack of emotional support can also contribute to women remaining in marital abusive relationships.

5.5 THE ABUSED WIVES COPING MECHANISMS

Abused women try very hard to cope with the abuse because of the negative attitudes, such as being called names and being labelled as a failure that the society has about abuse. However, some of the coping mechanisms, such as denial, that they use can be detrimental to their psychological well being. Women in abusive relationships use various coping mechanisms, such as praying, denial, using substances like alcohol or drugs and so on. They can also depend on the social support that can be offered by family and other professionals.

All the abused women in the study mentioned that they sought solace in prayer and that they seek counselling from their priests when they encountered problems in their marriages. The priest served as a support system and offered guidance on how to cope with the abuse in the marriage. The candidates were also encouraged to pray about their problems during those sessions with the priest. Abused women use different strategies to cope with the abuse in their relationships, most women who participated in the study, use emotion focused coping, which is a style of coping that is usually used in situations which are viewed as unchangeable. It serves as an emotional and arousal oriented coping style with the purpose of reducing negative emotions regarding a situation and preventing further emotional pain (Lazarus & Folkman cited in Barkhuizen, 2004). Emotion focused strategies include behaviours such as looking on the brighter side of things, accepting sympathy and understanding from others, and trying to forget about the problem. Examples are denial, avoidance, religious faith, acceptance and social support. Data indicates that abused wives minimize and deny the

occurrence of the abuse or resort to using substances or drugs, like alcohol. However, the use of such drugs can pose serious threats to their psychological and physical well being in a long run.

5.6 SOCIAL SUPPORT

The women interviewed in the study indicated their families, friends and general society as unsupportive towards their option to leave the abusive partner; instead they reported that they were generally encouraged to hold on to their marriages. They also feel that society supports patriarchy and man's behaviour, such as having extra marital affairs is acceptable and tolerated. African men are perceived as powerful, decision makers and heads of families. African women were socialised to respect their husbands and to keep their family problems secret. It appears as though most of the abused women were not aware of the support structures available for them, such as support groups, which can offer them emotional support, and the justice system, which can offer a protection order in cases where there is physical abuse.

Highly educated women (with at least tertiary qualification) who find themselves in abusive relationships are likely to become oblivious of their surroundings and loose touch with resources available in the community, and therefore, unable to help themselves and others. These women adopted various strategies of dealing with their problems, such as becoming too spiritual and using denial as a coping mechanism. The majority relied on their parents for emotional support, but it appears that they did not get the support that they hoped for; instead their families encouraged them to hold on to their marriages. Those who opted to report the abuse to the police indicated that they were encouraged by their families not to pursue the option of reporting the case to the police or to drop the charges. The participants indicated that their families encouraged the victims to handle their marital problems privately and to rather solve the problems within the family, with the help of the elders.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to explore the experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in marital abusive relationships. In the next paragraph the researcher made recommendations to assist abused women and therapists working with abused women

to understand the dynamics of abusive relationships. The recommendations will help towards developing intervention strategies and improving on the current or existing programmes aimed at helping abuse victims. The findings will be available for organizations working with abused women to help them deal with abused victims more sensitively.

(i) PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Clinical and Counselling Psychologists should develop social programmes, like support groups, which can help women explore some of the challenges that victims of abuse are faced with, thereby put things into perspective and generate more understanding on the dynamics of such relationships and improving on the existing campaigns against women abuse to help empower women with knowledge about the dynamics of abusive relationships, targeting women especially in the rural areas. The targeted province is the Mpumalanga province as it has sections that are neglected due to the fact that those sections are quite remote.

(ii) THE MEDIA

The problem of wife abuse should be discussed more often on the media, for example, TV, Radio, etc., to help the women who are still not aware of the dynamics of abusive relationships, thereby, reducing the number of abuse victims. Currently there are adverts on TV and on print media that attempt to teach women about abuse and the resources that are available for abuse victims, but they are quite few. Hence, there is a need for a more aggressive approach. Officials from the Government may also be encouraged to take part in those activities in order to help other women realise that abuse cuts across, it is not only restricted to one social group. The department of Social development and other organizations, like People Opposing Women Abuse can form a collaboration with the South African Broadcasting Commission and work towards creating informative adverts that will reach every woman in South Africa.

(iii) POLICE SERVICES

The new Domestic Violence Act (116 of 1998) has a clause that emphasize that the police personnel should be trained to handle the cases better. The police are now trained to handle cases of abuse with more sensitivity and women are now given opportunities to talk to female

cops in cases where there is a necessity. The response time or rate has also improved, that may also encourage more and more women to report abuse when it occurs. Such changes allow women to have more faith in the justice system and it enables them to have more faith in them. The abuse activists and organizations should continue to put efforts towards activities that would encourage the police personnel to be more sensitive towards the needs of abused women. Organizations like the People Opposing Women Abuse should continue to do the good work that they are doing, working with relevant stakeholders, like South African Police Services to help abuse victims.

(iv) PATRIARCHY

Social therapists, such as social workers, psychologists and other social activists dealing with issues of gender, have a huge task ahead of them with regards to redressing the issues of gender and power. Therapists are more likely to come across abused women who may decide to seek counselling in therapy rooms. What suppress most women are the macro system arrangements in our society. As mentioned earlier our society is still characterised by patriarchy, which makes it difficult for mind shifts to occur amongst the community members. Policies on domestic violence may have been changed, but people still need to be socialised to treat women equally and fairly, by educating our community members that women should be treated with respect. The study indicated that culture contributes towards women abuse, by instilling that men are superior from women and for change to occur, there should be a mind shift with regard to how women in general are perceived.

5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

(i) The researcher may not generalise the results of this study, because the results are not representative of people from other locations, only nine black women, from the Mpumalanga province were interviewed for the study.

(ii) The results are based on what the participants had to share with the researcher. Some of the participants were secretive and not very open to talk about certain issues.

(iii) The qualitative nature of the study created some limitations on the methodology. The Swazi and the Ndebele cultural background of the participants encourages abuse victims to

keep their problems to themselves; the participants could have been withholding some of the experiences that they went through during the interviews. Some of the experiences that they could not share might have been very valuable towards the conclusions.

5.9 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences, the impact of remaining in an abusive marital relationship and the coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in marital abusive relationships. The research was intended to explore the dynamics of abusive marital relationships. A complexity of factors contribute towards abuse victims resorting to remaining in abusive relationships, for example, culture and societal beliefs and structures, personality factors, and lack of support. The study aimed to explore the meaning attached to remaining in abusive relationships in order to help abused women understand the dynamics of abusive relationships.

The results from this study highlight the importance of dealing with people holistically, not in isolation from their social environment. It is easier to understand people's behaviour when one knows the meaning attached to behaviour. Human beings function within a system, they are affected by their system and they also affect the system, they are not in isolation. If one needs to cause change, the whole system should be taken in to consideration. A lot still needs to be done to redress the societal factors that encourage woman abuse, for example, young men and women should be taught from an earlier age that human beings are all equal and they all deserve to be treated fairly and with respect in spite of their gender. It appears that the women interviewed in the study were highly educated and had average paying jobs, but they were still unable to separate from their abusive partners because of cultural practices. Although there is an improved legal system in our country, some African cultures, such as the Swazi, Zulu and Ndebele culture as well as the Christian religion still condemn divorce and women are encouraged to stay married. However, it should be noted that human beings are diverse, irrespective of the cultural and the religious prescriptions, certain people still decide to divorce when they are unhappy. However for the purpose of this study, the focus was more on abused women who decide to stay married to their abusive partners. It is therefore important for therapists to take the background of the abuse victim in to consideration when dealing with abused women in therapy. Abused women observed over time that their families

and community condone and normalises marital abuse, by saying statements, like marriage is not easy.

The study brought understanding to reasons attached to staying in abusive partners and the coping mechanisms they use to cope with the abuse. It is hoped that the recommendations from this study will encourage further research. The results may also help abuse victims and mental health workers to help deal with abuse victims effectively. It is easier to be empathetic towards abuse victims when one understands the dynamics of an abusive relationship.

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Appendix A

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Mlombo Fikile (Ms)

013 794 4290

CONSENT FORM

TITLE: Experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships

I, THE UNDERSIGNED (state full initials and surname)

.....

DECLARE myself willing to participate voluntarily and without remuneration in the proposed research study which will be undertaken by Ms F E Mlombo for the purpose of a Masters Degree dissertation.

The participants will be required to take part in an interview process that will take approximately one hour. This undertaking is subject to the conditions that all information will be treated as confidential and that my identity will be protected at all times. Participation in this study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without negative consequences for the respondent. The data will be destroyed should the respondent wish to withdraw. The researcher and her supervisor (Mrs. R Gcabo) are the only individuals who will have access to raw data from interviews.

The study will not harm the participants physically but the interview might raise emotions from participants, participants who become emotional after the interview will be debriefed by a qualified counsellor.

In addition, I undertake that all interviews may be audio taped and notes may be taken during the interviews. These recordings may not be used for purposes other than this research study. Respondents are allowed to contact the researcher in connection with the interview details if they want to. The data gathered from the respondents during the interview will be stored in the University of Pretoria, Psychology department for a minimum of 15 years. The results of the study will be made available to the University of Pretoria library and any member of the republic of South Africa and abroad who has interest in the study.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study you are requested to sign this consent form before participation.

Signed aton this the.....day of2007

As witnesses:

1.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

Appendix B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Identity no...

TITLE: EXPERIENCES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF BLACK MIDDLE CLASS WOMEN WHO REMAIN IN MARITAL ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

SP no....

Pseudo Name:..... Date of interview

Venue.....

Start time: Finish time:

Biographical information

1. Date of birth..... Age.....
2. Home language.....
3. Home address.....
4. Contact no.....
5. Marital status..... Married.....
Single.....
Divorced.....
6. Length of marriage.....
7. Do you have children?..... No
Yes
8. Are you in an abusive relationship? No
Yes
- 8.1 If yes, for how long have you been in that abusive relationship?
9. Are you still married to your abusive partner? No
Yes
10. What is the highest level of education completed?.....
11. Do you have a constant source of income?.....
12. What is your current employment status?.....
13. On average, how much do you earn per month?...R.....
14. How many people live in the house?.....
15. To which cultural group do you belong?

If the participant does not qualify to participate in the study, they will be thanked for their participation.

MAIN QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a Counselling Masters student at the University of Pretoria, Department of Psychology. I am conducting a study on the experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. I would like to ask you questions about your situation. I would like you to read through the consent form and sign it if you agree to continue with the study.

A. Experience

- (i) May you please tell me a little bit about your current relationship with your spouse
- (ii) May you describe the form of abuse that you experienced in your relationship with your husband
- (ii) Why do you think the abuse is continuing the way it is in your relationship?
- (iii) Why do you think this is happening to you?
- (iv) Other than in your relationship, where did you first experience abuse?

B. Impact

- (i) How does the abuse experience make you feel?
- (ii) (Scenario) Discuss the cycle of abuse
Explore how the client reacted after the:
(a) First abuse experience (b) the middle phase e.g. 5 years later (c) now
- (iii) Did the abuse experience affect how to relate to other people?

C. Meaning for staying

- (i) In your view, what are the causes of remaining in your marriage with your abusive partner?
Explore the following: (a) Culture (b) Family (c) Religion (d) Children

D. Coping

- (i) What ways did you use to cope with the abuse?
- (ii) During the First stages of abuse (iii) Middle phase (iv) Currently

E. Support

- (i) It has been noticed that you are part of a support group, what motivated you to join the support group?
- (a) What kind of support do you receive from the support group?
- (b) Is there any other support that you would like to receive?
- (c) Is there anything that the Government is doing to support abused women?
- (d) What do you think should be done to support women in abusive relationships?
- (e) How do you evaluate the support that you receive at the centre?
- (f) How do you evaluate the support that you receive in your family?
- (g) How do you evaluate the support in any other place?
- (h) Do you have knowledge of any other support available for abused women?

Thank you for participating in the study!

Appendix C

University of Pretoria
Department of Psychology
Pretoria
0001
Mlombo F.E (Ms)
078 129 5619

Department of Health and Social services
Private Bag x 4002
KwaMhlanga
1022

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in marital abusive relationships. An application for permission to conduct a study amongst women within the Support group

I am a Masters Psychology student at the University of Pretoria. I am conducting a study on Experiences and coping mechanisms of black middle class women who remain in abusive marital relationships. I hereby request for permission to interview the women who are part of the support group which is under the management of the Social Service department.

Attached is the letter from the University of Pretoria.

I will appreciate if the department would give me permission to conduct the study.

Yours truly,

Mlombo F. E (Ms)
078 129 5617