African women in abusive relationships with intimate partners:
A sociological study

by

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I Kampata Geraldine Dolo declare that this dissertation is my own unaided original work.

I declare that all necessary efforts have been made in order to acknowledge and reference all secondary material used in this dissertation.

Signature: _____

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ABSTRACT AND KEY WORDS

ABSTRACT: Against the background of a history of apartheid and colonialism, high levels of unemployment, an established tradition of hegemonic masculinity, pervasive violence, especially gender-based violence, as well as some of the highest levels of inequality in the world, this mini-dissertation focuses on the accounts of a cross-class selection of African women who live in South Africa and who self-identify as being in a relationship with an abusive intimate partner. It is based on eight in depth interviews with women, many of whom are immigrants or migrants from elsewhere on the continent, and all of whom are either married or in long-term relationships with their partners and have children. The study focused on the factors that impacted on their decision to stay on in the abusive relationship as well as on their internal thoughts and how these illuminate their decision to stay. In particular, the study explores how to make sense of the notion of 'agency' when considering women who stay on in an abusive relationship, and draws on the work of Margaret Archer on reflexivity and internal thoughts, as distinct from and in addition to a Bourdieusian focus on habitus and a structural analysis of the social context in which the abuse takes place and of factors that impede participants' ability to leave the abusive relationship.

The study identifies the key factors women cite as playing a role in their decision to stay, namely fear of violence; a concern with providing a 'home' for children; cultural considerations and family pressures; and structural factors (finance, migration status, employment status and a lack of adequate support structures). In addition, one of the major contributions of this study is its focus on the participants' self-described internal thought processes to consider to what extent these processes could be described as demonstrative of or enabling 'agency' in difficult circumstances.

KEY WORDS: *intimate partner violence; agency; abuse; refugee; patriarchal; migration; reflexivity; culture; gender-based violence; habitus; reflexive states; internal thoughts; children; Archer; Bourdieu*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

South Africa is a country of cultural diversity, a country of refuge for many, and a country full of history. Yet according to Moffett, (2006:129) it is said to have "the worst known figures of gender based violence for a country not at war". According to some statistics, South Africa was rated highest in the world for violence against women. Research found that between 25% and 55% of women have experienced physical intimate partner violence, and the rate of female homicide by an intimate partner is six times the global average (Jewkes and Morrell, 2010). Another study showed that approximately half of all South African women murdered in 1999 were killed by intimate partners; it also shows that domestic violence affects as many as one in two women in some parts of South Africa (Garcia-Moreno and Guedes, 2012).

However, this should not take our attention away from the fact that abuse is a global problem affecting millions of women. It has been estimated to affect between 10% and 60% of women, cutting across economic, social, religious and racial lines (Fox et.al, 2007). Historically, we read that for centuries, women have been subjects of abuse, discrimination and marginalisation (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Despite women gaining more power and the freedom to fight for their own rights in recent decades, it is still evident that women are seen as subordinate to men in some communities. This is further emphasised by Connell (2005) in Jewkes and Morrell (2010:3) who argues that "…women are globally subordinated to men".

Abuse against women in South Africa must be analysed against the backdrop of the history of the country. Factors such as the aftermath of apartheid, wide-spread poverty, a lack of education and very high levels of unemployment, all contribute to the high rates of intimate partner violence.

In addition, however, according to Jewkes and Morrell (2010), South Africa's society is strongly patriarchal and violence against women is widespread. Jewkes and Morrell (2010), drawing on Connell (2005), argue that South Africa has a dominant "hegemonic masculinity", which is generally associated with the subordination and oppression of women. They argue that there is a strong representation of the dominant cultural model of idealised manhood where idealised or 'successful' manhood is one that legitimates the subordination and control of women by men:

1

Men's control over women is seen as a sign of masculinity. Culture, religion and media reinforce these norms. These norms promote the view that men should be in power within homes and public institutions, which women should be in a position to subservience (Jewkes et. al. 2011:22).

According to Jewkes and Morrell,

Hegemonic masculinity is given power as a 'cultural norm' (2010:3).

Another factor to consider is the effectiveness of institutions that cater to assisting women in abusive situations. Dutton (1992) states that one of the major factors that influence abused women's efforts to escape from the abuse is the response of institutions, which are designed to provide protection and security for these women. In the South African context, we see that NGO's are not fully equipped with sufficient resources to efficiently help. Jewkes and Morrell (2010:9), also point this out as they agree that:

…resources for this work remain severely and disproportionately limited.

There is a shortage of social workers as well as money to fund the many projects needing assistance. Additionally, the police are not very resourceful when it comes to assisting the women who report the abuse, nor do they keep records of such reports (Walter and Morna, 2010). Another argument raised by Jewkes and Wood (1997), is the fact that these institutions are neglecting work with men. This is partly due to the fact that the institutions prefer to allocate the scarce resources they do have to women. However, it is important to note that attention should be shifted towards changing the attitudes of men if we are to move into the right direction when it comes to fighting this pandemic. A positive institutional response can help facilitate an abused woman's success in avoiding further abuse as well as potentially mediate the severity of the traumatic effect of the abuse; talking about her experiences in a safe environment can facilitate the woman's healing process.

Against the background of this broader history of gender-based violence, the researcher argues that intimate partner abuse should not be ignored. Examining the above-mentioned factors that contribute to the alarming rates of abuse against women is of paramount importance. This research seeks to tackle this issue and to do so in a way that examines women who stay in abusive relationships' sense of agency, as well as factors impacting their decision to stay; particularly as it relates to questions of culture and its relation to hegemonic masculinity.

Archer's concept of reflexivity and agency and Bourdieu's concept of habitus will be examined so as to highlight the relation of culture and agency and how these impact dynamically on women's decision to stay in abusive relationships.

Some researchers have argued against using culture as the primary way of understanding or accounting for the different dynamics around abuse. For example, Fox et. al. (2007) have argued instead that it is important to bear in mind the structural roots of inequality and the legacy of a violent state apparatus to avoid pathologising or essentialising South African culture. However, the researcher chose to include a focus on culture nonetheless and against the background of this broader history because culture is one of the main factors that governs people's way of life, their thought process and in many ways their choices and decisions. In the researcher's opinion, culture is the very foundation of socialisation. The aim therefore, is not to state culture as the main reason why women stay in abusive relationships, but rather to explore it as one of the prevalent reasons among others.

CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2. 1.Research Question
How do black women in South Africa who are in a relationship with abusive intimate partners narrate, and account for the position they find themselves in and what are the factors they identify as central to their decision to stay in such abusive relationships?

Other key research questions:
- *How central are cultural considerations as factors influencing their decisions to stay?*
- *What kind of internal conversations do these women report as having influenced their decision to stay?*
- *How do we understand their agency as expressed through their decision to stay in abusive relationships as well as their reported "internal conversations"?*

2.2. Background and Rationale
This topic is relevant and necessary in South Africa, because as stated, abuse against women is a major problem in the nation, and it may well be termed a pandemic. Ebbe and Das (2010) state that according to the Institute of Security Studies in South Africa, research results generally confirm that abuse against women is most likely to happen in the home, a supposedly safe place for these women. This is further emphasised by Mabena (2002:11) who states that:

> In the South African context, abuse is widely tolerated and has come to be perceived as normal and largely accepted rather than challenged. This has led many women to perceive abuse as normal/acceptable; causing them to stay in abusive relationships.

In fact, the main finding from the researcher's honours project entitled: *Women and Abuse in South Africa: Do They Leave or Do They Stay? Social Workers' Perceptions*, was that most women that the social workers, who participated in the study, work with do in fact choose to stay in abusive relationships. Their staying in such relationships was as a result of many factors, which will be discussed later in this research study. It is also important to note that the range of choices that women who find themselves in abusive relationships have may be very circumscribed and that staying does not necessarily imply that the abuse was seen as normal by all women involved. Moreover, the social workers that were interviewed argued that the danger of being killed after leaving an abusive relationship forces many women to endure abuse, choosing one lesser evil over another (Dolo, 2012).

In addition, another very important reason for conducting this research is that children are mentally, emotionally and in many instances physically affected by abuse too. The cycle of abuse becomes harder to break when children are subjected to a home of abuse.

Children are said to learn by observation, and what they see impacts greatly on how they behave. It is therefore possible to set the notion that a child under the care of an abused woman or in an abusive environment is very likely to be affected.

Walker (1979) argues that the experience of abuse between caretakers have been explored as factors in predicting subsequent abuse in later adult intimate relationships. Several studies have also found that the impact of witnessing parental abuse in childhood is a stronger predictor of abuse in adulthood than the direct experience of childhood abuse. This view is shared by Jewkes et. al. (2004) who note that childhood exposure to sexual violence including being physically punished frequently and witnessing abuse perpetrated on a mother were predictors of (sexual) violence.

Ebbe and Das (2010) point out that there are indications that exposure to abuse, particularly at an impressionable stage of personal development, contributes to perceptions of violent behaviour being a normal way of dealing with conflict. This may lead to abuse compliance in adult life. Mabena (2002) highlights this fact by stating that there is a greater likelihood for individuals who were exposed to abuse at an early age to continue this pattern into their adult relationships. This is because in most cases the children were caught up in their parents' conflict. This is reinforced by Cohen, Groves and Kracke (2009: 78) who argue that:

> Children react to exposure to violence in different ways... however children's exposure to violence has been associated with difficulties with attachment, regressive behaviour, anxiety and depression, aggression and conduct problems, dating violence, delinquency and involvement with child welfare and juvenile justice systems. There is a strong likelihood that exposure to violence will affect children's capacity for parenting later in life, continuing the cycle of violence into the next generation.

Garcia-Moreno, Knerr and Guedes (2012) also argue that many studies have found that intimate partner violence against women had negative social and health consequences for children. This includes anxiety, depression, poor school performance and negative health outcomes. It also makes the children susceptible to abuse later in life.

Based on the above evidence, the cycle of abuse is bound to continue if children are continuously exposed to abuse in their homes. This too will continue unless greater attention is placed on understanding and dealing with abuse, educating and empowering women as well as providing adequate, immediate help for women in need. The discussion above emphasises why researching such a topic is relevant. It has been highlighted that the issue of abuse has been normalised, despite it being a pandemic in South Africa.

Furthermore, women who do not stay are often likely to be killed or assaulted by the abuser. The cycle of abuse is likely to affect children and thus causes social harm to the next generation.

Fear of the abuser, poor institutional responses to abused women, the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, as well as the psycho-social factors related to the aftermath of apartheid, wide-spread poverty and high levels of unemployment are some of the factors that have fuelled the prominence of intimate partner abuse. It is important, however, to remember that abuse always should be studied within context. Not all women experience abuse in the same way, nor will their choices be based on the same factors. Their agency in relation to the decisions they make will not be identical. Identifying these differences is a major key to fighting this pandemic; which is the focus of this study.

If one understands 'agency' narrowly as 'action', this would be alarming as choosing to stay may then imply that women choose to tolerate or live with abuse. If this is so, where then does it leave the issue of fighting against something that is tolerated? This emphasises the fact that researching and delving deeper into these issues, including understanding of 'agency' is of paramount importance in South Africa.

There is therefore a need to identify in greater detail the issues that lead women to the decision of staying in an abusive relationship. Knowing the reasons why abused women will stay in this kind of relationship will allow for better assistance and allowing women who find themselves in such situations to give an account of how this came about. Understanding, what they think about the situation they find themselves in could lead to greater understanding from scholars, social workers, other support service practitioners and possibly other women who find themselves in the same situation.

2.3. THEORETICALANDCONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
2.3.1.Culture
According to Kimmel (2008), culture can be defined as the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, institutions, beliefs, norms and values governing behaviour. Culture acts as a guideline for how people are supposed to act. Culture is multifaceted and influences us in many different ways. It is important to note, as highlighted by Hall (1997), that culture is a complex concept that holds many definitions and can at times be over-used and abused. Hall (1997) further argues that when trying to find definitions of culture, it is evident that no single unproblematic definition could be found. However, for the purpose of this research, it is Kimmel's broad understanding of culture that will be used. For the researcher, culture is that invisible 'force' that is socially constructed and reconstructed, that informs and shapes our behaviours, choices and decisions in direct and covert ways. Culture could thus be seen as a socialisation agent.

Bauman, cited in Archer (1988: 189) argues that:

> Culture as a whole labours on ordering the universe for humankind and without its success there would be no human actors or social interaction, for both are dependent upon a framework of meanings.

Culture is therefore seen to provide the essential condition of social life. Yet many studies have critiqued the choice to use culture in an attempt to understand issues around abuse. For example, Michalski (2004) argues that a focus on the cultural dimension of abuse may imply, a failure to recognise the underlying structural features that perpetuate abuse against women generationally. Michalski (2004) further states that the focus should rather be on the intergenerational transmission of abuse rather than a culturally transmitted set of values and beliefs. He argues that the focus on culture consequently obscures the more salient features of social life that promote violence. His main argument is that the structure of interpersonal relationships is the key feature of social life that promotes abuse.

The argument here is that culture has a major role to play in the socialisation of our lives. Our interpersonal relationships and social interactions are often governed by our cultural beliefs. The critique of culture does not present a strong enough argument. Archer cited in Elder-Vass (2007:331), argues that

> We do not make our own personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing. Our placement in society rebounds upon us, affecting the persons we become, but also and more forcefully influencing the social identities, which we can achieve.

This, in the researcher's opinion, points out the impact culture has on our way of life. Yet, Archer also highlights that human individuals have developed causal powers of their own. When culture is mentioned in this study, the focus is on the norms, behaviours, beliefs and habits that have influenced the choices, decisions and lifestyle outcomes of the research participants. As above mentioned, culture is seen by the researcher to be a strong socialisation agent; as such the researcher has explored how strongly it has influenced the participants and their decisions.

2.3.2. *Agency*

Margaret Archer, cited in Elder-Vass (2007:332), places reflexivity at the heart of her account of human agency. She also argues that:

> Our actions can be guided by the capability that human beings have to develop normative projects as a consequence of reflexive deliberations upon our social situations.

The researcher relates this statement to the abused women in this study. Although culture is strongly seen as a key component that governs people's decisions, the researcher also believes as stated by Archer, that the women who participated in this study have the ability to reflexively negotiate within themselves based on the social situation they are facing. Archer's view of individual agency is identified with emergent or developing causal powers people have. This could thus imply that regardless of the impact of culture on the women's decision to stay in the abusive relationship, their agency also plays a role. The aim, therefore, is to examine the tension between culture, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Archer's concept of individual reflexivity in order to conceptualise the notion of agency deployed in this study.

With reference to culture and its relation to agency and the role it plays in the women's' decisions, we are essentially talking about their internal thoughts when we follow Archer's model. It is evident that Bourdieu's argument about habitus, as discussed in Elder-Vass's work, is contesting that of Archers. He sees the habitus as produced by social conditioning (culture) and it tends to encourage people to behave in ways that reproduce existing practices as well as the existing structure of society. This conditioning is effective in the sense that spontaneity without consciousness or will is produced. According to Elder-Vass, Bourdieu sees this as a process of becoming "embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (Elder-Vass, 2007: 327).

Although the researcher agrees that culture's force is indeed very strong in influencing and predisposing behaviours, there still remains an element of choice and spontaneity to every decision or choice; whether this is played out upon by the individual remains the question. Archer also argues that when trying to understand the concept of culture and its utility or usefulness to society, it is important to note that human beings, social structures and cultural entities each have their own distinct existence and as such influences our social outcomes. Hence, the point is that the contribution of agency to human actions we take will vary according to the situation, the individual as well as the historical context. It is therefore important to note that although the focus is on culture, this is not the single focus of the study. Looking at the women's agency outside of culture is also important. Culture is just a component of the study.

With reference to this research, the researcher looked at whether the need of participants who stay in abusive relationships' to reproduce existing practices was unreflexive.

8

An example would be to look at women who grew up in societies where marriage is a lifelong commitment regardless of the internal problems within the relationship versus those women who grew up in families where divorce was socially acceptable. It was important to understand the 'process' of the internal conversations they had with themselves, in order to get to any given decision.

For Bourdieu, we acquire primary habitus in early childhood, but as we enter new social fields, we develop a habitus that is specific to that particular field. For Archer however, reflexivity or agency is understood as a power that humans possess. In other words, it is the ability to monitor ourselves in relation to the circumstances we face; this is exercised through conscious reflexive deliberations. According to Archer (1988), we conduct internal continual conversations with ourselves about ourselves. She further argues that such reflexivity is a mature ability to the development of a personal identity and social identity. The researcher is convinced by Archer's argument because she not only focuses on women's agency, but also on the social influences on human behaviour. The point here is that our identities are not made under the circumstances of our own choosing. Our placement in society affects the persons we become and more importantly influences the social identities we achieve. Yet, there is space for internal deliberation that cannot be reduced to the decision that is made.

As mentioned in the introduction, South Africa is a country filled with diverse cultures, with different types of social issues such as poverty, lack of education and unemployment facing our women; it is therefore safe to argue that their cultural backgrounds among other things will influence their choices in very different ways. Yet, according to Archer: (1988:72)

> Culture should never be detached from human agency.

2.3.3. Intimate Partner Violence

This research speaks of the concept of intimate partner violence because the focus is on the abuse that takes place between two people who are involved in an intimate relationship. According to Jewkes et. al. (2011), intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women. This form of violence is entrenched in gender inequality at a structural and relational level. However, in this section, a broad set of definitions of abuse are discussed so as to highlight the complexity of abuse; abuse takes many forms and its effects are vast. Research suggests that different types of abuse can often coexist (Gracia-Morena and Guedes, 2012).We find in the literature both a broad and a narrow definition of abuse and intimate partner abuse.

Ebbe and Das (2010) argue that abuse includes any threats to cause harm, comprising coercion or force to unwanted acts, denial of financial support, constant threats of divorce or abandonment and denial of peace of mind.

On the other hand, to Koss et. al (1994) abuse against women takes many forms, including rape, battering and sexual harassment. They also point out that understanding male abuse against women requires examining the power inequalities between men and women, including legal, economic and physical power inequalities. Davis (2008) argues that abuse can also be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner; it can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation and religion. The key is to note that abuse affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels; although it varies in seriousness and frequency. This shows that the issue of dominance and control is central to most understandings of abuse.

Jewkes et. al. (2004) state that there is substantial overlapping between the emotional, physical and sexual types of intimate partner violence. According to Garcia-Moreno, Knerr and Guedes (2012), intimate partner abuse refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. It is based on this definition that the researcher selected the study's participants. The focus was not placed on any of the above mentioned harms: physical, psychological or sexual. The aim was to simply find women who had experienced any of those harms or all three.

Recently, intimate partner abuse has been seen to replace the notion of domestic violence or domestic abuse. Although some literature uses the term "violence", for this study the term "abuse" will be used as an all-encompassing term to define these power relations within the relationship. A second issue to consider is what causes (intimate partner violence) abuse. According to the UNICEF discussion on domestic violence against women and girls, it is argued that abuse against women is very pervasive and persistent; this therefore makes it difficult to explain it as solely the product of individual psychopathology or faulty communication (UNICEF, 2000). This type of violence is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout the women's lives. According to Walker (1979), abuse is a serious social disorder, a combination of sociological and psychological variables.

At a societal level, male abuse against women is seen as a manifestation of gender inequality and as a mechanism for the subordination of women (UNICEF, 2000). Many scholars agree with this point and add on to the point by stating that the abuse of women serves to reproduce and maintain the status quo of male dominance. UNICEF (2000) explains abuse as a demonstration of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. This has in turn led to the prevention of the full advancement of women. UNICEF further argues that the vast majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men who have some sort of relationship with their victims; that could be intimate, working or acquaintance relationships.

The feminist view, according to Koss et.al. (1994), is one that seeks to 'name' abusive acts in ways that give voice to women's personal experiences rather than using labels that obscure or distort women's experiences. This research study aims to focus on the women's experiences as well, having them share their stories and experiences makes the findings more personal and authentic. The researcher seeks to ensure that the experiences shared are lived ones and not 'second hand' stories. Feminists also believe that the study of abuse continues to be plagued by terminological and consequently conceptual difficulties that influence our understanding of women's experiences. The researcher believes that the feminist view is one that links in with Archer's concept of reflexivity and agency; where the women's own voice and experience is at the forefront. The focus here is on the women's internal conversations and thoughts, not a mere focus on concepts, habits or traditions.

Anderson's study (1997) also sheds some light on the international understandings of the causes of abuse, particularly in the United States of America (USA), where feminist sociologists contend that issues of gender and power are the ultimate root of abuse or intimate violence; while sociologists from other substantive traditions argue that patriarchy is just one variable in a complex constellation of causes. Feminist research further shows that abuse is part of a system of coercive controls through which men maintain societal dominance over women. Other scholars suggest that the privacy and isolation of modern households in the USA and cultural support for violence facilitate domestic violence (Ebbe and Das, 2010).

Anderson (1997) used two theories to support her view on abuse. Firstly, resource theory proposes that violence is used by individuals to gain social power when they lack other means to do so. Secondly, gender theory suggests that men and women attempt to gain social power from different positions within a cultural context of male dominance.

In relation to the causes of abuse in South Africa, a study by Jewkes and Morrell (2010) highlights some causes of intimate partner violence. They argue that in South Africa, while gender identities show diversity, the dominant ideal of black African manhood emphasise toughness, strength and expression of prodigious sexual success. They further state that hegemonically men are expected to be in control of women, and violence may be used to establish this control. Instead of resisting this, the dominant ideal of femininity embraces compliance and tolerance if violent and hurtful behaviour. Gender power inequity in relationships is thus a cause of intimate partner violence according to them.

It is clear to see that abuse is complex and can be understood and experienced differently. We can however, find that issues such as power, gender inequality, a culture of abuse and patriarchy to name a few, are all common factors in our broad understanding of abuse.

Nonetheless, a more important point to consider is the argument raised by Jewkes (2002), who states that understanding the causes of intimate partner violence is substantially more difficult than studying a disease. She qualifies this point by stating that this is because intimate partner violence is entirely a product of its social context; thereby, this raises a need to study intimate partner violence in many social contexts so as to understand this form of violence better. Equally important to note is that intimate partner violence varies between countries and between otherwise similar settings within countries.

For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on a broad understanding of abuse, which centres on power relations that highlight gender inequality between the abused women and the male abusers. As stated by Walker (1979), the researcher concurs that abuse is in fact a social disorder. The researcher also takes on Koss et al's (1994) argument; which states that along with physical power, inequality also highlights legal and economic inequality. The researcher believes that these play a major role in our understanding of abuse, however, the feminist view which gives voice to women and their personal experiences is key in this research. Consequently understanding the internal thoughts of women who have chosen to stay in abusive relationships and examining how these governed their decisions will be very crucial to the findings.

The complexity of abuse highlights the importance of realising that even though abuse is perpetrated by an individual, abusive behaviour takes place in a socio-cultural context. It is therefore important to understand the context in which this abuse occurs; this is true of many societies because the societal perceptions are ones that overlook the circumstances around which the abuse takes place. Many people question why the women do not leave the abusive relationship, not realising that for many of the women, it is not that simple. Mabena (2002) argues that this is due to the traditional view on abuse. It is one where women are seen as victims, vulnerable and dependent; and in many instances they are blamed for leaving the relationship albeit an abusive one.

In the next chapter, the literature review supporting this study will be presented.

CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The South African context

Abuse against women in South Africa must be analysed against the backdrop of the country's history. South Africans experienced a history of colonialism as well as forty years of apartheid, which amount to many years of oppression, discrimination and poverty. These factors are all very important, when trying to analyse why abuse against women occurs. It is also very significant to note that the socio-political history of South Africa has eroded family and community life, an example being migrant work, which left many families fatherless (Ramphela, 1993).

The issue of apartheid is further argued by Henrard (2002) who states that South Africa has to deal with the legacy of apartheid's abuse of several techniques of minority protection where apartheid policy badly affected the concepts and techniques of group identities and group rights. In these instances, black people were almost always disadvantaged. This disadvantage is seen in the way in which apartheid was characterised by its central policy of "divide and rule" that was aimed at ensuring white survival and hegemony by dividing non-white population along racial and ethnic lines. In addition to that, apartheid was a scheme to dis-empower the non-white (black) population and corrupt the education system, which affected the education of black South Africans. Once one's education is affected, it places many barriers in ensuring a 'successful' future.

In relation to other countries, South Africa has a major problem when looking at issues of abuse. Mlombo (2010) states that research has shown that in South Africa a woman has about one in three chances of being violated in her lifetime; this has put South Africa amongst the highest statistics of abuse in the world. According to Moffett (2006), South Africa has the worst known figures of gender-based abuse for a country not at war. She argues that contemporary sexual abuse in South Africa is fuelled by 'justificatory narratives', which are rooted in apartheid and illegitimate violence by the dominant group against the disempowered in political arenas as well as in social, informal and domestic spaces. Her argument hinges on the fact that abuse is being justified as the blame is placed on issues such as apartheid and violence. For example, apartheid has left many families broken and fatherless, and this therefore justifies the fact that men are powerless and the only way that they can establish their power is through abuse and violence. Violence is being seen as a means of survival rather than a destructive force in societies and families. Jewkes et. al. (2011) also state that in South Africa, the hegemonic African masculinity is framed around such ideas of heterosexual success and control of women and is believed to provide the predominant underlying connection between men's use of violence against women.

13

Fox et.al. (2007) highlight the fact that in post-apartheid democratic South Africa, abuse has become a 'socially endorsed corrective project for maintaining patriarchal order'. Ebbe and Das (2010) argue that apartheid laws, migrant labour practices and the culture of violence that developed through the struggle for freedom have separated, disintegrated and marginalised many families and communities. They further argue that the colonial domination and legacy of apartheid, demoralisation and poor self-esteem among men, as well as emasculation of men, has led many men to seek power, control and status through violent and abusive behaviour. One will find that many men were faced with unemployment issues as a result they had to look for work elsewhere (which separated them from their families) or they were left unemployed. For most men, unemployment left them feeling as less of a man and this in turn made them feel powerless, the only way for them to excurse this power was to become abusive.

Migration into South Africa is another pertinent issue influencing people's way of life in the country. In a study done by Tati (2008), it was seen that South Africa is the destination for many immigrants from all over the continent and a large proportion of migrants or migration activities are of an illegal nature. Although historically labour migration dominated the movement of people to South Africa, the post-apartheid regime has brought about a decline in the demand for foreign labour and yet a large number of migrants continue to enter the country. This in-turn poses some challenges to South Africa; these challenges arise from the fact that most migration movements are undocumented and there is also a mixed nature of migration where some are really economically motivated, others are refugees seeking asylum while others are simply illegal entries. The study uses the term "irregular migrants" to describe these types of migration movements and highlighted the fact that such migration movements may at times be associated/coincide with negative consequences such as xenophobia (Tati, 2008).

Although not a criteria in the selection process of this research study, the researcher found that most of the participants interviewed are not originally from South Africa. It was therefore useful to look at the impact migrating to South Africa could have had on them. The researcher noted that being in a foreign country with a refugee status made it very difficult for some of the women in this study to escape the abusive relationships because going back to their countries of origin was not something they wanted to do; since their motivation for moving to South Africa was to have a better life for them and their children. Going back would therefore not make sense hence placing the women in a place of double vulnerability, where they are not only faced with abuse but also the issue of being a refugee in another country.

Considering the impact of migration is important because as highlighted by Runner, Novick and Yoshihama (2009), when intimate partner abuse occurs in immigrant and refugee communities, additional challenges and complexities make it especially difficult to address.

In some cases abusive partners may use the victim's immigrant status against them, there is also a lack of familiarity in the new country's social system that may hinder women from seeking help. Menjvar and Salcido (2002) conducted a study in which they found that isolation may occur more easily for immigrant women as many left their families and friends behind. When they enter a foreign environment they may not know the language and culture. They further argue that in these situations, it is easier for men to control women's lives both emotionally and physically. Due to this isolation, the men are better able to gain sole control over resources that could offer legal, financial and or emotional support for the women. This makes the women so dependent on their abusers that they lose any control over their own lives.

In the South African context, the post-apartheid period has been characterised by complex changes in all sectors of society and many of these changes are likely to have affected gendered access to resources. Here we see a gender gap in poverty widened and it is women who are at a disadvantage. On average, female headed households are more vulnerable to poverty than households headed by men. It is further argued that a much larger proportion of women than men is participating in the labour market because women bear the overwhelming responsibility for childcare (Posel and Rogan, 2009).

It is also important to realise that most women feel shameful and are very embarrassed to describe the abusive acts that were performed on them to anyone, including the police or even family members and friends. Women are also fearful of losing financial security in a country where unemployment and poverty are so high. This point is further argued by Davis (2008) as applying in the USA, where he points out that there are dramatic differences in the reporting of abuse between affluent and educated victims and those with little education and are impoverished. This is due to the fact that affluent/educated women have the economic resources or educational level/knowledge to deal privately with the issues of being abused. However, the causal factors for abuse are more similar then they are different. This lack of or under reporting can also be seen as a contributing factor to the problem of abuse in South Africa and globally.

3.2. Why women stay

Much research has been done questioning why women stay in abusive relationships, however for the purpose of this research, the researcher will distinguish between psychological, economic, structural and cultural reasons. Walker (1979) highlights these points by arguing that many women have difficulty leaving because of complex reasons including psychological, economic, legal and social dependence. Structurally, many women have no safe place to go and fear that they cannot survive on their own; this is important because Jewkes (2002) argues that social support is a source of power for women. Good social support has been shown to be protective against intimate partner violence or is a 'power' they can use to leave the abusive relationship.

Social support from the women's family may indicate that she is valued, enhance her self-esteem and be a source of practical assistance.

Walker's (1979) understandings of why women stay seem to make psychological reasons very dominant. She draws attention to feelings of helplessness where there are repeated traumas within a short period of time; this then means that women become immune, passive and convinced that they cannot do anything to get help; this in turn leaves them feeling powerlessness. A further argument is that many women are deeply affected by the fact that society blames them for the abuse. Most of them are told that they should stop the abuse or leave and this affects their self-esteem. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, humiliation and self-blame are real psychological issues that these women deal with; the internalisation of these feelings makes it a very big internal problem to deal with (Walker, 1979).

Michalski (2004) in addition to Dolo (2012) pin point the structural factors that force women to stay. Countless women lack support from their families and society at large; this lack of support leaves them with no way out, no escape and nowhere to go. One of the strongest arguments as to why women stay is that abuse against women endures because the social structure of interpersonal relationships within societies continues to encourage the use of violence. Jewkes and Morrell (2010:3) further state that "women who adopt femininities based on resistance or indeed engage in acts of resistance can be marginalised and stigmatised". Similar studies on abuse as well as the work of Jewkes and Wood (1997), have also stressed power relations and social structures as being very important factors to consider. Jewkes and Wood (1997) argue that power relations take many forms and that these are manifested as and imposed through abuse. Fox et.al. (2007), further highlight this fact as they argue that power dynamics within a relationship play a role in the issue of abuse.

We have seen that many women are affected economically; the majority of them are not economically independent. As a result, they rely on their partners for financial support; Ebbe and Das (2010) argue that such dependence makes it very difficult to leave. The fear of the abuser's arrest makes it an even bigger burden because this will mean that they will not have an income or financial support for that period of time. Culturally, we see that most, if not all African cultures, see the men as superior and in charge. Women are encouraged to be submissive and supportive towards the men who are seen as the heads of the home. Failure to submit is seen as a sign of disrespect. Since this is a societal norm, failing to conform makes the woman somewhat of an outcast. Fox et.al. (2007) further argue that cultural constructions of sexuality also play a major role in the issue of abuse. Anderson (1997) mentions that feminist scholars emphasise the interplay between cultural constructions of femininity and structural conditions in analyses of why women do not leave abusive relationships.

It is imperative to note that the aforementioned are not the only reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. In research done by Dolo (2012), three other reasons were highlighted. Firstly, abuse is a process, it does not happen overnight, by the time the abuse becomes deadly, the woman has accepted it as being a 'normal' part of her life. Secondly, church and religion are also contributing factors. Most religions advocate staying together, cherishing and valuing the union of marriage, leaving is thus seen as not being faithful to one's religion. The third reason is fear of the abuser. As previously highlighted, leaving places great danger on the women, the abuser feels like he has lost his control when the woman leaves. In order to regain that control, he makes it his mission to get her back and abuse her even more than he did previously, as a means to affirm his power over her. Another reason is the presence of children. Many women who are being abused by intimate partners have children. Some women want financial security for their children, others want a male figure in the children's lives and still for others not having a place to go makes it really difficult to leave with the children.

In the South African context, it is important to note that many women grew up in abusive homes and this has in turn made abuse seem to be a norm. Another issue is that the way society and what young children are taught when growing up, fuels abuse and its tolerance. Michalski (2004), therefore points out the importance of challenging the cultural acceptance of violence as well as to teach children how to handle conflict non-violently.

As previously highlighted, hegemonic notions of masculinity state that men are taught that they are providers and if they fail at this, they see themselves as less of a man, this results in them being insecure in their relationships, which fuels the need to exhort power through violence (Morrell and Jewkes, 2010).When looking at global or general reasons why women all over the world (internationally) stay in abusive relationships, it was stated by Runner et. al. (2009), that many abusive men appear to be normal and may have many positive qualities; this in turn makes it easy for the women to tolerate them. The main issue is that the abuser is not always abusive. They can be charming and kind when not being abusive, meaning that when they beg for forgiveness, they are easily forgiven. The other point is that their behaviour outside of them being abusive gives the women hope for change. Anderson (1997), highlights dominant notions of femininity, which emphasise nurturance. Here women attempt to 'heal' abusive men through their love, understanding, and patience.

Gracia-Moreno and Guedes (2012) argue that women stay in abusive relationships for various reasons. Some include: fear of retaliation, lack of alternative means of economic support, concern for the children, lack of support from family and friends, stigma/ fear of losing children and finally love and the hope that the abuser will change. It is very evident that leaving abusive relationships is not as easy as one may assume it to be.

There are many factors such as psychological, physical and economical among others, that affects or influences this decision. Equally important to note, is the fact that there are not enough structural resources for women to stay on their own, this makes it more difficult to leave.

In the next chapter, the methodology used in this study will be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR
METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

A qualitative research approach was used in this study as this allowed the researcher to be part of the research as well as make the voices of the participants audible. I found this to be very enlightening because the participants' experiences were so unique to them and their situation; each interview left a desire to know more and learn more. Seeing how resilient some of these women were made the me feel hopeful and yet some interviews left mefeeling sad and somewhat despondent.

Malherbe (2005) states that this type of research allows researchers to be sensitive to the possibility of emerging new knowledge; to basically have an openness to all types of information and the acceptance that this information can be interpreted in a number of different ways. I found this to be very true in my own study, because as I interviewed the women, they opened my eyes to more information and issues that I personally would not have been able to 'come up with'. I also found that having an openness to the information they shared made the study fuller and richer than it would have been otherwise.

Qualitative interviews were conducted therefore because they allowed for an understanding of the world from the participants' point of view, as Archer (1988) argues that women's internal thoughts are very important if we are to fully understand the role of reflexivity and agency as contributing factors to their decision to stay. It was therefore very critical that I allowed the participants to fully open up and give meanings to their lived experiences. Hearing their individual experiences and how they chose to make their decision was invaluable; the women's internal thoughts were very different and as such had a different impact on their experiences and decisions.

4.2. Research Design

I conducted an exploratory, qualitative research study with the aim of gaining knowledge from abused women living with intimate partners. According to Blanche and Durrheim (1999), exploratory studies are normally used to make initial investigations into fairly unknown areas of research. Although much research has been done on abuse, not much has placed focus on the internal thoughts of the women.

I opted for this research design because it allowed me to gain insight into and comprehension of a very relevant topic of research in the South African context, especially given the very high rates of abuse in the country. This method also allowed for data to be gained in an open, flexible and inductive manner.

19

The aim of the research was to gain more insight into the participants' perceptions and thoughts and qualitative research's primary goal is for the researcher to understand and describe human action from the insider's perspective (Babbie and Mouton, 2005). Tutty et. al. (1996), further argue that it allows for the acquisition of an insider's point of view while maintaining the analytical perspective or distance of the researcher. This method therefore allowed me to describe the findings from the participants' context and perspective.

4.3. Interviews

According to De Vos et. al. (2005), interviews yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values and feelings and this is important for this research because the aim was to bring insight into the experiences and feelings of the abused women. Interviewing involves the description of the experience and a reflection on the given descriptions. This is important because this helped me get to the core of what governs the women's decisions. Interviewing was the optimal choice because May (2011) sees it as the predominant mode of data collection in qualitative research, which allows for both researcher and participant to be active and involved in meaning making; they are both able to contribute to the outcome and findings of the research.

Interviews were also a useful way of getting large amounts of data quickly and were an effective way of obtaining in-depth data. Interviews allowed the researcher as interviewer to get a sense of how the interviewee was feeling by looking at their body language, facial expressions etc. This placed the researcher in a better position to get 'extra' information, because it was easier to get additional information from the participant once she became more comfortable and at ease to express herself. A good example, being that one of the participants was not comfortable making eye contact, and as a result connecting with her was very difficult. However, I tried very hard to make her feel comfortable and at some point she was able to make a little eye contact and open up more.

Strydom et. al. (2005) further highlight that interviews are a great way to connect with participants, even on an emotional level, which is very important for this research question. Being able to identify emotionally and be present for the participants was a great way to make the participants feel valued and not used. This is crucial to this study, because the topic was very sensitive and close to the participants' hearts. The researcher found that being able to talk to them about such a personal topic, one that many hide and keep to themselves for years, was a very good way for us to connect emotionally. However, the researcher realised that it was easy to become empathetic, thus jeopardising the interview process hence the ability to balance empathy and remain a skilled interviewer was very important.

Most of the participants expressed that talking about the abuse and pain of the situation made them feel a little better. It was a way for them to release some of the pain and stress and having someone who was willing to listen to them without any judgment was reported by some to have been beneficial.

4.3.1. Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs about or perceptions of the topic. It also allowed for more flexibility and for the emergence of more topics. This type of interview is suited where the researcher is interested in complexity or process or where an issue is controversial or personal; this was therefore useful because this study's topic is very personal (De Vos et. al. 2005). My plan was to have a set of pre-determined themes on an interview schedule; but I made sure that the interview was guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it.

Although I had an interview schedule, I was not very strict with the order the questions were asked. Each question was a follow up to the direction the conversation took; this was very successful because there was a flow to the interview and in the end I was able to ask the interviewees all the questions on the schedule. The first few questions, however, were general questions, and these allowed the researcher to get a sense of who the participant was. The desire was for the respondents to be free and not limited by a very set schedule, thus leaving room for them to lead some parts of the interview process. This allowed the respondents to share closely in the direction the interview took and also enabled them to introduce issues and themes that the researcher had not thought of including.

The questions were mostly open-ended and the set themes were used as a way to provide a direction to follow during the interview process although this was not identical for all the interviews. Each interview was different and this made the interview process interesting and more exciting. The interview process let the respondents speak for themselves, rather than have secondary documents speak for them.

The interviews were conducted at a place suggested by the participant so as to ensure both their safety as well as that of the researcher. The consideration of physical safety was very important, especially since these women were still living with their abusers, it was crucial to find a location where the abuser was not able to see or hear their interview.

4.3.2. Selection

The selection of participants was solely focused on African women living in South Africa who were living with an intimate partner in a relationship characterised by abuse. Race was a factor in the selection process because of the link made between the study and the history of struggle, marginalisation, poverty, unemployment, discrimination and the lack of education most black women endured due to colonialism and apartheid. However, this is

not to say that Indian or coloured women did not go through the above mentioned struggles, but in the South African context; black women were disproportionally affected by the above mentioned factors in comparison to women of other races.

The historical and contextual direction pursued in this study led me to narrow down the area of focus to black (African) women. Although I speak of the importance of race, 'race' itself was not a focus of the study and it was not looked at in depth. I found that my main conceptualisation in relation to the race issue was centred upon notions of culture and the way in which I linked certain types of cultural practices to 'blackness', such as issues of lobola, for example. Race was not really seen as a primary factor, but rather culture and the relation posited between culture and race. Although I speak of 'black', it is interchangeable with the term 'African'. My understanding is that culture can be shared within groups and between groups, an example being how religion is shared in addition to lobola. Therefore, working with the view that African culture can be shared, although the boundaries are porous, has led me to speak of 'black'/ 'African', although the focus was not on race per se. I am aware of the fact that in the South African context, 'black' is inclusive of coloured and Indians. I therefore want to highlight the fact that the use of the term 'black', which in this case is interchangeable with African, simply seeks to highlight the shared experiences of a certain group of people, rather than the understanding of race one would otherwise focus on.

Although this was not the plan from the onset, some of the study's participants are not South African. However they have lived in South Africa for a few years, they are aware of the impact of apartheid, colonialism, and poverty etc. in reference to the issue of race, and as outlined above, the focus was on the notions of "Africanness" rather than race as one would normally understand it in a South African context.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used because the research purposefully and specifically targeted black African women (living in South Africa) in abusive relationships with intimate partners. Women in abusive relationships were hard to reach, and this selection method allowed the researcher to come up with a sample based on judgment.

The interviews were conducted with eight abused women who have chosen to stay in abusive relationships. Staying, as deployed in this study, implied that these were long term relationships, which may involve children. The women selected to participate in this study fit the following criteria:

- They are Black women living in South Africa, between the ages of twenty five and sixty years of age.
- These women have been in a relationship, married or living together, for at least a year.

- They have experienced intimate partner abuse. The definition of abuse was inclusive of: physical, emotional or sexual, there was no exclusive focus on any specific type of abuse.
- They have made a decision to stay in the relationship.
- They have children.

The women interviewed were in their twenties, thirties, late thirties and fifties. Another interesting factor was that most of them were not South African, meaning that they had experienced living outside of South Africa and also experienced abuse and how it is viewed in those other countries; however, they have all been living in South Africa for a number of years. The fact that I did not go to a non-governmental organisation (NGO) to find participants, made them more willing to share their stories, because they voluntarily shared their stories. Class was not a criteria and I believe that this makes the research very interesting because most studies of this nature focus on class. Seeing the impact of the different classes was therefore an added benefit to the research even though the number of participants was small. The participants were from different socio-economic backgrounds and this too added some elements of richness to the study, although I had to sacrifice some depth as a result of this breadth.

My age did not affect the interviews at all; there was a level of transparency and understanding between researcher and the participants. The interviews were insightful, enjoyable and very sad. Hearing their stories was a painful reminder to me of how many women and families are living under terrible circumstances in silence. It reinforced the fact that a lot of help still needs to be offered to abused women, children and families facing this pandemic. The participants were very open and willing to share far beyond my expectations.

I chose to interview eight women because as mentioned, this is a very sensitive topic and finding more participants was a very difficult task. There was a desire for more participants but I found this to be very difficult as most women were not willing to share their experiences. Scheduling the interviews was a struggle because most of the participants cancelled a few times. Most of them needed to be reassured of the fact that this was not in any way the researcher trying to invade their private space. Making them understand the researcher's interest in the study and hearing their stories was crucial. I left out some participants that I had approached and wanted to interview because it was important to respect the women's wishes and to let them give their consent without feeling pressured to do so. The research participants' number was therefore limited to eight, although the desire was to have more participants. However, it is evident that this is in fact a sensitive topic that many people do not wish to talk about.

Walter and Morna (2010:7) have argued on this point as they state that:

23

Many survivors of violence feel that they are unable to speak about their experience for negative consequences. This includes the fear of being ostracised and judged by their families and communities; the fear of retaliation through more violence, of not being believed, or of having to relive the trauma.

With this being said I feel that the women interviewed were very 'generous' with their responses and they were all very different; age, life experiences, among some other factors were very different for each woman. This therefore made the findings very interesting.

Eight participants seemed to be a large enough size to fully ensure that the findings were not too skewed towards individual experiences, but that the amount of material was manageable, as this was a qualitative study that generated a lot of material for analysis. The diversity of the participants also added to the richness of the interview material and the range of experiences included.

In terms of recruitment, I set about finding women participants for the study starting from people that I had met through my own networks who had disclosed to me that they were in abusive relationships. From there onwards a snowball sampling method was used, i.e. asking the first set of interviewees if they knew other women who shared the inclusion criteria and would be willing to become involved in the study. The minimum requirement was that the referred women gave their consent prior to a formal approach. Having access to a second group of referrals allowed me to have access to a further group.

The first two interviews were done in Cape Town; these two women were referred to me by a woman I know. She is involved in counselling people and as I was talking to her about her research and the kind of women I was looking for, the woman put me in contact with the first two participants, after first checking with them about their willingness.

The other six interviews were done in Pretoria. I was talking to a few women from church about my research topic and one of them volunteered to be interviewed. The next participant had come to visit my Bible study group, and as I shared the need to find women to interview, the participant volunteered herself. I then got most of the other referrals from Zandile who was my housekeeper at the time. I was talking to her and asked her if she knew of any women who fit the study criteria. She then referred me to two women. From these two women, one of them referred me to another women.

After completing seven interviews, Zandile then came up to me and said that she could be interviewed too. It was surprising because throughout the research process Zandile never came forward, but she later told me that she had spoken to the women who had been

interviewed and they informed her that the interview session was very beneficial to them. As a result she felt that she would also benefit from sharing her story with me.

Interviewing her did pose ethical challenges. However, I felt that we successfully negotiated these based on the fact that their working relationship and the interview were clearly separated and that we discussed the implications. Zandile was comfortable to share her story and did not feel obliged to do so at any point. It was therefore very important that she voluntarily came to share her story.

The order of the interviews was therefore directed by the women and how they came forward to be interviewed.

4.3.3. Data Analysis and Coding

Ely et. al. (1991) in Mabena (2002), stated that data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research. The aim of an ongoing analysis is to critique the data as it is obtained, so as to identify gaps in information and to see whether light is being shed on the issues being identified in relation to the research topic. The aim was to keep track of emerging themes so as to begin making sense of all the data.

The steps taken in the data analysis process are as follows:
- Transcribe
- Read and re-read the interview transcripts, so that the researcher knew the data before the analysis process;
- Kept track of themes and ideas – this was done by coding;
- Looked for emerging themes and organised the material accordingly.

Following De Vos et. al. (2005), coding can be described as the formal representation of analytical/methodical thinking. It is also a process designed to fracture the data so as to group it conceptually. It is also a way of generalising concepts that emerge from the data. It is a systematic way of developing and refining interpretations of data. Codes may be abbreviations of key words; using colours or numbers. Coding is important because as the researcher codes the data, new understandings may emerge and this may lead to changing the original plan.

In the coding process, every theme was numbered in a certain way. For example culture was numbered as three, thoughts as two etc. These numbers made it easier for the themes to be clustered together as well as to identify how frequently they appeared. Coding was very helpful in the analysis process because it made the spotting of themes quicker and easier.

4.3.4. Ethics and Limitations of this study

Ethics are a set of moral principles, which are suggested by an individual or group, they are subsequently widely accepted and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). As such every researcher is required to abide by them.

Ethical guidelines serve as standards and a basis upon which researchers can evaluate their conduct. These allowed the researcher in this study to deal with matters of right and wrong throughout the research process. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), ethical lapses occur in research studies, such as, faking of interview data, inaccurate reporting of results and bias shown in favour of the research hypothesis. It was therefore vital that ethical principles be internalised, and become part of my lifestyle. With regards to ethics in research, I was responsible for every aspect of the research and was accountable to the research community, the participants, as well as to myself (Malherbe, 2005).

Ethical dilemmas may arise when it comes to the responsibility the researcher has towards the respondents. This being a very sensitive topic made it very crucial that I consider everything I said, so as not to offend the participants in any way. De Vos et.al. (2005:63) argued that "researchers have an ethical obligation to their respondents to be sufficiently skilled and competent to undertake a proposed scientific investigation". Having had some prior research experience enabled me to use already learnt skills to effectively conduct this research.

The dignity and welfare of the respondents were of paramount importance. Dilemmas that arose in this research were: avoidance of harm, confidentiality as well as informed consent. I discuss each of these in turn below.

AVOIDANCE OF HARM:

With this dilemma, it was possible that participants are harmed emotionally. According to May (2011), emotional harm has far-reaching consequences for the participants. This could also result in harming the participants' family life, relationships or employment situation, especially if negative behaviour of the past is reached in the memory during the process. The best way to address this was that the researcher protects the participants at reasonable limits. I made sure that the participants were informed beforehand about the potential impact of the research; this gave participants the option to withdraw if they wished to do so.

We have already established that the exploration of culture is not always encouraged in these types of studies. It was thus very important that I consider everything I said about culture very carefully. Culture is a very subjective and challenging set of concerns; discussions around culture may often lead to misunderstandings. When tackling the link

culture had on the decision to stay, it was crucial that I did not imply anything offensive. Given that the research focused primarily on factors surrounding cultural and other considerations playing a role in participants' decision to stay, rather than on the abuse itself, I did not foresee the risk of severe psychological stress. However, given that the participants were self-identifying as being in an abusive relationship, there was the risk of experiencing psychological distress when being interviewed. For that reason, I made arrangements with social workers to whom I could refer respondents for debriefing and counselling if necessary.

For all the above reasons, I ensured that participants were properly informed beforehand and debriefed after the interview, as this was crucial in this type of research. Most of the participants thanked me for the interview session, as they felt as though they had released some stress, having someone to talk to and listen to them was very helpful to them. Strydom, in De Vos et. al. (2005), states that the debriefing allows participants to work through their experience of the research as well as minimise any possible harm that may occur during the interview session.

During the debriefing at the end of the interviews, the respondents were given the opportunity to ask questions or to highlight any areas that needed clarification at the end of the interviews. They were also given the opportunity to comment on their experience of the interview. I believe this helped them debrief as well as have some sort of closure in their participation of the research. It was at this point that help was offered in the form of counselling with professionals. I had the names and contact details of social workers and the organisations they work for at hand. Knowing that the research participants were living in abusive relationships made it my duty to offer them possible channels of help they could follow; yet, I had to respect their agency. It was therefore evident that I could not in any way force them into any such decision.

My supervisor was available to be of assistance when it came to any issues the researcher might have faced in the interview/research process. However, I did not need to engage the supervisor as all the interviews went well.

Since most of the participants have children, we made sure that the children's safety was considered too. For those who came with their children, it was ensured that the children were not able to hear what was happening during the interview, they were put in a different room and were taken care of by an adult. The other participants who did not bring their children along were also involved in the decision of where the interview would be conducted. This made them comfortable and at ease that nothing would go wrong during the interview process.

INFORMED CONSENT:

It was imperative to ensure that the participants were well informed about everything the research and its outcomes would entail. It was also important that all information was accurate and complete. This was all crucial because participants' involvement was voluntary and not forced. Failure to ensure consent, would have placed me in a compromised position should any of the participants change their mind. Informed consent protects the researcher, as well as the well-being of the participant (May, 2011).

Not following this ethical rule may even have affected the possibility of publishing or the sharing of the research findings with the public. May (2011) argues that credibility of the research lies in the complete involvement to the success of the research by both the researcher and participants. It was important that the participants freely gave consent, and that they understood the aim and processes of the research.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

It was vital that all information be handled in a confidential manner. This was to protect the participants from any discomfort, distress or harm as a result of the research. Failure to do so, would have affected the participants relationships and in other cases employment situations. In the case of this research, it may have placed the participants in a place of danger, with regards to their abusers, as well as affect their relationships with family members and work relations. Abuse is not something that people speak of freely; it is still one of the best kept secrets among many women. Being sensitive to a participant's need of not exposing herself was very crucial. It was therefore important to practice confidentiality, as this protected the identity of the participants.

It was also important that participants' involvement are voluntary and informed. This ensured that privacy issues were discussed beforehand.

The participants' real names were not used so as to ensure their safety as well. By so doing the dignity of the participants was ensured and prioritised (May, 2011).

In one case the issue of confidentiality posed a challenge because the researcher disclosed in the discussion that one of the participants was her employee. However, in this case the researcher expressly checked with the participant if this would be a problem and she stated that it would not. She in fact allowed the researcher to use her real name. However; the researcher chose not to do so.

4.3.5. Limitations of the study:

During the interviews, my intent was to write down the respondent's responses. I anticipated that this may be a limitation, because most of the focus would be placed on getting all the information on paper, thus leading to divided attention, making it difficult to

fully engage with the respondent. As a result, I may have become stressed and this could have potentially had a negative impact on the final research. However, this was not the case; the interviews went very well, the participants paced themselves well and this allowed me to keep up with them.

Although recording would have been a better option, based on my previous research experience with a similar topic, most women were not comfortable with recording such a sensitive topic. In order not to make the women feel uncomfortable, I opted to erase a concern on their part about being recorded so that they could express themselves without reservation.

The second limitation was in access to an adequate number of respondents. The snowball sampling technique enabled me to access eight participants, but this was not easy. Finding willing participants was very difficult. A number of them cancelled and some rescheduled a few times; this slowed down the pace of the research. This reinforced the fact that this is a topic that many women are still ashamed of and are not willing to share as a result.

4.3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is, "the ability to formulate an integrated understanding of one's own cognitive world, especially understanding one's influence or role in a set of human relations"(De Vos , as quoted in De Vos et. al. 2005:363). I come from a family where women are taught to be strong, independent and self-confident. This has allowed me to be a strong woman who believes in myself and this is an important and powerful tool to use in one's life. This view is however not shared in many societies, nor is it seen as important by society and the government.

Throughout my academic path, I have read many stories of the abuse, marginalisation and lack of regard for women in many societies around the world. The rights and well-being of children is very important, however it is essential to note that women play a very pivotal role in their children's lives.

The history of South Africa points out to many single mother headed homes, proving that women are mostly responsible for the raising of children. Literature also points out that South Africa has one of the highest rates of domestic abuse in the world. This led to the importance and need to further research on the topic, so as to identify the core issues contributing to the continued abuse of women, so as to empower and assist them where it matters most.

My passion for women and children's wellbeing has led to the research of this topic so as to ensure that as many women as possible find it possible to be free of abuse, independent,

confident and self-standing women, who believe in themselves and their worth as women. This type of mentality will then be reflected in their children too.

In the next chapter, this study's research findings will be presented and discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the biographies of the participants are included at the beginning to provide a better sense of the women who participated in this study. The findings of the research study will be presented derived from the experiences shared by the women in the research study. Although in some cases these women may have seen signs of abuse or abusive behaviours in the early stages of their relationships, in most cases, the abuse came as a complete surprise to them. The different reasons women gave for why they stay in abusive relationships will be highlighted. Finally the chapter considers the way in which participants reported on their reflexive states, as they account for the internal processes in relation to their decision to stay in these abusive relationships.

5.2. Biographies

Tiyana:

Tiyana is a thirty six year old mother of two; a nine year old girl and five year old boy. She has been married for ten years and currently lives in Cape Town as a legal refugee. She is still in the process of getting her permanent residence papers. She is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo but has been living in South Africa for the past eleven years. Her husband, also from the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a good mechanic. He started his own business and has a regular client base. Tiyana was studying medicine in Congo but decided to leave school so as to get married. She is currently working as a caregiver at an old age home. Before she found this job, she worked as a hairdresser. She is still a refugee and is trying to get permanent residence as is her husband.

Emily:

Emily is a fifty year old woman and a mother of four; three adult children (who still live at home) and a teenager. She has been married for more than twenty five years. She currently lives in Cape Town but is originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She has been living in South Africa for almost twenty years and is in the process of getting permanent residence. She is an electrical engineering graduate but has not worked as an engineer in South Africa. She has had a few jobs, but none are professional. Her husband has a good paying job; he too is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She describes him as loving, kind and handsome when not abusive. She got married at a young age and describes herself to have been head over heels in love.

Olga:

Olga appeared to be in her late fifties, but she was not comfortable giving her exact age. She has four adult children, one of whom passed away. She is also a grandmother and she is raising her grandchildren. She has been married for thirty years and has known her husband for fifty years. She works for the national defence force because this is the only job she could get. Her preferred profession is importing and exporting. Both her and her husband are South African citizens but have moved around in many African countries. She and her husband were in exile and they moved around with their children. However, Olga was not very forthcoming with details on her husband.

Debrah:

Debrah is a thirty eight year old mother of two. Her children live in Zimbabwe with her mother and are not the abuser's children. She is also in a polygamous marriage with her abuser; she is one of three wives. She relocated from Zimbabwe in order to provide for her children. Upon her arrival, she met her now husband and abuser. She has been living in South Africa for a few years and has been with her husband for two years. She is in South Africa illegally and is hoping to get refugee papers. Her husband has a part time job where he works twice a week doing garden services. Their financial status is not good.

Emelda:

Emelda, originally from Zimbabwe, looked much younger than she is. The researcher's first impression of her was that she was a teenager. However, she is a thirty year old mother of two. She grew up in a Christian home and she was very passionate about the fact that Christianity is all she knows and bases all her life decisions on. She started off by stating that it is her Christian values she lives by and not culture or tradition. She has been married for ten years and her husband is the only man she has ever known or been with. She has been living in South Africa for a few years and is an illegal immigrant. Her husband, also from Zimbabwe, does piece jobs.

Christine:

Christine is a twenty five year old woman and she is currently pregnant with her first child. She had never been in a relationship before because of the way she was brought up. She was saving herself for marriage and the man of her dreams and that is why she stayed single for a long time. She came to South Africa in search of a job and within weeks of her arrival she met Anthony, a twenty seven year old electrician from Zimbabwe; she later found out that he was in fact already married. By then it was too late because she had already fallen pregnant. She is originally from Zimbabwe and has been living in South Africa for about a year. She too is an illegal immigrant.

Mary:

Mary is a fifty one year old corporate woman in a managerial position. She is originally from Tanzania but has been living in South Africa for many years, as a legal immigrant with a work permit. She is a mother of two adult children and a teenager and all her children went to school in South Africa. Her job involves a lot of travelling, she is a very busy woman and holds a Masters degree. She did not say much about her husband except that they have been married for many years and most of them were very unhappy. She was the sole breadwinner in the home; he had many mistresses and mistreated her and the children. He drinks alcohol and this makes it worse.

Zandile:

Zandile is a twenty eight year old woman who is originally from Zimbabwe but has been living in South Africa for about ten years as an illegal refugee. She has been married for seven years and has two daughters aged five years and three months respectively. She is married to Esau, also from Zimbabwe, who is thirty five years old and currently unemployed. She describes him as very quiet and a liar. She on the other hand is a very ambitious woman who is able to survive and find a way to make things work. She is very hard working and has been providing for her family doing piece jobs as a domestic worker or house help.

5.3. Accounts for the nature and start of the abuse

Based on this study, the researcher has come to the realisation that the impact of abuse is different and the accounts, though similar at times, are also very 'unique' for each woman. The findings echo Walter and Morna's work (2010, 15) as they argue that, in as much as statistics are important, and we need to know the facts behind the problem, the voices and stories of those most affected can paint a very personal picture of this very complex and pandemic issue. In addition to this, it is important to look at or consider the context in which the abuse takes place. For example, as highlighted in the literature review, looking at the South African context, factors such as immigration, poverty and apartheid among others, all fuelled the high rates of abuse in the country. It is therefore important to consider the factors as well as the context in which the abuse takes place.

One of the participants Olga, who has experienced living outside of South Africa remarks that:

> *Having lived in many African countries, I have noticed that abuse is worse in South Africa. I feel that people especially women need to be educated on this issue. I also see that in South Africa, abuse is like a taboo that women have to live with, they are not free to speak about it.*

> *Society is therefore…, as a result of its secrecy; people living in the closet. Other countries have campaigns and talk about this issue freely it's not the same here.*

She further states that people in South Africa are too angry and that the government is not doing much about this issue. Olga seems to be making an argument with broader validity as Walter and Morna (2010:8) also highlight this fact. They state that particularly in the South African context:

> despite progressive legislation and law reform, women's experiences of the criminal justice system and the response by society as a result of cultural and societal norms do not create the condition in which survivors of violence feel safe enough to speak out about their experiences.

Jewkes and Abrahams (2002:1232), further emphasise this point as they highlight a few factors that hinder women to speak out due to the lack of response or support from the government. They argue that there is a barrier in reporting where many women fear that the police will not believe them, few cases go to court and many women have problems of physical access to the police. They also highlighted the fact that many women fear the legal process because of the fact that most of them are treated rudely, poorly and insensitively by the police.

The focus of this study was the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships rather than the nature of the abuse. It was therefore important that the women self-identify when it came to the nature of the abuse. Only three of the participants experienced physical abuse, one of whom only experienced it once. The majority of the participants reported emotional abuse more extensively. The researcher also gathered from the interviews that most women felt that emotional abuse was more detrimental than physical abuse. Christine is a good example. She explains that she was left alone most of the time and says that although he beat her, the emotional abuse was far worse. He insulted her, belittled her and made her feel useless. The worst part was that his wife was also very abusive towards her.

> *I think it was better when he hit me cause the pain was gone later, but when he insults me, the pain is worse. I feel like a nobody, insults take a long time to leave my head.*

Literature also highlights this point as seen here:

Physical and emotional abuse is interwoven. Sometimes there is healing on the outside, but still scarred within (Walter and Morna, 2010:17).

Zandile explains that her abuse is not and has never been physical, it is all emotional abuse and she has reached a point where she cannot live with it anymore. Her husband is a pathological liar, has poor communication skills, lacks ambition and drive, she is the bread winner at home and she has discovered so many lies that she has lost the love and trust she once had for him. She remarks:

> *I married him because he was a peaceful man; I thought our house would be happy and peaceful too. I did not realise he was a bad guy. My mother told me that I must not marry him but I did not listen. Some people told me about his other wife but I did not believe them. It's my own fault that I am married to someone I don't love anymore, if I listened to my mother maybe I would be happy today.*

Although Tiyana, Emily and Debrah experienced physical abuse, they did not go into details, proving that it is not easy to discuss the nature of the abuse and the assumption is that it could be something that still affects them emotionally and that is why they were not able to go into much detail. As the interviewer, the researcher believes it was not proper to force them into any such discussion, should they not feel free to do so.

The following section will account for the start of the abuse.

5.3.1 There were signs of abuse but they overlooked these

In two cases, the women saw signs of abusive behaviour as early as when they were still dating, such as anger issues and aggression, but chose to overlook them for various reasons. This is an interesting factor because one is left wondering why these women would choose to overlook such behaviours. It reinforces the fact that abuse is very complex and even more so for the women who find themselves in such situations; walking away is never easy. For the majority of the participants, the signs were not there at all. However, it is interesting or significant to note that only two cases saw signs of abuse early in the relationship and Emily is a good example of this:

> *I met my husband when I was very young and we were very in love, he was a very good looking man but I knew that he got angry very quickly. But because I love him so much, I did not focus on that. He hit me a few times before we got married and he even went out with other women but I was very in love and thought that if we got married he will change.*

Emily explains that although her husband was aggressive and angry while they were dating, the abuse took a turn for the worse after they got married. She further shared that although her husband showed signs of aggression and infidelity, the abuse was never extreme while dating. She was abused for twenty years of the marriage before things started getting better. She claims that she feels as though she has wasted twenty five years of her life that she can never regain. She wishes she could go back in time and change her fate.

Another factor that contributed to her over-looking his abusive behaviour and anger issues was that she knew that he had had a very difficult childhood. Her husband is mixed race. His father was a white man from Belgium and his mother was a black woman from Congo. When he was still under the age of thirteen his parents got divorced. He was separated from his brother who went to Belgium with his dad while he stayed in Congo with his mother. His childhood was very difficult and he has to date never seen or been in contact with his brother and father. She explains that going through this made him bitter, resentful and angry. She therefore felt a lot of compassion for him. Anderson (1997), as previously mentioned, highlights the fact that notions of femininity emphasise nurturance where women attempt to 'heal' their abusive men through their love, understanding and patience. Jewkes and Morrell (2010) have also highlighted this point by stating that the dominant ideal of femininity embraces compliance and tolerance of violent and hurtful behaviour. This point is clearly shown in this case.

Tiyana also spoke of how she saw some anger issues, and yet overlooked them. Outside of his abusive behaviour, she describes her husband as loving and very generous. However, according to her, he can become the complete opposite of this when he is abusive. This is intensified when he drinks. The abuse started almost a year after they got married and it has been going on for the past nine years of the marriage. She states that she never thought that this would ever happen to her. Although her husband had a short temper, she described him to be a very kind man who never showed any signs of being abusive. The abuse started after their daughter was two months old. She recalls very well the first time he laid his hands on her:

> *The baby was very sick and had a very high fever. I was not able to drive at the time and thought that if the baby gets worse we would need to go to the hospital. It was about 9pm and I knew that I would need him. He told me that he had to go out with his friends and I explained to him that I needed him to stay home. He became so angry, he beat me so much and left me with a very sick child.*
>
> *From that day on our marriage was never the same again. He never once called to check on us and only came back at 3am the next morning.*

36

She spent a lot of time thinking back to her parents asking her not to go on with the relationship. She then realised that she had married the wrong man, and that she was not strong enough to handle this. Her husband was very indifferent towards her and saw nothing wrong with what he was doing. This is not a surprise because as highlighted in the literature, most men find their abusive behaviour normal and justifiable, see for example Jewkes and Morell (2010:4).

It is evident that even when signs of abuse are seen very early in the relationship, this does not mean that the women will walk away from the abusive relationship. This proves the point that leaving an abusive relationship is not easy. Looking at the two cases where the women did see signs of abuse, it was clear that the issue of love and sympathy played a big role in their choice to stay in the relationship.

5.3.2.The abuse came as a surprise

For most (six) of the women the abuse came as a complete surprise. The abuse was unexpected and left the women confused and lost. Walter and Morna (2010:16), echo this point in their work arguing that:

> Abuse attacks like a slow poison and destroys you physically, mentally and spiritually. Abuse does not knock at the door when it comes, but it creeps in unexpectedly in a quiet happy marriage and damages it, steadily but surely.

They further state that:

> They could not predict the violence that eventually took place. For many women it is this intimate betrayal that leaves the longest lasting scars (Walter and Morna, 2010:18).

Olga who has been married for thirty years, spoke of how the first nineteen years of her marriage were happy and free of abuse. She is not sure why the abuse started or what brought about this change in her husband. She did not see this coming at all; this was a major cause of her hurt. She argues that the current abuse has erased any happiness she ever experienced. The abuse is said to have started suddenly, out of the blue. And to this day she is still confused and wondering why. She says that her relationship with her husband used to be perfect but now it is destroyed beyond repair.
They communicate through the children, and this form of communication has limited the amount of fights in the house.

Debrah states that:

> *When I met my husband he was very nice to me, but a few months*
> *later I noticed that he had other women, he lied to me for a while but*
> *later he confirmed that there was two other women. We all live very*
> *close to each other. He forced me to have a child and I refused, I*
> *finally accepted and when I was five months pregnant he hit me so*
> *much I lost the baby. This made me so sad…*

The sad part was that this had happened just a month before her interview for this study. This explained the sadness the researcher had seen in her and it made the researcher feel so sad, because being a mother herself, she could just imagine how painful this situation was. She also spoke of how lonely she felt, especially because her husband had to share his time amongst the three women. She says that in these moments, she wished that there was a place she could escape to and live in peace. She told this story with tears in her eyes and so much emotion that it was impossible not to be touched or moved in some way.

Debrah explains that she sees her husband as a sex partner and nothing more she no longer loves him. She further says that there is nothing more to their relationship and that she had nothing to define or describe it because there was nothing to it but sex. She has shut down emotionally from him and the sex is not something she looks forward to, she merely does it because she knows that resisting him means more beatings and verbal abuse from him. She regrets meeting him and wishes she could erase the entire relationship from her life.

Emelda grew up in a Christian home and she was very passionate about the fact that Christianity is all she knows and bases all her life decisions on. She had a very happy and healthy marriage for the most part of her marriage. It is only in the past two years that things took a turn for the worst. Her husband has always been loving and a very good father, but one day when her husband left his phone she felt the need to go through it and that is when she discovered that he has been cheating on her. The lady he is with was even pregnant. She later found out that she knew the woman in question. The mistress then started calling her and even informed her of the birth of the baby. It was after she confronted her husband that the abuse started.

> *My husband is all I know and have, I love him so much that I was*
> *ready to forgive him… I'm so hurt and shocked …. Only my children*
> *keep me alive.*

Christine is currently pregnant with her first child and seems to be very vulnerable. She moved in with her partner and his cousin and months later his wife came back, it was then that she realised that he had been married all along. She was then stuck in a situation where she was jobless, homeless and had no choice but to keep living with him.

When his wife came back he did not apologise he just insulted me, smacked me and we all sleep on the same bed in the same room. Him and the wife have sex in front of me all the time. They acted like I was not even there. I was sad and crying every day, all the time.

No one was there for me, even Anthony changed his behaviour. He shouted at me and beat me like I was his child.

She further explains that he started drinking and partying every night, and he went to these parties with his wife. A study done by Fox et. al. (2007) highlights some of the above points, as they state that male substance abuse, general communication problems between the couple as well as financial dependence and control among others, hinder women from leaving abusive relationships. This is the case for Christine, she is trapped in a situation that is hard to escape due to these factors.

Zandile describes the first two years of her marriage as amazing and happy. It was in the third year of marriage that she found out that her husband had two children with another woman and that he was still married to this woman because the divorce was never finalised at the Home Affairs. She says this changed the dynamics of their marriage because she could no longer trust him. She describes her husband as very quiet, reserved and very bad at communicating; she cites this as the source of the detriment of their marriage.

He is very quiet and doesn't communicate with me and he does things I do not know, I find out later and he doesn't explain. It hurts my emotions a lot. Sometimes he sells things in the house on credit so people do not pay him. We are stuck with everything gone and no money. I get angry because he sells and doesn't tell me, now he sold the car and we don't have money for it. He told me the car was at the mechanic but it was gone. He lies too much, always denying, never listens.

Mary has been married for many years and most of them were very unhappy. She was the sole breadwinner in the home; her husband had many mistresses and mistreated her and the children. He drank and this made his behaviour worse. Her reluctance to fully open up, made the researcher think that she could be very hurt and does not want to re-open some of the experiences she has buried for so many years.

As in the previous case where some signs of abuse were seen, we see that even when signs of abuse came unexpectedly or as a complete surprise, leaving is not any easier.

39

It is also very interesting that the root or cause of the abusive behaviour or change in the women's partners (abusers) is never clear. The women are therefore left with un-answered questions; never really knowing what went wrong or changed in the relationship or their partners. The researcher feels that this uncertainty may also be a major contributor to their not wanting to leave. As in any situation in life, closure is always important, and from the interviews the researcher gathered that for most of these women, they did not have clear answers as to why or how everything changed, therefore staying in order to have some clarity or closure was very important to them, although this was not articulated by them in these exact words. This continues to show the complex nature of abuse and the importance of further research in this field.

5.4. Reasons for staying

In identifying the reasons why women choose to stay in abusive relationships, based on an analysis of the eight interviews that were conducted, a number of important issues need to be taken into account. First, the participants often gave different reasons why they were staying with their abusive partners. However, even where the reasons given were similar, these did not always have the same impact on the women. An example being that although all participants expressed that their children are one of the reasons why they stay, the importance of this reason is not always weighted the same by the participants. This brings us back to the importance of considering the context of the abuse, because this has a great impact on the abuse and how it is experienced.

Second, this being a qualitative study with a small selection, we may not always know or have all the answers we are after; this does not however undermine the answers that we do get in this study. Although we cannot say much about how representative the findings are, it is very important for us to compare what was found and link it to the literature. Another important factor is that there is not enough South African work in this field, very few focus on internal thoughts and the emotional impact the women go through as a result of intimate partner violence. More work that focus on the above mentioned factors is needed. The findings of this study will be enriching and add to the field because as highlighted, intimate partner abuse is a major problem that needs attention.

Third, we see that there are many overlapping issues, putting this into consideration is very important because it is not as easy to pin point specific reasons. One cannot really identify one issue or another. For example, we have women who are both refugees and unemployed or those that have no structural support and still have the 'burden' of taking care of their children.

There is really no clear distinction here because these issues are overlapping and are all important. One can therefore not say that one issue is more 'important' than another.

Based on the findings of the study, women stay in abusive relationships because of psychological reasons, for example, they harbour feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Another was due to structural factors, where most women had nowhere to go and lacked the support they needed. Cultural factors, economic factors, children, fear of the abuser as well as church and religion were also contributing factors or reasons why women stay in abusive relationships.

Looking at the literature review, the findings drawn from this study demonstrate both similarities and differences from the general pattern of abuse emerging from the literature. In the literature review, a distinction was drawn between psychological, economic, structural and cultural reasons in an abusive relationship. One way in which the findings of this study depart from the arguments put forward in the literature review relates to the centrality of psychological considerations purely because this was not a focus of the study. However, Psychological issues did surface during the interview process.

For many authors, for example Walker (1979) and Walter and Morna (2010), psychological reasons were very dominant. For example, Walter and Morna (2010) argued that abuse has the power to affect one's way of thinking and can have such tremendous emotional impacts on the victim that it becomes very difficult to think through things in a rational way.

They also argue that:

> Abuse, in whatever from, drains the mind and ones self-esteem and leaves you helpless and brainwashed, hoping for an undefined change of the situation (Walter and Morna , 2010:16).

While it was not central to the findings, psychological reasons keep surfacing. Instead as Michalski (2004) and Dolo (2012) highlighted, this study demonstrates that structural factors such as lack of family support and having nowhere to go, are more central to 'forcing 'the women to stay in abusive relationships and may lead secondarily to self-esteem problems. Jewkes (2002) also highlights the importance of social support and how it can empower women in their decision to leave abusive relationships.

Another major way in which this study departs from the general pattern that emerges from literature is that in the findings children came up as a dominant reason for staying. Although this reason was highlighted in the literature, we see that it was not as dominant as the researcher found it to be in the findings.
The literature review shows that when children are given as a reason for staying, it was often linked to economic factors, meaning that the inability to support the children financially was a major concern. However, this was not necessarily the main reason the women gave when speaking of children as a reason for staying.

For the women in this study, the focus was on having the children grow up in a stable and 'whole' home. They did not want to place the burden of a broken home and an abusive home on the children; giving them what appeared to be a stable home was important to them. In addition, having a father (albeit an abusive one) present was better in their view, then growing up without one.

Religious and cultural reasons came up in both the literature and this study's findings. We therefore see that in as much as there are similarities between the findings and literature, it is clear to see that hearing the women's 'voices' sheds more light and clarity on the factors that contribute to their staying. In as much as literature points out the factors contributing to women staying, hearing from the women enables the reader to have a deeper and somewhat 'personal' understanding, which one may not necessarily get from the literature.

5.4.1. Children

It was very evident that children play a very important role when it comes to making a decision on whether to stay in an abusive relationship or not. Although not all the women spoke of their children as the main reason for staying, all of them saw this as a very important reason for not leaving their partners. The researcher noted that when they spoke of children, they saw this as 'stability' in the home. Their wish was to have a 'complete' home that was not broken. They felt it important to give the children what appeared to be a stable home, rather than raise them in a single parent headed household. The researcher felt as though these women feared that leaving would affect the children more than having the children stay in an abusive home that had both parents.

Emily is a good example of this as she expressed the fear of resentment and blame from her children. Her answer fascinated the researcher because it opened up a view of the abuser and how he is perceived by his children that the researcher had never heard of. She shared the fact that to this day her children are closer to her husband than they are to her. She felt at the time and still now that had she left, her children would have never forgiven her. Although the children were exposed to the violence and mistresses coming to the house, they had an unbreakable bond with their dad. Emily stated:

> *My children have always been very close to him more than me, I still*
> *don't understand. Sometimes I feel like I'm a very bad mom because*
> *even today I have not been close to them like he is. I have three boys*
> *and a girl but even the girl is close to him more than me.*
> *Sometimes they all leave me and sit together with him but they don't*
> *do that with me.*

42

She explains that her husband's weakness is his children; he is very different with them, he is very loving, caring and compassionate. She further argues that she is not naturally loving and caring and the abuse made her angry, hostile and difficult to get along with. This affected her relationship with her children, and she is very sad that she can never fix it. Emily argues that she is staying because she knows that leaving would cause her children to resent and blame her. She also knew that their father offered them the love and compassion that she was unable to give due to the impact abuse had on her. She did not want her children to grow up without him. Leaving would deprive the children of the special bond they shared with their dad. Furthermore, seeing the impact of being fatherless had on her husband made her reconsider:

> I did not want them to rebel and see me as the person who took them away from him.

One of the first issues Tiyana raised was the fact that her husband/abuser always told her that he would take the children should she ever consider leaving. This was a major cause of her many fears and stresses regarding escaping the relationship. She was very scared because she knew that her husband would never be able to take care of the kids. She could not imagine living without them and more importantly, she knew that her children would suffer at the hands of the mistresses and her husband.

> My husband was not only abusive but also had mistresses. I was so scared of HIV, I did a test every 3 months. One of his mistresses used to be his client, he used to fix her car. I knew she was his mistress but could not do anything about it.
>
> Years into our marriage I also found out that he lied to me about his age. He was much younger than he told me. He is a dangerous man capable of anything. Leaving him will end very badly for me and my children
>
> My husband once held a gun to my head and threatened to kill me and the kids. Because I know him, I knew that he was very serious and capable of killing us.

Olga spoke of how children may not always understand why adults do what they do; and she did not want them to go through life wondering why. She said:

> Children will never understand, they will ask you why you left and blame you.

Because we moved around a lot, I was very financially dependent on my husband, even when we came back and I started working, I was not going to be able to support myself, my children and grandchildren.

I also blame the justice system because it forces us to stay. There is very little support for us. Even reporting to the police is a waste of time.

The justice system still sees things culturally where the man is seen as the head of the house, the main care-taker of the family.

Mary also speaks of children and how leaving would destabilise them. She argues that she has always wanted to have a stable family. This made her endure the pain and suffering of being married to an unfaithful husband.

She also felt that staying was the best option for the children and extended family. Leaving would mean that the family is disgraced, that the children are fatherless and she was not willing to do that to them.

It is mainly because of my children that I am staying, not wanting to destabilise them mentally as I believe that they had nothing to do with the choices I made in marrying my husband. They need not be punished because of my wrong choices. I wish I had married a God fearing man from the outset.

Zandile also spoke of her children, but she was not as passionate as some of the other women. She did mention that she did not want her children to be raised without a father, but her main wish was to get the children's birth certificates, leaving would mean that her children would never be able to get them. According to the law in Zimbabwe, only her husband could help her with this.

My children still need their birth certificates and in order for them to have them, I need to travel to Zimbabwe with my husband and the children. Unless I am still with him, I will not have access to them. I'm also very scared because the other wife has the same problem. I'm staying to help my children. Also I don't want to be a single mother my children still need this man, his abuse doesn't really affect them a lot.

It was very significant to note that the women did not really consider the impact of the cycle of abuse. Although the researcher and participants did not discuss whether or not the children knew of the abuse, in most of the interviews, it was mentioned that the children were aware and affected by the abuse. In Emily, Tiyana, Olga, Emelda and Mary's cases, the children were aware and affected by the abuse; this did not raise any major issues for the women. They felt 'bad' that the children were exposed to the abuse and were concerned about how this would affect their lives, but they still chose to stay.

The women seemed more concerned about keeping the family whole, not having the children grow up fatherless or in an 'incomplete' home. Something that Olga said resonated with me, as I am also a mother. It demonstrated to me how mothers carry so much for the sake of their children:

> I learnt that I could be broken but the kids would have been more broken than me.

It is 'beautiful' to see that her brokenness did not mean as much to her as that of her children. It was ok for her to be broken, but it would be too much for the children. This reminded the researcher, that women are truly givers and that they have an ability to endure so much for the sake of others. However, being a researcher (outside of being a mother), based on the findings of the study, the researcher sees that such 'responsibility' has the ability to pose a bigger problem. An example is that the cycle of abuse was not an issue to the participants at all; this should raise alarm bells because one of the factors contributing to the high rates or levels of abuse is growing up in an abusive home.

Although the women want to stay for the sake of their children, the children are victims, being set up for a possible future in an abusive relationship or situation too. Although this is not a guaranteed outcome, the probabilities are very high. This shows that there is still more work to do when it comes to protecting children who are exposed to abusive relationships. Similarly important, is the fact that women also have to be educated on the cycle of abuse and its negative outcomes.

5.4.2. Fear of physical harm

Fear of physical harm has to do with power dynamics as highlighted by Fox et. al. (2007), where it is highlighted that the abuser uses the power relations or dynamics, which take many forms as a way of controlling the woman. This was further highlighted with reference to the fear of the abuser when women consider leaving because leaving places a greater danger on the women. When a woman leaves, the abuser feels like they have lost their power and control, they will do anything to gain that power back, even if it means physically harming the victim, supported by Jewkes and Wood (1997) and Jewkes et. al. (2011).

Tiyana is a good example as she states that she was very fearful of physical abuse. She had physical injuries that sent her to the hospital a few times in the marriage. She was also held at gunpoint and told that if she considers leaving, she would be killed. She was one of the participants who reported extensive physical abuse. This shows that her husband does indeed have the ability to extend physical harm that leaves her fearful and scared for her life and that of her children. From the interview, it was evident that she was truly fearful and aware of the fact that her husband would do anything if she were to attempt leaving.

Another participant who shared this fear was Debrah; her main reason for staying was the fear she had of the abuser and what he would do to her. Her reasons were also some of the most intense as she described her abuser as very controlling and manipulative. She further stated that he is capable of doing anything in order for her to stay. Her wish is to leave, she has had enough and really wants to go, but his threats are serious and she believes that he is able to kill her if he must.

> *He used witchcraft to keep me with him. And if I leave, I will die. When he went out I noticed that some of my clothes had missing labels and I know he cut them off. I started looking for them and found all these pieces in his wallet and some other charm things. When I asked him about it, he said that he took it to the witch doctor so they have pieces of my clothes, if I leave, my private parts will have growths on them and no man will ever want me and I will die from that disease.*

This to the researcher was one of the most drastic measures any abuser has taken. It is therefore understandable why she has no way of leaving although she really wants to leave. Her husband has also told her not to use condoms and she fears that she may end up with HIV because he is a womaniser. She also has no way of taking care of herself and has nowhere to go. She is in a very difficult position and leaving does not seem to be a likely option.

Here we see that fear is informed culturally. In some instances culture has a dimension that accesses the issue of fear, as can be seen here where witchcraft - which is a cultural issues, is being used against the woman.

5.4.3. Social and economic insecurity

The literature review indicates economic concerns as a major contributing factor for women staying, however, this was not a major factor or concern for the participants in the sense that during the interviews, they did not focus on this as a major concern or problem. This is not to say that they were all economically and socially sound. In fact some were unemployed and most of them lacked any form of social support.

46

It was just not something they felt was a major factor but three of the participants shared this fear and spoke about it a little more extensively.

Christine and Emelda shared that they are afraid to venture out because they are not sure that they can make it on their own. Christine's situation was more intense in the sense that she lacked any form of social support, she literally had nowhere to go and she was unemployed. This makes her situation very difficult. She stated:

> *If I leave him the child will not have a father and I can't support this child alone, I don't even work anymore. Sometimes I think leaving is better but I'm scared of what I will become. But I'm scared of living with him…*

> *Staying is the only thing I can do now, I don't have another option, for now I will not fight…, but I'm still sad and scared for my life.*

Emelda's reason for staying was very intriguing because she had all the social support she needed to leave, yet she chose to remain in her situation. Based on her statement, we see that religious issues, the issue of 'nurturance', as well as children, all impacted her decision in some way. This highlights the point that was made about the overlapping issues that some women face.

> *The bible tells us to forgive no matter how big the sin committed to us. He was my first love and he is still the only one. If he asks me to forgive him I will, so I'm waiting for him to ask me. The children need him too. He asked me to divorce him but I can't. We are not divorced but we are also not together the way it must be. I can't see my life without him. How will I live, he is all I know.*

Another factor is that the family has requested for her husband to go to her family in order to officially end the marriage, but her husband has refused to do this; his main reason for refusing is this process would require him to travel back to Zimbabwe, but he is not willing to incur the expense. This means that their families still consider them to be married regardless of what is happening between them. She has the support of her family and they are willing to take her back. She argues that even though she has the support, leaving is not that simple. It is very hard, considering how much she loves her husband and what her leaving will do to the children both emotionally and economically, since her husband is the sole provider. She also mentioned that she did not want to be a financial burden to her family.

Tiyana also speaks of how difficult things would be for her and the children. She not only lacks the social support she needs but she is also a refugee. She is scared that she will not survive on her own, although she has a job, her salary is not enough to take care of her two children.

This is an issue that so many women face. Many factors affect women and their decision to stay in abusive relationships. Jewkes et. al. (2011: 61) shed some light on the economic and social issue in the South African context where they state that:

> Cultural and societal factors are compounded by the country's history of apartheid. The legacy of apartheid worsened the socio-economic conditions of women as they remained at home while men went to work as migrant labour. Women were and continue to be heavily dependent on their partners for their livelihood making it difficult to leave abusive relationships.

5.4.4. Culture, religion and family dynamics

Culture is indeed a very complex and difficult issue to deal with and or fully understand, Hall (1997) highlights the fact that there was a lot of resistance and remorse towards culture in his study. Although most women tried to outline some positive aspects of culture, the women also stated that it made them stay in abusive relationships for various reasons.

Emily argues that culture made her stay because she was always fed with stories that no one in her family was allowed to divorce. She was warned never to go back home to her family of origin. She stated that she hates culture a lot; she mentioned this fact a few times. She sees culture as emphasising the superiority of men and portraying women as nothing in society. This was a point we saw in the literature review, where it was highlighted that culture tends to make abuse acceptable, where men are seen as superior and women are left with no support at all.

Walter and Morna (2010:35), further emphasise this as they state that:

> Deeply-rooted patterns of patriarchy and gender equality in cultural and traditional practices often render women even more vulnerable to abuse.

Emily said:

> *Culture emphasises that women must submit, obey and listen as they let the husband lead as he wants*.

According to Emily culture states that divorce is not an option and condones anyone to suffering should they choose to go back. She mentioned a story of her aunty who went back after being beaten so badly. The family rejected her and made her suffer; she was labelled as a disgrace to the family and a failure in society.

She says that seeing what her aunt went through instilled fear in her and a big dislike of culture. She mentioned that she never had a problem with culture growing up until she saw what culture did to people.

> *Culture is bad and very controlling. I also remember that culture teach us good morals and good behaviour but I see culture destroying people, people become the victim and they are forced to do many things they don't wanna do it.*

She further stated that indeed culture made her stay, it was one of the main reasons why she stayed. Everyone including her mother told her that she was not allowed to go back home. Thinking back to her aunt's experience, she knew that she would suffer even more if she went back. Culture made her a victim; she had the fear of rejection because she knew that if she left she would be rejected and judged by society:

> *Now I know better and it's why I hate culture. I have more information now and see that culture is very bad.*

Although Olga has disregarded culture completely, she admitted to the fact that culture played a role in her staying as well. This is because:

> *…the family sends you back to your husband*.

So even if she left, culture would send her back. She says that her mother told her to stay for the sake of the children and that is why she stayed. She also felt that because her children grew up outside of South Africa and could not speak any of the national languages, she feared that they would be ostracised and unaccepted by society. Leaving would place another burden on her children, they would have to bear the impact of a broken home and being out-casts in society:

> *Culture says that staying is the best decision for the children.*

Christine's answer was brief and to the point, she did not seem willing to expand on her answer. The researcher found this to be interesting because she was the most passionate and loyal participant when it came to culture. However, she did mention that culture plays a very important role in her life and decisions.

49

Although she is not officially married to her abuser, she still believes that as her culture says she must respect her boyfriend and let him lead her. She believes that leaving means that she has broken some cultural rules. She further said that the fact that she is going to be a mother soon means that she must be strong and for the sake of her culture she will be strong.

Mary started off by stating that culture played a major role because there are so many cultural expectations when it comes to marriage. Leaving is not an easy thing to do, for the sake of honouring her culture and avoiding the aftermath of leaving, staying was the easiest and safest option. She shared that:

> *Culture played an important role in my staying bearing in mind what my family would think if I left. I remember my mom once told me that whatever I am going through with my husband, I should not leave it is painful and needs a lot of sacrifice as Jesus did when He was crucified on the cross in Calvary for us all to be freed of our sins. Equally, my actions are bearing fruits as I see God's blessing pouring in my family.*

Tiyana says that she used to believe that culture was very important to her and that she could not stay away from it or do anything outside of it, but after meeting a social worker who was a neighbour of hers, her views changed. She met the social worker after her husband beat her and the neighbour went to find out what was happening. The social worker showed Tiyana the many dangers one can face when they hold on to culture so much; an example being staying in an abusive marriage because culture does not condone divorce. Her culture sees the man as superior and more important; what he enforces in the home should be followed. Women are not held to the same status/value. Tiyana shared:

> *My husband once told me that if his mother was able to stay in an abusive relationship until her husband died, I could do the same. Culture is one of the most controlling things I know. It stops me from living my life. I feel very trapped and unable to escape. All this because of culture, and I hate it.*

She further elaborated on her above statement by saying that she feels like her husband brainwashed her. Her husband kept telling her that if his parents stayed and survived through an abusive marriage, they could do the same too. She further argues that she feels as though culture promotes the notion of abuse and the subordination of women.

50

After listening to her strong sentiments about her dislike and disappointment in culture, there was a sense that she was an avid believer of culture; growing up culture was all she knew and loved, but after experiencing the downside of cultural practises, she felt trapped in a situation she had no control over, the fact that her husband also uses culture as an excuse for his behaviour has made her 'hate' culture and what it stands for. She did mention, however, matter of factly, that she still believes that there are a few positives to culture, such as: respect for elders, morality, and oneness.

Debrah also felt that culture played a role in her staying because her husband paid lobola and in the African culture this means that both families are involved in the relationship. This makes leaving very complicated. Both families (hers and husband's) are in Zimbabwe, meaning that if they want to call off the marriage they would both have to go to Zimbabwe and they do not have money. There are many cultural proceedings to be followed and these are not necessarily easy or quick. Culturally the husband is always right; she knows that she is fighting a losing battle. Culturally her family will not support her because leaving one's marriage is not supported. She told me of an incident when she informed the family what she was going through and the response was not encouraging. She said:

> *My family told me that this is normal, a man must beat you cause he is the head and you must not over power him.*
>
> *Culture is making me uncomfortable; I can't be free and open minded. My emotions can never be known by others, no one can feel them. Culture has ruined my life and I am now a slave. Because of this I am stuck here and I don't have a solution. It traps me and makes me cry, now I can't be me. Because of this thing, when I talk about my relationship people think I am dramatic... no one understands me and my problem and pain.*
>
> *I feel like I am adopting an I don't care attitude where I will just do whatever I want and deal with whatever happens. But it's not easy because culture stops me from making myself happy.*
>
> *Lack of knowledge is dangerous, many African people can't see right and wrong and this is because of culture. There is too much focus on what the ancestors say. People need advice, ideas and support. The justice system must take action.*
>
> *Training on abuse must be given because many people don't know. Most of them think it's normal because that is what they tell us.*

51

Black people need to understand their rights and that they have value.

It is evident to see that culture has a stronghold on many African marriages and relationships. Based on participants' accounts, there seems to be a great lack of respect and support for the women, making it very difficult for most of them to leave.

Walter and Morna (2010) as well as Michalski (2004), allude to this as they speak on the impact of culture. They argue that in the worst cases, some people, communities and or societies hide behind culture as a way to perpetuate and condone the worst kinds of abuse. A further argument is that perhaps due to the long held beliefs and traditions of silence, along with the police and justice system, families and communities are also reluctant to intervene.

Whilst Michalski (2004) favours more research on culture, she warns that exclusively focusing on the cultural dimensions of violence may mean that there is a failure to recognise the underlying structural features that perpetuate violence against women from generation to generation. Culture as seen in the literature review, plays a major role in our lives. It was therefore very enlightening to see how culture impacted the women's relationships and their understanding of culture in relation to the status of their relationships. It was clear that most of the women blamed most of their problems on cultural practises and traditions.

Having looked at how culture played a role in making the women stay in the abusive relationships was very enlightening. We will now look at the women's understanding of culture as well as how they felt culture impacted or contributed to their relationships and the 'problems' or issues therein. As in most African families, marriage is not only between two people but the entire family; this means that the way culture affects society's way of thinking and viewing things will have an impact on the relationship/marriage.

Tiyana was always told that she is to keep her issues to herself, in her own home. She describes this as *'African Culture'.* As a result of this she felt like she had no one to turn to or speak to and kept silent for two years. She faced her pain and abuse in silence; she argues that the hardest part was pretending to be happy to everyone while she was in so much pain and sorrow. She also knew that talking to her family was not going to help because they had warned her not to marry him. She was too embarrassed because she realised that her family was right. Marriage is valued in her culture; leaving would therefore mean losing a thing of value and bringing shame to the family.

She further argues that although culture has the ability to control and influence many of her decisions in life, she sees culture as more destructive than helpful. Culture pushes for silence, restriction and seclusion; where abuse is seen as a taboo topic that should never be discussed. There is no sense of support. She believes that leaving would be a disgrace to her

52

family because of what culture depicts marriage to be. She shared that her mother always emphasised the importance of marriage. She said:

> *Culture limits my mind, freedom and views. It stops equality and sees me as inferior because I am a woman. It makes me a slave to him.*

> *Although culture was the cause of my abuse, my husband saw his father do it and he felt that it was normal to treat me that way, I chose to stay for the sake of my children, not because culture told me to.*

She later told me that people should never think that their identity is in culture. Culture forced her to be in silence for years in order to please everyone but herself. The husband's family even threatened to take the lobola back and her children were constantly used to scare her and stop her from leaving.

Having heard the women and analysed the literature, the researcher realised that prior to the study, she had the preconceived idea that culture controls, which it does, but the control that was observed is different. The assumption was that the women would abide by what culture says, this was however not the case. The control was more from the expectations placed on them by family members and communities who held cultural practices highly. The women felt pressurised not to 'disappoint' their families and communities because acting outside the bounds of cultural expectations was not accepted by their families and community.

If there were no children involved, Tiyana would have left regardless of what culture says. She argues that although culture has the ability to control and influence many of her decisions in life, she does not feel as though it played as big a role in her decision to stay. This is a sentiment shared by Emily who said that when she thinks of her relationship in relation to culture she feels trapped, she feels that there is no escape and that she is a victim unable to communicate or share what she is going through with anyone; she harbours resentment, anger and guilt. Cultural expectations made her stay in a relationship that could have killed her and culture made her husband feel that what he was doing was fine. She argues that the fact that culture never tells the abuser he is wrong for being abusive makes the relationship unbearable.

Olga on the other hand describes culture as a shaping agent; it shapes people and prepares them on how to face the future. She speaks of the role the elders have in shaping young women and that culture used to be important but now there seems to be a greater focus on human rights, freedom of speech and other such initiatives. She says that culture is no longer important. She said:

> *I have deleted so many things out of my mind. I no longer see the*
> *benefit of culture. I choose not to consider it at all.*

She further argues that culture was a good thing when it focused on respect for elders, unity in the family and instilling good values in children.

However, she feels that culture is no longer respected or even worthy of respect. Children no longer rely on the principles of culture but run towards children's rights and the inability to discipline children. When asked how much she considers culture she argued that culture will never play a role and that she will base her decisions on something else not culture. She was one of the most resistant to culture; she was very adamant that culture means nothing to her at all.

When asked about culture, Debrah defined it as a way of life and her background. She argued that culture was very important to her because she felt that it is something that could or should protect and support her wellbeing. The morals and principles she grew up with due to her culture were also very important. Nonetheless, she has changed her view towards culture because she feels that culture enslaves her and makes her a victim of her circumstances and relationship. She said:

> *Culture is not important to me anymore. I hate it because it makes*
> *me suffer.*

She defines the cultures she grew up with as those practices that taught her how to be a woman. She tells stories of her aunties and elders teaching them how to be good wives and women in society. They were taught how to dress, respect elders, family members and in-laws as well as how to take care of their husbands and children. When she became older, she remembers being told that no matter how tough or difficult things become in her household, leaving is never an option. They were told that being a wife is not easy but that once they become one, they have to stay until the end. Marriage was also seen as a very important part of a woman's life. When asked if she ever thinks without considering culture because she hates it so much she answered:

> *Just because I hate culture so much, it does not mean it is gone,*
> *culture is always there. Yes I have my own opinion but culture always*
> *holds me back sometimes. If I leave my relatives won't like me and if I*
> *stay I suffer. I try very hard to not consider it but it is always there.*

She shared that living far from her children makes her suffering and situation easier and more bearable. The fact that her children are not exposed to this makes her feel more at ease. She is happy that her children do not get to see her tears. Although like every mother

54

she would have loved to raise her own children even if it means they suffer together, she acknowledges that the lack of finances and abuse would not be the ideal situation for them; she blames this entire situation on culture.

From the start of the interview Emelda was very adamant that culture does not and will not dictate her life or her family. Her response was very brief and to the point:

> *I belong to the Shona culture, they are very cultural in terms of beliefs for example lobola is strict but Christianity has made it easy. Culture is not important to me. I never consider culture; my decisions are based on the Christian way.*

The researcher asked her what the Christian way is to her and she said:

> *It is the biblical way of doing things. Things like the Ten Commandments, respect for parents, no adultery and forgiveness.*

Christine was one of the most passionate about culture and how much she loves it. She argued that culture is all she knew and grew up with and that she will live by what culture says. However, it is very interesting to note how much culture has 'destroyed' her life. Her story is very sad, as already seen, and yet she remains very faithful and loyal to her beliefs. She said:

> *Culture to me is how we live and the elders tell us to live. We learn about respect, becoming a woman and wife, and that the man is the head of the house. Things like lobola are important and marriage is very important in our culture, if you are married there is no going back. Many women worship their husbands, he is the one in charge of everything. I have to respect him no matter what; the elders always say that we have to stay even if it's very hard.*

She explains that it is because of culture that she wanted to wait for her husband and save her virginity for him and now bad things are happening to her because she did not respect culture. She did acknowledge that times are changing and that things are more modern now but this she argues, will not stop her from following her culture. She further noted that there are a few things that are not very good about culture like the man always being right, but she does not mind these little things because nothing is perfect in life. She shared:

> *I know that being stuck in culture is negative I have seen it destroy my life. I'm suffering today, yes it keeps us back and makes life difficult but it is all I know all my life.*

Mary's understanding of culture was that:

> *Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Culture in a particular setting is largely influenced by exposure and interaction with people of different background.*

When asked which culture she associates herself with she said her Christian values are what she associates herself with and not her culture. Albeit, there are certain aspects of her culture that she lives by such as respect, the cuisine, music and arts.

Zandile on the other hand understood culture as:

> *Culture is how we were bought up. We were forced to believe in it, it was not an option. It makes sense sometimes and other times it does not make sense. Like sometimes I don't understand why my culture doesn't let me speak to my father in law or look him in the yes, I always have to kneel. But I like culture because it taught us respect, hard work and saving ourselves for marriage, morals and values we must always have.*

She was very adamant that culture had nothing to do with her staying; she felt that if the above factors were sorted or were not an issue, she would leave. She has reached a point where she is very ready to leave despite of the factors she mentioned, but she has given herself time to try and fix things and forgive him. If the situation is still not as it should be, she plans to leave. She said:

> *I really don't care anymore, if I had support and enough money, I would leave today. I feel like I will leave him one day; I will get my job, birth certificates and stability then I will just go. Even if I don't want to be a single mother and the children to not have a father, I think I must leave if things don't change soon.*

The initial assumption was that every African woman is very passionate about their culture, however, the study showed t that although there was a general respect for culture, Christine was the most and only 'loyal' one among the participants. The researcher learnt that in as much as culture shapes us in many ways, we still have the power to decide how far it can shape and control our lives. Prior to the study the researcher assumed that everyone would 'love' and 'live' by their culture, but the results showed that this is not the case; some people are more dedicated then others, while others do not even care to

consider it anymore. Agency however, remains the main source of 'power' when it comes to making decisions and choices; because in the end, we are in control of our own thoughts; regardless of the external factors that may influence them.

5.5. Reflexive States: Accounting for the internal processes relating to the decision to stay

One of the research questions was to find out the internal conversations that influenced the women's decision to stay in the abusive relationship. This is important to look at because as highlighted by Archer (1988) in the literature review, women have the ability to reflexively negotiate within themselves, and this negotiation is based on the social situation they are facing. It is evident that the women that were interviewed all had different experiences and as such their thoughts or reflexive states will be different and will in turn have different impacts on how they make their decisions to stay. This section will therefore examine the women's thoughts and how these impacted their decision to stay in abusive relationships.

Through-out the research process, the researcher realised that one's ability to think and analyse the situation in their own minds impacts greatly on their ability to deal with the circumstances they find themselves in. Looking at Archer's notion of reflexivity enables us to better understand agency and the importance of reflexivity and how greatly it impacts our decisions and choices. As seen in the literature review, agency is a power that humans possess. Although it is a power that we possess, it is important to note that not all internal conversations or thoughts reflect or mean agency. From the women's actions it would seem that they are using their agency in some way, it is from asking them these questions that we are able to find out why it is seen as agency or not. Agency is therefore not only in action per se, but it is also in the thinking process.

The researcher has found that sometimes the process of thinking brings about more clarity and sanity while acting indifferently to the situation (abuse), may have an adverse effect. However, over thinking, has the ability to also make situations worse; it was nevertheless evident that those who avoid thinking may find themselves in a really difficult situation. When someone can no longer afford to think, it may lead to many unresolved issues such as trauma for example. This becomes very problematic because the fact is that sociology can only go so far; this is where one's agency becomes very important. It is important to note that not all thoughts demonstrate agency however, not thinking may also limit agency. It is crucial to distinguish which thoughts can be understood as agency or demonstrating agency as well as the extent to which the women use their agency.

For Bourdieu, agency is shaped by habitus; he believes that habitus is produced by social practices, which encourages people to behave in ways that produce existing practices and structures of society. The main argument therefore is that habitus lacks agency. For Archer, agency involves actively thinking and being reflective.

57

She places reflexivity at the very heart of human agency. This therefore means that the contribution of agency to human action will vary according to the situation, individual and historical context.

Having looked at the concept of habitus and reflexivity, it will be useful for us to examine the women's thoughts so as to see to what extent these thoughts reflect agency. As mentioned before, most women find solace in their thoughts, the ability to live in an imagined world where things are better than reality, allows them to escape reality and find some peace for a little while. The question nonetheless remains as to whether or not these thoughts, despite how peaceful they may make them feel, reflect agency or not.

Tiyana believes that her personal thoughts are very important to her because it is the only 'place' where she can be sane. Finding herself in an abusive relationship is a big shock to her, she never saw this coming. She says that she has been loyal, faithful and did all she could to be a good mother and wife, and she still got this in return. So thinking allows her to escape for a while.

This is how she accounts for her thoughts:

> *I will never love another man like I love him. I'm scared of the unknown; this has become very familiar to me. Starting over would just be a waste of time, I'd rather keep fighting for change and hoping that he will change one day.*
>
> *Although I thought of leaving, I saw it as a way of threatening him, not necessarily leaving forever. My thoughts make me feel better about myself, the abuse made me doubt myself and my self-worth, but my thoughts allow me to see myself differently. My children consume my thoughts. I dream of better for them and always pray that they don't blame me for exposing them to this. I often blame myself and am guilty that I allowed my children to be exposed to such abuse. But I also dream of better days for them. My thoughts allow me to dream.*

She shared that people used to have a big influence on her, their opinions mattered a lot, but once she separated herself from culture and the world, when she could just escape and be alone with her thoughts, she felt better about herself and her future. She felt that in her thoughts she could just be 'her'. However, she feels that now the key is to focus on herself and not what people or culture dictate to her. Pleasing people has been very detrimental to her and her family. She has moved from pleasing people and culture to focusing on developing herself and healing in the process.

> *When I'm better, my relationship with others will also be better.*
> *Pleasing people - parents, church members, family, community and*
> *extended family - just made me very sad and lonely.*

She ended with this quote:

> *We can only overcome evil with good.*

She qualified this by stating that this quote made her stay calm and not fight her husband as hard as she could or should have. Understanding agency as a 'power' that one possesses, we can see that Tiyana has used this power as a tool to help her choose her battles. We see that she has been very reflective and active in her thoughts; these are some elements that Archer highlighted as displaying agency. Her thoughts have therefore displayed the use of agency and the ability to choose how far she is willing to 'fight'.

Debrah on the other hand believes that her thoughts are very important only because they help her deal with what she is going through not because they are the solution to her problems. Most of her thoughts revolve around how much she hates culture. She thinks of going to a faraway place where no one will ever find her. In her thoughts she feels as though she has the ability of escaping. She is however unable to carry her thoughts out because culture and fear hold her back. She said:

> *My thoughts give me a sense of hope that things may be better again*
> *for me and my children that things may change. It's a place I escape*
> *and think positive. But after thinking I'm sad again 'cause I can't do*
> *those things I think about.*

She acknowledges that she spends most of her time thinking about her relationship and the way her life has turned out. She is consumed by regret, and wishes she could have done things differently and made better choices. She spends many sleepless nights thinking about the miserable life she is living. She blames herself because no one forced her to marry this man. She also believes that she deserves to be happy and that this is not her fate. She wishes she had taken more time before marrying him. She shared:

> *I still believe that one day I'm gonna be happy, I just need*
> *counselling, advise and a stable job. Whether I die or not I must leave*
> *one day.*

Another factor that influences people is how others view them. Debrah always has thoughts of how her family and community will 'see' her if she leaves.

59

She believes that her aunties will shout at her and that her father will not be proud of her. She however feels that pleasing herself is more important although it is not easy.She believes that because she is the one in the situation, it is crucial that she deals with herself and makes choices that make her happy.

Although Debrah has found escape through her thoughts, her thoughts have not demonstrated agency. Agency entails weighing the pros and cons, seeking help or some kind of solution regardless of whether it is staying or leaving. Although she is thinking, her thoughts are not reflective enough; they therefore lack the sense of agency. Her thoughts are mainly psychological in the sense that they help her 'escape' for some time.

Mary says that she has stopped thinking about her relationship and is rather focusing on how she and her family can move forward and please God. She has seen that patience and perseverance are the best things to focus on. What can be inferred from this is that she has in the past spent time thinking, but has chosen to refocus her thoughts and energy on other things. Thoughts of a happy and united family consume her most. She believes that it is more important to please God than it is to please people. Her thoughts reflect some agency, but in comparison to some other participants, hers may seem 'minimal'. She ended with these words:

> *Life is a choice, you can choose to live a happy or miserable life, the decision is yours. Submitting your life to God and living like Jesus Christ is the best option.*

Zandile came across as having spent a lot of time thinking and making plans for her daughters' future. She however mentioned that she spends most of her time thinking about the lies her husband has told/kept from her over the years. She feels betrayed and suffers from trust and anger issues as a result. She shared:

> *Most times I think that his sons will grow up and treat me badly because they will see me like the woman who took their father, broke their home and made them suffer. They will never know that he is the liar. Now everyone blames me when he doesn't send them money, they think I hate his boys and stop him from sending them money, but he is not working.*
>
> *I also have no peace that he is still married to the other wife because now it's like I don't even exist. My marriage is fake. If he dies, I can't do anything at the funeral because they only know the other wife.*

She is also scared of telling him that she no longer loves him because she is not sure of how he will react. She suspects that he may shut down and this will make things worse because he is already very reserved. She is also scared because she never knows what he is thinking and this she says is very frustrating. She also said that in her thoughts she sees herself raising her children alone, all she needs is a stable source of income and a place to stay.

She still stands on her desire for her children to know their father, she does not mind that they are still in touch with him, but she would prefer raising them alone; she feels that this is what she is currently doing anyway. She says that her husband once told her:

> *My husband told me one day that he will never make it without me.*
> *He knows that I am strong and will always provide for my children*
> *better than him.*

She argues that her thoughts are very important to her because they have helped her plan and strategise. Her thoughts have in part demonstrated agency, we see that she used her thoughts to plan a future for her and her children. She took action and did not merely stop at the thought process. Spending time thinking has allowed her to think of ways to leave and provide a stable home and future for her children. As a result of her thoughts she has taken action and:

1. She bought a plot of land in Zimbabwe where she is planning to build a house.
2. She has recorded an album (music) and she is working on marketing strategies, after which she will record a DVD.

She shared:

> *My thoughts made me take action, and now I have plans that will*
> *make my daughters have a better future. I'm a very good pretender*
> *and no one will ever think that I have problems; my husband is calm*
> *so people think he is a perfect man... my thoughts help me forget*
> *these problems and helps me focus on making things better for the*
> *future.*

Zandile is the one participant that has demonstrated the power of thoughts/reflexivity. We see that her thoughts have demonstrated agency to a very large extent. Although she has not left the relationship, she has used her agency in the decision to she made to stay and make progress even in her situation. Thoughts have the ability to destroy or empower and she has used her thoughts to her advantage. She closed her interview by emphasising the importance of knowing ones partner before getting married; she encourages people not to rush into anything and to take advice from their family members. She further states that

61

marriage is not a test that can be re-written. One's personality should never fool anyone, knowing the person's history is important. She remarked:

> *I feel like my heart is broken because of his lies, I really want to make myself happy but I pretend so that people think I'm happy, and that makes them happy too.*

In other cases, some women have found that thinking leaves them drained, sad and faced with the reality of their situation and the fact that it may never change. They find that there is a big disconnect between reality and what their thoughts present to them. As a result thinking just makes things worse.

Emily states that her thoughts were and still are very important to her. She spent most of her time thinking of ways to escape and take action. She however felt that the thinking process made things worse for her. This was because knowing that you have the power but cannot do anything about it made her feel useless. She thought of independence and how she lost it. She thought of her degree in electrical engineering and how she never did anything with it. She thought of ways to start over, but she realised that culture had taken everything from her. She also felt that the thoughts she had of herself were the very same thoughts that other people had of her. She had thoughts of pain, guilt and her perceived failure and incompetence as a mom. She saw her inability to use her own 'power' and 'strength' to protect herself and her children as the worst thing culture did to her.

In as much as her thoughts were important, she felt that they left her despondent and sad. She however sees thinking as a way to escape and relive any past failures and possible futures in the mind. Her current thoughts are of what she could have done differently, when it comes to her dreams, goals and career. Although her thoughts demonstrated her desire to take action (agency), the situation or circumstances did not allow her to do so. This shows that sometimes demonstrating agency is not always possible. She also thinks of how to rebuild a close relationship with her children and how to stop herself from harbouring thoughts of guilt and failure so that she can forgive herself. She explains that through this process, she had a very tough time forgiving herself and she is still in the process of healing.

She still has many questions about her children's future; she is worried about the effects of living in an abusive home have had on them. She does not want her daughter to end up in an abusive relationship or for her son's to become abusive later in life. She said:

> *I feel like I failed as a mother and I don't know how to fix it. The guilt is something I can't and don't know how I will deal with it.*

Although thinking makes her feel useless and a failure, she acknowledges the fact that it helps keep her sane:

> *If I didn't spend time thinking I was gonna become crazy.*

Her closing remarks were that she would advise other women to get out as soon as possible because the damage caused is not worth it at all. She further states that trying to be strong is deadly and that staying destroys children more than we could ever imagine. The fact that she is thinking shows that she is not limiting her agency, although her thoughts may seem 'depressing', she has displayed agency in the sense that she has taken the time to actively think, rather than stop thinking all together, and her thoughts have somehow allowed her to come to a place of 'acceptance' of her current situation and the fact that for the moment she is limited and unable to do what she wants to.

One participant whose thoughts did not demonstrate agency was Olga. She surprised the researcher when she told her that she sees thinking as a waste of time. She argued that thinking never helps with anything nor does it change anything. She did admit that thoughts are important and that they could help one escape from reality for a little while, but the lack of progress after the thought process, pushed her to stop thinking and as already highlighted, once one stops thinking, they are limiting their agency. Thoughts were liberating for a short while, but then it was back to reality. She used to think of hopeful ways to move on, to see her husband change his ways and to let go, but nothing ever happened as they did in her thoughts. She closed off the interview by saying:

> *I didn't do anything wrong, I looked for help, I did all I could to fix things but there was no response so I thought maybe it will fix itself along the way.*

Emelda shared similar sentiments as she argued that:

> *I used to think a lot but realised that my thoughts made it worse. They made me feel sorry for myself. The self-pity made me stress a lot. Not thinking and focusing on other stuff made me feel better.*

> *I spend most times thinking only about my life and how to make my children's life better. I also feel guilty because I used to work and take care of myself and children. He stopped my job now he is gone and we are suffering because of him.*

In as much as she spends a lot of time thinking, her thoughts are not consumed by the abuse and negative things happening in her life.

63

She is trying to use her thoughts in ways that make her feel better, ways that give her a sense of hope, and like the other participants her thoughts are a mere way of escape from the reality of life, it is a way of living in an imagined better future. Her thoughts are merely psychological and not displaying taking action.

Thoughts therefore play a major role, in the researcher's opinion, in assisting with the 'healing' process. Being able to escape from reality even for a while is better than being stuck there all the time. The problem this presents according to the women that were interviewed is that this escape is short lived. The women are on a constant roller coaster where they may escape for a while, but the escape never improves the situation. When asked about her thoughts concerning her being in this kind of relationship Emelda once again gave a surprising answer:

> *Being in this kind of relationship makes me think that there's a reason why this happened, maybe I should learn from it. I don't know why or how, but I'm sure that God can solve the problem.*

Her closing remarks were:

> *Don't depend on a man. Learn to take care of yourself even if he is not there anymore. People can let you down and not even worry about the hurt and pain they put you though. I have a learnt a very big lesson in my life and I am still deciding what to do from here.*

Christine on the other hand says that because she is always alone, all she can do is think. She thinks a lot about the fact that he was her first man and sexual partner and that he deceived her. Her thoughts are filled with regret and guilt because had she kept her initial plan to marry first, maybe this would not have happened. She also thinks of change and the possibility of this happening but most times she is hopeless. She shared:

> *He doesn't have time for me, he doesn't even ask about the baby and pregnancy but he wants to keep it from me if I go. He always tells me that I was a mistake he made but he doesn't want me to leave him. When I think of this I wish to kill myself sometimes. It's very painful and difficult for me.*

She too argues that most times thinking makes it very painful and that even those times when she tries very hard not to think, the thoughts keep coming. Seeing him and his wife brings back thoughts of hurt and when she is alone, all she has is time to think. The thinking seems to worsen things for her because it leaves her depressed and suicidal.

She wishes she had the power to stop herself from thinking sometimes, happy thoughts never come, and even thoughts of the coming baby do not excite her. They just leave her anxious and uncertain of the kind of life the baby will have. Referring to her relationship and the thoughts she has concerning it, she defines it as being painful, filled with lies and deceit and enslaving because she is now trapped and has nowhere to go. She said all that comes to mind most of the time is hurt.

Even though the women spent a lot of time thinking or avoiding the thinking process, change, in the researcher's opinion is only truly possible when these thoughts demonstrate some form of agency. The reality most women face shows that sometimes taking action or showing agency is not always possible. The complexity of abuse and the different issues women face, makes it difficult to translate thought or the reflexive process into action or agency. These women are connected to their families, societies and communities; this adds some pressure on them as well. This will therefore affect the extent to which they use their agency because of the expectations placed on them by these people.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, a biographical sketch of the participants was presented to help in identifying with the women and their thoughts. For most of the women, the abuse came as a surprise and even in the cases where the signs of abuse were there early in the relationship (while dating), it was seen that leaving the abusive relationship was not easy. The main finding therefore, was that the women chose to stay for various reasons. We also saw that the reasons highlighted in the literature review often times overlap with those identified by the women in the interviews. An example being fear of physical abuse, which highlighted the issues of power dynamics within a relationship (Jewkes & Wood, 2007), and how it impacts the women's decision to stay.

In the chapter, the researcher also looked at the women's reflexive states, focusing on the women's thoughts and how these thoughts 'helped' the women deal with the situation they found themselves in. It was seen that not all thoughts reflect agency, although the thinking process was seen to be therapeutic in some ways, albeit not all the time because it allowed the women to process and deal with the abuse.

In the final chapter, the conclusions from this research will be presented.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

6. Conclusion

In conclusion this study has shown that abuse is a serious problem in South Africa. Abuse not only affects women, but children, families and societies at large. Abuse holds many definitions and can be understood differently. I have demonstrated that culture is a complex concept that is contested in the use of our understandings of abuse. Although contested, Bourdieu's theory of habitus and Archer's centrality of reflexivity and agency compelled the researcher to use culture as an integral concept of our understanding of abuse as a factor that impacts on the women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships. I agree with Bourdieu that culture is lived and becomes part of us; this consequently leads to us making decisions based on our norms, beliefs and traditions. On the other hand, Archer's focus on our internal thoughts, our ability to reflexively think and use our agency to make decisions, is also important to consider.

Hence the aim was to see which of the two, culture or reflexive agency, is a stronger force when it comes to decision making. My research has shown that one's agency is a powerful tool that can be used to make choices and decisions. In as much as culture influences and governs our way of life, the study has highlighted that it does not have the power to over-ride one's agency and ability to think and make informed decisions regardless of what culture or any other factor presents one with. Culture has proven to be a double edged sword in the sense that although it is used as a point of reference in terms of how people live, for example, it has proved to be very detrimental too, especially in relation to intimate partner violence. As seen in the study, most of the participants found culture to be a negative influence on their lives and a major contributor to the abusive situations they found themselves in.

We have seen that the women's circumstances impact importantly on how they make their decisions to either stay or leave the abusive relationships. It was also significant that most participants are from other countries and that they are not only faced with issues of abuse, but also the burden of being refugees or illegal immigrants in South Africa. This allowed us to see the impact of migration and its impact on the women's lives.

The women were from different social, economic and educational backgrounds; this therefore enriched the findings of the study, because it enabled us to see the impact of one's 'lifestyle' and how they come about making the decision to stay in abusive relationships. It was evident to see that the impact of abuse is so detrimental regardless of how educated or rich one is.

Looking at South Africa, we can see that intimate partner violence is a pandemic and some of the participants' have voiced the fact that there is not much being done to eradicate the abuse. A study by Morna and Nyakujarah (2011), highlights the fact that the South African government has been criticised for under-utilising the resources for prevention and protection of the abused. They further state that the government does not prioritise gender based violence (abuse) in the same way as HIV and AIDS. Although they did acknowledge that this problem was not unique to South Africa, their argument was that there is a scarcity of financial and human resources to address gender based violence that directly impacts on the success of implementation of laws and policies as well as on the quality of the various structures, which are necessary to address gender based violence (abuse).

Emelda's story has reinforced my belief that leaving an abusive relationship is not as easy as many may assume. Emelda is a woman who has been offered support and a place to escape to. Her family is one of the few that has not rejected her but have offered support and comfort, and yet she is still not willing to leave the abusive relationship. Not only that, but her husband is not the typical controlling and possessive abuser. He has allowed her the freedom to leave, and yet she has endured this abuse and heartache for more than two years. It is also interesting that she is one of the few participants that did not give the typical reasons for staying, such as those expressed by many abused women; examples include, fear of the abuser, no escape, cultural rules and financial dependency, yet she is still willing to endure. This really surprised me and attests to the fact that leaving is not an easy thing that one can do over night. It has also made me realise that NGOs and such organisations have more work to do if they are to rehabilitate and empower women to choose a better life for themselves.

The ability to leave becomes an area of further research and investigation because if a woman has the freedom to leave and chooses not to, it becomes a little more complicated to intervene. Intervening on behalf of the children involved also becomes difficult as a result of the mother's unwillingness to leave. It is therefore important to come up with prevention strategies that will help eradicate this pandemic.

It has already been highlighted by Jewkes et. al. (2011), that some of the major causes of intimate partner violence is the notion of hegemonic African masculinity, power inequality as well as structural issues among others. A look at a study done by Jewkes (2002), argue that some of the ways of preventing intimate partner violence include empowering women and improving their status in society, reducing the use of violence, which as seen in the literature review, has become normalised in the South African context, changing community norms, creating a climate of non-tolerance of intimate partner violence as well as implementing research and monitoring. In another study by Jewkes et. al. (2004), they have highlighted the fact that more focus has been placed on women when it comes to intimate partner violence, although it is a product of male behaviour.

This poses a problem because it contributes very little towards an understanding of most of the risk factors. It is therefore important that focus is also placed on men and ensuring that they are educated and empowered in this regard. This is further emphasised by Jewkes and Morrell (2010), who argue that a way of prevention entails a focus on building more gender-equitable and caring masculinities, and less acquiescent or submissive femininities.

I learnt that an abuser is very dangerous and has the ability to control and destroy someone's life. It is a very scary thought and it reinforced my passion and desire to see abused women assisted, as well as educate abusers and create more awareness on the issue of abuse. Many people are not aware of the intensity of the problem in our nation. Many families and people's lives are being destroyed by this pandemic; more work needs to be done.

The focus on women's thoughts was very enlightening and is a great contribution to helping us understand intimate partner violence and how the women understand and deal with it. Most studies have not focused on thoughts, so this is seen to be one of the advantages of this study. It was clear that thoughts have a way of making the situation worse or better, depending on how the thoughts are directed and channelled. The ability to see whether or not the thoughts reflected agency or not was also very enriching to the findings, as it allowed us to have a better understanding of Acher's concept of reflexivity and Bourdieu's concept of habitus.

While the limitations of the study have been mentioned in the methodology section, another factor that may be seen as a limitation is the fact that there was not so much literature that focused on the women's internal thoughts. Therefore, the researcher had to rely to a large degree on Walter and Morna's (2010), work in the findings section because their work focuses on the women's stories and this focus helped in using their stories as a way of trying to get an understanding of their thoughts through the women's stories. This further emphasises the point that more research with a focus on the women's thoughts is needed.

While culture was central to this study, I did not delve deeply into culture in part because the focus was on internal thoughts. Hearing what the women had to say about culture was more important. I found that culture is very powerful, but not entirely powerful when it comes to controlling the decisions we make. We still have the free will and power to decide which elements of culture we will hold on to and which we will ignore. We see that the women's agency played an important role in their choices and decisions. Although culture was there as a governing force, they still had the ability to use their personal agency in making their decisions.

I also learnt that culture is perceived as a very negative factor by the participants; it is seen as controlling, enslaving and trapping. These are the very factors that hinder progress in the modern world we live in; the modern world enables us to use our minds, to be creative and to be our own agents, while culture does the very opposite of this. Although culture has positive aspects to it, the negatives far outweigh the perceived positives of culture in the now changing world according to the participants. Cultural expectations and the social understanding of it play a major role in the 'level' of intimate partner violence. For example, the need to keep the family 'together' regardless of what is happening within that family, all stems from the expectations placed on people to keep a family together. We also see the impact this has on children, which was a major concern of the study. Issues such as divorce are not tolerated and this is where the issue of religion comes in as well. These factors continue to highlight the complexity of intimate partner violence (abuse) and continue to emphasise how important it is for further research to be done in this field.

Doing this research was enlightening and allowed me to grow as a researcher and interviewer. The ability to get an understanding of the participants' internal thoughts and to explore how such thoughts influenced these women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships are opportunities I am grateful to have encountered. It was evident to see that even in circumstances where women are unable to leave, they have the ability to aim to feel in control through their thoughts. This research allowed me to grow my knowledge and reinforced a passion and desire to do as much as I can to help decrease the alarming rates of intimate partner violence. Protecting our children and ending the cycle of abuse is a priority.

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