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**AN EXPLORATION OF THE MEANING AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE  
PROVERB “LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON  
INDIGENOUS AFRICAN WOMEN’S HEALTH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the thesis, '**An Exploration of the meaning and the interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health: a phenomenological study**' is my original work and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other institution. All the sources that have been used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references in the text and the reference list.

.....  
**SEEPANENG SALAMINAH MOLOKO-PHIRI**

.....  
**DATE**

## DEDICATION

### *In loving memory of*

- My grandfather, Malose Solomon Moloko, and my grandmother, Pauline Monni Moloko. You were my best parents ever.
- My late mother, Jolinah Ramasela Moloko, and late father, Bunyane Steve Tlou; my late brother, Joseph Moloko, and my late sister, Sarah Sekgothe. I will always cherish your memories...

*This work is also dedicated to the many people who inspired me to follow my dream*

- My children, Ben Moloko and Onneile Moloko, and my grandchildren, Kutlwano Moloko and Kopano Moloko.
- My sister, Leah Sopasi, and her children Molebatsi, Mmapaseka and Tlhompfo.
- My brother-in-law, David Sekgothe; my nephew, Solly, and his wife Motsei and their children Kabelo, Ramoreki and Gosego Sekgothe.
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## ABSTRACT

An Exploration of the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health: a phenomenological study

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**Introduction:** The proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) is used as a language tool during premarital counselling to instruct African women on the value of marriage and to encourage married women to stay in their marriages. However, some African proverbs which are commonly used to define the marital relationship between men and women appear to be gender-biased and focus more on women only therefore perpetuating ill-health, discrimination and oppression.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the study were to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”, the implications of the proverb as experienced by the indigenous African women on their health, and to describe the study’s theoretical framework and the analogy of the proverb based on the study findings.

**Methods:** Hermeneutic phenomenological methods and a qualitative research design and methods were used to achieve the study objectives. Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle was also used to understand and interpret the meaning of the proverb. The study population consisted of indigenous African women who were selected using snowball and purposive sampling methods. A total number of 57 married, divorced, widowed and, on their request, single women who were attending social clubs/networks in the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg in Gauteng, South Africa were included in the study. Data were collected by means of five individual and eight focus group interviews and field notes were taken. Colaizzi’s data analysis method was used.

**Findings:** Four themes namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress and awareness and nine sub-themes emerged and these were supported by literature. A framework based on Wittmann-Price theory of emancipated decision-making and Masenya's (bosadi) womanhood approach was developed. The hut and the sun were used analogically to understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb.

**Conclusion:** The study concluded some women asserted the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" brought positive reinforcement and sanctity to their marriages. While other women asserted the proverb had negative implications on their health. Recommendations for the nurses, education and for indigenous African women have been clearly described.

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# 1 ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The characteristic of language that probably best encapsulates the culture and moral belief system of any society is its proverbs. Similarly, proverbs play a pivotal role in the social behaviour and traditional practices in the African populace across the African continent. Olasupo, Kikelomo and Adeniran (2012:11) comment the application of culturally derived proverbs in the daily life of African societies depends wholly on the situation and is invariably used to emphasise a point during formal and also informal discussions.

Hussein (2009:98) states proverbs are often directed towards the achievement of a particular objective. They are symbolic in nature and express effectively some traditionally held truth, offer advice, or serve as a rule for life lessons. For most cultures in Africa proverbs and idioms are socially-induced practices of which the meanings are configured with other broader issues in society such as gender inequality, the rearing of children and religious practices.

Proverbs and idioms are typical examples of linguistic tools used to express the world views of societies based on their collective experiences, values, and beliefs (Ndungo 2002:65). These societies have defined specific expectations regarding the behaviour of men and women within the confines of a conjugal relationship; hence, the belief that proverbs reflect the norms and values of a particular society and become enhanced in a gendered culture (Hussein 2005:59; Ndungo 2002). Language can therefore not be separated from the way people interpret the meanings of proverbs, as the selfsame language is at the core of the description and interpretation of reality to produce meanings and understanding of the proverbs from an indigenous context and perspective (Clark 2006:8). Societal expectations are inculcated among members of a society through language as part of their socialisation process.

Ssetuba (2002:1) regards proverbs as the “noble genre of the African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of people’s wisdom and philosophy of life”. According to social interactionism, human beings have the capacity for thought which is shaped by social interaction. These proverbs provide meaning to the experiences, norms and values as well as belief systems of a society (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene 2006:20). Accordingly, on the African continent proverbs are widely used as rich oral arts by African ethnic groups, societies and communities.

In the Republic of South Africa (SA) the African proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” has significant meaning for three indigenous African ethnic groups: the Batswana, the Bapedi (Northern Sotho) and the Basotho (Southern Sotho). Maundeni (2002:269) asserts that specifically many of the Setswana proverbs inadvertently condone the oppression of women, thus promoting gender inequality. In addition, there are some societal and cultural reflections embedded in language which inculcate women’s subordination to men and further contribute to the perpetuation of inequality (Masenya 1998:83). Ellece (2011:44) concurs with Ssetuba (2002:1) that the nature and extent of a society’s communication and way of life is a product of, and is shaped by, language as an oral tradition of the particular society. The proverb at the centre of this study, “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (which roughly translates into ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) is a communication tool used during premarital counselling to guide women to value marriage; it suggests that once a woman is married, she must stay with the husband and his family (even if he has died) for the rest of her life. Thus, considering divorce or returning to her father’s house (her own family) when marital problems occur or there is a misunderstanding between a wife and her husband, is a taboo (Masenya 1998). Once a woman agrees to enter into holy matrimony, she is expected to conform to her new role: that of the submissive partner and obedient daughter-in-law whose freedom of movement and expression has suddenly evaporated.

Therefore, “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” may be viewed as gender-biased because it symbolically compels women to persevere in a place and situation where she lives a life of angst and silence. Hussein (2005:72), who analysed the impact of the symbolic meaning attributed to “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” on men and women, argues that African proverbs perpetuate gender legacies and ideologies because

they associate maleness with firmness and supremacy and femaleness with meekness, indignity, and powerlessness. The author's interpretation is that the proverb deals with the fate of women trapped within the ideal of maintaining their credibility as a good wife who remains virtuous despite physical and/or psychological blows. But Phiri (2007:52) disagrees by contending the proverb does not only refer to promotes endurance and sanctity in marriage; in spite of the gender-free application of the adage, and due to the patriarchal influences of society, people *choose* to understand the proverb to be directed at women only. Contrary to what Phiri (2007) suggests Ellece's (2011:46) view is that the proverb does pertain to women only as it is commonly used in premarital counselling of the bride-to-be. She is advised and encouraged to persevere in her marriage before being escorted to the home of her in-laws. Masenya (2005:10) also perceives the proverb as discriminatory against women. Arguing that it leaves them with no choice other than opting for perseverance in their marriages, this author reiterates Hussein's (2005) argument that the proverb strengthens male supremacy over female subordination.

Hussein (2005:71) on the other hand acquiesces that the use of the current proverb and other idioms of similar credibility can sometimes be viewed as a strategy to promote sanctity and ways of holding marriages together. The author also agrees couples in a marriage may endure a variety of challenges but, if both make sacrifices, a functionally effective marriage may withstand any onslaught. O'Leary and Ickoviks (1995:121) posit that endurance in marriage may lead to resilience, which may also be a good strategy for the necessary homeostatic balance in family life. For families to be together, both spouses have to put in effort to sustain the marriage. Hussein (2005:61) further asserts the colourful imagery and value-carrying roles projected by proverbs sometimes contribute to their sexist tone becoming ignored. In a societal context, the interpretation of cultural practices, including proverbs, may be viewed as contributory factors and predisposing causes of disease that affect women's health negatively.

Perseverance in marriage may have a positive or a negative effect on women's psychosocial and physical health. There are undoubtedly women who may endure the hardships of nuptial relationships by developing perseverance as a mechanism to cope with negative issues occurring in their lives. At the same time, endurance

may also be detrimental to women who do not have strong characters and their psychosocial well-being may be negatively affected. Hussein (2005:67) states some African proverbs may have negative connotations as they cause harmful social, biological and psychological inferiority to women. Such harmful effects are exacerbated by people in patriarchal societies using the assumed stereotypical inferiority of women to limit their access to resources and positions.

In a study conducted on emotional violence against women in intimate relationships in Botswana, Thupayagale-Tshweneagae and Seloilwe (2010:39) found sociocultural practices emerged as salient factors that contributed immensely to emotional abuse. These sociocultural practices exposed women to stress-related health conditions such as mental and physical problems manifesting as bipolar disorder, depression, high blood pressure, and other illnesses. These authors emphasise the importance for nurses to understand and identify the extent to which sociocultural factors such as African proverbs can – and do – perpetuate oppression and the abuse of women.

Many women present to healthcare services with physical and psychosocial ailments emanating from mistreatment by their abusers. In the same vein, these women sometimes do not report the abuse because when they seek treatment, they may have to deal with healthcare workers who have not been trained to handle the issue of abuse (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2000:4). Understanding the meaning and the influence of proverbs on women's health could guide nurses in the way they provide healthcare services to women suffering from culturally engendered abuse. In healthcare service delivery, nurses are expected to play a vital role in supporting the affected women and creating a space for dialogue to make abused women's voices heard. Acting as nursing counsellors can provide a space for women to verbalise their problems to nurses without fear. A thorough assessment of and support for these women and their care should not only include the management of their obvious physical injuries, but also the identification of possible deeper lying psychosocial problems in which case they can be referred to appropriate healthcare professionals for immediate and effective interventions. This study therefore explored the meanings and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" ('a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband') and its implications on indigenous African women's health.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In a gender-based society, language affects the daily lives of women and men as it is used to express people's behavioural patterns (Ellece 2011:44). Language is also used to express stereotypes of the self and others, and may therefore sometimes contribute towards unequal power relations in a family. The current proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" has a link with other proverbs that contribute towards the subordination of women in their relationships with men. This view is supported by Maundeni (2002:269) who conducted a study in Botswana on wife abuse. The study revealed idioms such as "monna o laola mosadi" ('the husband rules the wife') give men a superior status over women. In addition, Ellece (2011:45) reports that during pre-marital counselling the bride's older aunts and female married relatives take part in advising the bride not to leave her marital home and return to her family no matter what abuse or mistreatment she has to endure. In the same vein, Ellece (2011) asserts the traditional Setswana wedding protocol excludes unmarried persons from engaging with the ritual of premarital counselling. During such counselling sessions, the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" is used as a primary tool to instil perseverance to marital life in the woman irrespective of the hardships she may encounter. Whether out of respect for the culture and traditions that govern their life or simply doing as they were told by older family members, many women abide by this 'rule' despite being in a life-threatening and injurious marriages.

Premarital advice is given to the woman to inculcate values of perseverance, patience and sacrifice when in a marriage. Unfortunately, following this advice may lead to the married woman experiencing psychosomatic disorders (Ellece 2011:46). Such premarital teachings and counselling tend to reinforce men's assumed domination over women and often result in women having to hold out in dysfunctional marriages. They may believe it is their duty to endure any physical or psychosocial abuse; to them it would be fundamentally wrong to disregard the older women's apparent insightful premarital counselling (Masenya 1998:87; Maundeni 2002:269). Some women are taught that under customary law, their husbands are the unquestionable head of the family and therefore he has the final decision-making power in all family matters (Maundeni 2002).

Women often suffer harmful cultural practices and beliefs that are subjecting them to gender inequality under the disguise of cultural and social expectations (UNICEF 2000:6). Such stereotypical cultural beliefs are biased towards women, compelling them to persist even in difficult marriages where they may suffer psychological and many other health- and social-related problems. Gender-biased proverbs have the tendency to subject women to the inability to make emancipatory decisions regarding their own lives, thus leading to a culture of silence.

Failure to make informed decisions with regard to one's own health issues has the potential to subject women to emotional stress. It affects their psychosocial well-being and may even expose them to HIV and AIDS infections (Masenya 2000b:189). A married woman's already dire situation can further be aggravated by the use of masculinity-oriented proverbs such as "monna ke tshwene o ja ka matsogo a mabedi" ('a man is like a baboon, he eats with two hands'). The underlying meaning of this saying indicates a man is free to have an extramarital affair in spite of his marital status (Masenya 2005a:189). The irony is that if a married woman has an extramarital affair, she is labelled as promiscuous whereas a man is not ridiculed, isolated or called names. It may well be that if wedding songs and rituals such as premarital counselling during which gender-based and discriminatory traditional proverbs like 'a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband' are used as instruments to encourage gross powerlessness in women, women will constantly be exposed to many ailments compromising their health and general wellness.

Moreover, Masenya (1998:87) asserts the meaning of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" binds wives to their husbands "beyond death". The author argues that the proverb implies a married woman remains the property of her husband's family even after his death. According to Masenya (1998), the traditional values entrenched in this proverb prescribe that, in the event of her husband's death, the widow is not allowed to remarry into a family or clan other than that of her husband. In fact, the widow has no voice in a situation like this because a man from only the husband's family is chosen by the deceased family to remarry her. The assumption is made that through this practice the deceased husband's lineage will be protected as well as the wealth and inheritance of the new husband who is the deceased's brother (Mulaudzi 2005:331; Masenya 1998). Of significance is that Masenya (2005a: 9) further states

this practice can exacerbate the spread of HIV and AIDS if the first husband has died of the disease. Mulaudzi (2005) explains marrying off a widow to the brother of the deceased (or any other man in the deceased's family) is known as "widow inheritance" and is a common practice among the Vhavenda people and among other ethnic groups such as Vhavenda and Bapedi.

In a study conducted in Ethiopia by Kifetew (2006:123) on gender and cross cultural dynamics, widow inheritance was cited as one of the harmful traditional practices that speed up the transmission of HIV and AIDS. In his study on the upholding of patriarchy and the use of ancient – or then traditional – proverbs versus modern gender relations in Uganda, Ssetuba (2002:1) found language was used to persistently preserve and sustain patriarchal ideologies. The findings clearly indicated that the use of culture and language compelled women to assume a submissive status in their relationships.

In the case of marriage, divorce is oftentimes not even considered because in many African cultures women are often the ones blamed (even if undeserved) for failed marriages. They therefore docilely endure and fail to take emancipatory decisions. The derogatory terms "mbuya vuhadzi" ('the one who came back from the marriage') or "mmoa bogadi" ('the one who came back from the marriage') in the Tshivenda language are often used to refer to divorced women who return home to live with their own parents.

Despite the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (SA 1996) protects all citizens, thus including women from the Christian religious perspective, the meaning of "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" namely, that a bride's burial place is with her in-laws is widely practised in SA. Investigating women's disproportionate power-relations in indigenous marriage contexts in Zimbabwe, Filemoni-Tofaeono (2004) (cited in Chireshe & Chireshe 2011:98) concluded that within the context of Christianity, endurance in marriage is also emphasised and women are discouraged from seeking a divorce.

When taking marital vows, the priest or minister often reminds the newlywed couple that in marriage, according to Mark 10 verses 8 – 9, "the two will become one, So

they are no longer two, but one. No human being then must separate what God has joined together.” (Good News Bible 2011:700). It can be posited that this biblical reference emphasises perseverance – the woman and man who are married must not be separated thereby implying its meaning is similar to that of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” which also stresses endurance. Based on the aforementioned faith-based grounding, Christian couples are also expected to persevere and stay in marriage until they are separated only by death.

When women who remain in abusive, dangerous marriages become ill from a physical or psychosocial condition, they report to emergency units, clinics or doctors’ consulting rooms. Conducting a study in China on the lived experiences of women victims of intimate partner violence, Loke, Wan and Hayter (2012:2341) found women who suffer from partner abuse do indeed present at the different health settings, including to the maternity section if they are pregnant. It is therefore crucial that all nurses who work in these health settings are equipped with the skills to care for these patients holistically. An integral part of a nurse’s occupation constitutes caring and understanding. It is through having knowledge and understanding that nurses will be able to identify, provide care and assist women who suffer emotionally, physically, and psychologically as a direct result of the use of gender-based proverbs.

Although it is acknowledged that there may be different views in African societies’ understanding of the meaning of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”, much research also points to a gender-biased interpretation thereof. Considering how the differential understandings and applications of this proverb can impact on the overall health of African indigenous women, the researcher felt compelled to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

### 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

As the central phenomenon under investigation, the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its impact on indigenous African women’s health is not easily understood because it is concealed, hidden or veiled (van Manen 1990:27). The proverb is viewed by Batswana, the Bapedi (Northern

Sotho) and the Basotho (Southern Sotho) as protecting the sanctity of marriage and holding the centre of families together. Women are in most instances encouraged to persevere in marriage, and the encouragement is part of the advice offered to the bride during the premarital counselling ceremony. Many women do not seek resolute interventions in the presence of abuse. Lee, Park and Lightfoot (2010:201) verify this statement by mentioning some women feel they have invested many years in their relationships and have already built strong ties with their in-laws and for these reasons they choose to stay married and remain with their in-laws.

The proverb under study suggests married women have limited options and therefore they have to live the kind of life characterised by forced perseverance in their marriages. The tone of this proverb reveals further if her husband dies, a widow is not expected to return to her father's home or remarry (Masenya 2010:7). This practice is seemingly more prevalent in the Setswana, Sepedi and Southern Sotho traditions. Masenya (2010:7) observes among these ethnic groups the implication of the proverb is that "every woman must have a husband, remain in marriage [i.e. whether it is abusive or not] until the two are separated by death". For example this is supported by Mark 10:9 (Good News Bible 2011:700) who indicates that "no human being then must be separate what God has joined together". Hence, a further implication is that the gender-based status quo is maintained through the use of the specific current proverb or similar gender-prejudiced proverbs.

The use of proverbs, especially such as the one under scrutiny in the current study, is viewed by Hussein (2009:106) as a patriarchal inculcation of obedience and loyalty according to which virtues of fear, compliance and guilt are instilled in women. This author states the patriarchal orientation gives men power of control over women while women are placed in a role of subordination in their relationships. As a result of this compliance, women endure hardship; they live in fear and harbour guilt which can lead to physical and psychosocial illnesses such as high blood pressure, stress-related conditions, psychosomatic conditions, depression and bipolar disorders that can have a major negative impact on their health (Nash 2006:200). Furthermore, practices such as widow inheritance may result in women being more susceptible to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) (Mulaudzi 2005:331).

It has been noted in Kenya that married women stay in marriages even in the presence of abuse because they attach value to the institution of the family and stable marriages. These women believe the value of marriage is uniquely enshrined in sociocultural expectations such as proverbs which allow them to persevere and accept entrapment in their marriages (Ondicho 2013:110). Moreover, it was observed that the longer the exposure to intimate partner violence, the worse the health outcomes were for the Kenyan women. This observation is supported by Jewkes et al. (2010:46) who found in rural areas in South Africa a women who experienced partner abuse had a high rate of gender inequality in their relationships and also showed increased incidences of HIV infection.

To assess and plan appropriate care for their patients, it is imperative for nurses to understand both the physical and social contexts of diseases. Acquiring more knowledge on the meaning and interpretation of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” will be valuable information for nurses; and will help them to assess, assist and render appropriate health services when they come into contact with these women. Failure on the part of the nurses to understand both the physical and social contexts of the diseases from which their patients are suffering may result in them being unable to assist the patients because they have no knowledge and do not understand the contributory and predisposing factors related to the patients’ physical or psychosocial problems (Hamberger (1998) cited in Loke et al. 2012:2343). It was therefore of great importance for the researcher to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions directed the study:

- *“How do you understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi?”*

### **1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY**

Based on the problem statement and the research questions, the primary aim of the study was to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

### **1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Whereas the aim (goal) of the study relates to the broader intentions of the study, the objectives of the study focus on the specific intentions to be achieved by the study. Objectives are more specific and concrete statements (Bruce, Klopper & Mellish 2011:167). In this regard, the objectives of this study were:

- to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” as experienced by indigenous African women
- to explore and describe the implications of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” as experienced by the indigenous African women on their health
- to describe the study’s theoretical framework based on the findings of the study using the Wittmann-Price (2004; 2006) theory of emancipated decision-making, Masenya’s (2004) “bosadi” (womanhood) approach, and the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and the implications on indigenous African women’s health.

### **1.7 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

This study was the first to be undertaken in South Africa on understanding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health from a nursing perspective. Many studies have been done to address similar proverbs for example (Balogun 2013:562; Balogun 2010:46) who conducted a study on the panacea to the problems of gender inequality in Nigeria and proverbial oppression of women in Yoruba community. Most of these studies were conducted in other countries on the African continent, for example, in Nigeria, Botswana and Zimbabwe. It was envisioned that the study will make a significant contribution for Nursing knowledge and practice, Women’s Health and Indigenous knowledge system.

Furthermore, the researcher developed and described a theoretical framework by means of which proverbs directed at indigenous African women's issues in a patriarchal system can be understood. The theoretical framework was developed using the Wittmann-Price (2004; 2006) theory of emancipated decision-making and Masenya's (2004) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach. An analogy of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" was used to explain the analogical relation of the hut and sun to the findings of the study.

It was also envisaged that the study will contribute positively towards empowering nurses to identify indigenous African women who need care as a direct result of being the recipients of abuse and discrimination fuelled by gender-based proverbs that promote male domination and female subservience. The study will add issues of cultural knowledge in forensic nursing thus assisting nurses to be cultural sensitive.

## 1.8 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

For the purpose of enhancing clear understanding of the key concepts and their use in the context of this study, the concepts 'proverb', 'indigenous African women', 'meaning' and 'interpretations' are operationally defined next.

### 1.8.1 Proverb

A 'proverb' is a "short, generally known sentence of folklore which contains wisdom, truth, moral and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder 2004:3). Chilisa (2012:133) defines 'proverbs' as tools to describe and express sociocultural events, community's behaviour and practices handed down from one generation to another.

In this study the concept 'proverb' refers to metaphorical words used during premarital counselling. For example, "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" ('a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband') (Masenya 1998:83) is a proverb used as the basis to advise an indigenous African woman that, once married, she can never return to her parents' home to live there again. She has to stay with her in-laws until she dies and be buried at their place or home.

### 1.8.2 Indigenous African women

The concept 'indigenous' refers to populations and communities that are aboriginal to a particular geographic area (Dondolo 2005:112; Loubster 2005:10). The key concept 'indigenous African women' refers to adult black females of African descent whose origins can be traced within a given geographical area on the African continent.

In this study the concept 'indigenous African women' refers to married, divorced, widowed and single women who belong to different black ethnic groups mainly Batswana, Basotho and Bapedi in South Africa, Gauteng province. They all understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on their overall health. For sampling purposes, these women resided in two cities in Gauteng, South Africa: the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg.

### 1.8.3 Meaning

According to Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström (2011:90), to be human, to have a world, and to live in and through a life world (how humans relate and interact with the world) are all integral aspects of meaning. Therefore, experiences are in itself primary aspects of meaning hence meaning is symbiotically linked to experiences.

In this study 'meaning' refers to the experiences of indigenous African women in their daily lives and how it is influenced, guided and controlled by the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi".

### 1.8.4 Interpretation (Hermeneutics)

Hermeneutics has its roots in the Greek verb *hermeneuein* which means "to interpret" as well as in the Greek noun *hermenia* which means "interpreting" (Dahlberg et al. 2011:66). Palmer (1969) (cited in Dahlberg et al. 2011:66) defines 'interpretation' as "expressing something aloud with words or to proclaim verbally, also to explain something and to clarify it or bringing unknown text into a language which is understood".

In this study ‘interpretation’ refers to allocating relevant meaning to the conversations of indigenous African women pertaining to the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on their overall health.

## 1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The study was conducted in two phases.

- Phase 1: Research design and methods
- Phase 2: Theoretical framework and the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and the implications on indigenous African women’s health.

An overview of Phase 1 is summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Summary of research design and methods

Research design and methods	Brief description
Phenomenology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• Method</li> </ul> <i>(View Section 2.2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hermeneutic inquiry has no formally described research method.</li> <li>• The research process therefore adhered to a philosophical underpinning of phenomenology as its methodological framework.</li> </ul>
Setting <i>(View Section 2.2.2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City of Tshwane and Johannesburg in Gauteng province.</li> <li>• Social club, network gatherings and at church retreats.</li> </ul>
Study population <i>(View Section 2.2.3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Married, divorced, widowed and single indigenous African women.</li> <li>• Living in City of Tshwane and in Johannesburg.</li> <li>• Attended social clubs, network gatherings and church retreats.</li> </ul>
Sampling methods <i>(View Section 2.2.4)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Snowball sampling technique was used first.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposive sampling method was used.</li> </ul>
Sample size <i>(View Section 2.2.4.1)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five participants were interviewed.</li> <li>• Fifty-two participants participated in the focus group interviews.</li> </ul>
Data collection <i>(View Section 2.3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five unstructured individual interviews were conducted.</li> <li>• Eight focus group interview sessions were held.</li> </ul>
Data analysis <i>(View Section 2.4)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colaizzi's 7 steps of data analysis were followed.</li> <li>• A co-coder was used to reduce biasness.</li> <li>• Four themes and nine sub-themes were identified.</li> </ul>
Rigour in research <i>(View Section 2.5)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility, transferability, consistency, dependability conformability and authenticity were maintained throughout the study.</li> </ul>
Ethical considerations <i>(View Section 2.6)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed consent, confidentiality, autonomy, deception of participants, fairness/justice.</li> </ul>

Based on the research findings, in phase 2 the theoretical framework was developed using the Wittmann-Price (2004:441; 2006:378) theory of emancipated decision-making, Masenya's (2004:120) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach, and the analogy of the "proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and the implications on indigenous African women's health. A detailed overview of the research design and methods is presented in Chapter 2.

## 1.10 ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS

The chapters and how they were organised in the study are summarised in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Summary of chapter organisation

Chapters	Summary
Chapter 1	Orientation to the study
Chapter 2	Overview of phenomenology, research design and methods
Chapter 3	Presentation of study findings and interpretations
Chapter 4	Discussion of findings and literature control
Chapter 5	Theoretical framework and analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and the implications on indigenous African women’s health
Chapter 6	Overview of the study findings, recommendations, implications, limitations and conclusions of the study

### 1.11 SUMMARY

There is a firm belief in many societies that proverbs are central to the language used to shape the belief system of particular societies worldwide. In many African societies there is a firm belief that proverbs are rules and guidelines conveying wisdoms and truths about life that help the people to uphold traditional values and belief systems. Also in South Africa proverbs have significant meaning for indigenous ethnic African groups and communities who still rely on them to guide and lead them in their daily living.

However, as mentioned, many African proverbs that are used to illustrate and define the relationship between men and women, specifically in a marriage, seem to be gender-biased. Control over women in marriage seems to lie at the core of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” because being taught that ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’ can be interpreted as encouraging hegemonic masculinity in marriage. In many indigenous ethnic African societies in South Africa this proverb is used to stress that marriage is a lifelong commitment. Once married, a woman has to stay in the marriage even if the circumstances are detrimental to her physical and psychological health or even life-threatening. Therefore, it is essential that nurses are trained to understand there may be a deeper underlying reason why women oftentimes present with certain illnesses and are often not ready to talk about them. Nurses must have the knowledge and insight to know how to identify women patients whose lives are built around the proverb – whether by their own choice or forced by their societal culture. It is only by being aware and knowledgeable that

nurses will be able to render care to these women or assist them by referring them for alternative healthcare if and when necessary.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF PHENOMENOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

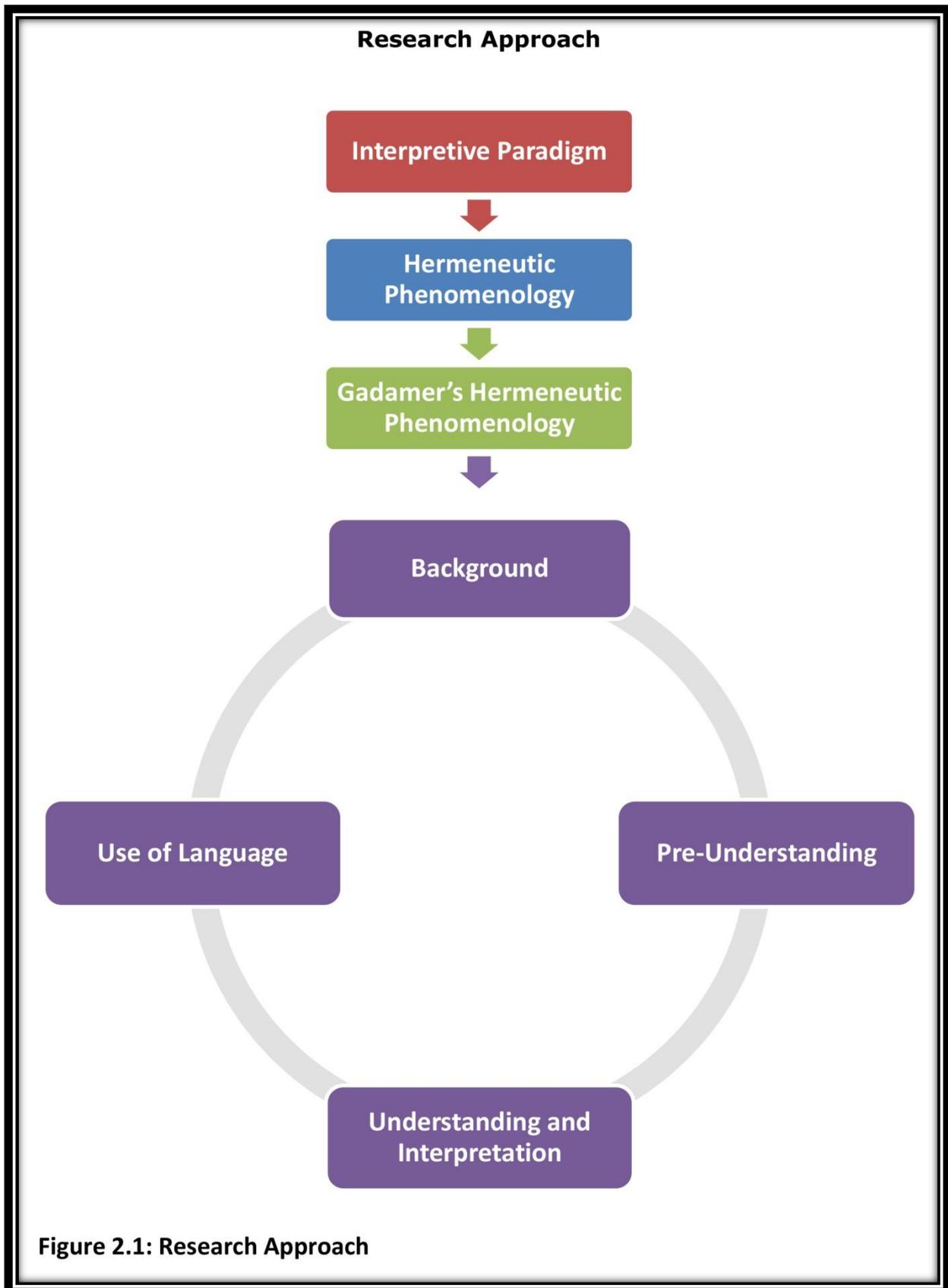
### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to the study. Chapter 2 presents an overview of phenomenology and an in-depth discussion of the research design and methods adopted to address the general and specific intentions of the study. It also includes the processes covering Phase 1 of the study, namely, an overview of the research design and methods, the interpretive paradigm of enquiry, philosophical assumptions and hermeneutic phenomenology. In this chapter the research design and methods are discussed in detail and the ethical considerations adhered to in the study are recounted.

Phase 2 of the study focused on the description of the theoretical framework based on Wittmann-Price's (2004; 2006) theory of emancipated decision-making, Masenya's (2004) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach, and the analogy of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and the implications on indigenous African women's health. The second phase is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 5.

### 2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The research design and methods are discussed in the following section. A research approach framework of the overview is presented in diagrammatic format (see Figure 2.1) to add to the written explanation of the study process undertaken.



### 2.2.1 Interpretive paradigms

Paradigms are considered to influence and be the lenses for theory development within a particular discipline or field of study. The current study followed the interpretive mode of enquiry to uncover the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under study.

It is the interpretive aspect of hermeneutics that provides the distinction between purely phenomenological research that seeks rich life-world descriptions of participants and hermeneutic phenomenological research which seeks to understand these life-world descriptions from the participants' point of view (Cole 2010:1). Holloway and Wheeler (2010:228) differentiate between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. They state descriptive phenomenology describes essential structures while interpretive phenomenology interprets the contextual meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. Following Holloway and Wheeler's (2010) analytic premise, the researcher opted to use the interpretive phenomenological paradigm because it provided for interpretations of the proverb in question to be explored and described. For purposes congruent with the objectives of the study (see Chapter 1, section 1.6) as well as the research methodology followed, 'interpretive/hermeneutic' will mean the same as 'interpretive inquiry'.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011:102) report interpretivists gain and advance understanding by interpreting participants' perceptions. Considering this orientation, the interpretive phenomenological paradigm was appropriate and relevant to this study since the interpretation of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health were of interest.

### 2.2.2 Philosophical assumptions

Guba (1990:18) asserts many paradigms are available and used to direct actions in research. These various paradigms are generally characterised by their proponents' response to the three basic philosophical assumptions, namely, ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions. The philosophical assumptions on which this study was based are discussed in sections 2.2.1.1 to 2.2.1.3.

### 2.2.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology refers to the multiple and subjective nature of reality (Creswell 2013:20; Polit & Beck 2012:13). In the current study indigenous African women in their natural settings were asked to give an account of their experiences regarding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’). Botma, Greef, Mulaudzi and Wright (2010) affirm reality is subjective as it is the participants themselves who directly provide their lived experiences. Both Botma et al. (2010:44) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011:103) argue subjective reality is important in research as participants experience it (the subjective reality) in different ways. Similarly, in this study every participant experienced her subjective reality in a different way and was able to explain her own personal subjective experience with regard to “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”.

Within the ontological worldview, it is assumed that the reality we know is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Guba & Lincoln (1994) cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2011:103). The meaning and interpretations of the proverb under study were constructed intersubjectively and socially by means of dialogue between the researcher and the study participants. The human nature is viewed as another aspect of ontology.

During the researcher’s interaction with the participants, a collaborative relationship was developed. The researcher therefore had to constantly be aware of the possible effect of intersubjective influences on the study situation as it could affect the participants negatively. For this reason it was imperative that an equitable researcher-participant relationship be established (Dahlberg et al. 2011:114). The intersubjective influence between the researcher and the participants explains the issue of pre-understanding and bracketing, that is, what the researcher already knew about the study topic in order to pre-empt researcher bias. As a Motswana woman herself who fully understands the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”, the researcher purposefully bracketed her existing knowledge of it to allow the participants to explain their *own* experiences of the proverb unhindered by any influence. The researcher’s pre-understanding of the proverb was premised on presuppositions, assumptions and everyday knowledge that predispose one to interpret the phenomenon

before one can even study it as an existing body of scientific knowledge (van Manen 1990:46-47).

Pre-understanding describes the meanings and organisation of cultural symbols which are already in the world before we even reach an understanding of them, and, according to Koch (1995:831), such symbols include language and cultural practices. It is the ontological structure of our being in the world as human beings; we cannot eliminate our pre-understanding as it already exists with us in the world. It is therefore important that pre-understanding be recognised and reflected upon by researchers during the search for meaning to prevent the risk of obtaining findings that are primarily a reflection of past experiences based on unrecognised or unverifiable and unfounded beliefs. For this reason, the researcher had to make sure she disregarded her own experiences as much as possible and focus on the experiences of the participants.

### **2.2.2.2 Epistemological assumptions**

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on “the nature of knowledge and evidence generated from that knowledge” (Botma et al. 2010:40). Since it was found applicable and relevant to the description of the proverb under investigation, the particular orientation paradigm was used in the study. When conducting a qualitative research study the researcher has to be as close to the participants as possible by, inter alia, conducting the study where the participants work or live. If this is not possible, a neutral place must be favourably considered as it will allow for free and open researcher/participant dialogue and a more detailed understanding of the participants’ experiences will be possible (Creswell 2007:18). Polit and Beck (2012:13) add the findings of a study should be a creation of the interactive process; an interactive process explains the actual developments during the data collection and analysis processes of the study.

Knowledge is based on the beliefs, norms, values, and understanding of language (Botma et al. 2010:45). Accordingly, the knowledge generated during the course of this study was based on the participants’ own beliefs and values and how it related to their own understanding of the meaning and interpretations of the specific proverb and the implications on their health. According to Creswell (2007:18) and Botma et al. (2010), knowledge is not only based on observable reality, but also on subjective beliefs and

values, the reasons being discussed, and the understanding of concepts such as those entailed in “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”. In the view of Denzin and Lincoln (2005:156), knowledge constructed during a dialogue consists of the consensus (or at least some direction towards consensus) between the researcher and the participants. In addition, multiple knowledge construction occurs that may be exposed to continuous revision. In this study the constructed knowledge on the proverb was continuously reviewed by both the researcher and the participants through dialogue during the interviews.

### **2.2.2.3 Methodological assumptions**

Creswell (2013:22) reports that the logic followed in qualitative research represents an inductive approach to a study as opposed to proceeding directly from a theory or from the researcher’s own perspective. Because the aim of this study was to interpret the participants’ perceptions and experiences related to the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”, the methodical method chosen was phenomenology. Creswell (2013) also advises that phenomenological and inductive processes should be considered as the best option for data collection and data analysis in qualitative studies.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011:100), constructivists/interpretivists use hermeneutic and dialectical methods to plan a research study and execute the collecting and analysing of the data. In the current study this method of inquiry allowed the researcher to socially construct the meaning and interpretations of the studied proverb through individual interviews and focus group dialogue with indigenous African women.

## **2.3 HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY**

Phenomenology is considered as a part of philosophy and a research method. It is usually discussed together with the differences between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:72). Hermeneutic phenomenology, also known as interpretive phenomenology, was employed by the researcher in this study. Although phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology may be used interchangeably, differences and similarities do exist (Laverty 2003:3). It is for this reason that the researcher was compelled to carefully distinguish between these two associations.

According to Creswell (2007:59), phenomenology is not only descriptive but also provides an interpretation of a phenomenon. Creswell (2007) supports van Manen's (1990:26) statement that the term 'description' includes both interpretive (hermeneutic) and descriptive (phenomenological) elements; 'phenomenological' is used when the descriptive function is emphasised whereas 'hermeneutics' is used when the emphasis is on interpretation. Holloway and Wheeler (2010:213) concur that the main aim of descriptive phenomenology is to generate a description of a phenomenon whereas hermeneutic inquiry emphasises understanding more than the description. Applying hermeneutic inquiry fitted this study as it relied on the interpretations of the meaning of the phenomenon investigated.

### **2.3.1 Overview of phenomenology**

Holloway and Wheeler (2010:213) state phenomenology has three major streams: the descriptive phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002), and the existentialist phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980). These streams overlap and have differing features. However, for the purposes of this study, the researcher next discusses only the historical development of the streams of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hans Georg Gadamer as they are linked to the current study.

#### **2.3.1.1 Edmund Husserl's (1859 – 1938) phenomenology**

The German philosopher and founder of modern phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) studied mathematics and philosophy. He named his philosophy that related to the life-world meaning of the world we immediately experience, 'phenomenology' (van Manen 1990:9). Phenomenology is a systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures of lived experiences and aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen 1990:10). Husserl (1859 – 1938) developed descriptive phenomenology based on the question: "What do we know as persons?" His philosophy emphasised only the description of the meaning of human experiences. According to Wojnar and Swanson (2007:174), descriptive phenomenology is a complex philosophical tradition and a method of inquiry which calls for the exploration of both a phenomenon and the objective(s) of studying the particular phenomenon or phenomena. Phenomenology requires from researchers to set aside preconceptions through bracketing to prevent researcher biases.

Laverty (2003:6) supports the idea of bracketing because, as Husserl explained, the goal thereof is to actually see things “as they are” intuitively.

Pascal (2010:3) asserts Husserl’s phenomenology is aimed at exploring the conscious lived experiences of phenomena as it is perceived in daily encounters by participants who have been exposed to the phenomena. Searching for an understanding of lived experience, Husserl emphasised that bracketing (which refers to keeping in abeyance the researcher’s preconceived ideas) must be practiced by a researcher because it may impact on the analysis of the phenomenon (Pascal 2010). In an earlier statement Lopez and Willis (2004:727) noted that an important component of Husserl’s phenomenology is for the researcher to shed all prior personal knowledge through bracketing; it is only by doing this that lived experiences of those being studied can be fully grasped.

### **2.3.1.2 Martin Heidegger’s (1889 – 1976) hermeneutic phenomenology**

Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) sought to answer “the essence of being”. He believed human beings are interpretive beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives (Draucker 1999:361). This author asserts Heidegger believed human beings always live hermeneutically, finding significance and meaning in their worlds. Heidegger argued that phenomenology attempts to address the “situatedness” of an individual’s human way of being in the world; the *dasein* which translates to the “ability to question its [human’s] own being” (Lopez & Willis 2004:727).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a “special kind of phenomenological interpretation, designed to unveil concealed meanings in the phenomena” (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:84). It is further known as the philosophy of understanding knowledge gained through interpretation. Van Manen (1990:26) defines hermeneutics as describing one’s interpretation of the “text” of life. In addition, hermeneutics comprises all situations in which we encounter meanings which are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort (Gadamer & Linge 2008:xii). Hence, these authors reaffirm Munhall’s (2007:218) argument that phenomenology explains personal meaning and unveils hidden meaning thereby including the explicit meanings in human beings’ experiences.

Ndungo (2002:64-65) states “the fact that proverbs are said to express the collective wisdom of people implies that they reflect the philosophy of the people, their modes of thinking, traditional norms, values and means of safeguarding them”. It is therefore important for nurses to understand the meaning and interpretations of proverbs and their implications on women’s health. The nurses are the healthcare workers who come into contact with women when the latter report at health centres with different health problems. Several of the health problems women present with may stem from how the different interpretations of the proverb can implicate on their overall health.

### **2.3.1.3 Hans-Georg Gadamer’s (1900 – 2002) hermeneutic phenomenology**

The hermeneutic phenomenology inspired by Gadamer (1990) (cited in Fleming, Gaidys & Robb 2003:113) influenced this study. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002) was a student of Heidegger who developed his own philosophical hermeneutics dissimilar to that of Heidegger (Kakkori 2009:24). Gadamer’s assertion was that understanding phenomena could be done through dialogue. With dialogue researchers would be more receptive or then ‘open’ to participants’ opinions and ideas. Moreover, the significant aspect which connects this study to Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology is that with dialogue, language is paramount for the understanding of each other (Gadamer (1993) cited in Fleming et al. 2003:117).

In this study the relationship of language to human existence was practised during the individual and focus group interviews because exploring the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” necessitated language. Fleming et al. (2003:117) agree with Pascoe (1996:1310) the overall aim of the Gadamerian tradition is to achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and the phenomenon is always historical, dialectic, and uses language for better understanding. Geanellos (1998:161) adds to understand the phenomenon under investigation when using Gadamer’s approach researchers have to engage the hermeneutic circle. A discussion of the hermeneutic circle follows to expand on the process of making the current proverb understandable since it is deeply rooted in history; it is the dialect and language commonly used in premarital counselling which specifically focuses on the woman’s role.

### 2.3.1.3.1 Gadamer's hermeneutic circle

According to Ajjawi and Higgs (2007:622), Gadamer's hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for understanding and interpreting the meaning of a phenomenon where such understanding is circular and easy to be interpreted. Also, the metaphor can be linked with analogy. In this study the metaphor or analogy of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health was related to the study findings to fully understand and interpret the data which evolved from the study. The analogy compared the similarities and differences between the *known* system (or source [the African hut and sun]) and the *unknown* system (or target [the findings of the study]). (See chapter 5 section 5.3).

The hermeneutic circle and dialogue used during data collection were based on the strategies drawn from the hermeneutic literature incorporated into this study. By studying the proverb under investigation the researcher was able to create a text from the data collected from the participants. The meaning of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications emerged during the process of dialogue between the researcher, the participants, and the text.

The hermeneutic phenomenology circle comprises the (a) background; (b) pre-understanding; (c) understanding, constitution and interpretation; (d) the notion of truth, and (e) the use of language. These aspects guided the researcher during the study process and are discussed below.

#### (a) Background

Heidegger emphasised the hermeneutic circle and the notion of historical understanding and the hermeneutic circle. Benner and Wrubel (1989) (cited in Koch 1995:831) observe that culture determines our background from birth. Accordingly, background is handed down through generations and presents a way of understanding the world. Researchers are expected to focus on tradition first in order to enhance understanding. The stance of Fleming et al. (2003:115) is that Gadamer emphasised the notion of historical awareness; in other words, it is the belief that human beings are all part of history, and that it is not possible to step out of our history and look at the past objectively. In the same vein, Fleming et al. (2003) note Gadamer reported that understanding occurs through the "fusion of horizons" with prejudices and history and that understanding can only be achieved through

historical awareness. The “fusion of horizons” also applies to linking the history of participants with proverbs such as the one studied. Proverbs are part of the participants’ history; it has an impact on their lives and is widely used as rich oral arts in some African countries, including South Africa (Ssetuba 2002:1). Devlieger (2010:440) reports that proverbs are containers of meaning; it is a tool for analysing an indigenous language. Therefore, individuals are given guidance on how to generally behave in life. In other words, proverbs guide individuals’ way of living.

In this study, all participants had experienced the proverb in one way or another and all had stories to tell. These stories served as the basis for the knowledge generated through dialogue that occurred during data collection.

### **(b) Pre-understanding**

Researchers usually have to deal with pre-understanding in the form of pre-suppositions, for example, prejudices in order to remain open throughout the whole process of research (Dahlberg et al. 2011:135). In this case the researcher had to be open and transparent to the pre-understanding of the participants’ interpretation of the meaning of the proverb without prejudices.

Pre-understanding refers to fore-having, foresight and fore-conception (Holroyd 2007:3). Through these concepts the researcher and the participants are guided towards understanding and developing self-awareness. Self-awareness should assist us to relinquish our prejudices of how we currently understand the world to prevent bias (Holroyd 2007). Being aware of the biases in the world is linked to recognising and being aware of the oppressive forces that exist to oppress women as identified by Wittmann-Price’s (2004; 2006) theory of emancipated decision-making (see Chapter 5 section 5.2.2 and diagram 5.1).

The word ‘pre-understanding’ describes the meaning and organisation of culture and cultural practices (Koch 1995:831). This pre-understanding is the structure of our ‘being-in-the world’. As such, we cannot eliminate our pre-understanding as it is already with us in the world. In research studies it is thus pivotal that pre-understanding is recognised and

reflected upon during the search for meaning to prevent the risk of researchers obtaining findings that are primarily a reflection of their past experiences or untested beliefs.

Dahlberg et al. (2011:138) argue researchers are obliged to deal with pre-understanding to exclude personal bias before undertaking a hermeneutical phenomenological study. According to Mak and Elwyn (2003:396), Husserl believed meaning is attained in our everyday experience; although meaning is often simply taken for granted, truth is uncovered through this “taken-for grantedness”. Mak and Elwyn (2003) point out it was Husserl’s belief that truth lies in an object after suspending or bracketing the person’s preconceptions. Heidegger, however, rejected this subject-object duality because he believed a person’s historical and traditional contexts are already integrated into their experience; it becomes part of their existence without separation of the subject-object. Therefore, subjective preconceptions cannot be bracketed (Mak & Elwyn 2003).

In this study, the researcher adopted Gadamer’s suspension of one’s own prejudices and keeping pre-understanding in check (Dahlberg et al. 2011:140). The assistant researcher helped with the interviews and the researcher took field and observational notes to maintain the fore-structure of understanding. This approach enhanced the bracketing of the researcher’s prejudices regarding the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

Understanding involves the loss of self and arises out of “being”. In other words, as explained by Holroyd (2007:6), understanding means being open to the perspectives from which the person or text has formed the views to be disclosed, or then shared. During the data analysis process in the current study, the researcher was open to what the text was saying; being receptive allowed for correct interpretation of the text. Distancing herself from her own conception of the meaning of the proverb helped the researcher to take in the full emergence of the true meaning and relevance of the research data.

### **(c) Understanding and interpretation**

According to Gadamer (1993) (cited in Fleming et al. 2003:117), “gaining understanding” in hermeneutic phenomenology is enhanced by gaining information through data collection. It was during this stage that the researcher gained an insightful understanding of the meaning of the text obtained from the study participants. Fleming et al. (2003:118) ascertain it is during this stage that understanding is made possible through dialogue; that is, conversation between two or more people or with the text. In the context of a research study interest in hermeneutics is motivated by the quest to enhance understanding and textual interpretation of the gathered data.

In this study the researcher sought to apply Gadamer’s principles of understanding and interpreting during the analysis of the texts relating to “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health. According to Schwandt (1999) (cited in Holroyd 2007:4), “the art of understanding is similar to a game in which a to-and-fro movement characterises the encounter with that which we seek to understand”. It is therefore indicated that any interpretations or understanding in the hermeneutic philosophy is based on the fore-projections of all people involved in the study (Holroyd 2007).

Pascoe (1996:1312) refers to Gadamer’s stance that purports the process of understanding can never be achieved in its finality as it is always open and anticipatory because, as human beings, we always understand and interpret on the basis of pre-judgements, fore-structures and/or prejudices. In this instance, Thompson’s (1985) (cited in Pascoe 1996:1312) contribution is although there can never be a final or “absolute truth”, it is possible for the “absolute truth” of a phenomenon to be discovered. It is therefore quite possible that in this study the “absolute truth” about a proverb proclaiming that a married ‘woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’ might not have been readily realised because more meanings may emerge when addressing the meaning and understanding of this proverb over time.

### **(d) Use of language**

Language is central to hermeneutic philosophy. It is through language that the world we live in is disclosed to us (Holroyd 2007:5). Language is also a tool in all dialogue, questioning, and understanding processes. It opens our life-worlds. As such, it has an important

hermeneutic function (Dahlberg et al. 2011:83). Without words, thoughts will indeed remain unfinished and incomplete. According to Gadamer (1995) (cited in Dahlberg et al. 2011:84), the whole process of understanding is verbal and language becomes the medium through which substantive understanding takes place between two or more people. Holroyd's (2007) view is that the world and our existence in it create a shared understanding between individuals and language is the medium that makes this textual or spoken discourse possible.

Based on the emphasis placed on language, this study explored the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health. To achieve the centrality of language as a medium of deriving convincing meaning and interpretations of the proverb under study, the researcher allowed the participants to use the language they were comfortable with. Some participants used their mother tongue because they felt more at ease to disclose their experiences in a language they understood well. The following statement demonstrates the comfort with which the participants communicated their lived experiences after they had been provided with the opportunity to have a dialogue with the researcher: *"The talks felt good. It was like therapy. We feel good"*. It is through the use of the participants' undiluted language that the researcher understood and interpreted the quotes well.

## 2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To understand the phenomenological essence of the studied proverb, the researcher adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach as the relevant qualitative research design and method. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed her to understand the proverb's meaning and interpretations as expressed by the indigenous African women themselves. The chosen research design was deemed appropriate and was based on Mak and Elwyn's (2003:396) reasoning that hermeneutic inquiry has no described formal method and, therefore, the research process adheres to the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenology as its methodological framework.

Bogdan and Taylor (1975) (cited in Creswell 2007:5) refer to the research design as the entire process of research: from conceptualising the problem to writing the research questions, the data collection, analysis and interpretation, including the report writing. In

addition to the description offered by Creswell (2007), Polit and Beck (2012:12) describe the research methods as the techniques used to structure the study and gather and analyse the data collected based on the research question. In the current study the data were systematically collected for the purpose of exploring and describing the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

The systematic way of collecting data used by the researcher is supported by Wilding and Whiteford (2005:99). These authors maintain phenomenology as an enquiry is systematically used to study a phenomenon which is difficult to observe and measure. Wilding and Whiteford (2005) warn that portraying some commonplace fact or experience through a few condensed words (proverbs) which evoke different images, meanings and interpretations from the study participants due to their varied cultural and traditional heritages is “difficult to observe and measure”. Thus, by carefully considering the intricacies embedded in the phenomenon under study, it was the researcher’s opinion that systematic data collection would best provide relevant and honest data from indigenous African women participants regarding the meaning and interpretations they attached to this specific proverb.

#### **2.4.1 Qualitative inquiry**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) (cited in LoBiondo-Wood & Haber 2010:86) assert qualitative researchers explore and describe phenomena in the natural settings of participants. These authors write that phenomena are interpreted in terms of what researchers observe or hear from participants during interviews or dialogue. It is interesting to note that, according to Munhall (2007:10), the natural sciences seek causal explanation, prediction, and control whereas the human sciences search for understanding and interpretation of the meaning applicable to a study. Being in agreement, LoBiondo-Wood and Haber (2010:88) ascertain that qualitative researchers believe that the uncovering and exposition of meaning is the foundation for developing new knowledge.

The current study intended to explore, describe and interpret the meaning of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health and therefore a qualitative inquiry was best suited to this study. The participants lived and were

part of the societies where cultural practices such as the use of the particular proverb are generally used to encourage women to stay married.

The researcher intended to explore the experiences of these women with regard to the use of this proverb; how they felt about it, how they understood the meaning, and the subsequent influence it had on their health to live a life prescribed by a cultural rule of conduct. Phenomenology was found to be a suitable approach because it describes what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon Creswell (2007:58).

#### **2.4.2. The context of the study**

According to Struwig and Stead (2004:12), human behaviour does not occur in a vacuum; therefore, it was necessary to provide a clear description and analysis of the social context of the participants in this study.

The indigenous African women who participated in this study were mainly Setswana, Sesotho and Sepedi speaking and often attended social networks (societies) at different places and locations in two cities, namely the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg) for social support. They were mature adult women who lived in Gauteng, one of the nine provinces in South Africa. The majority had been born and raised in different rural areas in the provinces and had migrated at some time or another to live in the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg in the Gauteng province.

All the participants understood the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and were willing to participate in the study. They were interviewed at different places in the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg where they attended their social club gatherings, for example, in restaurants (in a reserved and quiet place), at church retreats, and in their homes. A social club is a club where members go to meet one another, spend time together and enjoy leisure activities. A church retreat is a gathering of church members who withdraw from the public to a secluded area for prayers and meditation. These gatherings can last for a whole day. Tullio and Rossiter (2010:66) explain the intention of a retreat is to provide a secluded place where harmony and peace enhances personal and spiritual development. A retreat “provides a special opportunity for people to experience first-hand some of the traditional religious

spirituality that can be made more accessible to them in a favourable community setting” (Tullio & Rossiter 2010:73).

These social networks provide members with a support system. Women meet on a monthly basis. At every gathering they choose a date for the next meeting – preferably at the month’s end because this will be after they have received their salaries. It is at these social gatherings that the researcher made contact with women who were willing to participate in the study. The researcher visited the participants in the setting where they met for their social networking at that specific time. They were allowed to choose the most comfortable venue for the individual interviews and the focus group interviews. Choosing the venue was not a problem because some of the women had the meetings at their homes or in a restaurant while others were interviewed at a church retreat where there was a quiet, serene atmosphere. The researcher was not in control of the study setting as participants were allowed to freely decide where they felt comfortable for the individual and focus group interviews.

### **2.4.3 Study population**

The study (research) population refers to all the elements (individuals, objects or substances) that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a given universe (Burns & Grove 2011:290). The study population for the current study included indigenous African women in the City of Tshwane and Johannesburg, Gauteng, who were part of social clubs and willing to share their experiences regarding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on their health. These women were selected for the study as the researcher had once been invited to one group’s social club. She observed that the women discussed various topics which related to issues affecting women. The researcher decided to collect data from women who came together for social networking because they seemed relaxed and willing to engage in dialogue.

#### **2.4.3.1 Inclusion criteria**

Married, widowed, divorced, indigenous African women who understood the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and the implications on their health were included in the study. Although initially excluded, single women requested to be

part of the study. They felt they too had been affected by the proverb because close relatives, friends or mothers had been influenced by the same proverb.

The women were asked to verbalise the meaning and interpretations of the proverb and its implications on their health. Any interested married, divorced or widowed woman who did not belong to a social or networking club, but was interested to take part, was included in the study. These women were invited to attend the social or networking meetings where they were welcomed as new members.

#### **2.4.4 Sampling method**

To access the participants, a snowball sampling technique and a purposive sampling method were used. The snowball or network sampling method assisted the researcher to access the participants who were difficult to reach. One participant was selected and she informed others (Speziale & Carpenter 2007:29). The researcher chose snowball sampling as it helped her to identify useful participants who were married, divorced or widowed and were willing to participate in the study. The selected participant referred the researcher to more participants who in turn referred her to groups of women attending different social clubs (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:141). One of the disadvantage of the snowball sampling is that at times only acquaintances of the researcher can be accessed and therefore a purposive sampling was also used to strengthen the sampling method used (Polit and Beck 2012:517).

Purposive sampling was also used when the researcher identifies participants who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study (Polit & Beck 2012:517). In this study the researchers used purposive sampling to access suitable participants who were willing to participate and were knowledgeable about the proverb and its implications on indigenous African women's health. The researcher negotiated visits with some members of a specific social group. Permission was verbally granted and thereafter some of the members of the social group organised more participants who fitted the inclusion criteria for the study. These participants were also purposively selected for inclusion in the study.

After having conducted five individual interviews on two different days, the researcher then decided on using purposively sampled focus groups. Some of the participants who were in

the first focus group referred the researcher to other groups of women who held their social gatherings either at their homes or at other places such as restaurants that was convenient for all of them. Purposive sampling was used as the researcher was at that stage able to identify suitable groups of participants who had experienced the effect the use of the proverb had on their lives and health (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:136).

#### **2.4.4.1 Sample size**

In qualitative research focus is placed on the quality of information obtained from persons, situations or events sampled rather than on the size of the sample. Huberman & Miles (2002), Munhall (2007) & Sandelowski (1995) cited in Burns & Grove (2011:317). Furthermore, Burns and Grove (2011) state a small sample size can lead to inadequate depth or richness which may reduce the quality of the findings. On the other hand, the number of participants is adequate when data saturation and verification of information are achieved. Conversely, Dahlberg et al. (2011:175) argue in qualitative research the decision on the number of interviewees cannot be decided in exact numbers before the commencement or completion of a research project. When the analysis of the first portion of data has been completed, other participants could still be invited for more interviews.

The researcher began with five individual interviews. These were followed by eight focus group interviews after some participants had suggested they thought discussing the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” would be better in a group as participants may benefit from the extensive experience shared by various other women in the group. A total number of 57 participants were interviewed. Of these, five were individual interviews and 52 participated in the focus group interviews. Thirty-six participants were married and two were widowed. Seven participants were divorced. Later 12 single women were included at their own request. As mentioned, even though they were not married, the proverb had still impacted on their lives and therefore they were invited to participate. All 12 voluntarily participated. Eight focus group interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. The participants profile included Batswana (n=48), Bapedi (Northern Sotho) (n=5) and Basotho (Southern Sotho) (n=4) and their ages ranged between 21-65 years.

## 2.5 DATA GATHERING METHODS

In qualitative research data gathering is an activity in which researchers seek descriptions, utterances, characterisations, narrations, and other possible expressions of the phenomenon being studied (Dahlberg et al. 2011:172). In the current study the researcher gathered data on the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health using individual and focus group interviews. It was in line with the assertion of Dahlberg et al. (2011) that activities *occurring* in the life-world are based on the clear understanding that the meanings *belong* to the life-world but *emerge* during the relationship formed between the researcher, the phenomenon, and the participants. Moreover, these activities do not occur in a vacuum, but in a world full of meanings.

Data collection procedures in this study are discussed as they occurred: gaining access to the site and establishing rapport; conducting of the pilot study interviews; individual interviews, focus group interviews including phenomenological approaches required during data collection.

### 2.5.1 Gaining access to the site and establishing rapport

Gaining access to the research setting is important and has to be planned in order to establish trust between the researcher and the participants (Polit & Beck 2012:184). In this study strong interpersonal skills and being familiar with the language used by the participants were to the advantage of the researcher as well as the participants themselves. Gaining access to the research site also facilitated meeting with prominent members of the groups of women and for the identification of gatekeepers who helped to make appointments with the relevant participants (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:37). The site appropriate and suitable for the individual and focus group interviews was identified by the participants. The researcher gained access to the participants through initial contact with some members of the social club network who later agreed on a date to attend their social gathering.

Two weeks before the set dates the researcher made a follow-up call to remind the women, who had agreed to assist with organising the participants to make sure they would attend the social club meeting on these dates. The researcher took information leaflets containing the purpose of the study, informed consent forms, all the details of the study process, and

the reasons for collecting data at their specified site with her and handed them over to the women participants on the respective days of the interviews as suggested by Polit and Beck (2012:184). The information leaflets also contained the personal contact details of the researcher, the supervisor, the co-supervisor and that of the secretary of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria (see Annexure A).

### **2.5.2 Pilot study**

A pilot study is a smaller version of the main study to be conducted. It is done to refine the study methodology, identify problems with the study design, and refine data collection instruments (Burns & Grove 2011:49; Creswell 2007:133).

The researcher conducted a pilot study during the first week of November 2012, two weeks before the commencement of all the interviews which started in the third week of November 2012, to help with the preliminary information for the main study. Polit and Beck (2012:195) assert that pilot studies play an important role in determining the feasibility and inherent flaws of a study. For the pilot study, two in-depth interviews were conducted to assess the appropriateness of the research questions. The two participants in the pilot study were not included in the main study and neither was the information they shared. No methodological changes emanated from the pilot study. The only changes made were that the research question was slightly rephrased to better communicate to the participants exactly what the interviewer wanted them to focus on.

#### ***2.5.2.1 Lessons learnt from the pilot study***

The two women who participated in the two pilot interviews seemed willing and eager to talk about “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on their health. Their willingness made the researcher feel at ease and enthusiastic although she did not know what to expect. These participants expressed an eagerness to be interviewed; in fact, they were pleased and said they were grateful that someone showed interest in studying the Setswana proverb in question.

It emerged from the pilot study that two potential participants were unhappy about the inclusion criteria which excluded single women. This occurred after the researcher had indicated she would interview only married, divorced, and widowed women. The researcher

then realised it was insensitive to exclude women on the basis of their marital status because, as single adult women, it did not mean that they were excluded from or had not experienced the meaning or understanding of the proverb instructing that ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’. She therefore made the decision to make ‘single women’ part of the inclusion criteria.

The selected two interviewees indicated they would feel more relaxed expressing themselves in Setswana as the proverb was also commonly known among indigenous Setswana-speaking women. Although they were both primarily Setswana speakers, they were fluent in English. With their permission, the interviews were conducted in English with both interviewees responding in Setswana or English depending on how best they could express themselves at the moment. It made the researcher realise it was essential for the main study to have all information related to the study (for example, the informed consent forms, the research question and permission to conduct the study) available in Setswana and English. Using both languages during the interviews was in line with Gadamer’s insistence that the use of appropriate language to understand the dialogue is crucial as it is through language that understanding becomes possible (Gadamer (1990) cited in Fleming et al. 2003:117).

### **2.5.3 The interviews**

An interview is one of the qualitative data collection technique. Interviews can be conducted face to face or with focus groups with the specific purpose of collecting information (Kumar 2011:244). In this study the researcher used unstructured individual interviews and focus group interviews to collect data. Unstructured individual interviews allow the researcher to capture detailed information from participants and they are free to answer in depth.

Palmer et al. (2010:100) appraise the employment of focus group interviews in phenomenology. These authors argue that focus groups can be attractive as they allow multiple voices to be heard at a single interview session, and draw a larger sample into a smaller number of data collection events. In addition, the discussions may sometimes stimulate more experiential reflection than one-to-one interviews. Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine (2009:66) assert focus group interviews allow participants to hear

ideas from others, thus helping them to formulate their own lived experiences about the issues under discussion.

### 2.5.3.1 Unstructured individual interviews

Unstructured interviews are interactive in nature and are regarded as controversial due to the fact that researchers cannot predict the outcome of the interview as they do not have a set of prepared questions in advance of the interview itself (Polit & Beck 2012:536).

The researcher conducted the unstructured individual interviews with five participants who were allowed to relate their stories based on one main research question, namely:

*“How do you understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”?”*

The other questions on the interview guide were used to probe further for more information (see Annexure B). As an aspect of hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, the five individual interviews became more like a conversation with the participants as suggested by Polit and Beck (2012:563). However the participants suggested they will feel free discussing the topic as part of a dialogue among their respective groups or clubs. The researcher then decided to use focus groups.

### 2.5.3.2 Focus group interviews

As indicated in the interviews, focus group was pursued as the second technique for data collection and is referred to by other scientists as “group interviews” (de Vos et al. 2008:299). Focus group interviews present a better understanding of respondents’ feelings and thoughts about the issue under discussion. Polit and Beck (2012:537) ascribe the relevance of focus group interviews to interviewing participants with homogeneous characteristics in a group in order to promote comfortable group dynamics. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2010:125), focus groups involve interviewing a number of people with common characteristics at the same time for the purpose of stimulating ideas and perceptions about a specific topic – such as the topic under discussion in the current study. Polit and Beck (2012:537) indicate the size of the focus group to be between six and 12

people; Coté-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy (1999:281) also suggest smaller groups of about six to 12 members.

Each focus group comprised of four to eight participants in a group and eight focus group sessions were conducted (see Sample size, section 2.4.2.3). On the appointed interview days – at a social club gathering and a church retreat respectively – the researcher was warmly welcomed and allocated a time slot in the programme. The research assistant who is an expert in qualitative research and has been a researcher for several years conducted the interviews and the researcher operated the tape-recorder and collected field notes. The purpose of the study as well as the duration of the focus group interview (one hour) were clarified to the participants by both the researcher and the research assistant (Creswell 2007:134). Data were collected over a period of five months: from November 2012 to February 2013.

### **2.5.3.2.1 Reasons for conducting focus group interviews**

The reason for also conducting focus group interviews in this study was prompted by a common suggestion from some individual interview participants indicating that being in a group discussion at which common issues relating to gender-abuse (attached to the underlying meaning of studied proverb) would be beneficial to other women. These specific participants were all of the similar opinion that having conversations with other women may bring to light challenges facing women in general when having to deal with the proverb in question. They shared, for example, since the cultural meaning of the proverb is directed at married women, it is sometimes taken for granted that it is solely their responsibility to work (cooking, serving food, washing the dishes and so forth) when everyone else is in a festive mood during family gatherings.

Although focus group interviews are not commonly combined within the phenomenological paradigm, a number of nurse researchers such as Jasper (1996) and Côte'-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy (2001) (cited in Bradbury-Jones et al. 2009:666) used focus groups in their phenomenological studies on the rationale that focus group interviews were a means of enhancing the credibility of their research participants by providing an environment which encouraged interaction and dialogue among them. According to the aforementioned

authors, focus group interviews allowed the interviewees to elaborate on and share the issues being investigated. Côte'-Arsenault and Morrison-Beedy (2001:240) used focus group interviews to gather descriptions relating to the experience of pregnancy after perinatal loss. Their findings revealed women were more forthwith to share their common experiences of childbearing after loss during these focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews provide access to forms of data that are not readily obtained from participants when using observations or individual interviews because the researcher is able to observe interaction and non-verbal communication on a specific topic in a short period (Morgan 1997:8) In a study conducted by Palmer et al. (2010:100) on the use of focus groups in interpretive phenomenology, focus groups were found well-favoured as they allow multiple voices to be heard at one sitting, drawing a large sample into a smaller number of data collection events. Reference to these authors has been cited as evidence to support the reasons why the researcher conducted focus group interviews. It was to provide indigenous African women who faced a similar obstacle to realise they were not alone but that others had to deal with the same challenges on a daily basis. Additionally, sharing their views, ideas and experiences in an environment where being a married woman whose 'grave is at the place/home of her husband' was a shared phenomenon positively contributed to the collection of relevant and specific data. The negative effects that relenting to the meaning of the proverb under study had on their lives and overall health after marriage were openly shared and discussed in the focus group interviews. As Palmer et al. (2010:100) point out in some situations a group discussion may stimulate more experiential reflection than one-to-one interviews.

On the other hand, Smith (2004:50) is cautious about the use of focus group interviews in interpretive phenomenological analysis. The author agrees that these interviews focus on exploration of personal experiences, but argues semi-structured interviews also serve the same purpose. Smith (2004:51) therefore suggests a responsible researcher must observe the group dynamics, identify the participants who is not at ease in a group environment and conduct individual interviews with them.

Flowers, Duncan and Frankis (2000:288) used individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews because of the potential differences in the yielded data. For the same

reason, Flowers et al. (2001) and Flowers et al. (2003) (cited in Brocki & Earden 2007:93) presented their focus group and individual interview data also in combination arguing that, in spite of the synergy between the two, there were potential problems in mixing the individual and focus group data. Yet, Dunne and Quayle (2001:680) report they were convinced that their focus group participants elicited the same data as they would have done in individual interviews. Accordingly, when considering the different arguments and views of the aforementioned authors on the issue of whether conducting focus group interviews is 'good' or 'bad' in the phenomenological paradigm, it seems as if this aspect remains unresolved.

It is perhaps then important to consider Morgan's (1997:23) assertion that both focus group and individual interviews provide a preliminary or follow-up capacity with each other with the main goal of combining to strengthen the research project regardless of the research approach. The current researcher believed combining the two methods would increase the credibility of the study and made an informed decision to use both individual and focus group interviews as methods for data collection.

- **Facilitation skills during interviews**

Participants often do not respond to questions in full. This requires the researcher to listen attentively to the participants and to use probing to elicit further information. With probing non-directive questions are used to encourage the participant to elaborate on an aspect she or he had touched on, clarify what has been said, extract more information, and to address a question if insufficiently answered (Polit & Beck 2012:310).

In the current study the interview guide served as the basis for the researcher's probing mechanism (see Annexure B). Some questions were repeated to create better understanding and to eliminate ambiguities. The researcher and the research assistant refrained from interrupting participants unnecessarily and made a point of listening carefully and not leading participants towards any particular direction of responding (Polit & Beck 2012:543). The focus group interviews progressed until data saturation was reached and no new information was forthcoming (Polit & Beck 2012:521). Both the researcher and the assistant researcher remained respectful and offered little advice to participants for the duration of the entire focus interview process (Creswell 2007:134). A tape-recorder was only used to record data and with the prior knowledge and the permission of the participants.

### 2.5.3.3 Phenomenological approaches undertaken during data collection

Holloway and Wheeler (2010:219) and Streubert and Carpenter (2011:34) recommend the three phenomenological approaches to be followed when conducting interviews are: reflexivity, grounding and humanisation.

**Reflexivity** refers to self-reflection (the researchers' ability to understand their influence in research studies and who have the drive to seek enhancement of the quality of their research study) (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:34). The researcher has to understand the extent to which her or his own values and beliefs may influence the findings and credibility of the study. Reaffirming the aforementioned, Holloway and Wheeler (2010:220) also corroborate Heidegger's view that human beings are self-reflective persons and their relationships and experiences happen in a temporal and historical context and space. For this reason, human beings use experience and reflection in texts that are open to multiple interpretations. In this study the researcher and the participants reflected on the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under investigation and its implications on their health.

**Grounding** refers to recognising the life-world as the "place of origin of the research which is filled with complexity and contains tensions" (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:220). Grounding in the current study took place in the form of the researcher bracketing her assumptions concerning the proverb under investigation. Streubert and Carpenter (2011:77) ascertain researchers should remain neutral with regard to their knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Understanding of the life-world demands an open-minded attitude in which prior assumptions and prejudices by the researcher are bracketed so that detailed descriptions and clarification are obtained regarding the topic under study (Holloway & Wheeler 2010). The researcher bracketed her own beliefs and value system without being pre-judgemental on what she had observed or heard during data collection (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:77).

Holloway and Wheeler's (2010:220) view is that **humanisation** and the language of experience, the body, time and space reflect the qualities of human presence. Since phenomenological research focuses on the life-world, lived experiences are often described by the participants themselves. At the same time the researcher has to bracket his or her

prior assumptions gained through the experience of literature and personal experience to “see” the phenomenon with an open mind.

## 2.6 Field notes

Field notes are analytic as they interpret the occurrences which unfolded during the data collection (Polit & Beck 2012:548). Field notes represent what the researcher observed and recorded so that the data are understood better. Field notes consist of narrative accounts of what happened in the field (Polit & Beck 2012). Researchers are expected to record all their impressions about what transpired during the interview, namely, what they have heard, seen, thought or experienced and what they think about in the process of interviewing (de Vos et.al. 2005:298) Streubert & Carpenter 2011:42). In this study, the researcher captured the participants’ expressions, changes in position and their mood which could not be captured by the voice recording as suggested by Streubert and Carpenter (2011).

Field notes comprise observational or descriptive notes, methodological, and personal notes (Polit & Beck 2012:548-549).

### 2.6.1 Observational notes

These are notes about what the researcher has observed and include documentation of objective actions observed during the dialogue (Polit & Beck 2012:548). During the interviews some participants were openly showing how they were affected by the proverb which they said contributed towards them feeling trapped in their relationships. A feeling of helplessness was observed from participants who were scared to leave the relationships because of fear. Other participants displayed a confident manner when they mentioned they were determined to carry on with what the proverb under study dictated. Their upright postures and self-confident way of conducting themselves displayed their resilience and determination to persevere in their marriages despite the challenges.

The mixed atmosphere that prevailed at a wedding surfaced when some participants in the focus groups spontaneously started singing well-known wedding songs that were commonly sung for the bride. As other participants joined in the singing, the mood

among the groups varied between sombreness and happiness. Issues of how in-laws sometimes mistreat the daughter-in-law raised some ill feelings among the participants; it appeared as if discriminatory actions against the daughter-in-law were a serious and general concern among most of the participants. The observational notes reflected that the majority of participants spoke up confidently when sharing that there should be forums for educating the public on gender-biased cultural practices and how they impact on women's lives and health.

### **2.6.2 Personal notes**

Personal notes pertain to the researcher's feelings and what she or he has experienced in the field. In addition, the researcher's emotions and the challenges they encountered are reflected in personal notes (Polit & Beck 2012:549).

The researcher listened to different women and felt that they were going through difficult times. These observations left her emotionally upset, especially when she realised some women were trapped in their marriages and had nowhere to go. For instance, one participant raised the point that her son was not coming home anymore because he could not take the treatment his mother was receiving from her husband and in-laws. Although the pain she expressed made the researcher feeling extremely sad for her, the researcher took control of her own emotional distress, deliberately set her own feelings aside and continued displaying a professional and neutral attitude. To be belittled by the in-laws also made the researcher realise that many participants were going through continued pain but had to keep on persevering because endurance in marriage was advocated by "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi".

The focus group discussions evoked a joyful mood in some women who started singing the wedding songs to remind themselves of their responsibilities and purpose as a wife. The irony was that the words of some songs encouraged the subordination of women while promoting the superiority of men. The researcher noted that the happiness displayed by some anti-proverb participants during their singing might be ascribed to the fact that, because they were in a relaxed and happy atmosphere, they were enjoying themselves for a few minutes and forgot about their hardships. Conversely, the researcher reflected that the participants who felt there was nothing wrong with the

proverb, sang because they believed the proverb inspired them to honour the sanctity of marriage.

### 2.6.3 Methodological notes

Methodological notes are written memos of the observations made about the strategies used to collect data and why the strategies were used (Polit & Beck 2012:549). The researcher conducted individual and focus group interviews to capture the lived experiences of the participants related to the proverb under study. However it was noted that some participants in the focus group also expressed the perceptions of their significant others rather than their own experiences and these were highlighted during data analysis. These two methods of data collection were considered relevant to the process as it elicited only data that related to the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitle la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health (see sections 2.5.3 and 2.5.4).

## 2.7. DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously. This approach of simultaneous data collection and analysis makes it possible to address data collection challenges immediately (Morgan 1997:59). After each data collection process, the researcher listened to the recorded tapes and transcribed the recorded data verbatim (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:92). Colaizzi’s seven steps for analysing data were used as indicated in Table 2.1 below (Polit & Beck 2012:566) but step 7 of Colaizzi was replaced by ongoing probing for member checking as suggested by Polit and Beck (2012:591).

Table 2.1: Data analysis used according to Colaizzi’s seven steps

COLAIZZI’S STEPS OF DATA ANALYSIS	DATA ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES IN CURRENT STUDY
1. The analysis of data starts with the researcher reading the written data from the transcripts several times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All the verbatim transcripts were read several times.</li> </ul>
2. Each protocol is read and significant statements are extracted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading each protocol (written data) enabled the researcher to move back and forth</li> </ul>

	between parts of the data in order to structure new understanding.
3. New meanings from significant statements are acquired.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A deeper understanding of the text led to attaching new meanings to the statements made by participants.</li> </ul>
4. Meanings are formulated for each significant statement from the transcripts and these formulated meanings are clustered into themes and sub-themes as suggested by Colaizzi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four main themes and nine sub-themes were formulated.</li> </ul>
5. Findings are described and integrated so that they give meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New understanding was found in the merging of views when themes and sub-themes were developed.</li> </ul>
6. Writing and re-writing themes and sub-themes are supported by quotes to further validate the findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The text was classified and reassembled into one complete whole document.</li> </ul>
7. Further validation of the analysed data to be done with participants to validate the findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation of the findings with participants. Ongoing during data collection suggested by (Polit and Beck 2012:591) as an aspect of member checking through deliberate probing.</li> </ul>

The analysis of data started with the researcher reading the written data from the transcripts several times (Polit & Beck 2012:566). Reading all the protocols or written data allowed the researcher to become immersed in the data. She continued asking the research question to the text which was being analysed (Häggman-Laitila 1999:17).

The researcher reviewed each protocol (written data) and extracted significant statements (Polit & Beck 2012:566). This process of reviewing each protocol enabled the researcher to move back and forth between parts of the data in order to structure new understanding and to recognise connections between the messages from the data (Häggman-Laitila 1999:17).

New meanings of significant statements were acquired. A “fusion of horizons” happened which eventually led the researcher to a deep understanding while engaging in the

participants' stories. A horizon refers to "the field of vision, which includes and comprises everything that can be seen in a certain perspective" (Fleming et al. 2003:117). A deep understanding of the meaning of each significant statement was formulated.

Meanings were formulated for each significant statement from the transcripts and these formulated meanings were clustered into themes and sub-themes as suggested by Colaizzi (Polit & Beck 2012:556). The researcher had to go back to the original transcripts for validation purposes. Identified discrepancies were corrected so that data were not lost. Four main themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the data.

The researcher described the findings and integrated them so that they gave meaning as indicated in step 5 of Colaizzi's data analysis method (Polit & Beck 2012:556). For the researcher to attain a deeper understanding of the proverb under scrutiny, language that described this new understanding was found in the merging of views when developing the themes and sub-themes (Hunter 2008:409).

During the step 6 the researcher became involved in writing and re-writing the themes and sub-themes supported by quotes to further validate the findings as recommended by Colaizzi (Polit & Beck 2012:556). The text was classified and reassembled into one complete whole document (Hunter 2008:409; Morrison & O'Gorman 2008:218). The process allowed for a deeper interpretation of the themes and sub-themes and also for further comparison of interpretations with the text.

Polit and Beck (2012:556) assert in Colaizzi's method of data analysis, the final step (step 7) of the analysis requires the researcher to ensure there is further validation of the analysed data. However, in this study the validation of findings was ongoing as the data were collected through deliberate probing to ensure that the participants' meaning and interpretations of the proverb under study was understood.

## 2.8 RIGOUR IN RESEARCH

Rigour in qualitative research ensures that trustworthiness is maintained throughout the study (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:47). Qualitative researchers address rigour by using the relevant criteria and concomitant appropriate strategies for a qualitative design

(Klopper 2008:69). The researcher ensured that the current study was trustworthy by applying all the strategies and criteria for trustworthiness as indicated below. The model of trustworthiness in qualitative data proposed by Guba (1981) is often used to assess rigour in this qualitative study. The four epistemological standards of trustworthiness used throughout were credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Krefting 1991:215-216, Polit and Beck 2012:585).

### 2.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth and interpretation of the data. It further means carrying out the study in a credible way (Polit & Beck 2012:585). All research studies are expected to ensure that there is truth in their findings. The truth value of the study assists the researcher to establish confidence in the findings (Krefting 1991:216-221).

This researcher ensured that there was truth in the findings of the study relating to the discovery of the truthful meaning and interpretations of the proverb under investigation and its implications on indigenous African women's health. In support of the Gadamerian influence of ensuring truth value in research, Fleming et al. (2003:119) assert credibility should be maintained by making sure the participants' perspectives are represented as clearly as possible. For purposes that were congruent with the research processes of this study, credibility was ensured through the researcher's prolonged engagement with the participants intended to establish rapport and trust with them (Krefting 1991:217).

The researcher met the participants at their social networking gatherings where they had their monthly meetings. One focus group session was conducted at a church retreat held at a guest lodge in the City of Tshwane. The researcher's presence at this guest lodge was motivated by the need to build relevant rapport with the participants. Time sampling was maintained by instituting different times and days for data collection. The time sampling was purposefully adhered to in order to avoid possible confusion caused by the conflicting schedules of the participants. Again, reflexivity was maintained to prevent the researcher's closeness to the study participants (Streubert & Carpenter 2011:34). The prerequisite for rapport building with the study participants did not obscure or circumvent the researcher's obligation to professional conduct according to which she was obliged to limit her influence on participants' output behaviour.

The five unstructured individual interviews and eight focus groups interviews and integration of visual observations captured in field notes enhanced both the credibility and triangulation aspects of the current study (de Vos 2008:306 ; Polit & Beck 2012:175). According to Polit and Beck (2012:591), member checking may be carried out in an ongoing way as the data are collected. Member checking was initiated by the researcher through further ongoing probing to ensure that the meaning and interpretations the participants attached to the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” were understood.

### **2.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings are applicable to other settings under similar conditions (Polit & Beck 2012:585). Transferability is also described as the ability to generalise the findings of the study to other populations.

The qualitative nature of the current study and its attendant population and sampling dynamics may not necessarily be conducive to the typical transferability of findings. Applicability is considered to be the same as transferability of findings to other studies which is not possible in qualitative studies because the purpose of qualitative research is to describe a particular phenomenon which is not generalisable to other populations (Krefting 1991:216).

Sufficient contextual information about the field work sites was provided including clear descriptions of the information and experiences the participant shared (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:7; Polit & Beck 2012:526). In the same vein the phenomenon explored in the current study was the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health which was unique to the current study context and therefore the findings cannot be generalised to other populations.

### **2.8.3 Dependability**

Dependability is described as consistency of the data generated (the findings) and description of the methodological process Guba (1981) cited in Krefting 1991:221). Polit and Beck (2012:585) assert that dependability also refers to the extent to which data

stability can be relied upon even under conditions of dissimilar occurrence as the original research study process.

In the current study an independent coder was engaged to analyse the data and assess the manner in which the findings were arrived at (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:302). A detailed description of the methodology was given and a clear description of the context and the research process was also provided (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:303).

Two methods of data collection were used, namely, individual interviews and focus group discussions to enhance the dependability of the study (Krefting 1991:221). Peer examination involved the researcher's supervisors and colleagues to assess the methodological correctness. The supervisors' expertise in qualitative data collection methods was critical in the review of the study.

#### **2.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability is also viewed as neutrality which is the freedom from bias in the research process. Confirmability is achieved by maintaining rigour in the research methods (Krefting 1991:216). Data triangulation was established through conducting five individual interviews and eight focus group interviews with between four and eight participants per group (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:303). Field notes were also taken and integrated in the analysis of data to support the themes and sub-themes identified. To further maintain confirmability, the researcher was supervised by two supervisors who had extensive experience in qualitative research. Polit and Beck (2012:585) state for confirmability to be achieved, the findings have to reflect the participants' voices and not the researcher's own view or suppositions. Conducting individual and focus group interviews during which the participants' voices were recorded and transcribing these recorded interviews verbatim confirmed the data collected originated from the participants themselves.

#### **2.8.5 Authenticity**

Authenticity refers to how the researcher fairly and faithfully shows a range of realities and used authentic and appropriate strategies to report the participants' lived experiences as they are lived (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:304; Polit & Beck 2012:585). In this study the researcher warranted that what had been reported represented the participants' lived

experiences regarding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under study by using individual and focus group interviews. The researcher further obtained informed consent from all the participants and allowed them to choose their own venues for the interviews as suggested by Holloway and Wheeler (2010). These authors assert tactical authenticity prescribes that the research should aim at empowering participants. In this study the participants themselves suggested initiating forums as a way of making women aware of the influence the proverb can have on their life and health. Also, at educational level they suggested boys and girls should be introduced to ways of preventing abuse towards females at primary school level by, for example, simply respecting each other as equal human beings.

## 2.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When human beings participate in research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the rights, dignity, safety and well-being of individuals are protected (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:53; Polit & Beck 2012:150). Before commencing with the data collection, ethical approval was sought from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. Permission to conduct the study was granted in 2012 (see Annexure C).

Every individual indigenous African women participant was given an information leaflet to read in order to understand the purpose of the study. The women were requested individually to complete the informed consent form which was the conduit for seeking their permission to be included in the study (see Annexure D). The following ethical principles were adhered to in the study: participants' informed consent; confidentiality of participation and non-disclosure of information; the right to human dignity which guaranteed respect to participants' privacy; and openness throughout the research process (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport 2002:66; Holloway & Wheeler 2010:69; Kumar 2011:244; Polit & Beck 2012:158; Pera and van Tonder 2008:32-33).

The nature of the study was such that it was possible for participants to experience emotional distress. The researcher therefore made provision for counselling services by providing the participants with the contact details of a pastor who had agreed to such services should the need arise (see Annexure C).

### **2.9.1 Informed consent**

It is unethical to collect information from participants without their knowledge; all participants have to express willingness to participate in a research study (Pera and van Tonder 2008:32-33). In the information leaflet the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and of the possibility that participation could affect them either directly or indirectly (Kumar 2011:244). The indigenous African women were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. None were coerced to participate. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to do so without stating a reason (Polit & Beck 2012:158). Those who voluntarily chose to participate were asked to sign informed consent forms confirming that they chose to participate of their own free will without being coerced.

### **2.9.2 Confidentiality**

Sharing the information obtained from participants other than for the purposes of research is unethical and therefore it is required from researchers to be conscious of the confidentiality principle. The participants were assured that all information obtained would be kept confidential; to maintain anonymity, no names were used on any document. Fictitious names and numbers were used to guarantee anonymity. All the records pertaining to the study must always be kept safe (Kumar 2011:244). Holloway and Wheeler (2010:69) add the research data must be protected at all times. The researcher thus secured all records related to the current study in accordance with policy of the University of Pretoria on the safekeeping of research documents. During the study all relevant documents were kept under lock and key and in password protected files in the computer where it will remain for a period of 15 years.

### **2.9.3 Autonomy**

Autonomy expresses respect for the unconditional worth of an individual and for their thoughts or actions. Autonomous people are able to make informed choices (Pera and van Tonder 2008:32-33). In this study the participants were respected throughout the process of research and were allowed to make their own choices. Pera and van Tonder (2008:33) confirms respect for autonomy is binding to health professionals and should be adhered to at all times. The study addressed a proverb viewed by some participants as packed with oppressive meaning while others saw it as bringing sanctity to the institution of marriage.

Therefore, it was important for the researcher to display equal respect for participants with alternative viewpoints throughout the study.

#### **2.9.4 Deception of participants**

Deception refers to withholding information or offering incorrect information deliberately in order to secure the participation of participants (de Vos et al. 2002:66). To prevent any form of deception, the information leaflet contained all the ethical aspects of the study. For all the participants to know exactly what would be expected from them, the researcher made it clear that they would be requested to describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under question and its impact on their health.

#### **2.9.5 Fairness/justice**

The researcher checked that the selection of participants was fair and that none were exploited during the study or excluded unfairly from the study (Polit & Beck 2008:155). Of further importance is that the participants were informed they could withdraw from the study without prejudice. Respect for the participants' culture, lifestyles, habits, norms and beliefs were maintained throughout the study (Polit & Beck 2008:155-156). The researcher made sure the relationship between her and the participants was balanced and favoured the needs of the participants. Bias was eliminated by assuring that no coercive influence to participate in the study was exerted. The researcher further warranted that the research process was appropriate for the research questions and aim of the study (Holloway & Wheeler 2010:69-70).

#### **2.10. SUMMARY**

Phenomenology was discussed extensively in this chapter as both a branch of philosophy and as a research method. Hermeneutic phenomenology guided by Gadamer's hermeneutic circle was used to understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health. Gadamer's hermeneutic circle and its application to this study were explained in detail.

The research process including the assumptions of the study, design and methods of research, ethical considerations and trustworthiness were thoroughly addressed. In Chapter 3 the study findings and interpretations are presented.

## 3 PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 described the overview of phenomenology, research design and methods. This chapter presents the study findings and interpretations. The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

### 3.2 OPERATIONALISING THE FIELD OF STUDY

The study was qualitative in nature and followed a qualitative design, namely, phenomenology (see Chapter 2, section 2.4). Five individual interviews and eight focus group interviews were conducted with indigenous African women in Gauteng. Snowball and purposive sampling were used to select participants who had experience about the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on the health of indigenous African women. The demographic characteristics of the participants are explained in Chapter 2, section 2.4.2.3. The research question was clear and understood by all participants. Saturation of data was reached when no new information emerged during the individual and focus group interview discussions related to the proverb under scrutiny.

### 3.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings and its interpretations were grouped into themes and sub-themes. Four main themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the transcribed texts. The findings were based on the experiences of participants as shared in their own voices. The Quotes were written in italics and the researcher’s interpretations were written in a normal font. The findings of the study are indicated in figures. Figure 3.1 is a summary of the main themes and sub-themes that emerged.

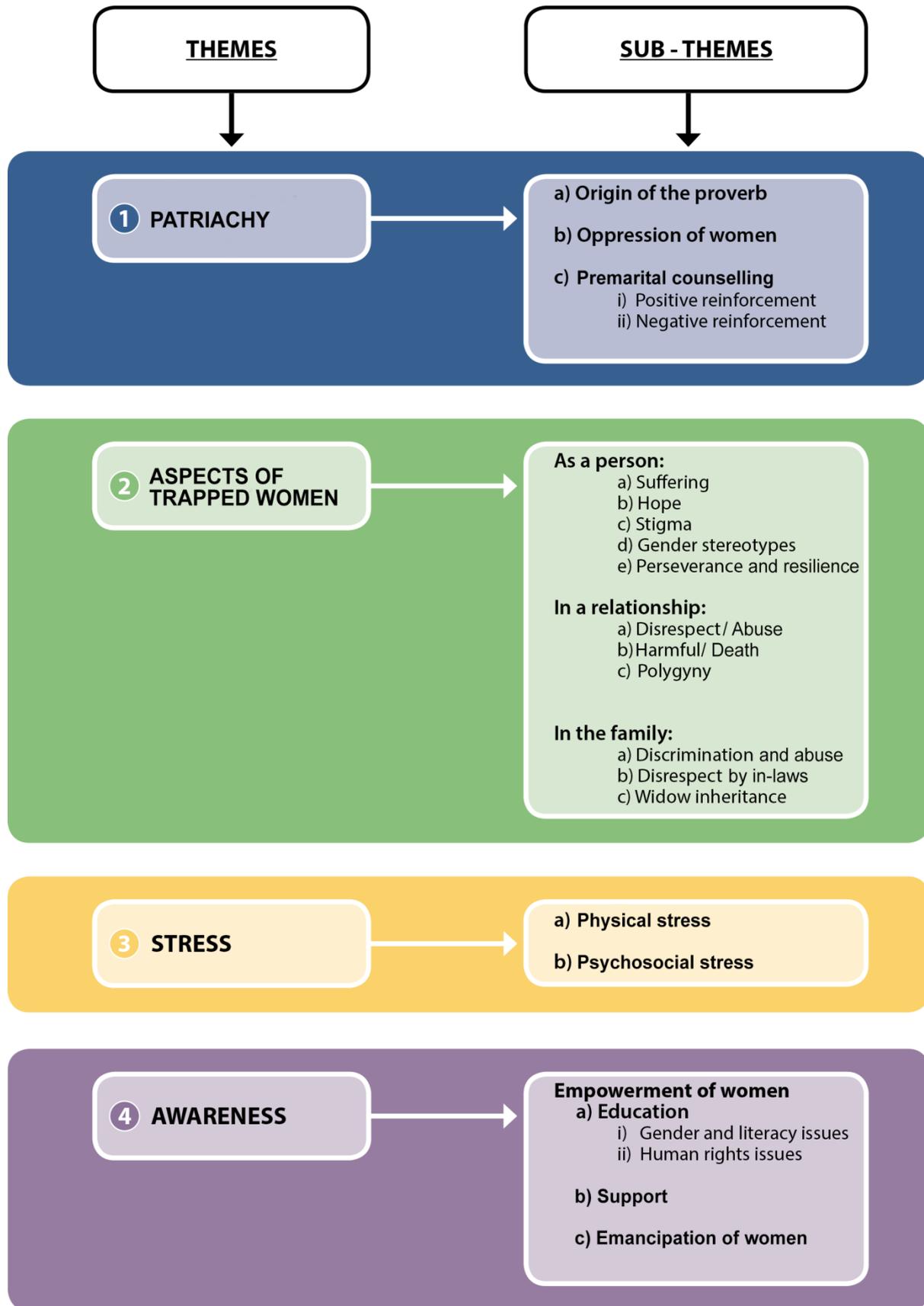


Figure 3.1: Themes and sub-themes

### 3.3.1 THEME 1: PATRIARCHY

One of the main themes that emanated from the study was patriarchy. Participants felt that they live in a patriarchal society. In this study Patriarchy is perceived as a system in which both men and women participate through discourse and action; however, women’s participation is subjugated to using and maintaining proverbs that dishonour them or articulate their subordination to men. Theme 1: patriarchy and its sub themes are shown in figure 3.1 followed by figure 3.2 which is a diagram of the first theme and sub-themes.

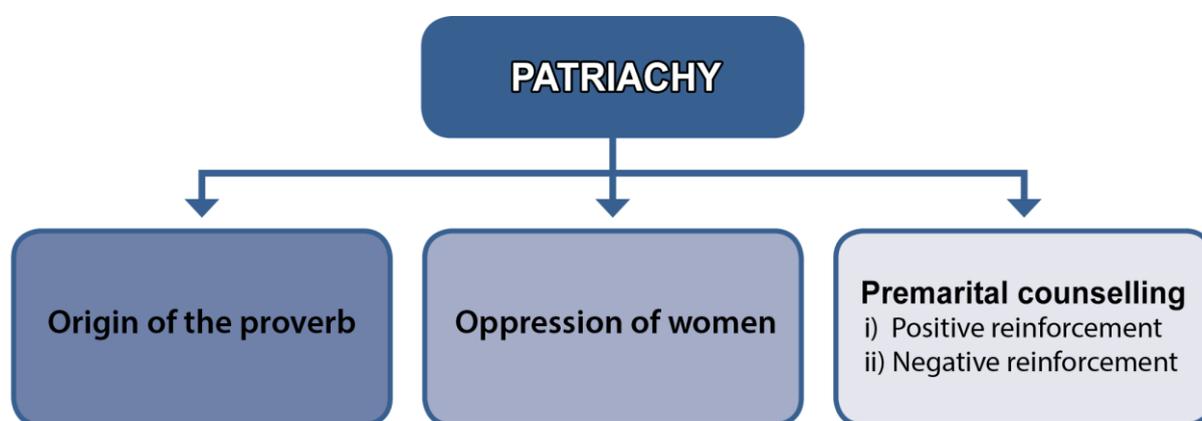


Figure 3.2: Theme 1: Patriarchy and sub-themes

#### 3.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Origin of the proverb

Like many African proverbs “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” is a wise saying known and repeated in the Setswana, Sepedi, and Southern Sotho cultures. The origin of the proverb under study is unclear but the participants revealed that it is probably an ancient proverb that has been known and used since “a long time ago”; “The proverb is old ...”; “My mother told me about the proverb ...” and “This proverb was there a long time ago before our great, great parents were born...”.

The above shortened quotes taken from the transcribed texts verify that “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” has indeed been part of the Setswana culture (the culture of the participants in this study) from time immemorial. Participants shared the meaning that has been attached to the proverb and their feelings about how it was used to prepare a female child for marriage. They felt that the system favoured men and the following was expressed:

*“It started a long time ago, whereby that time a woman was expected to get married, you know, and if one was not getting married they were called names such as ‘lefetwa’ [a woman who is past the period of being married]”.*

*“If a girl child happened to fail to do some household chores, she would be told that she would never get married because no man would want to marry a lazy girl.”*

*“This was to prepare the girl psychologically for the marriage.”*

*“So they knew that when you grow up you will be a woman and you will be married and have a family.”*

The above quotes indicate the cultural meaning and interpretation of the proverb guides society to perceive the only value a woman has is to be in a marital relationship. As indicated, the participants remembered a girl-child was prepared during socialisations to aspire to work hard and excel in household chores as part of her preparation for marriage. This psychological preparation of the girl-child started quite early in life so as to engrave the idea of commitment and hard work in marriage in her mind.

The quotes further reflect how fear was instilled into a girl-child by warning her that if she did not work hard she will not find a suitor to marry her. Often one of the consequences for women, who had not become a wife by a certain age, was to be called ‘lefetwa’ (a woman who is past the period of being married). It is a verbal insult referring to women who were not married. However, the same phenomenon of name-calling was not applied to men. According to the participants’ input, a man was allowed to marry at any age or stage of his life.

The participants voiced that women were born into and raised in a system that favoured men over women. This finding was expressed as follows:

*“This proverb is old and our parents found it being used, and grew up using it, and it made them endure marriage. Until today [modern times] they are still suffering and don’t know what to do because they could not go back home even when things were bad in their marriages.”*

The proverb was part of the socialisation process which had been carried from one generation to the next. This participant shared that the wife had to endure whatever happened in the marriage without having the option to return to her own parents’ home. The woman’s purpose was to keep the marriage intact because the interpretation of the proverb was that her marriage was her only “place” and “home”. In previous generations, the health consequences of unyielding endurance such as physical abuse and emotional trauma were overlooked.

Some older people cherished the proverb and used it to counsel their daughters about perseverance in marriage despite pain and hardship. This finding is echoed in the following statement made by a participant:

*“My mother told me about the proverb and said, ‘My child, do you see that I am still married, it is because of the proverb ‘lebitla mosadi ke bogadi’. I listened to my parents when they counselled me prior to my marriage. My mother told me that this proverb is old and if you want to keep your marriage you have to understand it and practice it. So I am asking you my child to do what I did and you will have a family.’ I [the participant] do not want to suffer like my mother because I saw her going through a lot of pain in her marriage.”*

Proverbs are traditional utterances used in language to introduce cultural or societal patterns of behaviour. The proverb used in this study was interpreted by the participants as a tool used by older women to teach and inform young women to be resilient and stay in marriage. The aforementioned participant shared that her mother was proud that she (the mother) had “*listened to her parents*” who counselled her before her marriage to understand the meaning of the proverb and “*practice it*”. However, despite her mother’s advice that the participant should uphold the same

value in her life, the latter shared she did not want to experience the pain her mother had endured. The participant was not inclined to agree to an unhappy marriage simply because culture and society dictated “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”.

Another participant explained the origin and underlying meaning of the proverb as follows:

*“This proverb was there a long time ago before our great, great parents were born and therefore families had no choice but to abide by the proverb. The idea was to encourage women to keep their marriages and must not divorce. The women then also knew that they were to get married because it was a societal expectation even though they did [not] feel ready to be married.”*

This quote highlights the fact that in past generations societies respected proverbs as it constituted part of their culture. Proverbs and idioms guided their behaviour in society. In the study context, this guidance entailed women’s behaviour and attitude in marriage.

In a patriarchal society where women are viewed and treated differently than men, using proverbs as an ideology or a cultural guide is common practice. It appears as if in the past everyone in families knew the proverb meant women should be married and stay married because it was expected by society. What the same quote further reveals is in most societies the proverb is revered as part of their culture. Hence, a woman’s life is determined by the family and the community who are the custodians of cultural beliefs and norms contained in proverbs. Anybody who does not respect proverbs is seen as going against the prescripts of society and such behaviour is unacceptable.

Participants explained society expects all women to get married otherwise a husband is chosen for them. In this regard, one participant expressed the following:

*“I am saying that our elders when they started these idioms, they had this that everybody will or must get married, by that time I think*

*everyone was getting married, you know ... because they would choose a man for you if you are not getting married. At times it would be known already from which family a man would be arranged who fitted their [parents'] characteristics, for example, the family which is generally being respected by the community."*

Another participant put it into present day perspective:

*"This is still being practiced in many families to date. Young women are always feeling stressed during their late twenties and early thirties if they are not married as they [families] view "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi as a norm"."*

The quote mentioned above was supported by a participant who was single and in her late thirties. She said:

*"I am talking from experience, you are afraid of going back to your hometown, the elders are always asking, 'When are the in-laws coming to ask for your hand in marriage?' I can see this is stressful for my parents, and it stresses me too. One may end up married to someone you don't love just to please people."*

These expressions indicate the way the proverb is still interpreted today. A woman is expected to be married; if married she would be respected. Societal expectations sometimes subject young women and their families to enormous pressure that maybe detrimental to their health. As already shown a suitor may be arranged. The couple may be incompatible and experience problems because it was not their intention to marry each other, but they have no choice than to succumb to societal pressure.

From the time this proverb originated, it had been societies' unwritten law that every woman had to be married. If they stayed married they were viewed as "successful" and were treated like "heroes". One of the participants confirmed this finding when she said:

*“This proverb [“lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”] is the root of all problems women experience in their marriages. It is a well-known fact that women are viewed as successful and heroes if they hold a marriage together.”*

It is significant that language has been used to convey and carry through gender-biased cultural prescriptions. Of further interest is that the proverb under study might have originated decades ago with the sole purpose of controlling how women, once married, should lead their lives in a patriarchal society. For a woman who failed to marry, the elders had a specific procedure they followed to arrange for a man whom they decided would be a suitable husband for the woman. As verified by the participants’ verbatim quotes, this proverb of undeterminable origin has rigorously dictated the course of a woman’s life for uncounted decades.

### **3.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Oppression of women**

The oppression of women emerged as the second sub-theme of theme 1: patriarchy. The participants expressed the proverb emphasises the worth of marriage while also highlighting the woman’s responsibility to work hard and ensure that the marriage works. The participants experienced it as oppression exercised in the form of an expectation – marriage entails taking care of one’s husbands as well as his extended family. The following two transcribed quotes support this finding:

*“Women are told by elder women [aunts who are married] that they must love and look after their partners; they are not told that they must have their ‘me’ time, to take care of themselves first, not the other persons first.”*

*“This is not fair you understand... You are told that you must take care of all the disabled people in his home and you must respect them irrespective of your whether your husband comes home or he does whatever.”*

It seems as if, once married, a man retains his freedom but the woman’s role in her new family is clearly outlined: she is the one responsible for taking care of her husband and all the other members of his family. It is often not acceptable for a married woman to do as she wishes or make her own choices because societal

expectations dictate her life. Going against these rules or expectations can result in her being considered as an outcast; she may even be ostracised. “Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” is used as a tool to keep on reminding women that, once married, they have no other option than to look after and attend to all the needs of their in-laws. This is sometimes seen by women as the cause of self-neglect and failure to reach self-actualisation. Having no voice, not being allowed to share in decision making or giving an opinion, they feel ignored and experience it as oppression.

In a focus group interview an argument ensued among the participants. They were divided on the aspect of whether doing all the chores and honouring the family who gave the woman her husband could be viewed as oppression. They ended up agreeing it is oppression because a woman has the right to do it freely and of her own choice and not because it was *expected* of her.

In the African culture a woman is married to man’s whole family and the community where they live. Proverbial language is a traditional tool used by the older generation to groom married women to sacrifice their own self to take care of everyone else. It is for this reason that it is expected from a new daughter-in-law to work hard and take care of her new husband as well as the new family. Sharing her opinion, an elderly participant confirmed this finding in a straightforward, if not accusatory, way:

*“You women of nowadays view everything as abuse and oppression. This was just a cultural expectation. No wonder some of you marry and go and stay in suburbs running away from in-laws. That is not good as the mother-in-law need[s] to be taken care of.”*

It is still the belief if a woman is married she has to prove to her in-laws that she is a hard worker. It appears as if married women are continuously judged by the way they carry out household chores and how successful they are in meeting the needs of their new families, especially the needs of her in-laws. Expanding on this aspect, a participant confirmed that the new bride sometimes already starts experiencing stress and anxiety (which often becomes a lifelong condition) on her wedding day:

*“After the marriage ceremony, relatives don’t leave your marital home for immediately after the ceremony. They stay to evaluate your ability to cook, clean houses, and take care of a large number of people. They have to be able to say that the money paid for the lobola [price, often cattle, that was paid for the bride] is was not wasted as you are a hard worker. Some women experience it as causing anxiety because one does know what the in-laws expect in this process.”*

African tradition prescribe that the concept ‘family’ encompasses the nucleus as well as extended family members (other relatives, for example, uncles, grandparents and siblings). Accordingly, as explained in the above quote, after the wedding ceremony everyone waits for the new “makoti” (bride) to serve them. For the new daughter-in-law this is a critical moment. She has to show her skills in caring for her new in-laws. She is scrutinised and evaluated by all to determine whether she was taught well and sufficiently prepared for marriage in her parents’ home. As verified in the above quote, the new bride stresses because she does not know whether her new family will approve of her caring skills. Although the process of displaying caring skills is a cultural expectation, some participants viewed it as gender-related oppression because a similar ritual is not expected from the new husband.

Some of the participants said many married women internalise societal expectations negatively; they experience a deep feeling of guilt if they realise, or even unnecessarily think, they do not meet the expectations of their husbands or his family. This perception was expressed as follows:

*“Then the women always feel guilty that ‘I didn’t do the laundry for my husband, I didn’t cook’. They feel guilty you understand...”*

This quote supports the notion that, although women are by nature caring human beings, if society expects more than this natural care, for example, caring for a husband, his immediate as well as extended family, their children as well as doing all the household chores, they *“always feel guilty”*. It is possible that this guilty feelings stem from having a sense of failure because the woman believes she fails to do what

she has been socialised to do. Once such guilty feelings surface, a woman may end up overexerting herself with the intention of compensating for what she believes she did not or cannot achieve.

### **3.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Premarital counselling**

Negative reinforcement and positive reinforcement emerged as sub-themes under pre-marital counselling. Receiving premarital counselling or going for premarital advice, known as “go laya”, is a common practice used in the Setswana and other black cultures (Ellece 2011:44).

#### ***(i) Negative reinforcement***

The negative reinforcement of premarital counselling was raised by some participants who were concerned about the proverb being directed at women only. This concern was expressed by participants as follows:

*“We know that when you are out [married and are out of your parents’ home], you are out. There is no way you could go back according to the proverb, because it says you are supposed to be buried in your grave at your in-laws’ place when you die; ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’.”*

*“A woman’s grave is at her in-laws’ place because you are supposed to die where you got married.”*

One participant said she was shocked and could not believe it when she was told the home where she grew up in would not be her home anymore:

*“On my wedding day, my aunt said to me, ‘Ngwanake’ [my child], you must know that now you are now married and this is no more your home, your mother is no more your mother ... your mother-in-law is now your mother, you have to take good care of her. You must know that ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’.”*

These quotes express the negative connotation some participants attached to the proverb. They viewed it as a tool used to force them to stay in marriage. These participants were upset with the idea that the proverb dictates women have no other option than to stay in their husband's home and serve him and his family until she dies. They pointed out the proverb under study clearly meant that, once married, a woman may never go back to her maternal home.

Based on the general cultural perceptions, this proverb was seen by these participants as reinforcing all that is negative in their lives. The quote stresses commitment to stay in the marriage irrespective of whether the woman is happy and fulfilled or unhappy and anxious. These participants viewed the proverb as an arbitrary and out-dated rule which denies a woman to have rights in a marriage: *you are supposed to die there* (author's emphasis) also indicates not having a choice. The reinforcement promotes endurance which can cause stress thus leading to health problems.

#### (ii) **Positive reinforcement**

Conversely, positive reinforcement refers to issues reinforcing marriage in a positive way. Some participants expressed the use of the proverb protects the sanctity of marriage and unites families. One of the participants shared the following:

*"I have three girls ... I will still put it [proverb] through to them like it was put to me, for a simple reason being that I don't want a child who will leave one foot here and the other one there. At any time she can die of HIV and AIDS or be killed ... We really need to make sure we use it, even modify it a little bit..."*

The above participant felt the proverb encouraged positive behaviour in marriage. Although an unwritten law, it is seen as inspiring a married woman to persevere and keep her family. Further, this participant said even in modern times the proverb should be used as a form of socialisation to inculcate issues of commitment in daughters to hold their own marriages together.

Participants who agreed with and accepted "*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*" voiced it was their belief that it gave guidance on how women should behave in a marital

relationship. It encourages respect and commitment and brings sanctity into the marriage as stated by a participant:

*“Even if I may have problems I vow not to leave my husband and my house unless someone throws my clothes out on the street ... ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’. I will do anything to save my marriage.”*

This participant was adamant that she would do all in her power to “save my marriage” despite the fact that she “may have problems”. Hers is an indication of how socialisation into marriage by using the proverb can contribute to a woman thinking positively about her marriage and exhibiting a positive behaviour towards it. Reflection on the societal and cultural expectations embedded in the proverb under study propelled and emboldened this participant to persevere in her marriage.

### 3.3.2 THEME 2: ASPECTS OF TRAPPED WOMEN

Aspects of trapped women emerged as the second theme. Figure 3.3 shows the findings of theme 2: Aspects of trapped women and its sub-themes.

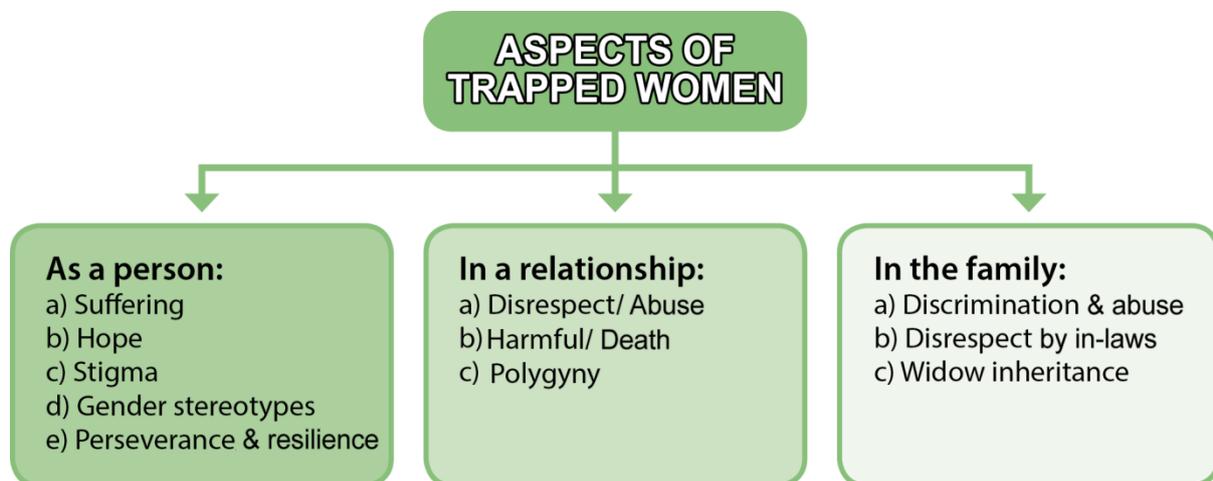


Figure 3.3 THEME 2: ASPECTS OF TRAPPED WOMEN and sub-themes

#### 3.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: As a person

The first sub-theme identified was participants feeling trapped as a person or as an individual woman. The participants expressed this feeling of entrapment was as a result of internalising the proverb to the extent that they had no purpose other than having to

make the marriage work. They felt they were solely responsible for the success of their marriages which resulted in feelings and experiences of suffering, hope, stigmatisation, gender stereotypes, and perseverance/resilience. Each of these aspects is unpacked and discussed next.

### (a) Suffering

Some married participants shared they endured much personal suffering in their marriages. Suffering was expressed in the form of feeling intense emotional pain, feelings of helplessness, and inability to take decisive actions. The next quote supports this:

*“My husband used to beat me and I just kept quiet about it because I was afraid that he will leave us and we will all go hungry because I am not working. At times I wanted to go for divorce but I was afraid you know. His family often talked to him and it became better.”*

This quote reflects intense emotional pain due to the participants' inability to take a decision in the presence of abuse. Being unemployed, she experienced fear of exposing her children to poverty. The use of the proverb under study encourages women to persevere and endure suffering in their marriages irrespective of what challenges they are exposed to. This participant was miserable and exposed to feelings of unhappiness and distress, but dared not think of challenging the situation because she was fearful of the consequences if she had acted upon her instinct to leave at times.

This same participant shared she had to endure the pain of seeing her husband with other women:

*“I used to find my husband chatting with women at church and when going he would take them halfway and leave me to go alone with the children. These women would even fight for him. When I ask him about it he blamed me for trying to control his life. I realised that I was becoming a fool. I then decided to take a transfer and attend a church at [closer to] home. I decided to sleep in another room*

*because I was afraid of diseases such as STIs or HIV and AIDS and that made him not to buy us food. That made me goes seek employment because my children were being affected. I am now tired but what do I do? 'Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi'."*

This verbatim quote illustrates how women who are trapped in a marriage suffer feelings of helplessness, unhappiness, embarrassment and guilt. When confronting him about his flirting with other women, the participant was made to think she was the guilty one as she *"controlled his life"*. She was embarrassed when not only she but also her children were left to return home alone after church. This hurt her. When she finally had the courage to change her place of worship, the husband punished her by not providing them with food. An apparent total lack of respect from the husband is demonstrated in this woman's statement. The participant expressed fear of contracting diseases such as STIs, HIV and AIDS, but at the same time she was afraid of opting out of the marriage. She felt obliged to stay and to think about her commitment to her marriage. She was socialised into believing that once married, there was no going back home. It can be assumed that her reference to being tired does not only refer to physical tiredness, but also to mental exhaustion due to being trapped in a situation from which she saw no escape because of *"lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi"*.

### **(b) Hope**

Living with the hope that things will change has been the core sustaining women who struggle and suffer in their marriages. Some participants expressed they embraced the Christians faith and used this faith to instil the hope in themselves that one day their lives would change for the better. One participant expressed this as follows:

*"He is not contributing anything. I extended our house alone. For my peace I have decided to forget about him but it is very painful, my mother told me to persevere because he does not beat me. I wanted to leave him but ... ah... there are no men any more out there and it will mean I start again it is the same; you see... He is irresponsible but I have hope and faith that he will change one day."*

This quote highlights how women live with expectation and trust that events in their stressful marriages would eventually turn out for the better. This participant remained hopeful that her desires would materialise one day even though her husband was irresponsible. In spite of the emotional pain she experienced, she never gave up hope. Her mother had repeatedly consoled her by pointing out at least her husband did not beat her.

Sharing her story, another participant added her mother-in-law unfailingly supported her while her parents encouraged her to persevere, stay hopeful and have trust that her marriage would eventually lead to happiness:

*“With me, my husband used to sleep out so often and he would say he had a car breakdown. It had become a habit. I once suffered from depression and my mother-in-law has been always on my side and she supports me and so I am no longer worried. I think I am now coping well. My parents told me that I should hold on, persevere and have hope and trust that my marriage would work one day. I thought of divorcing him but his family support gives me the reason to have hope.”*

A third participant described how, from the beginning of her marriage, the anxiety she suffered eventually led to high blood pressure. However, supportive and understanding friends gave her hope and she was “*now coping better*”:

*“... mine used to sleep out and come back during unholy [early hours of the morning] hours. I became an expert of the different sounds of car engines. At first I used not to sleep. I will be looking outside the window waiting for him to come back. I used to have sleepless nights. The following day I would not cope at work. I ended up suffering from blood pressure because of his action. With the support of friends who told me their own problems I am now coping better.”*

From these quotes it is obvious that having hope helps women to endure in a difficult marriage. Trauma caused by a cheating husband, suffering embarrassment and guilt, and being punished (not given being given basics such as food) can be somewhat lessened if married women have a support system. Support from relatives, friends who are experiencing the same trauma and having faith help them to endure. Yet, despite having some thoughts on changing their circumstances such as finding work or another place for worship, many women tend to continue believing it is their duty to remain with a husband in his home until she dies. For them, the proverb under discussion gives hope; it encourages them not to despair but to always be optimistic and hopeful because they are in the 'place' where they belongs – with their husbands. At the same time they maybe predisposed to physical and mental burdens that may affect their health.

### (c) Stigma

The participants in this study expressed they were afraid of stigma and rejection by their family and the community if they leave their husbands and return to their maternal homes. This fear of being stigmatised and the reasoning behind it were described by a participant:

*“My aunt said, ‘Ngwanake’ [my daughter], you must know that the grave of a woman is at her in-laws. I come from home having being counselled ‘ke laiwe’ [I was counselled]. They told me that they do not want anybody who comes back from her in-laws because in their family they counted grandmother so and so who has mothered my mother. You must know that from all the two surnames no one has ever come back home from her marriage, if you do it, you would have done something unusual in the family. We are expecting you to stay and endure all ... don’t disappoint us.”*

The participant indicated she did not want to be a symbol of social disgrace in her family; it was made clear to her that once she was married she could not go back to her maternal home because nobody in her family had ever been divorced. Her family feared shame and to be discredited by other family members and the community if their daughter divorced because staying married is a societal

expectation for all married women. This participant was warned by her aunt never to disappoint her (the participants') family by returning home. She was thus socialised to believe the family would not be able to withstand the state of dishonour caused by her should she divorce. Everyone in the family expected her to stay married and endure simply for the sake of the family name not being tarnished by a divorce.

More quotes from the participants emphasised that their own families would never accept them back should they either decide to divorce their husband or simply leave him and return home:

*“If you go back, your mom will also push you away, you see. And the family members and the community will say, ‘Why do you accept her back?’ because she is not supposed to come back from her in-laws’ place... You feel like you embarrassed them [own families] if you go back home, yes, and it’s like they have mixed feelings towards you. They feel as if they never taught you manners. Fear of rejection causes a lot of stress. The majority of us are suffering from diseases such as high blood and depression already. Going back is also the same you will end in a mental ward as everyone will isolate you.” [Participants laugh].*

For the majority of participants fear of rejection by one’s own family members was linked to the fact that their own families feared humiliation from society. The participants expressed they were taught perseverance in marriage upheld the honour and dignity of a married woman’s own family. Going back home was linked with embarrassment for her family because it was morally not acceptable for a married woman to return home.

It appears as if the main reason why parents reject their own daughters should the latter divorce and come home, is the fear of stigmatisation. Fears of being ostracised by their own family members seemed to be intense among participants who had considered, especially through divorce, leaving the abusive relationship. Unfortunately, what is also clear from the participants’ shared experiences is the

negative effect this fear of any form of stigma had on their physical and psychological health.

Another participant agreed that struggling and suffering at her in-law's home was preferable than going back home because "*people will talk too much about you and your family*". She added:

*"I have to persevere in this family and accept everything that happens because I once reported to my mother and she said to me, 'Go back my daughter, what will people say in the neighborhood? Remember I received and have used 'magadi a batho' the money paid for you as lobola."*

One participant shared that her family called a meeting during which her mother said:

*"I will not be able to stay with 'mmoa bogadi', 'o tlo go ntshegisa ka batho' [you will make people laugh at me]. You must just learn how to cope."*

Hearing her words, the majority of the participants shook their heads and others nodded to show that this was the norm; it was what they too would expect to be the outcome of a family discussion. One participant sighed and explained the tragic circumstances of a woman being trapped in an abusive and unhappy marriage as follows:

*"You sometimes feel trapped and hanging in space. You are unhappy in your marital home and at the same time you cannot be accepted back home. Everyone rejects you, the society also reject you."*

The fear of stigmatisation seems to play a significant role in forcing a woman to persevere in an unhappy marriage. One participant, although she experienced problems in her marriage, said she could never go back home to report to her mother because that would be awkward and embarrassing for the whole family. Her mother

made it clear that her family had already received and used the lobola paid for her; her mother felt people (the community) would question her (the mother's) morals if she accepted her daughter back when the lobola money had already been spent. For women who experience the same rejection as this participant, there is no other solution than to endure. They are not expected to act or respond to challenges in marriage for fear of embarrassing their parents and having them stigmatised by the community.

Unfortunately, continued exposure to stressful conditions can lead to the development of psychosomatic diseases. Feeling trapped, "*hanging in space*" with nowhere to go because they are rejected and stigmatised by everybody, can certainly leave major psychological scars on women who are forced to stay for years in unhappy marriages. If there is also little or no hope for improving their dire situation, such women can indeed present with various physical and/or psychosocial conditions.

#### **(d) Gender stereotypes**

The issue of gender stereotyping was raised by participants who believed their lives and health were affected on a daily basis by gender stereotypes used against them. Some participants maintained that the songs sung during the marriage ceremony also had a negative impact on their well-being later on in the marriage. The words of these songs, according to some participants, reinforce cultural expectations common in a patriarchal society. Few wedding songs address the groom; the main focus is always on the bride. A participant started singing a song which she said was sung by people who had attended her wedding. Following are the words (English translation provided in brackets) of a phrase of the song:

*"Monna ga a batliwe payslip...  
monna ga a batliwe paysilipi makoti..."*

(Daughter in-law, you must know that a man is not supposed to be asked about his payslip... )

As the participant sang, others joined her in singing. Because these women were singing and ululating, the seriousness of the message it conveyed sounded light and happy, but when analysed it is clear the words undermine the rights and integrity of a married woman. The participant, who started singing, commented on the irony afterwards:

*“Imagine we are singing and ululating forgetting that this song is depriving us of our rights as wives to our husbands.”*

It is the norm in African culture that when attending weddings, everybody sings. Wedding songs are customarily sung as part of the celebration to make the wedding a joyous and happy occasion. However, this particular song advises married women not to ask for money from the husband because he will automatically provide. In fact, an analysis of its deeper meaning reveals it promotes unequal power relations in the marriage; when unequal power continues it causes stress to the underling which, in this case, is the wife. She is not allowed the freedom to ask for money from her husband even if she (and their children) goes hungry.

After the singing, another participant stated some of the songs promote domination of men over women as well as patriarchal ideologies. She then continued and cited the following two songs:

*“go nyalwa ke Mr X ke maemo makoti...”*

(to get married to Mr X is a prestige for a bride...)

*“Mme Ma M, Dikgomo le jele, kgomo le jele , kgomo le jele, hle re feng bana...”*

(Ms M, you have the cows [money] we paid for lobola,

so give us our children please... [children and their mother]...)

Again all participants started laughing and joined her in the singing. After the singing, a participant made the following comment:

*“Imagine it is like they were making [doing] us as women a favour by being married by [to] those men .... ahh...”*

Considering the above discussions, the words of the songs undoubtedly point to society’s cultural perception of the supremacy of the husband in a marriage. Furthermore, such songs promote inequality between husbands and wives, among women and men in families and in general. For example, the words also emphasise the superiority of the husband’s family over the wife’s family which is supported by the mentioning of the “lobola magadi” (bride price) that the husband’s family has paid. The words emphasise stereotyping; the husband is the leader, the wife the follower; the husband is the superior partner, the wife the submissive partner. Culturally, the woman has gained some status (although still inferior to the man’s) by marrying a man who, simply because of his gender, is of a higher status. In a broader context, these songs can be viewed as praise songs honouring the traditional belief that the husband’s family gains prestige in the eyes of society because they are rich enough (had enough cattle) to pay the bride price (‘lobola magadi’) for the new daughter-in-law (‘makoti’).

#### **(e) Perseverance and resilience**

The following quote was extracted from a transcript of a participant who was single and believed every woman should persevere in her marriage and stay with her husband’s family even after her husband has died. She said:

*“Ijoo ... ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’ [Oh! The grave of the woman is at the place of her in-laws]. Your home is where you are married even if your husband dies you still belong to that family, death does not say, ‘Now you can go to your home’. You have to stay with your in-laws and give them respect. Even if it can become tough you just have to persevere because there is no going back...”*

A participant interrupted her. Although she agreed in principle with the view of the unmarried participant, she explained difficulties and problems can arise after the death of a husband:

*“You are right, but it is not easy you know. It can be very tough. [For] example, my mother-in-law goes to bed at 5 o’clock and she eats sour porridge only and I eat the normal ‘bogobe ba mosoko’ [porridge] so when I cook I have to cook two pots you see. She often complains a lot. But as a married woman you have to persevere so as to build your own family. So one has just to try and be happy despite all these challenges.”*

Another participant mentioned if a woman stays in a marriage despite many challenges, she can feel fulfilled because she makes her parents proud and is an example to other women who are in the same situation:

*“A married woman should make her parents happy by persevering in her marriage and she must make things to work and to be interesting and people should see her as a good example to other women.”*

There seemed to be consensus among the participants that perseverance and being resilient in an unfulfilling marriage do lead to some sense of having worth. Showing respect for one’s in-laws by staying with them after a husband’s death; taking the responsibility upon herself to care of her deceased husband’s parents even if they are demanding – making such unselfish efforts can give meaning to a widow’s life. Obedience was also mentioned by the participants. Some saw it as a virtue; by obeying her husband, a married woman can receive ‘benefits’ such as getting money from her husband or earning the love of her in-laws and her husband’s other family members. These participants believed obedience is important and failure to display obedience is a sign of being rebellious and it undermines the sanctity of marriage. They argued for a woman to be accepted and tolerated by her husband’s family she has to be submissive and respectful. This indicates forced endurance and compliance on the woman’s part to keep the marriage together. On the subject of obedience, a participant said the following:

*“When we get married culturally you must be obedient to your husband and to your in-laws. You are to swallow whatever comes and ‘go kgotlelela’ [persevere]. You must be obedient otherwise your husband won’t give you money, he won’t give you anything.”*

Another participant stated:

*“Eh ... you have to be ‘boikokobetso’ [obedient] and show respect to all when you are married even though you are against what is happening.”*

Some of the participants shared that nowadays some of the elderly women no longer rely on proverbs to counsel the young women but use verses from the Bible as counselling tool. As indicated in the next verbatim quotes, the older women tend to choose texts or verses that, in essence, contain messages regarding a wife’s duty to show obedience to her husband:

*“Prior to my wedding my aunts called me. They also called women from the church. The emphasis was on Ephesians 5 verses 23 to 24 which says ‘... for a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church’ and so wives must submit completely to their husbands just as the church submit itself to Christ. I felt like I was being blackmailed emotionally.”*

*“I was told that the Bible says ‘man’ is the head of the family and you have to agree otherwise you will never be happy if you disagree.”*

*“In my case they used Mark 10 verses 8 to 9 which says that in marriage the ‘two shall become one flesh in union joined by God and therefore what God has joined together’ no human being must separate.”*

According to these quotes, it appears as if in modern times women are no longer encouraged to persevere in marriage through the use of traditional proverbs, but the older teams assigned to conduct premarital counselling tend to use the Bible to inculcate Christian values into marriage. Perseverance and resilience in marriage through proverbs has always been the core of premarital counselling; nowadays the word of God is used to make women blindly obey her husband otherwise *“you will never be happy if you disagree”* with him.

Participants shared they were encouraged to bear difficulties calmly and without complaint because they were expected to emulate the church which is committed to

Christ. One participant was encouraged to persevere in marriage and obey her husband as he was the head of the family according to the Bible; another was advised that women should not leave or even consider divorce no matter what happens in her marriage because no one should separate *“what God has joined together”*.

### 3.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: In a relationship

The participants shared that married women oftentimes felt there was no escape from the negative relationship they experienced within a marriage. They felt trapped. The following sub-themes were identified: disrespect/abuse and harmful/death.

#### (a) Disrespect/Abuse

Disrespect and abuse were seen as the common aspects which made women feel trapped in their relationships. One participant said she suffered humiliation and mental abuse at the hands of her husband because she was not working. She expressed her feelings as follows:

*“You will find that I am unemployed and my husband is paying for the bond, he is paying for whatever and whatever. At the end of the day, he doesn’t treat me like a human being in the house, I am nothing, he can bring a girlfriend to the house and sleep with her, I don’t have a choice, you understand, I don’t have anything so I am at this man’s mercy...”*

It was distressing for the researcher to hear that a husband bringing a girlfriend into the home of his wife while she was there was a common practice. Participants commented on it as follows:

*“The same practice of bringing girlfriends was experienced by my younger sister who is married in a rural village in Limpopo. I never thought men around here can stoop that low.”*

*“You see! Ah... what type of a woman can do that to another woman? Ah! le rona basadi re dira go re bontate ba seke ba*

*re thlompha man* [Ah! even us women we also contribute to men disrespecting us]?”

As they discussed this issue, the participants in the focus groups started getting angry and raising their voices. They seemed distraught and upset as they began talking among themselves all at the same time. The facilitator had to calm them down. Then one participant spoke up:

*“My mother used to tell me that I should know that ‘monna o tshwana le selepe o a adimisangwa’ [a man is like an axe, he is shared].”*

Then another participant added:

*“My mother used to say to ‘O itshoke ngwanaka le fa go le thata, O itshoke’ [Persevere my daughter even if it can be difficult, persevere].”*

One participant verbalised that most of the time her husband would not show respect for her. This participant shared the following:

*“Somehow you find that the husband is providing you and the children with everything we need, but he fails to respect you as his wife and it will affect you somehow.”*

In the African context a man is the head of the family and is expected to provide for his family. During the process of being a provider, he expects gratitude and respect from all in the family. This particular participant felt although her husband was providing for her, he was not respecting her at all. She emphasised “*it will affect you somehow*” if a husband does not come home. Her husband used the excuse that he provided for her and the children with all they need so she had no right to question him:

*"He would tell me that he is doing everything for us so what do I want from him especially when I ask him about his whereabouts when he was supposed to be with us at home. To me he is not respecting me at all".*

The grim reality is that many married women find themselves in an intimidating situation where they are totally disrespected and emotionally abused by their husbands as evidenced in the above quotes. Being disrespectful breed anxieties and may lead to psychosomatic diseases which may ultimately be dangerous to the health of married women. Yet, as discussed, tradition, culture and their own relatives expect them to persevere. In some instances the participants said many women do not have the means to survive alone because they have no income other than their husbands' money. One participant said she felt humiliated but had no other choice than to endure her husband's affair in her own house because she was unemployed. Another's husband was treating her with disrespect and made her feel worthless and helpless because she was not employed.

The shared experiences evoked further distress among the participants. It was indicated that women are also responsible for abusing each other. The particular type of abuse mentioned pertained to the situation where the husband's mistress unashamedly entered his house when his wife was present and shared his bed. In response to her words that *"he can bring a girlfriend to the house and sleep with her, I don't have a choice, you understand"* another participant summed up this situation as unfathomable to understand because *"what type of a woman can do that to another woman?"*

In spite of the participants' outcry against infidelity, many mothers seemed to have accepted it as a husband's right to have girlfriends as one participants' mother told her it is 'okay' for a man to be *"shared"*.

The implication is clear: infidelity among men is not to be questioned; it is culturally accepted and condoned by society. Yet, her husband's infidelity is extremely detrimental to his wife's health. She experiences it as humiliating and painful. It makes her feel inadequate and less of a human being and a woman. Her general as

well as psychosocial health can deteriorate and can be characterised by high blood pressure, headaches, and other chronic conditions.

### **(b) Harmful/Death**

For women who feel trapped in a relationship the emotional harm and physical abuse they endure can be devastating. If she contemplates a divorce, the results can be just as serious. Both married and single participants shared they constantly lived in fear that their partners would kill them. One participant shared the following experience:

*“I told my brother who is a lawyer that I am going to file for a divorce and he cautioned me against it and he said, ‘This man will kill you my sister, we are not saying don't do it and we all know that you are not happy but the only thing is that you will die and leave your children’.”*

This scenario illustrates how life-threatening some marriages can be to the woman. The irony in this participant's situation was that her brother, although in the legal profession himself, cautioned her against leaving the marriage instead of giving her legal advice regarding a divorce. The participant therefore decided to be resilient and move on with her life although she realised she was running the risk of being seriously injured or killed by her husband. Her decision to tolerate the hurtful and hostile environment resulted in her living in constant fear. The signs of anxiety and stress on her face and the weariness in her eyes, she could not hide. Ongoing suffering in a dysfunctional relationship can lead to depression and mental and physical burnout.

According to another participant, in modern times specifically women who have no money of their own and are unemployed are still very vulnerable if in a relationship. She explained:

*“Women are not safe these days because when men feel that you are irritating them or they are [have had] enough with you, they will tell you that you think you are clever these days and they will kill you. ... Poor women do not have anywhere to go.”*

The participant painted an unsettling picture of how extremely vulnerable women are who live with abusive partners. Some are exposed to the danger of being killed at any moment for irrational reasons such as being “*irritating*” or accused of thinking they are “*clever these days*”. The participant also brought up the plight of poor women who have no money and nowhere to go. Abused women live in constant fear and feel trapped in their relationships. Living in fear day and night brings about anger and depression which can cause harm to a woman’s health because it is constant.

Talking about being killed a third participant butted in and told the focus group the tragic circumstances surrounding her sister’s death:

*“Initially, my mother did not want my sister to be married because she was still busy with her career but both her parents-in-law to be insisted that their son wanted to marry her because they all loved her. After marrying her, he started to be abusive and my mother told my sister to persevere. But things became worse and one day she came back home and decided she was going to leave this man and she asked my parents to give him his lobola back because she said, ‘I want this man to see that I am out of his life’. My parents and my sisters-in-law had a meeting to discuss their issues at her in-laws’ house. Her husband refused the ‘magadi’ lobola [bride price] he said the money must be given to the church. The day her husband got back his ‘magadi’ was the day my sister met her death because he stabbed her to death while walking in the street and hanged himself thereafter. So that thing affected us all in the family and no one wants to be married since then including myself.”*

Talking about the feeling that her partner could hurt or kill her, evoked painful emotions for this participant who immediately related the circumstances under which her sister died. The family of her sister’s husband all loved her sister and encouraged her not to leave their son. Her sister lived and endured the abuse and developed the ability to bounce back every time for many years. Her strength and resilience kept her going, but she finally made the brave decision to leave her husband. In the process of defining her feelings about her abusive marriage, she was already vulnerable and finally lost her fight for happiness when her husband

refused to receive his “magadi” [bride price] and later killed her. From what the participant expressed it can be deduced that women are vulnerable and considered easy targets by abusive partners. The entire group of participants felt sorry for the women who had lost their lives and just shook their heads in disbelief because being robbed of one’s life in such a way is an extremely painful experience. The families of the victim (and in this case also that of the perpetrator) had to live for the rest of their lives with unimaginable pain due to their great loss.

One unmarried participant became very distraught as she listened to the stories about the killings. She just kept on shaking her head in shock and disbelief. She was so upset at the thought of a woman staying trapped in a violent marriage until she “*come[s] out her marriage in a coffin*”, that she contemplated never to get married:

*“Can you see now? Women abide by the proverb ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’ which is used every time when they were being counselled. When abuse start[s] in the marriage, it means the woman’s life and safety would be compromised until she comes out of her marriage in a coffin, you understand? Now I am afraid of getting married you know...”*

In the opinion of the participants, some women fear leaving an abusive relationship because they are afraid of bringing stigma to their families if they divorced. In a culture which adheres to “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” women in abusive relationships have very few support systems (or in some cases none) from family or the society as the findings show. Under normal circumstances women expect to live happily ever after but many eventually end up finding their relationship has turned into a nightmare in which they are trapped. Fearing for their lives and living in desperation from day to day, they can be overcome with emotional weariness, despondency and despair which have a direct negative influence on their physical and mental well-being.

### (c) Polygyny

To understand the practice of polygyny in the context of this study, a brief explanation of the significant difference in the meanings of ‘polygyny’ and ‘polygamy’ follows. This difference is clearly indicated in the *Concise Oxford English dictionary*

(2006). ‘Polygamy’ is “the practice or custom of having more than one wife *or husband* at the same time” (researcher’s emphasis) while ‘polygyny’ refers to “polygamy in which a man has more than one wife”. In this study context, the practice of ‘polygyny’ obviously applied.

The societal, cultural and religious beliefs and norms in many communities encourage the practice of polygyny. Living in a marriage where there are two women can pose a challenge as there may be competition for scarce resources. Ill-treatment among women who are married to the same man is sometimes pronounced and leaves both women miserable.

One participant shared that both her younger sister and brother was living in polygynous marriages. She firstly explained her sister’s plight:

*“I have always been against polygamy [polygyny] and did not know that my sister will be married in that type of marriage. Both of my brother and sister attend a certain Pentecostal church and they told me that the church allows a man to marry more than one wife. My sister is the second wife in her marriage. She is not happy because she said the first wife does not always involve her in the family issues. She feels neglected and not supported. At times I assist her with buying clothes for her children. She looks dehydrated and pitiful. She says her husband spends most of the time with the first wife and she wonders because this first wife is the one who recommended her to her husband. I really feel sorry for her and do not know what to do....”*

Of her brother’s polygynous marriage she had the following to say:

*“My brother has two wives. The second one is still young and pretty. She has only one child and the first one has two. The first wife feels challenged by the second wife because she says my brother spends most of the time with the second wife and therefore she does not feel loved anymore. She complained to me and when I confronted my brother he said, ‘Oh! By the way I am still allowed to marry more wives, my church allows five more’. He*

*further said, 'If my first wife has issues with my second wife then she does not know the rules of the church'.*"

These quotes express how unhappy the participant felt about her sister and brother who were both in polygynous relationships. She felt saddened by the fact that both had marital issues which would not have occurred had it not been polygynous marriages. She was worried about her sister, who was the second wife and who showed signs of unhappiness and whose children were not well cared for. She verbalised she did not know how to assist her sister because she could see the former's marriage was not working. The husband neglected the sister and her children; he favoured the first wife which led to a lot of unhappiness for her sister and she *"looks dehydrated and pitiful"*. Since she endures constant rejection and is ignored in decision making about family matters, the constant attrition of strain may later predispose her to stress-related conditions such as high blood pressure and also to psychological conditions.

From the remarks she made about her brother's view about marriage it is evident that some modern men, like the participant's brother, still cling to old traditions; to *"a man is like an axe, he is shared"*. The brother's blunt reply, *"By the way I am still allowed to marry more wives, my church allows five more"* may communicate that culturally and religiously today's married men are still viewed by society as being of a higher or more superior status than married women. Unfortunately, some women who end up in this type of discriminating marriage endure constant pain and strain. The quotes indicate the atmosphere in polygynous families can be volatile and threatening which may lead to issues of hatred, jealousy, and disrespect that result in stress-related emotional conditions in women which, in fact, can be transferred to their children. It is also evident that it is not only the married woman that suffer but family and significant others are also affected.

### **3.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: In a family**

The following sub-themes emerged from aspects of being trapped in a family: discrimination/abuse, disrespect by in-laws, and widow inheritance.

**(a) Discrimination and abuse**

Some participants reported they experienced discrimination and abuse in their marriages. It was the opinion of quite a few participants that holding on to the belief that 'a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband' aggravates discrimination and abuse in marriages. In one instance, the aunt had warned a participant she would experience her "*husband may not show you love at some point, remember he is a man and you cannot be policing him*" and because the participant "*is now you are a woman of your own family and have to bear children for your in-laws*". If a woman has to be satisfied with whatever little emotion her husband shows or how little love he bestows on her, it is sometimes perceived as discrimination. The husband cannot be questioned on anything simply because he is a man; according to these participants, this translates into him being the leader and the participant being the follower and, finally, it signifies that her role and duty in marriage is mainly to bear children.

Expressing the same opinion, namely that a wife's biggest contribution to marriage is to bear children, another participant added:

*"You find that one has a problem of falling pregnant and the mother in-law start talking to you indirectly saying, 'If 'makoti' [daughter-in-law] is 'moopa' [woman who is barren or cannot fall pregnant], she has to be sent back to her home because I need a grandchild in this house.' This is undermining and disrespectful ..."*

This conversation led to a participant firstly asking a valid rhetorical question and continuing to say she viewed individuals' and society's sometimes negative attitude towards barren women as abusive and derogatory:

*"Does it mean that if a woman does not get children she should be divorced? I believe that marriage is not children. Some people are bold to tell a woman who does not get children that she should be send back home because she does not bear children. I find it to be disturbing and abusive to the woman."*

These quotes reflect a reality that oftentimes being married means the woman is perceived by the husband and in-laws only as the bearer of children. One participant was not happy about the fact that her aunt told her she should know being married means she has to satisfy her in-laws by having children. Even though the participant often felt unloved, society expects her to bear children for her in-laws. Moreover, if for some reason a married woman does not fall pregnant, many eyebrows are raised and her in-laws will start questioning her fertility. This means women who are unable to fall pregnant will encounter problems with their in-laws and the society at large and risk being sent home. One participant in particular voiced she found the whole process *“disturbing and abusive to the woman”*.

Another participant complained that her mother in-law was creating problems for her:

*“I and my mother-in-law are always fighting for my husband’s money. She said to me, ‘What do you think? Where were you when I nurtured my son? What do you think I was doing it for? Don’t you know that I wanted him to take care of me?’ So my mother-in-law was sending a message to me to say I should not expect to be cared for because my husband is her son and she struggled to nurture him to be [the] man he is now ... I felt so much pain you know.”*

When a woman gets married she expects her husband to provide for her and the children. This quote expresses the common cultural practice whereby a married man is expected to take care of his parents even if he is married. Traditionally, when children are born, parents take it for granted that the children will care for them in the future. This is especially expected from sons. If the son marries, it does not alter this traditional expectation or rule. The last quote reveals culture prescribes mothers-in-law need not allow their sons to concentrate on taking care of their own households first, but to first and foremost take care of his mother as this is what she raised him for. This traditional view raises an interesting question: ‘If the in-laws, specifically the mother-in-law, are the first to receive money or food or whatever they need (or want), when and how will the husband care for his own family?’ Considering the participant’s reference to her and the mother-in-law fighting constantly over the money brought in by the husband, the expectation of the husband’s mother can be

seen as mentally abusive and discriminatory because it resulted in the participant experiencing “*so much pain*”.

Although they acknowledged it was a common occurrence, abuse by the any in-laws was regarded by all participants as unacceptable. One participant said:

*“My sisters-in-law sometimes does not want to help with household chores and they expect me to wake up early to do the chores alone. They should get married and go to their in-laws’ place and leave me alone ... I hate it when they do that because I also get tired; I am human...”*

This quote highlights the plight of the daughter-in-law with regard to doing the household chores at the in-laws’ home. Everyone seemed to expect the ‘makoti’ [daughter-in-law] to do the all the work. This created problems for the participant as she felt she was being abused. Discrimination and abuse by in-laws create tension in married women due to frustration and helplessness because they have to bear it in spite of the fact that, being human beings they “*also get tired*”.

**(b) Disrespect by in-laws**

One participant made a connection between previous quotes relating to discrimination and abuse, disrespect towards the wife shown by the in-laws and the meaning of the proverb under study. She reflected:

*“Mmm ... in other words the proverb means you are a doormat at your in-laws’ place; your sisters-in-law will disrespect you, even your mother-in-law will disrespect you, everybody disrespect you. My husband would just keep quiet you know... You just have to persevere, because you can’t go back home.”*

Another immediately reacted to the statement made by the previous participant about her husband not saying anything if her in-laws disrespected her by adding:

*“Oh yes!... They [in-laws] will take advantage of you because they can even ask for whatever they want from their brother using undermining tones in front of him and he will never say anything. This is depressing.”*

These quotes explain when a woman is a daughter-in-law, the in-laws tend to be rude and treat her without respect even though she is part of their family. The first participant, connecting the proverb under study to the disrespectful attitude often displayed by in-laws, stated it encourages a married woman to persevere and endure the disrespect directed at her. Therefore, in accordance with the proverb, societal expectations are such that as a daughter-in-law a wife has to be optimistic and move on with life as if nothing is happening. But, the participants’ descriptions of their experiences indicate too much disrespect is shown by the in-laws which not even their husbands recognise. The feeling of disillusionment and hurt brings about anxieties which may lead to hatred between married women and their in-laws; if not attended to it might result in depression.

### **(c) Widow inheritance**

The pain of losing a husband and the issue of widow inheritance was elaborated on by a participant:

*“My husband was a senior person at work and died after suffering from a stroke for [a] few years, I did all I could do to care for him. I feel very sad that when he passed on I was blamed by my in-laws. They started demanding his money forgetting that he stayed for a few years being sick. ... So where would the money come from? He had children out of wedlock and they also had to get their share from his estate.”*

This quote focuses on the unfairness towards a widow who has endured her unhappy life in marriage, developed resilience, and rose above the pain. This participant felt sad that as a widow she was not allowed to mourn her husband in peace because she was blamed for his passing on. Her in-laws expressed it clearly to her that they wanted his money. As a widow the participant had to start defending herself against the in-laws and she was increasingly feeling helpless and depressed.

Another participant shared the following story about her aunt's loss and the family's performance that followed after the husband's death:

*“When my aunt’s husband died, a day after the funeral his family sent a delegation of men in suits to negotiate that they have already decided about the one who would replace her late husband. Fortunately in our culture a woman is given a choice to agree to have a replacement or not. The delegation arrived and they told my aunt that they had come with this person as the one who would replace her husband and help her to care for children. My aunt replied [to] them in a polite way and said, ‘Thank you for thinking of me but I am okay without a replacement.’ They tried to give reasons for their intentions but my aunt kept on saying she was fine. They then put it clear to her that no man should be seen entering the house because that would mean lack of respect for their family.”*

In some cultures when a woman's husband dies, the in-laws quickly organise a brother – or relative if there is no brother – to re-marry the widow or they arrange for the property to be reverted to them. This is done because in-laws believe they are now entitled to all the property and belongings of their deceased son. In this quote the participant told how the in-laws quickly arranged for someone to take on the position of the late spouse, but fortunately her aunt had a choice and she declined the offer. The aunt refused the offer in a polite way but she was then reminded the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” prescribes the widow has to abide by the in-laws' rules. Again, in this family the deceased's inheritance was the issue of concern. As family members of the deceased husband they felt obliged to protect what they believed was rightfully theirs, namely, the inheritance and keeping the family name. Everything the deceased had accumulated and worked for in his lifetime was viewed as theirs because they were his relatives or parents. It left the aunt with nothing to her name. The consequences of a situation like this are immensely stressful and worrying to the widow: her mourning is disrespected and her in-laws still have control over her personal future.

### 3.3.3 THEME 3: STRESS

Stress emerged as a theme third theme. Stress was identified as the result of endurance, resilience and perseverance. Most of the participants who endured complained of

experiencing stress-related conditions because they were trapped in their marriages. Physical and psychosocial stresses were identified as sub-themes. Figure 3.4 is a diagram of the third theme and sub-themes.

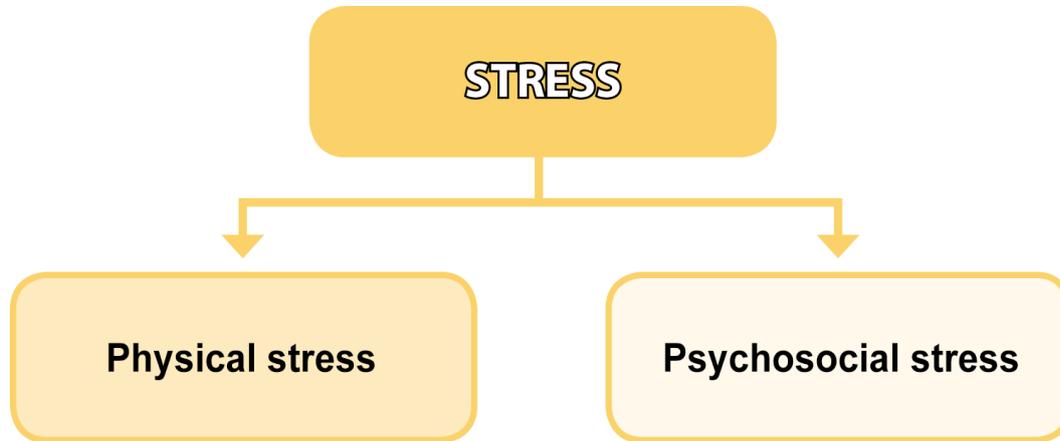


Figure 3.4: Theme 3: stress and sub-themes

#### 3.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Physical stress

The participants shared many married women do not talk about or discuss the stressors in their marriages; instead, they internalise it. According to the participants, married women are exposed to various conditions and illnesses caused by stress. One participant's statement read as follows:

*“Ah ... most of the women get attacked by stroke because they are afraid to talk about their problem... My friend has been going through a tough marriage for many years she used to be so stressed. She said her mother told her to persevere. She later developed high blood pressure which complicated into heart failure. She was a professional person and had to take early retirement due to ill health ... eh ... now you see if she had divorced maybe she could be fine...”*

Another participant said her sister's health also deteriorated due to many years of suffering in an abusive marriage:

*“My sister has developed diabetes and high blood pressure and she was told that her cholesterol levels were high as well. She has been put on treatment. She is suffering from emotional stress. She has always complained that her husband does not respect her; he belittles her in front of people. She is on medication but her diabetes and blood pressure are not well controlled because she worries a lot. When I asked her why she is not doing anything about her situation she said, ‘Where will I go? I cannot go back home you know, what will people say?’ Now she is suffering because of people ... ah...”*

A third one revealed what her mother had said to her:

*“If you come home you can sleep but tomorrow morning go back to your husband because you will be feeling better. Your children do not belong here they belong to your in-laws, so you cannot stay here. I now have high blood pressure and sometimes I experience swelling.”*

These quotes are examples of how complex marriage can be for women who are either determined to stay in a destructive marriage at the expense of their own health or who have no other choice than to continue in a marriage which is destroying their health. They keep quiet about the ordeal they go through, some for many years. Having no outlet for such continuous pain and suffering exposes them to severe stress and anxiety that can be detrimental to their overall health. In the above quotes conditions such as high blood pressure, a stroke, diabetes and suffering emotional problems are mentioned.

An important factor related to developing health problems was noted by the first participant who mentioned her friend whose mother *“told her to persevere”*. The friend did; the situation within her marriage did not change and her health deteriorated so much that she had to retire. *“Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”* in this case did not strengthen her endurance. The third participant was told to persevere and her mother told her she could be allowed to sleep over for only one night to become emotionally better. Her mother stressed she had to return to her husband the next morning because she and her children belonged with him. The participant developed

high blood pressure which she associated with stress caused by being forced to persist in a profoundly unhappy marriage.

Numerous chronic diseases have been cited as problems common among women who are exposed to stress in the marriage. A participant commented on this as follows:

*“If you are not careful somewhere down the line, you will develop asthma and allergies due to stress. I have not been asthmatic before but I have asthma attacks lately especially after our fights with my husband and when I am angry. I have seen my lawyer because I want to go for divorce I cannot die and leave my children. It is so easy to complicate if you are exposed to stress... I do not want anybody to grab my money and some of my things when I die it would be better if I divorce now I know that I was told to persevere but this I cannot endure you know...”*

This quote testifies that ongoing exposure to marital problems results in stress which compromises women’s health. Although it is known that stressful events are part of life, people possess certain coping mechanisms to help them through these difficult times. If stressful events or situations causing anxiety and strain are for some reason not managed, they can have a profound impact on a person’s overall quality of life. However, as verified in the quotes, continuing extreme marital stress compounded by no support system can manifest itself in a wide range of physical illnesses and psychosocial conditions.

### **3.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Psychosocial stress**

The participants expressed how they felt emotionally because of the numerous challenges and many difficulties they experienced in their marriages. Although acknowledging that the application of the meaning of the proverb in question may have some worth, most participants believed “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” was the root cause of the psychosocial stress many married women had to cope with. One participant described how her marriage had changed her into a person with no emotions – she felt nothing; no joy, no happiness, “*nothing impresses*” her. Her life

was so void of any feeling that she believed *“it is better if a person is dead”*. Her verbal statement reads:

*“Since I got married and experienced problems with my husband, I am very forgetful; I get angry easily from things that should not make me angry, nothing impresses me, I do not have happiness do you understand? ... At times I think it is better if a person is dead.”*

The participant became emotional; it was showing on her sad face and expressed in her body language as lifted up her hands to show her utter helplessness. Staying in her marriage can be the principal cause of psychosocial stress in women. Persevering in marriage is does not guarantee a woman will eventually be happy, feel fulfilled and be able to cope. On the contrary, staying in her marriage can be the principal cause of psychosocial stress in a woman. This particular participant was notably at breaking point because she verbalised it would better for her if she was not alive. This wish to run away from the depressing situation, even if it means by dying, is not unusual among married women who feel trapped in a married relationship.

The continued physical and emotional strain caused by their hardships can leave women with deep emotional scars. The effect stress in a marriage can have on their children is one of the most painful and unbearable experiences for mothers. The same participant who stated she had no happiness, elaborated on the impact her marriage had on her children:

*“My husband is a breadwinner at his home and he maintains two families and his children sometimes suffer because he cannot afford two families. This has affected me and my children. The elder one does not want to come home. We only communicate through the phone. When I ask him the reason why he does not come home he says because of what my in-laws and his father are doing to me. This has now affected children and I feel stressed and do not know what to do.”*

When her husband has to support his parents and extended family, or when they demand a lot from her husband, it creates problems for his wife and children who also have to be taken care of. It creates tension and oftentimes leads to confrontations with his wife. The problem is that the children also suffer which, in turn, aggravates the mother's anxiety, frustration, and feelings of guilt because she sees how her children are affected.

In a patriarchal society married women are expected to be obedient, submissive and hold out in their marriages. This leads to stress-related health conditions. One participant described how she experienced low self-esteem because she was treated like a minor and had no decision-making power:

*"They [the in-laws] make you feel that as a woman you are a minor, it's like they make you feel like wherever you go, you should be seen as a minor. You are not a decision maker in your marriage; this makes me so sick and I have even developed a low self-esteem..."*

A second participant indicated the use of the proverb under study led to a loss of self-esteem because it was expected of her to be docile and unassertive:

*"... when they say a woman's grave is at her in-laws' place, this proverb lowers your self-esteem as a woman ... you end up with low self-esteem because you get abused and you are afraid to react, you become submissive and cannot challenge issues coming your way, do you understand? You cannot say anything... It becomes difficult because once you lose your self-esteem it becomes difficult to regain it."*

According to this participant, being submissive as a married woman reduces one's self-worth because one is not allowed to react or confront issues directed at you. This quote evokes the feeling that the commitment to the marriage and cultural expectations contribute towards reducing a woman's self-esteem; because she has to abide by her husband's decisions, must obey him and be almost 'invisible', she has no power to confront issues but has to suffer in silence.

Because a wife is expected to be the docile partner, the husband tends to treat her in an abusive and disrespectful manner. Emotions such as anger, pain and frustration, feeling powerless, unworthy and defenceless are experienced by the wife and consequently result in emotional tension and stress. One participant said because she was not allowed “*to negotiate anything*” with her husband due to his position as “*head of the family*”, her greatest fear was to be infected with HIV and AIDS:

*“So most of the women are not allowed to negotiate anything with their husbands as the heads of the family, you cannot even negotiate to use a condom because you are afraid that you could be told that you are running around with men. This worries me because there is HIV/AIDS nowadays, I am worried about my life my children are small...”*

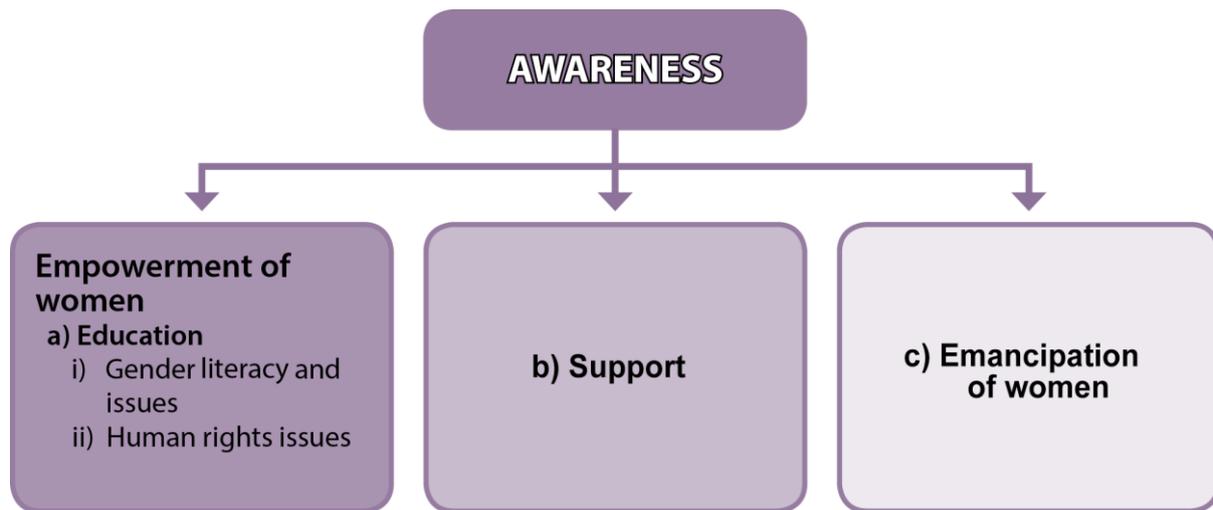
Confiding she was HIV positive, another participant told her harrowing story:

*“With me, my husband came home with another woman and insisted that I leave. I refused and they both wanted to attack me but my children jumped in to help me. I am unemployed and also HIV positive, on ARVs and now he wants me to go... I used his medical aid to consult a psychologist and he said I had traumatic stress. He sent me to the psychiatrist who admitted me to manage my anxiety and stress. I am still on medication for stress.”*

Concerning the stress in their marriage, the participants portrayed a disturbing picture of the how they were abused, mistreated and looked down upon. It was found alarming when one told her group she could definitely not negotiate for safe sex with her husband. In this era of life-threatening diseases it is critical for the wife to have the freedom to negotiate for safe sex with her husband; if she does not have this right it causes intense stress and anxiety because she lives in constant fear of contracting STIs including HIV and AIDS.

### 3.3.4 THEME 4: AWARENESS

Awareness was identified as the fourth theme. During the focus group discussions the participants were aware of the implications of the proverb hence they strongly advocated for increasing public awareness about gender issues that affect mainly women in a patriarchal society. To this effect, the analysis of the transcribed quotes indicated the participants had concentrated on the empowerment of women, support for them and the emancipation of women as illustrated in Figure 3.5.



**Figure 3.5: Theme 4: awareness and sub-themes**

#### 3.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Empowerment of women

Empowerment leads to self-efficacy and knowing one's rights in any given situation. For a married woman the first step towards being empowered is to be educated and informed about her rights, needs, preferences, and hopes as it plays a major role in relieving her stress and helping her to live a healthier, more fulfilled life. The first category under sub-theme 1 thus addresses education for women.

##### a) Education

The study participants asserted educating women *on* women issues *by* women can alleviate most of the oppressive factors characterising specifically their cultural and marital conditions. They suggested education on gender literacy and issues and human rights issues as pivotal aspects of empowerment.

### ***i) Gender and literacy issues***

The urgency of addressing gender literacy issues was raised by all participants. According to their verbatim quotes, they all viewed it as promoting the discrimination and imbalance practiced in a patriarchal society regarding the perceived role of a woman in her marriage. The issue of domestic violence against women was at the centre of the discussions. One participant's words made it clear women needed to be more knowledgeable on how to prevent domestic violence:

*"Violence against women, especially domestic violence ... eeh ... you know it will be good to teach women on issues of prevention of domestic violence because it is common these days."*

Participants believed it was necessary to have structured and organised programmes in place to educate women on domestic violence, especially since it is gender-related with mostly women who suffer from such unacceptable behaviour. Therefore, according to the participants, women have to be equipped on what measures they can take if they are either threatened with or the victims of domestic violence. The next participant confirmed not only women, but also their children who suffer as a result of domestic violence. She said domestic violence needs to be addressed in schools, in the business sector as well as by government:

*"People must be educated about gender issues in general and the education should continue until just before marriage. That could be done in the form of workshops at different schools, workplaces and at the political meetings."*

Normally, violence and abuse in a marriage is directed at the married woman. This participant felt a child's education on gender issues must begin in primary school and continue through high school. To change the inherited construction of masculinity and prevent domestic violence, education on gender-based issues needs to be continued in the workplace, from public and government platforms and, in the case of women, has to be included as part of her premarital counselling.

Further quotes from participants supported the ideal that programmes on gender issues be started at primary school level. In primary schools the focus should be on grooming young boys and girls to respect each other. They should be made aware that, although cultural and gender differences need to be respected, it does not imply that 'respect' means 'blindly following' unacceptable behaviour. Supportive quotes were:

*“Programmes should include prevention of domestic violence, unpacking the proverb ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’, other gender issues that affect women, for example, subordination or inequality between women and men in the society and others, to be taught starting at primary school and throughout the levels of schooling for both boys and girl.”*

*“Teaching how boys and girls should respect each other at that level will benefit the nation.”*

*“We are parents, we have sons as well; we must educate the young males that when they grow up and become men, they must know that they need to respect and complement each other in marriage...”*

*“... they [pupils] should be taught about the women and human rights at all levels of development in education.”*

The participants emphasised gender issues should start in primary school because it is already at this level where the idea that boys are superior to girls is sometimes created, for example, by treating boys and girls differently in the classroom. Teaching young children to accept and respect each other as individuals will ultimately create a society in mutual respect between men and women may root out domestic violence. It was articulated by a participant that central to humanity is respect; a lack of demonstrating respect for each other can cause various problems in a familial environment

On the aspect of women’s literacy, a participant voiced it needed to be improved and maintained as it will assist them with decision making in marriage. It will also open up opportunities for employment as having a job can promote personal and financial independence:

*“Women should be educated to improve their levels of literacy therefore employment opportunities, they have to be given access to knowledge. This will assist them with issues of decision making in their families. Most women who are suffering are not employed so encouraging them to study may change their lives forever.”*

This quote expresses if women are educated and exposed to knowledge, they will be more assertive to make decisions in their marriages. Education is a requirement for bettering one’s life circumstances by knowing one’s rights; hence, if women are educated and are aware of their rights the prevalence of physical and mental abuse of married (or unmarried) women may de-escalate. The education of women on their rights may eliminate cultural forms of oppression and inequality as it will equip them to be self-reliant and confident to make decisions and take steps to better their own lives.

***ii) Human rights issues***

Talking about women’s rights, the participants knew it refers to the rights all people have as human beings. It is the right every woman and man has to be viewed as equals and, accordingly, to be treated equally, also in marriage. This next quote is from a participant who believed equality between men and women need to be maintained in society and also in a marriage:

*“Equality of men and women should be maintained in all over including cultural societies; women should always be respected and be listened to and are not to be harmed.”*

As suggested by previous participants, upholding a woman’s human rights by *“already in starting at primary school”* to educate young children on *“subordination or inequality between women and men in the society”* as well as *“about the women and*

*human rights*” can lead to equality for all, including in marriage, which is emphasised in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996).

Societal expectations which usually prescribe how women should be treated or behave are incidental to traditional cultural practices. Most participants experienced this to be indeed what the proverb under scrutiny dictates to women concerning their position in marriage. In too many marriages and relationships women are physically injured by violent husbands or partners. Although less visible, their individual mental day-to-day suffering in a dysfunctional marriage is even more damaging and debilitating to their health. The dilemmas is that women who are uneducated on their human rights issues often simply accept their fate because they either assume or are culturally conditioned that domestic suffering is an intrinsic part of being a female.

#### **b) Support**

Supporting each other as women who endure similar suffering in a marital relationship will assure other women that they are not alone. For a woman to think or believe that her difficult circumstances are unique, aggravates her suffering. The thought of bearing such pain alone can have a decidedly detrimental effect on her health. The following quote emphasises this finding:

*“As women we must help each other and give each support. We need to have self-respect and good communication with each other; we really need to be open to each other ... support each other especially with issues of culture because they sometimes affect us badly.”*

It was indicated in a previous quote that “[because of] *the support of friends who told me their own problems I am now coping better*”. Keeping quiet and enduring in an abusive marriage eventually takes a huge toll on a woman’s physical and psychosocial health. Realising that others are in a similar position and reaching out to them, will help a woman to handle her dire circumstances better thus improving her health.

It was stated by some participants that even their mothers offer no support but advise them to persevere; they also mentioned they would rather stay in an unhappy marriage than expose their families (or themselves) to stigmatisation. Because it seems as if they do not have any other supportive system, the participants expressed that it is imperative for women to support each other and be there for each other. Sharing will reduce their burden if they have to deal with cultural and societal prejudices. Receiving support and giving support can bring about personal growth and happiness. In addition to supporting each other, the above participant said honest and open communication among them will enable women to understand not only how the other feels, but will contribute to the identification of those who need similar support.

### **c) Emancipation of women**

The emancipation of women was suggested by participants as a positive aspect that could help a woman to take responsibility and make her own decisions. A participant felt women had to be emancipated from cultural practices that dictate their lives and heighten the idea that their position in marriage one of subordination and obedience:

*“Women need to be liberated from cultural practices such as the use of the proverb ‘lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi’. I do not like it because it sounds oppressive to me. As women we need to be able to decide on what we feel comfortable with.”*

Cultural practices such as the use of the proverb “*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*” during premarital counselling was unacceptable to the majority of married as well as some single participants. This particular participant’s interpretation of the proverb was that it made her feel uncomfortable because she felt the meaning attached to it supports the ideology of oppression of women.

The use of language and proverbs was perceived by many participants as negating their right to be a female. They experienced the interpreted meaning of the proverb as oppressive because it took away their freedom and right to function as equals to their male counterparts. Conversely, other participants embraced the use of proverbs and language as tools to bring and hold families together.

### **3.4. SUMMARY**

In this chapter the findings were presented, interpreted and supported by verbatim quotes. Despite the contradicting conclusions derived from the identified themes pertaining to the studied proverb, the participants felt more dialogue meetings were necessary to support and emancipate indigenous African women who have been affected by the proverb. The following chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings and a literature control.

## 4 DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 the findings of the study were presented and described. The themes and sub-themes that gave meaning and interpretations to the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on women’s health were interpreted. This chapter is concerned with the findings and literature control. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with 57 indigenous African women at social clubs and a church retreat. Four main and nine sub-themes emerged from the conversations held with these women regarding the meaning and interpretations of the traditional proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”. The identified themes and sub-themes added knowledge and understanding to how indigenous African women experienced the proverb and its implications on their health.

### 4.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Four main themes were identified during the data analysis, namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress, and awareness. From these four themes, nine sub-themes emerged. The themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail and supported with relevant literature (see Chapter 3 Table 3.1 for an overview of the themes and sub-themes identified). Each theme, related sub-theme and its implications on women’s health is indicated and supported by literature. (See sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.4).

#### 4.2.1 THEME 1: PATRIARCHY

In patriarchy the male (men) is considered superior to the female (women) who is believed to be inferior to every man (Rakoczy 2004:29-30). Rodriguez (1988:15-16) and Froschauer (2014:21) describe patriarchy as a system where women are considered to be secondary to men; it is a historically developed and a deeply constructed integrated system of male dominance.

In the current study men were viewed as the privileged group who live comfortably in a patriarchal system that allows them to dominate and use language and proverbs to legitimise their male-gendered way of life. During the conversations with indigenous African women the patriarchal system emerged as the core theme supported by the following three sub-themes:

- (a) origin of the proverb
- (b) oppression of women
- (c) premarital counselling.

The three sub-themes are discussed in detail in sections 4.2.1.1 to 4.2.1.3.

##### **4.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Origin of the proverb**

Mieder (2007:18) describes proverbs as “a traditional saying that sums up a situation, passes judgment on a past matter, or recommends a course of action for the future”. The proverb at the centre of this study was “traditional” and “passes[ed] judgment” on the affected persons, namely, the married women.

The study findings revealed some participants were socialised to believe the deeper meaning of the proverb, namely, that ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’. Proverbs and sayings represent cultural and societal beliefs and values inherited from the forefathers. Over many decades African people, more specifically girls and women, have been brought up and counselled to conform to and follow these ancient instructions. “Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” directs how women, once married, should live their lives. Lungstrum and Folarin (1985:34,45) state proverbs and idioms reveal cultural attitudes, beliefs, norms and values in which societies live.

Addressing the cultural socialising of women into believing proverbs dictate their lives, these authors mention in Nigerian traditional life the use of such proverbs by the Ibo tribe survived for many years.

The thrust of the proverb under scrutiny in this study is that it guides women on how to behave in marriage. Women are socialised to believe the proverb represents their people's cultural and traditional heritage and therefore they are expected by their families, communities and society to abide by its instruction. The interpretation ascribed to 'a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband' discourages divorce while encouraging perseverance. This finding is similar to that of Mulaudzi (2013(a):154) who discovered cultural beliefs play a major role in holding forth certain values and expectations in marriage to men and women. Hoza (2013:149) conducted a study in South Africa and asserts "a woman has been socialised to accept and participate in the traditional marriage system whose power relations are skewed in favour of men". This socialisation of women is usually done through the use of traditions and proverbs as alluded to by the participants in the current study. Lawal et al. (1996:637) affirm proverbs reinforce and sustain the traditional respect for elder people and serve as a means for social control. In this study it was revealed that using the proverb was a way of society to ensure that women respected their culture, the elders as well as marriage. Women therefore had no choice but to abide by the proverb which has always, and seemingly still does, encourage endurance in marriage in spite of the fact that many suffer and leave them unhappy and depressed.

Finnegan (1976:413-416) concurs with the finding that proverbs are a means for transmission of cultural traditions and socially prescribe the actions and attitudes of people. The author states proverbs give direction to how people should behave because they represent the peoples' philosophy. By implication, women in this study were socialised to adhere to the proverb in the same way as their mothers had a long time ago. "Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" encourages endurance and commitment to marriage. Many participants internalised and applied it in their lives but endurance, as prescribed by the proverb, had negative effects on their health, especially those who were submissive, obedient and financially dependent on their husbands.

The participants further shared women were constantly challenged with fears. Langen (2005:196), for example, found women who had partners 10 years older than them and those who were economically dependent on their partners were less likely to suggest condom use. In the author's view, the powerlessness of these women made them extremely vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. The participants witnessed they experienced an ongoing fear of being infected with STIs, HIV and AIDS. In addition, they feared having no food for themselves or their children; the fear of being stigmatised by families and society if they could not make the marriage work; fear of the abuse and violence which could be potentially fatal. Deeply-rooted fears and ongoing anxiety can develop into psychological disorders as indicated in this study.

Married women who are forced to endure in failing marriages confirm the overruling power of gender imbalance in a patriarchal system. Submissive endurance, as prescribed by the proverb under scrutiny, oftentimes leads to the continued abuse of women; the tragedy is that many bear it in silence. This finding reaffirms Ondicho's (2013:105) discovery that battered women in some households in Kenya often disguised, ignored or denied the problem just to cover up family secrets and uphold cultural traditions. He observes because societal norms and beliefs rendered them voiceless and vulnerable, some women felt (and were in fact) trapped in abusive relationships.

The findings of the current study also indicated a long time ago married women were socialised to live by "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi". They internalised it as a way of living and as an accepted norm for giving guidance to younger women or daughters in preparation for marriage. Ebenso et al. (2012:211) and Mafela (2012:31) support this finding. Ebenso et al. (2012) report proverbs represent and guide the traditions, values and attitudes of people in a specific culture while Mafela (2012) asserts that proverbs are "regarded as the experiences of a given society".

The aforementioned literature sources confirm many African societies rely on proverbs or sayings to serve as a rule of conduct – often because it is based on ancestral thinking and ideas that have been handed down over years. In the current

study it was found that during the socialisation of women, a girl-child was constantly prepared to excel in household chores. The main purpose of this, as evidenced also in the findings of the following studies, was that her future husband should marry a well-disciplined woman.

Colclough, Rose and Tembon (2000:24) found parents in Ethiopia and Guinea were dissatisfied with the 12 years of schooling, specifically for girls. The parents felt schooling negatively impacted on the girl-child and wasted time for her preparation to perform household chores. Also, it delayed marriage for the girl. In Uganda, Tamale (2006:90) also found socialising a girl-child to become a 'good' wife included teaching her to be obedient and to make sure she pleased her husband. In this regard, Bell and Aggleton (2013:107) add when girls in Uganda approach puberty (during the onset of menstruation) they are groomed to become well-oriented with other feminine behaviours and roles, for example, how to sit, conduct oneself, respect elders, cook and do all other household chores.

The inference was therefore made that girls are prepared early to act as or be mature women. They are socialised to be the carers and satisfy their husbands. The current findings reflected patriarchal rules where women are socialised to accept their subordinate roles starts early in the life of a girl-child. As in earlier times, in some and societies early marriages are still encouraged despite the fact that it can be life-threatening to them in this era of HIV and AIDS. According to Tamale (2006:90) girls are taught household chores early in life to make good wives who may overexert themselves once married. Conversely, early preparation of girls for marriage may disturb a girl-child's growth and make her extremely vulnerable to STIs and HIV and AIDS.

The study findings further highlighted that since early times, proverbs purported that young women had no choice but to marry; born as females, their role in life would be to marry, have children and take care of their family. Failing to find a husband would disappoint their families as this would signify the family did not live in accordance with the norms, values and expectations of their society. In this case the woman may be called by a derogatory name such as "lefetwa" ['one who is passed

by’]. On the other hand, a mature unmarried man is assigned the name “kgope” [‘one who hooks in vain’] (Mulaudzi 2013(a):153); however, “kgope” is not commonly used because men determine when and who to marry. The implication is that men are privileged and can make choices whereas women have no choice but to get married, even at an early age, and remain in the marriage despite the suffering they endure and the challenges they face.

Mbiti (1969) (cited in Kwatsha 2009:151) argues that marriage is taken seriously in the African culture; it is not an option but a necessity in which everyone has to participate. If a woman does not find a man to marry by a certain age, an arranged marriage is planned. Since culture prescribes that all women should be married, many pre-arranged marriages took place in the past because if a girl-child failed to get married, it was viewed by society as an ‘abnormality’. Olivier (1995) (cited in Mulaudzi 2013(a):155) reveals the norm is for a girl’s father to take the initiative to initiate a marriage proposal because the girl’s family may be fearful that the girl will become a “lefetwa” (a spinster or “mutshelukwa” in Tshivenda).

The implication of these findings is that living in a society where all females are forced to married can be profoundly traumatic to women who may have feelings of insecurity and helplessness, especially if they are not ready to marry yet. Supporting this finding, Akpan (2003:71-72) states within the Ibibio community in Nigeria marriage is not only almost compulsory, but it should happen within a certain age otherwise the unmarried women will be ridiculed and blamed for having “missed the bus”.

For women to live in a patriarchal system where they are considered subordinate to men, the insecurity that they live with can bring about depression and anger. The proverb under study is obviously still used in many societies to encourage women to persevere irrespective of what harm and suffering they experience in a marriage. They are expected to internalise the cultural expectation from the proverb and be resilient should they experience problems. It appears that the health consequences linked to endurance in a dysfunctional marriage are often overlooked because, according to the findings, older women continue to encourage newlywed as well as

younger females to persevere. In fact, some participants shared even their mothers forbade them to leave their marriage and return to their parental home. The expectations set by the proverb were indicated as increasing the participants' stress levels causing much anxiety which affected their psychological well-being.

#### **4.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Oppression of women**

Kendal (1992) (cited in Lee and Saeed 2001:16) explains "oppression is where there are constraints and restrictions that diminish, immobilise and fashion people into subordination to others". Mooney and Nolan (2006:241) assert oppression exists where marginalisation, oppression and subordinate positions occur and these result in the loss of self-esteem and power.

The oppression of women was expressed in different ways by the participants. The findings revealed oppression of women was practiced and carried out under the pretext of cultural expectations as indicated by the use of the proverb under study. In the context of this study, oppression meant mistreatment of married women that resulted in psychological and emotional pain and continued suffering due to being trapped in an unhealthy situation. (See sections 3.3.2 and 4.2.2). According to Mbatha (2011:34), the oppression of married women under the banner of culture and religion is deeply constructed and women suffer silently while trying to persevere in a failing marriage. Culture is used to set expectations that have to be adhered to through proverbs such as "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi".

This studied proverb was considered by some participants as being oppressive to women. The findings indicated in black cultures a married woman is encouraged and socialised to care for all people around them including husbands, children and in-laws. However, reference to their own care is not part of any socialisation or guidance. These findings are in line with Chitando's (2004:154) affirmation that the role of women, according to tradition, is to perform domestic chores and serve all family members including the children and the sick. The study findings were clear on the issue of married women: they care for husbands, children and the in-laws because culturally society expects from them to take care of *all* the needs of her new husband and his extended family as emphasised in 'a woman's grave is at the

place/home of her husband'. This role of the married woman is characterised by Mulaudzi (2013(a):156) as to be in the kitchen, bear children, and look after her in-laws and her husband's other relatives. These are her responsibilities and she cannot expect her husband to help her. The author asserts if this is allowed, society and everyone in the family would question it or, worse, suspect that the husband has become "korobela" (in the Setswana language) or "gapuchete" (in Tshivenda) which translates to "you eat and become a yes-man".

According to the findings, nobody can challenge the married woman's responsibility to care for her in-laws as it is embedded in culture and carried through by the use of proverbs. Also referring to the married women's responsibility, Ali et al. (2011:2) agree but add in carrying out her usual chores, a good woman is also expected to provide income for the family when needed. Rakoczy (2004:33) states because married women are given no choice but have to live according to the patriarchal code of society, the multiple roles of being a wife, a mother, a caretaker and also a community member (because one belongs to the community as well) leads to incredible suffering in the lives of these women.

By implication, women get so involved in the myriad duties to be carried out that they neglect themselves and are left exhausted and fatigued. Rodriguez (1988:22) asserts women become trapped in the cycle of duties/exhaustion/fatigue/extreme stress resulting in poor health. The study findings revealed women were made to feel insecure should they fail to fulfil one of the duties prescribed by patriarchal rules. This made participants feel oppressed, unhappy and experiencing feelings of low self-esteem. Balogun (2013:562) concurs by reporting on the problems of gender inequality in Nigeria where women are made to believe their natural role is to procreate and serve men. The author found women who did not accept the prescriptions of societies, were considered "difficult" and therefore "deserved" punishment. Portraying the view that women are meant to work like slaves is seemingly an ongoing global problem because in China another name for a woman is "slave" (Balogun 2013:562).

To some participants the expectation to take care of everyone felt like oppression because a married woman is seldomly, if ever, allowed making a decision. Hutson's (2007:1) interpretation is that the oppression of women in marriage is still ongoing in South Africa since cultural traditions are still practiced in the country and gender equality still prevails. The author, in fact, posits it will continue because of the defamatory way women are persistently seen and treated in modern times. Balogun (2010:22) asserts the oppression of women is still rife in Africa and is encouraged through cultural rules such as proverbs.

The analogy applied in these findings is that the participants felt proverbs exposed them to oppression. Proverbs such as the one under study give directives that are oppressive in meaning thus leading to different interpretations of how a woman's life has to be lived. Women are expected to conform to societal norms such as caring for all family members without any choice: they are not allowed an opinion, have no bargaining power and no life voice because they are considered to be inferior to men. This is a situation which leaves them emotionally affected. Hutson (2007:3) supports these assertions by affirming cultural norms and societal expectations are still overpowering women and they therefore do not have any right to or way of expressing their feelings about the oppressive behaviours against them.

Within the aforementioned prescribed roles, Madiba (1996) (cited in Chitando 2004:154) makes the statement it is not only tradition that prescribes for women, but codes of conduct instituted by churches (religion) have to be followed by women. Such codes include how they should dress and behave – being submissive and obedient in marriage is rigorously promoted by the church.

In the current study it was further revealed married women would often feel inadequate because they did not do chores in the way expected by the husband and the in-laws. Ali et al. (2011:3) argue that a 'good' wife is one who is seen as a 'good' daughter in-law only if she treats her mother-in-law as her own mother and tolerates mistreatment without showing any sign of unhappiness. Failure to fulfil these expected caring roles may make a woman feeling she is a failure which often leads to depression. Feelings of failure may result in women developing anxieties and

depression because they feel guilty. It concurs with Hanna, Talley and Guindon's (2000:432) findings that when oppressed, one becomes deprived of 'something' such as one's own feeling of worth which may later become the source of psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and various other physical and psychological disorders.

#### **4.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Premarital counselling**

Premarital counselling is viewed among the Batswana ethnic group as a process of inculcating values of perseverance, tolerance, patience and sacrifice in a marriage (Ellece 2011:44). It is referred to as "go laya" in the Setswana language and is conducted before or during the wedding ceremony and before the bride is escorted to her in-laws' residence (Ellece 2011).

The procedure of the premarital counselling ceremony is usually the responsibility of the bride's aunts and other married females who are well experienced in marriage matters. Immediately after the wedding ceremony, the newlywed woman meets with the elderly women who explain to her how to behave as a married woman (Ellece 2011:45; Maundeni 2002:268).

Among the participants premarital counselling elicited different views and interpretations. Some believed in modern times premarital counselling is only applicable when a woman thinks or believes its relevance inculcates values of commitment to the couple, but particularly to the wife. Others viewed the proverb as oppressive to women, believing that premarital counselling based on it favoured men as the authoritative partner thus disregarding the rights and position of women in marriage.

The general use of language and proverbs came up strongly from the participants. They felt that during premarital counselling, "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" was touted as the most important saying relating to how a married woman's future life had to be lived. Although some of the proverbs used in premarital counselling were quoted, most of the conversations centred on "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" as directed by the research questions. Based on the apparent polarisation of the participants' views

concerning the use of the proverb during premarital counselling, the meaning of the proverb as a positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement of premarital counselling is discussed in depth.

### **i) Positive reinforcement**

During the premarital counselling session, proverbs are used to counsel women. Many women respect this counselling; they view it as an honour and adhere to its injunctions. The study findings indicated some participants considered the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” as providing them with the opportunity to remain married despite challenges. Therefore, they experienced the proverb as an aid that kept them positive in their behaviour and thinking which strengthened their marriage and kept it together. These participants vowed to continue using the proverb under study in the future. One participant was adamant that she was prepared to keep her marriage and persevere or die rather than leave her marriage. She had therefore consciously made the decision to thrive in her relationship with her husband and in-laws. Another participant echoed this stance. Making it clear that she supported the use of the proverb, she said she felt it helped her to stay in her marriage. Therefore, nothing would derail her from her belief because she was not ready to leave her marriage.

In a similar study conducted in South Africa, Mbatha’s (2011:34) findings in the study, ‘In and out of polygyny’, indicate in the Zulu tradition a woman should leave her father’s house, marry and remain in that marriage irrespective of the problems she encounters in the marriage. kaNdlondlo (2011:20) agrees with Mbatha’s view and also with the findings in the current study by confirming in the Zulu tradition the wife may “only leave in a coffin” because, ultimately, her grave is expected to be next to that of her husband.

The findings of this study highlighted the meaning of the proverb sanctions women to be submissive, humble and tolerant of all issues facing them in marriage; the purpose of the proverb is to ensure a woman keeps her marriage intact by all possible means. Masenya (2010:7) reaffirms the tone of the proverb under study reveals once the husband dies, a widow is neither expected to return to her home nor make independent decisions to re-marry.

The inference is that some participating women were ready and prepared to persevere because the proverb made them always remember their vows when there was a challenge; they were prepared to go through all the challenges just to keep their marriages. These participants further agreed promoting cultural values through the use of gender-based proverbs was indeed the source of many challenges in their marital lives; yet, they demonstrated a mutual belief that by facing and working through the challenges, their resilience brought them hope for a better future. But, having trust and faith about the use of the proverb was not enough. According to these participants, if the meaning is understood properly there would be commitment to the marriage since using this proverb has been linked to respecting the unwritten laws of culture. This study findings support Ebenso et al. (2012:211) who assert proverbs are considered to express accepted truths; hence, it is an incentive to incorporate them into formal and informal interactions, for example, during conversations.

The notion that women have to be prepared to persevere is emphasised by Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010:81) who note commitment to cultural affiliations and networks of social support serve as protective mechanisms for women who have vowed to stay and endure in marriage. In addition, Anderson, Renner and Bloom (2014:437) agree services to support women should be made available, for example, social services. The authors posit that once support is offered to these women, their determination towards resilience will increase.

O'Leary (1998:431) affirms stressors result in a loss of functioning, but also explains there are some individuals who adapt and even grow psychologically despite their challenges. This author believes whatever challenges, disappointments or adverse events one encounters in life, it provides an opportunity for personal growth depending on whether one approaches it positively or negatively. Consequently, if women who experience challenges in their marriages have support systems it would sustain them to survive not only their marriage but also the concomitant health problems because the support would help them grow more resistant to ill health.

## ii) Negative reinforcement

Most of the participants were dissatisfied with the way the proverb was interpreted. Their view was that it is oppressing women only. The fact that the proverb clearly states it is prohibited for married women to return to their maternal home even when in the midst of life-threatening challenges, was experienced by these participants as extremely sad and oppressive. Being told during the wedding that as a daughter one was indeed expelled because “*you are to die where you are married*” was viewed as cruel and inhuman. It left the new bride with no option but to obey and abide by a rule invested in an ancient proverb.

Mulaudzi (2013 (a):157) supports these participants by asserting the meaning of the proverb is that a married woman is in fact forced to be patient in her marriage and endure even though her life may be miserable. Ellece (2011:46) also found during premarital counselling aspects detrimental to a bride’s welfare were emphasised because most of the women counsellors operated within the patriarchal structures; hence, they promoted patriarchal ideologies. Balogun (2010:21) in turn argues that proverbs violate the rights and dignity of women and are indicators of discrimination against women in the Yoruba culture in Nigeria.

Patriarchy is practiced through culture whereby proverbs are used to instruct women on how they should conduct themselves in society. The proverb “*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*” is an example of the cultural stereotypes used to prepare women for marriage and sets the tone on how they should, as opposed to men, conduct themselves in marriage to achieve societal expectations. This assertion is in line with Hoza’s (2013:29) finding that a woman’s place is in the kitchen. The author asserts patriarchy is not a male system but a social system affecting both males and females but, she adds, women have been made to internalise this social system which stereotypes them.

The use of the current proverb during a premarital counselling session sets the stage for what is expected of an “*ngwetsi*” or bride (Ellece 2011:45). Despite worldwide attempts at continuous teaching and campaigning about basic human rights, the preservation of some proverbs have reinforced the old traditional patriarchal hierarchies and established rigid images of what it means to be a married woman.

The proverb encourages perseverance and endurance in marriage but it does not say what may happen should stress emanating from perseverance become unbearable. This situation left many participants with illnesses and physical and emotional scars due to the implications of the same proverb.

The analogy relating to these findings is that the proverb under scrutiny clearly states returning to the maternal home even in the midst of challenges are taboo. When analysed, the language used during the premarital counselling cautions a married woman not to raise issues of concern should she feel unhappy. Some participants emphasised the proverb was a directive which had been instituted a long time ago but was formulated only to address women. The directive was seen to be compelling and arrogant to women leaving them with stress because it encourages endurance even when the situation warrants a change in their mind-set and, subsequently, their lifestyle. When a woman is not able to confront issues relating to her unhappiness, she can experience stress which may complicate into serious health conditions such as raised blood pressure, anxiety and depression. (See sections 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2).

#### **4.2.2 THEME 2: ASPECTS OF TRAPPED WOMEN**

Participant expressed they felt trapped in their relationships due to the suffering they endured throughout their married life. Trapped in this context was described as the feeling of being unable to leave because the participants feared to be stigmatised and stereotyped by both families and the community. They described being trapped in a marriage as consisting of three levels:

- as a person
- in a relationship
- in the family.

##### **4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 1: As a person**

According to the participants, feeling trapped as a person was associated with suffering, having hope, experiencing stigma, gender stereotypes and perseverance/resilience. Each of these sub-themes is discussed in detail in sub-sections (a) to (e).

### **(a) Suffering**

The findings signify some participants suffered profound personal pain due to being exposed to abuse in their marital lives. However, they also experienced fear of attempting to act and remedy the abusive situation by leaving it. This was partly because of the proverb under question and their inability to make decisions about their marital situation; they were therefore left trapped in their relationships.

Soul City (1999:9) confirmed the fear women felt about disclosing abuse because of an additional fear that the abuse would continue in the sense that families, friends and society would respond negatively and ostracise them because of their disclosure. Owoaje and OlaOlorun (2012:49) support this by stating it is culturally acceptable for men to discipline their wives and some women have been socialised to accept it without questioning it.

The inference is that the suffering experienced was associated with being trapped in their marriages. The participants said they could not express to anyone how they felt about the cultural pressures brought about by the proverb under discussion. Their suffering went on and on and they could not report to anyone. Having no support system or person to share such deep inner feelings of hurt and pain with is dangerous to women's health because they may develop emotional distress and at times even contemplate suicide. Johnson (2004:23) states gender-based violence affects the victims on an emotional, a physically and psychological level. The author suggests on an economic level, abuse is often endured more by women who are totally dependent on their husband for money.

Concerning abuse as a person, the findings further indicated many women have a real fear of leaving the marriage because of the possibility of increased abuse and a lack of financial stability to survive without the support of the partner. This is in line with what Ondicho (2013:108) found in a study he conducted on domestic violence in Kenya. According to the findings, women in violent relationships found it difficult to leave the marriage because of their financial dependence on the partners. As a result of this dependency, there were unequal power relations between the two

partners making women more vulnerable to abuse. Perumal (2011:10) agrees with the findings and similarly state women stay in risky marriages for economic needs although it can mean risking their health. Owoaje and OlaOlorun (2012:44) also report in Nigeria the low socioeconomic status of a woman significantly contributes to her being abused. On the other hand, these authors acknowledge women who contribute economically are also at risk of abuse if their partners feel threatened by their independency.

The participants emphasised in an abusive situation support from the significant others and/or in-laws brought some kind of hope as it encouraged them to endure the difficulties. Hatcher et al. (2013:404) discovered in Kenya a woman was expected to report to her mother- and father-in-law for support in the presence of abuse or violence so that they could offer assistance or reconciliation. In a study conducted by Clark et al. (2010:149) in Jordan, the maternal family members were mentioned as the people who have to offer support during times of conflict although their role was influenced by family norms and values where the issues of privacy and family secrets were cited to be a challenge.

The participants shared women who experienced suffering and abuse endured in violent relationships because some had support from the in-laws which helped them to overcome their suffering. Without the relevant support they might have lost hope and failed to endure or persevere. The participants mentioned some women resorted to different methods such as going to church and focusing on worshipping and prayer as support mechanisms. Ali et al. (2011:7) strongly agree there is a need for support for women who have been discriminated against because they are afraid to ask for help out of fear for retribution punishment from their husbands and further punishment from families and society in the form of stigmatisation.

Mulaudzi (2013(a):157) states from a cultural perspective a married woman is expected to live with her new husband and his family in his home and persevere despite being abused, humiliated and hurt by her husband. The author affirms a married woman has to be patient even if life is unbearable; she has to continue to be there for her children and all of her husband's other family members. In this study it

was confirmed that the proverb under study was used during premarital counselling to encourage commitment to marriage and perseverance by women irrespective of what suffering they experience. The findings revealed some participants were prepared to persevere and raise their children without complaining but the biggest challenge for them and the other participants was fear to contract HIV from husbands who had girlfriends. This dread for HIV and AIDS infections is not unfounded since the UNAIDS Global report (2013:4) estimated that approximately 35.3 million people were living with HIV in 2012; more importantly, there were signs of an increase in risky sexual behaviours in several countries including South Africa.

The findings of the current study also showed women saw the solution to the “proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” as keeping the marriage for the sake of the children and ignoring the wrongful behaviour of the husband. Confirming this, Enwereji (2008:167) asserts in the Abia state in Nigeria a successful marriage is judged according to the efficient performance of married women, their excessive submissive roles, and adherence to sociocultural norms.

Fear to act in response to abuse was highlighted by a participant in the current study. It was evident that this particular participant was vulnerable, helpless, and trapped in the shame perpetuated by her partner. The participant knew that any decision she took could turn out to be worse for her and her children and therefore she thought it was better to be unhappy and live with stress rather than to leave the marriage.

Antai (2011:5) conducted a similar study in Nigeria and found that controlling behaviour, physical violence and sexual violence against women was prevalent. Fear of being abused escalated and became worse if they decided to leave; therefore, the women decided to remain in their marriages despite the suffering. The reality is that if women keep on enduring because they are abiding to the proverb under scrutiny, it may lead to personal unhappiness which may be reflected as anger in their daily living. Persistent anger breeds depression and other health problems which may be detrimental to the woman’s health. Gass et al. (2010:583) admit that

partner violence against women is a public health problem in South Africa which is also associated with health risk behaviours and the increased use of health services.

Balogun (2010:30-31) reports Yoruba proverbs discriminate against women and undermine their contribution towards marriage. Not being recognised as a partner or as a person who plays a significant role in marriage, contributes to women's misery. According to Phaliso (2012:361-381), women's suffering originated during God's creation of life. Phaliso (2012) refers to Genesis 3 verse 16 which reads that after the woman had transgressed against God, He said to the woman, "You will bear children with intense pain and suffering, your desire shall be for your husband and he will be your master" (Genesis 3:16). The transgression caused sorrow and pain for women and sharing lifetime subordination to men as dictated by the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi".

### **(b)Hope**

Hope is described as the "fundamental knowledge and feeling that there is a way out of difficulty, that those things can work out, that we as human persons can somehow handle and manage internal and external reality" (Lynch (1965) (cited in Larsen, Stege & Flesaker 2013:473). Webb (2013:397) views hope as an integral part of what it is to be human and sees it as an important part of human existence. Some participants expressed they were always hoping that things in their marriages would change for the better one day.

The participants shared holding on to the Christian faith helped them staying hopeful and having faith that peace and happiness would eventually follow. Hope made them develop survival skills. These skills sustained them as they endured. However, it was clinging to the hope that one day their lives would be better which helped them to cope best. Korner (1970) and Herth (1989) (cited in Benzein & Saveman 1998:322) argue that hope is a precursor to health and well-being because it buffers the stress by serving as an effecting coping strategy.

In this study even though participants were unhappy, they had hope that their unhappy lives would change in some indefinite time to come. Clinging to hope may

be the rationale for women who were socialised to accept the status quo to bear out and survive the violence against them in the name of culture (Ondicho 2013:105). This confirms the findings of Leipert and Reutter (2004:61) that nurturing a positive attitude helped women who were marginalised and vulnerable to develop courage and resilience to carry on in difficult times.

These assertions imply that without staying hopeful and having faith the survival of women who felt trapped in their marriages may be extremely difficult which may compromise their health status. Without hope, women may not cope well with the challenges they face in an abusive marriage. Living unhappy and unfulfilled lives make them more vulnerable to ill health including physical illnesses and psychological conditions. Leipert and Reutter (2005:62) reaffirm this statement by adding that even though marginalised women may become resilient, they may still be vulnerable to health risks because they may be unable to address other pressing issues in their lives.

Kocot and Goodman (2003:323) observe victims of abuse use many different strategies as a form of coping to eliminate threats to their physical safety and emotional well-being. This includes social support which is known to reduce mental health problems. Some participants in the current study agreed abuse is physical and emotional, but they emphasised in most cases emotional abuse is masked. Women were socialised to persevere and cope in the presence of emotional abuse better than when they were physically abused. To the participants, being instructed on how to cope with emotional abuse carried more weight because physical abuse is aimed at the body where evidence of an assault can be seen, whereas with emotional abuse no outside scars or signs are visible. Enduring feelings of unhappiness, strain and misuse are hidden inside the woman's person.

Kanagaratnam et al. (2012:651) conducted an investigation into the burden of womanhood. The findings revealed participants used different coping strategies to deal with their abuse. They diverted their minds from dwelling on the abuse by encouraging participation in different activities, some tried to normalise the abuse as part of everyday life, and others strived to be patient and resilient. Waldrop and

Resick (2004:300) verify this by indicating that when women are in abusive relationships, they tend to use an “avoidance approach” in trying to cope with the ongoing abuse. Their coping strategies also depend on the commitment they have placed in preserving the relationship. In the current study it was found the participants were able to simply continue with their lives when strengthened by support from family and friends.

The current study findings further revealed an abusive relationship can become chronic and ultimately one can develop chronic diseases such as raised blood pressure. According to many participants, family members and friends continuously encouraged them to persevere and have hope. Unfortunately, oftentimes the underlying and unnoticed but ongoing stress became harmful to their health without the women themselves even noticing it. Support received from the in-laws, friends and significant others assisted them to develop coping skills and hope. Yet, in the end many nonetheless developed chronic conditions including severe depression.

### **(c) Stigma**

Goffman (1963) (cited in Davis 2012:215) describes stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” while Goffman (1963:1) defines it as “signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the person who possesses it in the eyes of the society”. The current findings showed women were stigmatised in a number of ways. They were socialised into believing they cannot live outside the unwritten laws prescribed by proverbs and if they dared to, they would be stigmatised and victimised. Link and Phelan (2001:203) state stigmatising processes affect people’s lives on two levels, namely, their health and their quality of life. In this study the stigmatising process brought about a fear of going back home in the event of a failed marriage. Phelan et al. (2008:262) expand on these findings by indicating that society enforces conformity through social norms and failure to comply with these norms may lead to prejudices and stigmatisation.

In the current study participants said they feared that they or their parents would be stigmatised should they decide to leave their husbands and go back home. They also feared rejection from their families and society. The proverb under study

requires the married woman to stay and die at the place of her in-laws; failing this expectation society would see her as an outcast because of the stigma related to her failing to persevere. The study findings further revealed a married woman's parents were sometimes afraid of the embarrassment that would follow if they welcome their daughter home; their fear pertained to the public's judgement and stigmatisation of them. According to Phillips, Moneyham and Tavakoli/Tavakoll (2011:359), stigma is the "dilemma of being different based on the characteristic perceived to be different from the norm of the society". In this study stigmatised persons feared to be devalued and rejected by their families and society. This is in line with the findings of Hatzenbuehler, Phelan and Bruce (2013:813) indicating the concept of stigma covers multiple statuses and characteristics such as sexual orientation, but it is also broader in scope and covers discrimination which may arise from members of social groups such as the families of the indigenous African women.

Stigmatisation may impact on the woman's health as it can lead to stress and anxiety which in turn can result in the development of chronic ailments and general poor health. This is supported by Hatzenbuehler et al. (2013:814) who assert the situation of being stigmatised reduces resources that can be received by stigmatised people such as sharing of knowledge, power, and other health advantages exposing the affected people to stress. The authors further attest that psychological and some behavioural processes are also disrupted by stigma whereby there could be self-stigmatisation through internalisation of the negative societal perceptions. Krieger and Sidney (1996:1370) affirms discrimination may lead to somatic disease and that a link exists between the health status and the elevated blood pressure associated with racial discrimination at work.

The findings indicated sometimes the maternal family would push their daughter away because they were afraid of being judged by society as having failed in the upbringing of their child. Meanwhile, the daughter would experience stress due to rejection by parents or her own family leading to physical and psychological ill health. One participant said her parents told her to go back to her husband's place because culturally, once lobola has been paid for her, a daughter cannot return home. In this case parents felt embarrassed to return the lobola, meaning that their daughter had

to remain in the marriage. The issue of lobola being returned to the in-laws is also associated with the failure of parents in their upbringing of their daughters and this leads to stigmatisation. The inference here is that exposure to constant rejection, stigma and negative views about oneself may cause more harm to abused women leading to stress. Other psychological problems may emerge if the women feel alienated and stigmatised further (see sections 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.3.2).

#### **(d) Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes refer to biased information based on gender which leads to a particular way of thinking and attitudes that are prejudiced or pre-judged, discriminating and oppressive (McGibbon 2012:28-29). The findings of the current study showed songs were used as a way to emphasise some of the teachings done in private to make them public knowledge. For example, the song about not asking for a husband's payslip which was sung at one participant's wedding related a message that, as a woman, one is not supposed to know how much one's husband earns because he will buy what is needed for the family. It was interesting to note the women were themselves singing and ululating the stereotypic song about not asking for the husband's payslip showing that the stereotypes are a known and common practice for all including women themselves.

Ellece (2011:48), who conducted a study in Botswana, affirms a married woman is expected to be meek and humble and not ask for money from her husband because he will automatically provide what is needed. Mulaudzi (2013(b):43) in his study on the role of indigenous wedding songs in modern times concur with the findings of the current study, but he asserts there should first be an understanding of how marriage works in the African cultures. Marriage, according to Monnig (1978) (cited in Mulaudzi 2013(b):43), is defined as a "legal act entered into between two groups of relatives of the bride and bridegroom". To further support the findings of not being allowed to know how much one's husband earns, Msibi (2011:23) observes marriage is an expectation and by its nature it is patriarchal because roles for men and women have been clearly defined which gives men superior positions and with women always occupying the subordinate positions.

The findings in the current study further support the notion that wedding songs promote inequality and domination of women by men although most of them are thought to be giving advice to both the bride and the groom. In the song “monna ga a batliwe paysilipi” [‘do not ask your husband to show you his payslip’] because he will automatically provide, there is promotion of meekness from the wife and a subtle way of encouraging the man to provide for his family. Mulaudzi (2013(b):48) support these assertions by arguing that on the wedding day, songs are sung to advise the bride and to encourage her to show maturity in her behaviour. Ellece (2011:44) agrees wedding songs are used to illustrate and promote feminine values. She further observes few wedding songs focus on the groom’s role and responsibilities. It can therefore be deduced that most wedding songs promote gender inequity norms in marriage.

The logic here is that because songs are considered indigenous music, they are used to convey messages during the wedding. But, the words of the songs were coined a long time ago; yet, the same songs and words are sung today during wedding ceremonies. The songs send messages to the community and to the bride during the ceremony. Although sung for the bride, the community is also reminded that married women must be subservient to her husband and in-laws. The stereotypic messages sent to the bride prescribe subordination and meekness as values acceptable in a married life. These values are also promoted by the proverb under study which states women are to die where they are married. The bride’s road into the future does not lead back to her past and her maternal home. The findings confirmed domestic violence and the oppression of married women still exist but is hidden behind a culture mask, in the hidden meanings of words in songs promoting prejudices during a joyous occasion. Mulaudzi (2014:97-98) confirms this view. In his study on how communication of gender roles is hidden within indigenous songs, he agrees the accompanying indigenous music is appealing, that it may be the intention with the songs to promote good values, but he asserts the practices do not keep up with the changing realities of modern times.

The findings further showed the songs sung during the wedding ceremonies promote stereotypes against women as it praises the superiority of the man’s family over the

woman's family. It is sung with pride by the in-laws and guests but sends the message that the new bride should know she is now married to 'this' family and being accepted into 'this' family raises her status. Nkosi (2013:133) agrees in wedding songs gender discrimination is justified by stereotypes which perpetuate structural formations of discrimination against women. In the view of Tamale (2004:50), gender inequalities have persisted despite all the challenges associated with it. Gender inequality is woven into songs which downgrade a woman's ability in a gendered society.

Another song mentioned by the participants communicates the in-laws have now come to collect what belongs to them – the new "makoti" (daughter-in-law). Because the lobola has been paid there should be no delay in releasing her (and her children if she has any). Some of the participants also pointed out another dimension of the song they found upsetting. According to them, this song causes prejudices as the message conveyed recites the bride is supposed to be thankful because the husband and his family did her a favour by allowing her to marry him. This finding is supported by Struber (2008:355) who asserts prejudices are detrimental to the health of individuals because they lead to exploitation.

In this study the songs were perceived as promoting the exploitation of women by clearly defining gender differences which encourages the abuse of women leading to a stressful life and ill health. In the opinion of Jost and Kay (2005:506) exposure to such stereotypes leads to the enhanced support of the status quo where women are at times considered not important but weak and insignificant.

**(d) Perseverance/resilience**

The participants indicated during premarital counselling they were told to be obedient and persevere (“*go kgotlelela*”) in marriage. Some felt they had no choice but to persevere to satisfy family members at the expense of their own life and health. It is evident from the findings that premarital counselling is given to the woman to instil the values of perseverance, patience, sacrifice, and obedience in a marriage which should be practiced even if the husband has died (Ellece 2011:48). The author reports a good wife is a passive wife and only the tolerant wife who ignores problems as they come her way can persevere in marriage (Ellece 2011:47-48). In a similar study conducted by Khwathsa (2009:138) one woman accepted her husband as the head of the family to the extent that she also insisted his word must be made law in his homestead. Another woman in the same study asserted challenging the husband’s authority was taboo; she said she as the wife needed to be submissive and not make her husband feel overpowered in his own house. Therefore, she was expected to honour and respect him even if she was afraid of him.

The issue that women must be humble and submissive in a marriage also surfaced strongly during the focus group dialogues. The participants discussed the expectation that women have to endure, be respectful and ignore her challenges. The inference here is that women are required to persevere and hold their marriages together even if they sometimes experience extreme challenges such as infidelity and physical abuse. These women often found themselves trapped in relationships without support from family and friends. For those who experienced increased abuse, feelings of shame prevented them from talking about it. This resulted in them isolating themselves from other people while their self-confidence plummeted. Some participants reported being fearful and having feelings of guilt because they allowed the abuse; they kept quiet about it because they feared stigmatisation.

The participants shared they felt perseverance was at the forefront of the socialisation of women. However, in the presence of oppression and abuse participants who were affected ended up with a low self-esteem, emotional problems and feeling helpless because they were trapped in abusive relationships. Ondicho (2013:110) also notes abused women in Kenya were expected to be submissive and

follow the rules set by the husband. Those who attempted to leave were sent back to their husbands by their own family members and told to persevere which heightened their feelings of being trapped, isolated and helpless.

It was evident in the current findings that perseverance was promoted by the doctrines of Christianity. Biblical verses were used during couple counselling and again with the marital vows when the priest reminded the newlyweds that, according to Genesis 2:23-24, in marriage “the two shall become one flesh in union joined by God” (Good News Bible 2011:2). This biblical verse similarly promotes endurance as does the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’). It is further emphasised during the taking of vows when the couple is made to promise each other that they will only be separated by death.

Chitando (2004:154) conducted a study on how Proverbs 31:10-31 specifically states “a good wife” is one who is praised for taking care of her husband and how the understanding of this biblical verse influenced the HIV context in Zimbabwe. The author provides evidence that during premarital counselling many preachers use the book of Proverbs to encourage women to be good to their husbands and persevere in their marriages. The current study findings reflect Chitando’s (2004:152) view that the Christian Bible has been used to sustain traditions and practices that suffocate African women. Moreover, patriarchal traditions have left these African women to face defeat and possible death alone - due to their husbands’ infidelity they are very vulnerable to contract HIV and AIDS.

Perhaps attention should be paid to the finding that elders these days apparently deviate from the tenet of using culturally traditional proverbs to using the Bible in premarital counselling to encourage women to be obedient and submissive wives. All indigenous African unmarried or married women who participated in the current study were of the Christian faith. Although using biblical texts was acceptable to those participants who had been exposed to premarital counselling, one participant experienced the use of biblical texts during her premarital counselling as somewhat equal to indoctrination. This is not to say that all indigenous African women who

belong to other denominations may perceive the use of biblical verses during premarital counselling in a way akin to indoctrination, but it does imply that proverbs may have more universality in their cultural meaning as everyone who is part of that culture can relate to them in some way or on some level.

Christianity lays down strict rules for women. The ways of encouraging perseverance in the current study were imparted through the principles of Christianity. God-fearing women of the Christian faith will not want to go against the will of God; thus, the reinforcement of patriarchal ideologies that oppress women is maintained by devout elders, mothers and priests who use verses from the Bible. Rakoczy (2004:32) agrees and points out the lowering of women's dignity are continued through advocating certain biblical texts. For example, the relationship between husband and wife referred to in Colossians 3:18 (Good News Bible 2011:838) which states the wife should submit to her husband as is fitting "in the Lord". Unfortunately, promoting adherence to specific biblical texts without considering the overall biblical as well as the real-life contexts is not ideal. In the context of this study and considering the issue of being in an abusive marriage relationship, the mistreatment and oppression of women can indeed be ascribed to a certain degree of misinterpretation of biblical verses, traditional idioms and cultural proverbs. The repercussions on the health of women, who are trapped in an abusive situation but are still encouraged to be resilient and persevere, can be abysmal. These women present with psychosomatic symptoms, some have severe physical injuries and others suffer from depression, self-hate, guilt and profound loneliness.

#### **4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2: In a relationship**

According to the participants, feeling trapped in a relationship was caused by three aspects:

- (a) disrespect/abuse
- (b) harmful/death
- (c) polygyny.

**a) Disrespect/Abuse**

Fear of taking a decision in the marriage was cited as the main reason for one participant to stay in her marriage. She shared she was afraid to act (leave or divorce her husband) because she feared poverty as she was not working. The plight of unemployed married women is enormous. They are at the mercy of their husband who is the breadwinner and have to persevere if they want to survive (some together with their children). In a study similar to the current one Abayomi, Kolawole and Olabode (2013:57) found a woman endured brutalisation and dehumanisation from her husband because she was concerned about the welfare of her children. Her inability to survive financially without her husband and her fear of the stigma attached to being a divorced woman kept her trapped in the relationship.

To be financially taken care of is important to unemployed women and even more so if she has children. Having a husband who earns money is central to their economic survival. Therefore, many women who rely on their partners to provide for them may be challenged if, at some point, they consider separation or divorce. A participant in the current study revealed she was disrespected and humiliated but could not do anything about it. Her painful experience sparked some discussions from other women who supported and sympathised with her but also shared similar stories of being trapped because they were financially dependent on their husbands.

In a study conducted by Oweis et al. (2008:75) Jordanian women said they were bound by cultural rules that prevented them from divorcing their husbands to end the violence. Having no finances and facing stigma made them feel trapped. Although the study was conducted in Jordan, the findings were similar to the findings in this study where participants said as women they were financially wholly dependent on their spouses. They had no choice but to stay trapped in an abusive relationship because they would not be able to support themselves (or themselves and their children).

The vulnerability of married, unemployed women was highlighted by the participants in this study. These women are most prone to being deprived of economic support which exposes them to other social problems such as poverty. Gharaibeh and Oweis

(2009:380) reaffirm that financial dependency is a major obstacle for women to leave an abusive relationship. These authors discovered Jordanian women who were totally dependent on their husbands because they controlled the finances could not rely on financial support from their original families. According to their families, once the daughter was married, they had no financial obligations towards her as the husband becomes socially and culturally responsible for all the financial responsibilities of his wife and children.

### **(b) Harmful/Death**

Women trapped in marriages indicated they lived in fear in these harmful relationships because they were afraid of being killed. In spite of the increasing efforts to make all citizens aware of gender-sensitive policies in South Africa, it was found in the current study that women still lived in fear of being killed by their intimate partners. Policies that are protective of women rights in South Africa are, among others, the Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996:6-18) and the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998). This Act has been promulgated to protect people who experience domestic violence; the victims of domestic violence are in most cases vulnerable groups (women and children).

In the present study one participant described how unhappy she was in her marriage and how vulnerable she felt. She constantly feared for her life and considered divorcing her husband. Instead of being encouraged to proceed with it, she was warned against divorce by her brother who was a lawyer. Being afraid of divorce is an indication of how helpless women are even though there are laws in place to protect them. Seedat et al. (2009:1011) state in their report on violence and injuries in South Africa half the female victims of homicides are killed by intimate male partners and the high injury rate is driven by gendered-based violence. The findings of the current study also indicated participants were worried that men would harbour feelings of mistrust against wives whom they felt irritated them or from whom they had had *“enough of”* and *“they will tell you that you think you are clever these days and they will kill you”*.

Suffla, van Niekerk and Arendse (2008:11) did a study in South Africa on female homicidal strangulation and found there were high rates of strangulation among coloured women with the highest rates occurring in Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. Maundeni (2002:22) discovered in a study on wife abuse among a sample of divorced women in Botswana that they experienced severe life-threatening episodes where there were attempts by ex-husbands to set their houses on fire with the women and children inside. More recently, Abayomi et al. (2013:55) referred to media reports in Nigeria which carried horrible stories of men brutally killing their wives because they simply regarded them as their property.

Additional findings in the current study were that some young women were afraid of getting married because they feared being killed. Such fears were embedded in the stories shared by older women or in the fear she witnessed her own mother living with. Mathews et al. (2008:552) confirm South Africa has a high rate of intimate femicide-suicide which exceeds reported cases elsewhere in the world and also the rate of intimate femicide in South Africa itself. Intimate femicide refers to the “killing of a woman by her intimate partner” (Mathews et al. 2008:552).

The implication is that the majority of married women tolerate the abuse and live in silent fear in their own homes, behind closed doors – the source of their fear being that a drunk or violent husband may kill them for even the smallest or most insignificant reason. Some women who believe they are prepared and ready to approach a legal team for support and assistance with divorce often become afraid that they will be killed and they therefore decide to stay in the inhibitive situation. Being constantly afraid for their personal safety affects women’s quality of life leading to depression, high anxiety, guilt, shame and other health problems such as memory loss and generalised body pains. Bonomi et al. (2006:458) agree and note prolonged exposure to inter-partner violence results in higher rates of severe as well as minor depressive symptoms. According to Green and Ward (2010:122), abused women experience anxiety which should be noticed during consultation with a healthcare provider.

### **(c) Polygyny**

Polygyny refers to “one type of polygamy in which men have multiple wives (co-wives), as opposed to polyandrous polygamy, in which a woman has multiple husbands” (Falen 2008:53). The current study revealed some of the participants were in a polygynous relationship. This made them unhappy, they felt unloved and neglected and not involved in family issues. One participant blamed the Pentecostal Church for encouraging polygynous marriages. Falen’s (2008:57) comment is that some churches defend polygyny, for example, Benin’s Celestial Church accepts polygyny open without even demanding that any of the marriages take place in the church. Other churches which also support polygyny are the three Nigerian churches of the Zion Methodist Mission (Ekechi 1987) and the South African Zion Apostolic Church in Zion (Pretorius 1991) (cited in Falen 2008:57).

The implication is that if religious institutions support polygyny and condone it, it can lead to an even greater feeling of self-blame for the woman if she cannot cope with polygyny. Apart from blaming herself because she is unable to accept her life as conditioned by the church, she may also feel inferior because other women from the same church seem to accept and cope with their situation.

A disturbing finding in this study was that some married women had to live with a husband who brought a girlfriend into his own home while his wife was living there. The majority of participants expressed this behaviour as disrespectful, unacceptable and mean. In fact, their scorn was not addressed to the husband only, but also to the ‘other women’. To them it was unfathomable that one woman could abuse another so blatantly.

Persistent unhappiness may expose the affected women to stress and depression. It is also not worthwhile if two wives compete for attention, money and so forth because sometimes the competition is detrimental to their health leaving them both with stress-related conditions such as anger and frustration. Considering that Montalvo-Liendo et al. (2009:363) found some abused women of Mexican descent really had a need to unburden and disclose their abuse to someone, it can be posited that if two wives are abused by the same husband, and if they can grow

closer and share their mutual burden and unhappiness, it would be beneficial to their mental well-being.

When a husband has two wives, both the women and the children (or specifically only the 'unfavoured' wife and her children) can feel frustrated and miserable if they are all depending on the husband for love and support. On the other hand, as the findings of the current study revealed, should the husband prefer one wife above the other and make it noticeable by giving her more money or showing her more affection, it can leave the disliked wife feeling neglected, unloved, unworthy and filled with pain. Bove, Vela-Haynes and Valeggia (2013:83) state a husband often tends to display love and affection towards the junior wife whereas the senior wife has to witness and bear such discriminating behaviour. It must be noted that 'junior' and 'senior' does not reflect age differences as in the 'younger' and 'older', but the seniority in the household of the first wife.

Mbatha (2011:31) agrees jealousy can exist between the two wives. In the current findings it was indicated by a participant that her brother-in-law favoured his first wife and her children and neglected her sister (the second wife) and the sister's children by him. Mbatha (2011) state such jealousy may reduce cooperation between two or among many wives which leads to strain, arguments, and ill health. Bove and Valeggia (2009:22) add competition among co-wives increases whenever the women depend more directly on their husband for emotional support as well as for financial reasons.

As indicated in the current findings, living in a polygynous relationship was challenging and difficult for some women who lived with persistent frustration and stress. In support of the current findings Al-Krenawi (1999:417) and Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006:5) report findings from their studies showed senior wives suffered a lower self-esteem than junior wives but both women in a polygynous marriage presented with significantly more psychological problems. Al-Krenawi and Graham (2006:14) state sometimes the intricate interrelationships among people in a polygynous relationship are significantly associated with severe mental distress. What this statement means for the current study is that the competition between co-

wives may lead to psychological and social problems because one or both feel neglected, unloved and unwanted. The religious and cultural expectations in most instances determine women's lives in a marriage and they ultimately become unhappy and trapped with nowhere to go to

#### 4.2.2.3 In a family

The participants expressed they felt discriminated against and abused by their in-laws who showed disrespect to them. Some whose husbands had died stated they were ill-treated by the in-laws and felt frustrated. Feeling trapped in a family pertained to:

- (a) discrimination and abuse
- (b) disrespect by in-laws
- (c) widow inheritance.

##### (a) Discrimination and abuse

The findings show the participants experienced discrimination and abuse from their in-laws. To be told that 'a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband' was viewed by the participants as a negative and distressing feature of premarital counselling. According to the majority, the proverb promotes domestic violence because it seemingly supports the culturally marked inequalities between men and women and the rigid gender roles attributed to each by society. Cultural norms that support a man's superiority based on gender alone were unacceptable to the participants.

The proverb also directed the woman's attitude and behaviour towards her new family members. It instructed her to show respect, take care of them and not question them on anything. Ultimately, to the participants this indicated that even if abused, disrespected or mistreated by their parents-in-law they had to endure it without complaining or fighting back. What worsened the situation, as one said, was she could not even involve her husband when she had problems with her in-laws. Hussein's (2009:102) reflection on the Sudanese proverb "*a woman is like a hair that follows the neck*" (which means women are voiceless and mute) reaffirms this

finding. According to Hussein (2009), the crux of the this Sudanese saying means that if a woman is found to have reacted in any to abuse and is questioned about it she is not allowed to defend herself but has to remain silent.

Chigama's (2006:29) poignant poem, 'Because I am a woman' testifies that the negative influence the meaning of "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" has on women's lives and their health, is unjust and unacceptable: *"I am to be compliant, never get tired, keep my mouth shut, and say no word, my role should be subservient and yet I should be humble and keep on nodding my head till the day I die."*

The implication is that some married women felt they were not allowed to say a word about not being happy in their marriages. Failure to be able to confront what is hurting may create more discomfort, unhappiness and self-blame thus leaving a woman with feelings of low self-esteem, depression and helplessness (Ondicho 2013:108). Another aspect voiced by the participants was the societal expectation that the first and foremost duty of a married woman was to bear children. The woman's own parents (who emphasises it during premarital counselling) and her in-laws constitute a significant part of this bigger society. The participants shared a woman felt it painful and degrading when the in-laws either threatened to send her home to her parents if she fails to fall pregnant or they would ridicule her. Masenya (2010:5) argues in the event of a childless marriage, men are normally not blamed for it but it is simply assumed, in one way or another, that the woman is to blame. In many African societies having a biological child is an important phase of life and it is regarded as a status symbol with high social standing (Doyal & Anderson (2005) cited in Alo 2013:np).

Because there is the expectation that married women must bear children, there is often no excuse for the woman not to fulfill this role. A woman who is infertile is simply regarded as not fulfilling this role. (As mentioned above, a man's fertility is not even questioned). Gupta et al. (2012:1063) support the findings by stating among "South Asian, Rwandan, Iranian, Nigerian and Turkish women, a high prevalence of violence and maltreatment, both by husband and in-laws, has been documented among infertile women as a cultural expectation to produce offspring". In these types

of situations, women are always viewed as the cause of the problem and are seen as bringing shame to the family. This discrimination makes women feel frustrated, stressed, hurt and angry which negatively affect their health.

The feeling of being abused and discriminated against was many times fuelled by the participants' in-laws, particularly the mother-in-law and the sister(s)-in-law. The findings revealed in some marriages the mother-in-law expected money from the husband (her son) before he had taken care of his own family's needs purely because she had brought him up. Participants shared that sister(s)-in-law abuse them by letting them do all the household chores. This caused the participants to be overworked and stressed.

Olutola (2012:12) asserts among the Yoruba people in the southwestern parts of Nigeria a wife is viewed as being married to the whole extended family. However, this author mentions in troublesome marriage relationships the relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter(s)-in-law is the most complex because it is filled with intricate conflicts and problems. According to Masenya (1998:86), the future mother-in-law on the one hand wants her son to get married while on the other hand she does not want her son to bring an "intruder" into the house who would disturb the harmony between mother and son. Consequently, she often displays a negative attitude towards her daughter-in-law.

In a study conducted by Clark et al. (2010:148) it was indicated that mainly mothers-in-law, closely followed by sisters-in-law, caused family interference which lead to intimate partner violence. Although the mentioned study was conducted in Jordan, the complaints from the daughters-in-law were similar to the complaints raised by the participating women in the current study who agreed it was the in-laws who generally caused the problems. To support the findings further, Agrawal, Unisa and Agrawal (2013:438) state the girl-child has to grow up knowing that all the household chores are her responsibility because what happens in her childhood will determine the adequacy of her maternal state. Agrawal et al. (2013:446) continue the girl-child has to be socialised into caring for siblings and to do other household chores as she will be better prepared for marriage.

The implication of the study findings is that the mother-in-law expects her daughter-in-law to have been prepared for her future roles: mother, wife, cook, caretaker of all the in-laws and so forth. The in-laws, particularly the females in this case, will not consider the daughter-in-law's position as abnormal because it is expected of her to work hard. But, as voiced by the participants, physical and emotional exhaustion occurred because daughters-in-law were discriminated against. They experienced stress and abuse, discrimination and helplessness which resulted in depression.

### **(b) Disrespect by in-laws**

Disrespect and taking advantage of the daughter-in-law was seen by the participants as a common practice in marriage. The findings reflect they would sometimes be disrespected by both the mother- and sister(s)-in-law, yet they were forced to persevere because they could not return to their own parents' home. In some instances, disrespect was shown in the presence of the husband who neglected supporting or standing by his wife. Another finding suggested the in-laws showed disrespect to the wife by being rude and using a superior tone of voice. In addition, there was a lack of respect from the husband in the way he treated or spoke with his wife. Participants explained in some societies it is the norm for the husband to believe he has to provide financially for his own as well as his extended family. If he does provide, it is sufficient and showing respect towards his wife or family is not required.

Mbatha (2011:32) also found in her a study on polygynous marriages in-laws sometimes exploited the daughters-in-law as the latter would be expected to buy groceries and sometimes give the in-laws money. Olutola (2012:12) asserts among the Yoruba people a wife is married to the husband as well as to all his extended family members.

The implication is that the continuous lack of respecting the wife (daughter-in-law) can lead to insecurities and ultimately depression. This is supported by Ondicho (2013:109) who states abuse of women tend to cause them to have a negative self-image resulting in a low self-esteem and concomitant psychological problems.

**(c) Widow inheritance**

One participant shared she was blamed for the death of her husband and was told she does not deserve his inheritance. Widow inheritance, according to Muriisa (2011:617), is slowly disappearing and not common nowadays. Peterman (2011:2) notes “widows in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are perceived to face widespread discrimination in asset and property inheritance following the death of a spouse, leading to poverty for themselves and their children”. Contrary to what literature informs widow inheritance is still practiced in some cultures as indicated by this finding. Widow inheritance implies the in-laws decide about the inheritance of the deceased despite the fact that he was married and had children. The behaviour of relatives to control the deceased’s estate may leave the widow with much stress and anger if she is unable to sort out the issue with the in-laws.

From the findings it is evident that the husband’s family had organised one of the family member to re-marry the widow and replace their late brother. Since the widow was not agreeable on the matter, the in-laws laid down the rules of inheritance which meant no other man could enter their brother’s house because it would indicate disrespect to the family. Masenya (1998:86) confirms this finding and explains one of the reasons why it is a taboo for a married woman to seek divorce, is the societal expectations that she will re-married into the family or clan of her deceased husband to continue with his lineage and bear children. Re-marry in this case means the brother simply continues with the dead brother’s role as husband by moving into the house and taking her as his wife. According to Masenya (2010:7), “lebitla la mosadi ga le hlalwe” (‘a man’s grave cannot be divorced’) applies to the cultural expectation that after her husband’s death the widow is expected to remain with his family until her death. As discussed, it can include being forced to re-marry a brother or other male family member.

However, if it had happens that the woman agrees to the replacement of her late husband, serious health issues can arise if the husband has died of AIDS. This finding is supported by Peterman (2011:30) who observes the issue of property or asset ownership is one that commonly affects widows. If the husband has died of

AIDS, it is possible that the widow is already HIV positive which may create a health hazard for the new husband.

#### 4.2.3 THEME 3: STRESS

The participants identified stress as common tensions occurring in their lives due to what they experienced in their relationships. In her study on the health consequences of intimate partner violence Campbell (2002:1335) reports abused women present in all healthcare settings with many different health challenges. These vary from physical signs due to hitting and kicking to psychological abuse signified by anxiety, depression and suicidal behaviour (WHO 2002:7,15). Moreover, they may present to healthcare settings before they present to criminal justice or social service agencies such as social workers. Campbell (2002) asserts if healthcare practitioners identify abuse, these women can receive interventions to increase their personal safety and improve their health outcomes. Two sub-themes emerged:

- (a) physical stress
- (b) psychosocial stress.

##### 4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Physical stress

The study findings revealed the expressions of physical stress and its effects on indigenous African women who were exposed to the proverb under study. Of the participants, some shared stress affected most women who were encouraged and advised to persevere in dysfunctional marriages. Unfortunately, most kept quiet about their ordeals and silently suffered constant abuse and mistreatment.

According to the WHO World Report on violence and health (2002:7-8), victims of domestic violence do not only show physical signs of abuse but present with other physical health problems, for example, high blood pressure and diabetes, necessitating frequent visits to emergency departments. In the current study a participant confirmed that her friend presented with high blood pressure which “*complicated into heart failure*” while another shared her sister “*is on medication but her diabetes and blood pressure are not well controlled because she worries a lot*”.

Fisher, Zink and Regan (2011:264) state related psychological/emotional abuse may take a negative toll on older women's current health conditions. According to McEwen & Stellar (1993:2093) stress contributes significantly to disease and has specific effects on the immune and cardiovascular systems. The physiologic systems within the body fluctuate to meet the demands from external forces creating a state referred to as allostasis over a period of time. The "allostatic load then occurs as the cost of chronic exposure to fluctuating or heightened neural or neuroendocrine response resulting from repeated challenges in life that an individual reacts to as being particularly stressful (McEwen & Stellar 1993:2093).

The implication for the study is that healthcare practitioners including nurses need to be aware of the frequency of the abuse and should flag conditions such as depression, irritable bowel syndrome or chronic pain when assessing a female for abuse. Gass et al. (2010:583) observed certain behaviours among women that correlated with intimate partner violence. These authors assert that the South African Stress and Health studies found there were associations between domestic violence and all categories of psychiatric disorders including substance abuse. The implication is that the physical health of married women who were advised to adhere to '*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*' deteriorated as a result of their perseverance which resulted in persistent exposure to abuse.

With regard to women's perseverance the findings revealed the only way some could cope and move on with their lives was to ignore the abuse. A disturbing aspect was that professional women who were assumedly knowledgeable and knew what the negative effect of abuse on one's body systems are, were also enduring it. This finding is verified by Ushie et al. (2010:76) who found the prevalence of violence against women cuts across age, culture and socioeconomic status evidencing that violence does not choose its victims but affects the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated. In another study conducted by Pico-Alfonso (2005:182) on psychological intimate partner violence it was found intimate partner violence is a worldwide public health problem which impacts on women's mental and physical well-being. This author asserts intimate partner violence has high prevalence and incidence among the female population of all countries regardless of race, education, religion or economic status. What it means is that everyone may be abused

irrespective of her educational standard and the abuse may leave them with chronic physical illnesses and mental conditions.

The participants emphasised most women had nowhere to escape to and were terrified of being judged by society for not showing the courage to persevere. The problem was that for those who remained in violent relationships, abuse and mistreatment increased leading to excessive physical injuries. Ondicho (2013:108) reports many women cling to the belief that they have to protect the sanctity of marriage but living in continuous misery also leaves many feeling trapped with no foreseeable escape. In further support of the findings McCormick (1999:427) argues it is often difficult for the victims to leave their abusers. They have become so accustomed to violence that feeling helpless, inadequate and the as guilty party who deserves punishment have conditioned them to endure it time and again. Another significant problem is that in a gender-based society such violence is not condoned but accepted as normal behaviour in a marriage.

However, pressure by families, society and culture to stay in a marriage lead to married women developing insecurities and feeling insecure lead to stress-related conditions which are detrimental to human health and even life. Gass et al. (2010:582) add women who are exposed to intimate partner violence are at risk of developing short- and long-term health challenges; serious physical injuries and even death may result. Mapayi et al. (2012:16) share there was a significant association between intimate partner abuse and anxiety/depression in their study population. The finding reflected that violence by intimate partners was a public health issue which required intervention by many sectors.

For the victim of marital abuse to feel, think or say she does not have anywhere to go, it can be argued that society's expectation to adhere to "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" can be blamed. It is a sad irony if a woman, who may fear for her life in her marriage, has the courage to leave her husband and return to her parents' home only to be told to go back to her husband's home where physical aggression may in any case lead to her death. A participant reflected she had developed asthma as a stress-related condition and was extremely afraid that she might die during the

process of suffering. Her biggest concern was leaving her children alone to fend for themselves.

Campbell (2002:1332) asserts abused women are prone to develop adverse physical health conditions such as STIs, asthma, back pain, heart diseases and other conditions. Campbell (2002:1331) Conducting a study on the health consequences of intimate partner abuse, Campbell (2002:1331) further found the victims experienced physical and mental health problems characterised by, for example, gastrointestinal problems, STIs, depression and post-traumatic stress among others.

Gass et al. (2010:582) add women who are exposed to intimate partner violence are at risk of injury and death. Ellsberg et al. (2008:1165) argue in support of the findings by indicating there was a significant association between life-time experiences of partner violence and self-reported poor health such as memory loss and emotional distress. The implication is that continued strain which is perpetuated by perseverance may expose abused women to compromised health.

Another finding revealed an abused woman, who was driven by fear of losing her money to either her husband or other women who could re-marry her husband should she die, decided on divorcing her abusive husband. Dutton et al. (2006:959) warn that fear heightens cortisol which is known to increase blood pressure levels therefore leading to the development of psychosomatic diseases. As a result of intense fear, the victim's health can be so adversely affected that it requires urgent medical intervention. According to Ellsberg et al. (2008:1171), women's experiences of physical or sexual violence are almost without exception associated with reports of poor physical and mental health. This highlights the urgent need to address partner violence nationally and globally.

The study findings reflected women who were abused developed severe stress-related conditions, for example, high blood pressure and diabetes, which could lead to heart failure or a stroke. A major concern was the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS.

#### 4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2 Psychosocial stress

One participant told her group she persevered in her marriage despite the fact that she was unhappy and suffered abuse right from the beginning. As a result her well-being was severely affected and she experienced forgetfulness and anger. She felt she had no reason to continue living. Feelings of helplessness and suffering from emotional strain were pronounced in the conversations.

Campbell (2002:1331) studied the health consequences of intimate partner abuse and found they experienced physical and mental health problems characterised by, for example, depression, gastrointestinal problems, post-traumatic stress and sexually transmitted diseases among others.

Campbell (2002:1331) studied the health consequences of intimate partner abuse and found they Rees et al. (2011:518) note women who had experienced gender-based violence reported a higher level of severity in mental disorders, an increased rate of physical disorders, mental health related dysfunction, general disability, and impaired quality of life. In support Danielsson et al. (2012:122) ascertain when a person experiences stress, the body responds and one can experience, for example, chronic fatigue, no motivation to work, memory disturbances, numbness, and chest pressure. The current finding is in line with Khan's (2000:9) conclusion that the repercussions of violence and abuse can be physical and psychological including asthma, headaches, depression, fear, suicide, HIV infection and others.

Abuse did not only affect the participants but also their children. This was described as being very painful and depressing by the participants. Khan (2000:9) agrees that children who have been exposed to violence tend to develop health and behavioural problems. The implication is that children also experience the negative and hurtful consequences of domestic abuse in their home environment and therefore they should be protected.

Feelings of low-self-esteem and low morale were revealed as findings in this study. As the daughter-in-law some participants were regarded as incapable of making decisions and were excluded by all when family decisions had to be made. They were furthermore not given any opportunity to respond to issues confronting them.

As a result their emotions and strength were challenged and they experienced feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem and powerlessness. Agreeing that under such circumstances women would experience deprecatory feelings, Ali et al. (2011:7) share that Pakistani housewives were considered as having less decision-making power because they were totally dependent on their husbands – financially the husbands took care of them and therefore he had all the decision-making power. These women were, in fact, unaware of their human rights which, in fact, in itself is considered a violation of women's and human rights.

Oweis et al. (2008:72) share that women described their psychological and emotional consequences of the different forms of abuse as having low self-esteem, they were socially isolated, and felt helpless and hopeless. They were at the stage of despair where they believed they were the aggressors who invited violence; they thus always asked for forgiveness because their self-blame made them feel they deserved being punished.

In the presence of HIV and AIDS women felt they wanted to feel independent and free to negotiate for safe sex. Unfortunately, this is impossible when there is abuse in the marriage. This finding concurs with Chireshe and Chireshe's (2011:97) who found in Zimbabwe that even when a man knows he is HIV infected, he will use his muscular and patriarchal powers to force his wife to have unsafe sex because she is helpless and has no negotiating power. The findings of the current study revealed women were not free to openly communicate their feelings in the marriage. This placed them in an extremely dangerous situation because they could not ask for, demand or refuse being intimate with their husbands. Although they felt intimidated and terrified of contracting STIs or being infected with HIV and AIDS diseases, they were powerless and had to succumb to the abusive husband's wishes and demands.

The study findings concur that of Vetten and Bhana (2001) (cited in Onyejekwe 2004:35) namely that most women in abusive relationships do not have the financial means to leave and at times they are unable to negotiate for safe sex or condom use out of fear for their partners' reactions. Khan's (2000:9) findings affirm women in violent marriages are less likely to negotiate for safe sex and therefore they are at a

high risk of contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS. The UNAIDS Global report (2013:4) revealed in 2012 “globally, an estimated 35.3 (32.2 – 38.4) million people were living with HIV” but the signs of risk behaviour were increasing in several countries including South Africa. In fact, the WHO Report (2013) also mentioned the fact that people in SA were not using condoms for prevention and protection of HIV and AIDS. The implication is that her fear of confronting the abusive husband can result in a woman being forced into having unsafe sex which leaves her in constant terror of contracting STIs, HIV and AIDS.

The study findings further revealed infidelity was cited by participants as the main source of many problems in a marriage. Chitando (2004:152-153) confirms in Zimbabwe men generally occupy dominant positions in the various spheres of life and the subordinate position among women has translated to an increased exposure to HIV infection because of the lack of power to negotiate. In this study a participant asserted she was already living with HIV/AIDS and her husband wanted to “*throw her out of the house*” to settle in another woman. In support of this finding Chireshe and Chireshe (2011:97) report on a participant in their study who, when she told her mother-in-law of her son’s infidelity, advised the participant to pray, keep quiet, forgive him and just bear children for him to win back his love. Gass et al. (2010:582) emphasise women with a history of intimate partner violence and victimisation reported increased rates of HIV risk factors due to unsafe sexual practices. In the same study, it was reported that intimate partner violence in South Africa was a significant public health concern associated with health risk behaviour and increased use of medical services.

The implication is that women who are abused, violated and discriminated against in marriage have no voice – they have no negotiating power, no say in sexual practices and have no choice other than to participate in unsafe sex. Their husband’s exposure to sexually transmitted diseases as well as HIV and AIDS with other sexual partners increases the wives’ risk of being infected every time they are intimate.

#### 4.2.4 THEME 4: AWARENESS

Participants raised the issue of awareness which should be heightened to empower women. The empowerment of women emerged as a sub-theme.

##### 4.2.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Empowerment of women

Empowerment is the process that provides the resources, tools, and environment to develop, build, and increase ability and effectiveness of others to set and reach goals for individual and social needs (Hokanson-Hawks (1992) (cited in Wittmann-Price 2006:378). In the current study the participants raised the need for the empowerment of women to be realised through the following:

- (a) education
- (b) support
- (c) emancipation of women.

##### **(a) Education**

The study findings revealed women needed to be educated on the following to raise their awareness towards empowerment:

- (i) gender and literacy issues
- (ii) human right issues.

##### **(i) Gender and literacy issues**

Knowledge acquisition regarding violence against women was the first aspect raised by the participants. They felt it was pivotal for women to be aware of precisely what the term 'violence against women' encompasses because they are at present living in a time where culture and society still do not condone such gender-biased and unacceptable behaviour in a marriage. It was observed in literature that the abuse of and violence against women are not confined to certain populations or certain people only but is a problem which affects everyone in communities and societies in the world (Balogun 2013:562).

Further findings revealed that exposing women to cultural practices and societal expectations through the use of traditional proverbs and other cultural practices pressurised participants to stay in violent and unhappy marriages simply because it is the norm. Agreeing with these findings, Ondicho (2013:105) argues domestic violence unfortunately remains deeply hidden and is covered up in spite of it being the major cause of physical and emotional abuse among women.

The current study findings further brought to light the fact that because of violence against women, indigenous African women believed structures have to be in place to address domestic violence and other gender-related issues because women and children in the communities are at risk and vulnerable to abuse. Ushie et al. (2010:75) suggest ways to address domestic violence should be done on three levels. Firstly, the primary level in which educational programmes are used to support abused women. Secondly, the secondary level is for early detection of warning signs of violence against women and, thirdly, at tertiary level through creating women's shelters and community-based support services.

The implication is that any form of physical and mental abuse of married women (also commonly referred to as domestic violence) should be prevented at all cost by ensuring strategies are in place to curb gender-related violence in communities. If violence against women can be prevented, it can result in reducing HIV and AIDS infections because women will be knowledgeable, empowered and have the self-confidence to negotiate safe sex without fearing a violent and injurious reaction from their partners.

Additionally, the findings showed people in general should be educated on gender issues. In the case of a marriage, such education needs to be introduced in the marriage counselling sessions before a couple is married. Supplementary to these findings, Balogun (2013:564) writes regarding the abusive cultural rites evidenced in Nigeria, the Nigerian government was committed to introduce courses on inequality and gender-related issues on a simple yet informative level in nursery schools, on basic education levels in primary and high schools, and in higher learning. It is further recommended that curricula should address examples from both females and

males instead of favouring a particular gender. Indeed, in the current study participants similarly suggested for workshops to be introduced early (in primary schools and throughout further levels of schooling) but they made it clear the programmes need to target both boys and girls. They further advocated for 'respect' to be the central message in the programmes because having and showing respect is the core of humanity.

Participants were concerned about girls being viewed as the weaker or less important children and thus treated differently to boys in schools and communities. To them it seemed as if issues on gender-bias originate in society itself and therefore one should not wonder where such discriminating behaviours and treatment come from. This is supported by Thupayagae-Tshweneagale and Seloilwe (2010:44) who maintain that by having forums where women are given a voice and can share their experiences will assist towards creating a culture in which values and norms are not unilateral but acceptable to everyone. Such forums can promote the overall health and well-being of all women.

Over and above the education that was recommended, the current findings confirmed education can be done in the form of workshops at different schools, in the workplaces and in venues where political meetings are conducted. The study findings concur with Owoaje and OlaOlorun (2012:49) who assert in order to prevent violence against women, women should not simply condone it but take active steps to become involved in educating all communities about how to prevent it. According to these authors, community and cultural processes that are oftentimes dictating to women (such as the proverb discussed in the present study) can be changed through offering appropriate health education intervention programmes in communities.

In further support of the study findings, Maundeni (2002:271) advises training institutions to develop appropriate educational and training material on prevention of women abuse and other gender issues to train all professionals who come into contact with abused women. In addition, Thupayagae-Tshweneagale and Seloilwe (2010:44) assert there should be forums where women can contribute to discussions

concerning cultural issues applicable to women thereby making aspects of culture acceptable to all in communities without excluding people of different gender, age, race and so forth. Bishop's (2013:261) opinion is that masculine power emerged in the education hierarchy when issues of literacy became of importance to the country and there was the power to oppress women.

According to a further finding, programmes should be in place focusing on the prevention of domestic violence by addressing cultural issues such as unpacking the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and other gender-related aspects perpetuating the perceived inequality of women to men. Balogun (2010:34), although reaffirming this finding, argues that not all proverbs are demeaning and oppressive to women. Balogun (2010:34) admits a need exists to re-examine or reconstruct African proverbs such as "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" to reprimand or instruct both males and females and not be biased towards one gender. Ushie et al. (2010:75) propose the focus of education should be on early detection of threats of violence. Early recognition of signs and symptoms that may be the consequence of physical and/or mental abuse may lead to early intervention thus preventing possible disability and death resulting from violent acts against women.

The study findings also highlighted that improving the literacy level of all women was of paramount importance. The aim of increasing their literacy levels was not only for the sake of their safety, but also to give them a chance of finding employment to become less dependent on their husbands. When women are educated they may be able to make informed decisions in their families; thus, in the words of a participant, "*so encouraging them [women] to study may change their lives forever*". Jewkes, Flood and Langs' (2014:8), stance is successful prevention of violence against women should include empowerment of women within relationships and across society so that they will understand gender issues which affects their day to day existence. Phaliso (2012:383) points out in the past few women were in powerful employment positions because fathers and the elderly in households (especially in the African community) were not in favour of their daughters or any girl receiving education. It was their belief that a knowledgeable and educated girl-child would not respect her husband.

The implication is that when women are educated there is a strong possibility for her to find employment, earn her own money and be empowered to make decisions to live a life independently from her abusive partner. Having no education, being unemployed and not being self-assertive in decision making means women have no access to resources. They remain subordinate to men in their households and communities leaving them with continuous stress-related health conditions in “societies where there are marked inequalities among men and women, rigid gender roles, and cultural tenets that acknowledge and even promote a man’s superiority with weak or no sanctions against such behaviour” (WHO 2002:16).

### **(ii) Human rights issues**

The study findings showed the participants felt strongly about human rights issues affecting women. They were adamant that all people’s human rights have to be accorded to all citizens in South Africa irrespective of cultural or societal expectations. The Bill of Rights as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stipulates that everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law (RSA 1996:1-5). Unfortunately, as indicated by the current findings and confirmed by Ssenyonjo (2007:39), the instruments used in Africa to protect the human rights of women as well as eliminating all forms of discrimination and harmful practices against women have up to now been unsuccessful since women continuously experience violations of their human rights.

It was also deduced from the findings that cultural issues pose a threat to women’s human rights. It is quite clear from the interpretation of the proverb ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’ that in modern times a woman’s life in society is still enmeshed in gender discriminating practices. It is thus crucial for interventions to be put in place to support women against the oppression emanating from societal expectations. In fact, Balogun (2010:31) confirms African proverbs in particular are viewed as sacred texts which must remain unchanged. But, the author also believes such oppressive proverbs must at least be resisted or reconstructed through education programmes which accommodate and fit also women’s needs.

The participants felt the proverb promotes inequality which is against the Constitution of South Africa. Regarding human rights, Bauer and Taylor (2005) (cited in Scribner & Lambert 2010:46) state the Constitution of the Republic of South African is one of the most inclusive Constitutions in the world because it incorporates individual, social and cultural rights. Owoaje and OlaOlorun (2012:49) add cultural justifications for violence such as the use of proverbs are often made in various settings in many countries around the world. These traditional justifications are impacting on women's rights as well as on their human rights. The inference here is that there should be equality between men and women who must all ensure women's rights are maintained.

### **(b) Support**

The findings of the study revealed supporting each other when there was a need reduced the burden many women carry alone in their marriage. Kamimura, Parekh and Olson (2013:e184) state social support was determined to be an important factor for women who experienced intimate partner violence. Sullivan (2011:355) describes domestic violence support programmes as to enhance justice, autonomy, restoration and safety which in turn enhance physical and psychological safety. Furthermore, Gupta et al. (2012:1065) ascertain that strategies to support women should be implemented and should include economic empowerment of women to improve their decision-making skills within their households and extended families. Green (2010:122) argues because there are various reasons why women decide to stay in an abusive relationship, she needs consistent support in all decision-making undertakings.

Furthermore, according to the findings, open communication with each other among women themselves was paramount. Open communication included being honest and forthwith with each other as women regarding cultural issues and how it trapped them in their marriages. It was also indicated in the findings that women who were trapped needed to be helped to develop a self-concept to improve their self-esteem. To enhance the concept of open communication and improve the reduction of intimate partner violence, OlaOlorun's (2012:51) advocates for both the males and females to liberate themselves from cultural norms such as the use of proverbs by

making use of interventions directed at guiding and assisting couples to communicate freely.

The participants shared they were thankful and felt good about the understanding and support they gave to and received from each other at the social clubs. These monthly meetings served as proof that they needed to communicate and share issues in their lives with others who were in similar situations. The finding confirmed women who were in abusive marriages needed more similar forums in their communities where they could share, support and be encouraged by others who understood the difficulty and complexity of persevering despite unhappiness, abuse and victimisation. Confirming that members of a social club can indeed strengthen a woman's morale, give her courage and support her emotionally, Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000:247) found in their study on the process of recovery and rebuilding among abused women that social involvement facilitates and personal empowerment provides care for each other and serves as an avenue for building partnerships within societies. The authors assert social agencies can become more effective in meeting the needs of abused women by increasing awareness and support. These authors further suggest training workshops and counselling workshops administered by churches can offer much social support to abused women.

The implication is that failing to give each other support as women who are exposed to cultural and societal oppression and feel trapped in their married relationships can result in ill health and health problems such as depression, anxiety, sleeping disorders, and other chronic conditions. Mutual support and open communication among married and single abused women can be the impetus to cultivate a society more supportive of their plight.

### **(c) Emancipation of women**

Emancipation refers to “a state of freedom in choice by first acknowledging the affective experience of oppression while oppression is recognizable when it produces a dilemma in decision-making by socially acknowledging one alternative as superior to the others.” (Wittmann-Price (2004) cited in Wittmann-Price 2006:378).

The findings revealed women not only wanted but also needed to be liberated from cultural practices that were dictating and oppressive to their gender such as the use of the proverb under study. The findings affirmed women did not want to be forced to stay in loveless and abusive marriages; they did not want to be guided by or feel trapped within cultural practices they did not feel comfortable with because some said they experienced it as discrimination. Balogun (2010:25) agrees with the finding. The author states proverbs can indeed play a derogatory role with respect to women and some do perpetuate women's subordination. Tamale (2004:61) proposes without liberating women or empowering them, Africa would not be liberated itself. Balogun (2010:31) believes proverbs are human sayings, and as such, some proverbs are misleading because have been authored by men to inculcate their superiority over women.

Based on the study findings, "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" seems oppressive and perpetuating inequality; therefore, it does not allow women to be freely emancipated. It was evident from the findings that the proverb authored for the subordination of women which prevented them from being on par with their male counterparts. These assertions suggest that in some societies linguistic resources are used to perpetuate inequality between women and men (Hussein 2009:98). A further argument put forward by Hussein (2009:107) is that the majority of the selected proverbs announces women's assumed powerlessness, indecisiveness and lack of intellectuality and infuse loyalty through instilling fear, inferiority and obedience.

Despite the bleak picture painted on women's emancipation by the proverb, some participants did not find anything wrong with it. Instead, they praised it for upholding the values of commitment to marriage by women. These participants felt strongly that the proverb, if used properly, brings sanctity to marriages. Recognising these participants' positive experience of "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi", Moon (2004:1) adds "instead of regarding proverbs as simply a tool to be used, they should be regarded as a deep symbol within culture that reveals the worldview of the people". The author adds an understanding of local proverbs serves to assist in the thinking, reasoning, and valuing patterns of many people practicing culture.

With the awareness, empowerment and support suggested by the participants, it is evident that the process of emancipation of women can be achieved and therefore continuous awareness should be maintained in societies practicing linguistic resources. Again, there is a need for women to critically review the proverbs used to oppress them based on language and culture. This is supported by Froschauer (2014:142) who suggests a critical stance towards gender discrimination is needed, but, the author remarks, it will require an examination of patriarchal and gender principles. Rakoczy (2004:34) agrees a radical change in the mind-set of society is needed because women's homes where they live are centres for abuse instead of places of safety. Men need to acknowledge their role as perpetrators and change their attitude. Conversely, women need to be vocal about how they feel. Rakoczy (2004) also recommends for churches to become more active in transformation through preaching, teaching, providing public advocacy, and counselling.

The implication of the study findings is that women need to be liberated and freed from oppression used against them through culture. Additionally, those who feel that cultural practices such as the use of the proverb are acceptable and necessary also need to be supported. There is, however, a concern that women who cannot handle the pressure and impact of abuse may develop severe stress-related health problems such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes. The implications of stigmatisation, rejection, isolation and self-rejection on the health of women can progress from physical and psychological conditions to severe life-long mental illnesses.

### **4.3. SUMMARY**

The findings were discussed and supported with relevant literature. The related literature assisted with revealing important information on the use of the Setswana proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" ('a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband') and its implications on indigenous African women's health. The themes and sub-themes were relevant to the use of language in the form of culturally inherited proverbs to inspire women to persevere in marriage despite abuse and victimisation.

The next chapter concentrates on the description of the theoretical framework derived from the findings and the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

## **5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ANALOGY OF THE PROVERB “LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI” AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON INDIGENOUS AFRICAN WOMEN’S HEALTH**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 4 the study findings were discussed and supported by a literature control. This chapter deals with the development of the theoretical framework and analogy of the “proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and the implications on indigenous African women’s health based on the findings.

The theoretical framework was informed by Wittmann-Price’s (2004:441-442 ;2006:378) theory of emancipated decision-making and Masenya’s (2004:120 page) “bosadi” (womanhood) approach which positions women’s issues in the centre of the discussions. In addition to the theoretical framework, the researcher used the analogy of the African hut and the sun to give meaning and interpretation to the proverb as experienced by the indigenous African women participants.

### **5.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theoretical framework is the creation and rigorous structuring of ideas which are expressed by symbols to form a conceptual structure (Chinn & Kramer 2008:182). Polit and Beck (2012:128) state a theoretical framework consists of abstract generalisations that offer a systematic explanation about how the constructs of the phenomena under study are interrelated. A theoretical framework is also considered as an abstract; a logical structure of meaning which directs the development of a study and enables the researcher to link the findings to the body of knowledge in nursing (Burns & Grove 2009:126).

This study was qualitative in nature and an inductive process was used to arrive at a theoretical framework relevant to the study. Briefly, this means the researcher conducted the study and the findings were used inductively to build the theoretical

framework. The theoretical framework was constructed by the researcher following the individual and focus group interviews. (See Chapter 2 sections 2.5.2.2 and 2.5.2.4.)

### 5.2.1 Developing the theoretical framework

This study was culturally oriented and explored the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” deeply rooted in the African heritage. The findings revealed the participants identified patriarchy as the source of their challenges.

The development of the theoretical framework relevant to the current study was guided by Masenya’s (2005b:741) African-South African methodology she recommends in her work. Her recommendation to use the African-South African methodology is based on the argument that after South Africa had gained democracy in 1994, Western standards were appropriated to the cultural heritage of the country and all of its citizens. But, according to Masenya (2005b), it is a misapprehension of the uniquely African traditions which form an integral part of the African culture in the continent as well as in South Africa. This ideology prompted Masenya (2005b:741) to develop an African-South African methodology which she named the “bosadi” (womanhood) approach.

Masenya’s (2004:9) “bosadi” approach elicits the African paradigm of looking at women’s needs and concerns by analysing the African culture and liberating African women who experience oppression as a consequence of cultural and religious practices. This approach was developed to revive the elements of African culture which elevate the status of women and to also critique those elements that are oppressive to women (Masenya 2004:121). The researcher initially considered identifying a nursing theory that was congruent with the findings, but it did not fit. However, aligning the findings to the theory of emancipatory decision-making of Wittmann-Price (2004; 2006) was found appropriate and applicable.

Masenya (2004:123) discusses the oppressive elements of the African culture, the positive elements of the African culture, and the significance of the family. These identified features identified are discussed in detail with reference to sketches (Figures 5.2 to 5.9) depicting the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” as inferred to in the study findings. The researcher brought in the features discussed

by Masenya (2004:123) to create a context in which to link Wittmann-Price's (2004:441;2006:379) theory of emancipated decision-making with the study findings. The diagram in Figure 5.1 explains the concepts based on the application of Wittmann-Price's (2004;2006) theory of emancipated decision-making in women's healthcare and some elements of Masenya's (2004:122) "bosadi" approach linking with the findings.

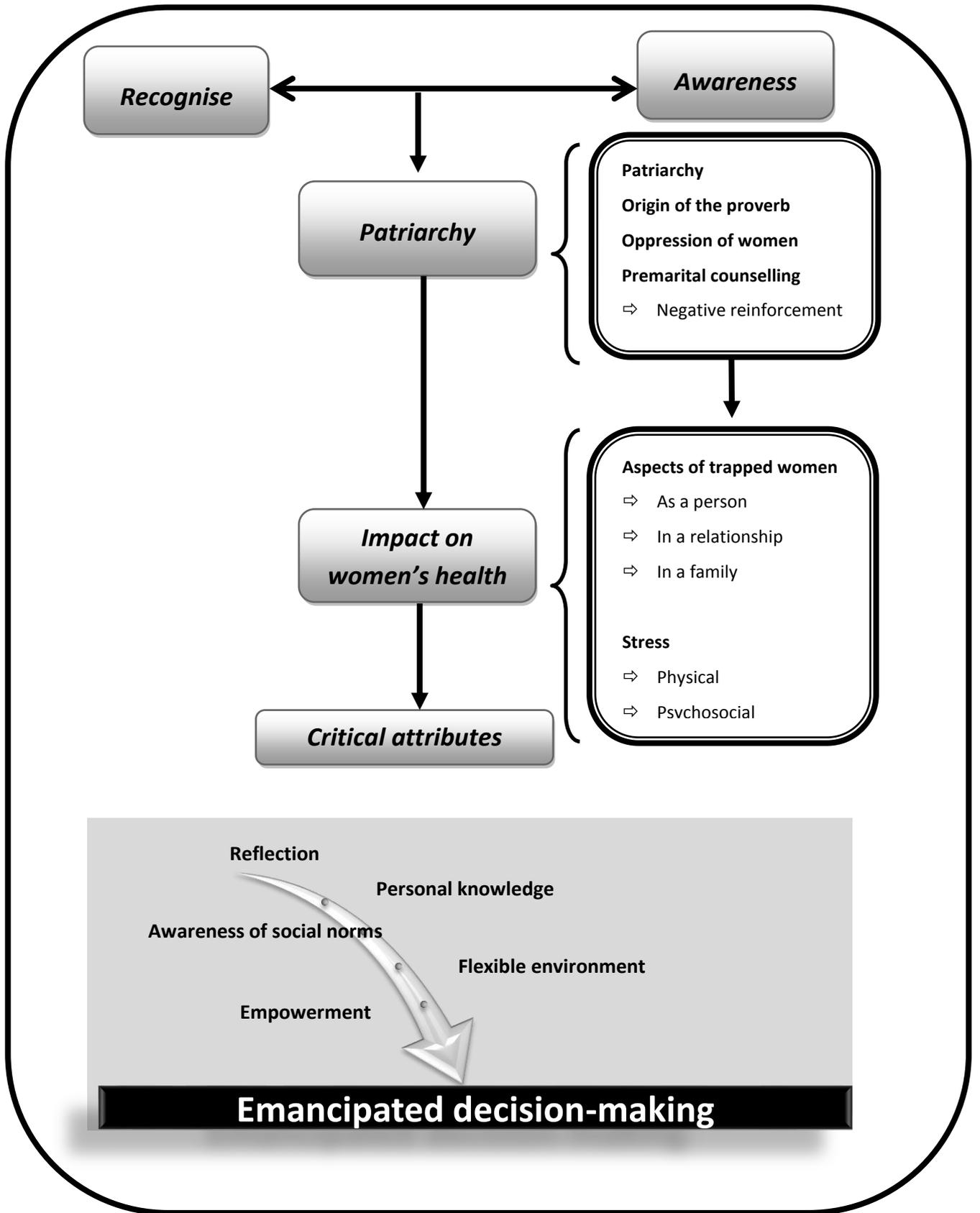


Figure 5.1: Linking of Wittmann-Price's (2004; 2006) emancipated decision-making and Masenya's (2004) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach to the study findings

At the top of the diagram the first two concepts are *Recognise* and *Awareness*. *Recognise* and *Awareness* are linked horizontally to each other by a line ending in an arrowhead on both the left- and right-hand sides. These two concepts are linked to Wittmann-Price's (2004;2006) theory of emancipated decision-making and the contexts, namely, *Patriarchy*, *Aspects of trapped women*, *Stress*, and *Awareness*.

According to Wittmann-Price (2004:441), the first step towards emancipated decision-making is 'to recognise' and 'become aware' of oppressive forces. The reason why the theoretical framework thus starts with *Recognise* and *Awareness* as the first two main concepts is to show how the context of emancipatory decision-making created by Wittmann-Price (2004) is related to the study findings. As explained by Wittmann-Price (2004), antecedents such as oppression must be 'recognised' by individuals or groups when making decisions because it is dehumanising. Subsequent to 'recognising' that oppressive forces exist, individuals or groups should be 'aware' of the types of injustices or unequal power prevailing within the context where women live in a patriarchal society. The assumption is that unequal power as implied in patriarchy reduces the affected persons' self-esteem and further limits their choices in decision-making. Chinn and Kramer (2008:78) agree with Wittmann-Price (2004) by stating emancipatory knowing is the capacity to be aware of injustices and to critically examine why injustices are sometimes not noticed. Astor (1998) cited in Wittmann-Price (2004) affirms having an awareness of the feeling of injustices is necessary to understand oppressive forces.

Moving to the next part of the theoretical framework, the line horizontally connecting the first two main concepts, *Recognise* and *Awareness*, forms a vertical line in the middle with arrowheads linking the two concepts (singularly as well as in combination) with *Patriarchy*, the first context identified. Findings which emerged from *Patriarchy*, namely, origin of the proverb, oppression of women and premarital counselling form a unit in a box located on the right-hand side of *Patriarchy*. This unified block is linked horizontally with *Patriarchy* with a single bracket.

In the theoretical framework *Patriarchy* is viewed as the context wherein the indigenous African women live and experience oppression. *Patriarchy* and the second context, *Impact on women's health*, are linked with each other by means of a

vertical line with arrowheads connecting *Patriarchy* at (at the top) to *Impact on women's health* (at the bottom) and vice versa. The implication is that *Patriarchy* together with its sub-themes impacts on women's health because some women feel trapped and experience stress in their relationships.

The three sub-themes of patriarchy (origin of the proverb, oppression of women and premarital counselling) are linked with a vertical line ending in an arrowhead at the box containing the sub-themes (aspects of trapped women and stress) related to the second context, *Impact on women's health*. This linkage illustrates how the origin of the proverb, the oppression of women and premarital counselling leads to aspects of trapped women and stress.

The sub-themes, aspects of trapped women (as a person, in the relationships, and in the family) and stress (physical and psychological) are located on the right-hand side of the context *Impact on women's health* and horizontally links to it by a bracket ending in an arrowhead on the left-hand side of the horizontal line where it meets *Impact on women's health*. Sharing the same box with aspects of trapped women is the sub-theme stress (physical and psychosocial stress). The box containing both sub-themes (aspects of trapped women and stress) also links horizontally to *Impact on women's health* by means of a singular bracket. The reason for using one box for both sub-themes is to illustrate how women's feelings of being trapped and stressing about their situation merge to impact on their health (as shown by the use of one bracket to link the one box to the context *Impact on women's health*).

In the theoretical framework, the identified sub-themes in each context are linked to each other by means of a vertical line and arrowheads. A combination of lines, arrowheads and brackets are used to connect contexts to and with each other as well as to and with the sub-themes. All of these intermixed connections signify that interplay between and among the various identified elements/constructs of the phenomenon studied are constant and interrelated.

Wittmann-Price (2004:441) raises consciousness by indicating that individuals or groups who are oppressed should be capable of 'recognising' oppression before becoming 'aware' of it in their lives. The context originated from the dialogue and

conversations the researcher had with the participants about the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’) and its implications on indigenous African women’s health. In this instance, both the researcher and the indigenous African women realised oppressive forces were present in the patriarchal society in which the participants lived and that these forces impacted negatively on their health. It is for this reason that the researcher developed the third concept of the theoretical framework namely, *Critical attributes*. According to Wittmann-Price (2004:440-441), oppressive forces usually occur before emancipation. If no oppression exists neither will the need for emancipation exist since the outcome of emancipation is to equalise the power between the oppressor and the oppressed and enabling free choice.

The particular oppressive forces in this study were related to patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, and stress. These forces were seen as compromising indigenous African women’s health causing them to be vulnerable to diseases such as HIV infection due to the power difference in their relationships and stress related disease. Sen and Östlin (2008:7) in fact assert when women are abused they may be at risk of heart diseases, cancers and depression.

Although the proverb under study is directed specifically at married women, 12 participants were not married. However, as indicated in Chapter 3 section 3.3.1.1 and Chapter 4 section 4.2.1.1, the proverb applies to women and girls who are from a young age mentored by society, elders and their mothers that, once married, ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’. As indicated in the findings, some of the single participants in the study had already been exposed to male dominance when being prepared for marriage; others witnessed the definitive impact of the proverb in their mothers’ and female relatives’ marriages.

The developed theoretical framework (see Figure 5.1) secondly illustrates how women living in a patriarchal society and feeling trapped by its cultural traditions can suffer from stress-related health conditions. These findings are linked with the “bosadi” (womanhood) approach of Masenya (2004:123) where patriarchy, aspects of trapped women and stress are linked to oppressive forces present in the African culture. In her “bosadi” perspective, Masenya (2004) explains how such oppressive

forces affect the overall well-being and position in life of women who have to survive in a society where their oppression is one of the “different faces of violence” (Mandela (2002) cited in the WHO 2002:Foreword). Masenya (2004:123) also observes other features (she names them the ‘positive elements’) which can have an impact on women’s lives, for example, the significance of the family. She states in post-Apartheid South Africa the rights of all people has been realised including freedom linked with culture and religion. The human rights pertaining to freedom of culture and religion were related to the positive reinforcement of premarital counselling which is enhanced by the use of the traditionally inherited African proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”. The participants praised the proverb for empowering and encouraging women to uphold the sanctity of marriage in spite of many challenges.

The oppressive elements in African culture alluded to by Masenya (2004:124-125) are linked with patriarchy within which the origin of the proverb was identified by participants as the source of their problems. The origin of the proverb was associated with the societal expectations participants found to be dictating to women’s lives. The oppression of women and premarital counselling were also identified as forming oppressive elements of the African culture because some women felt oppressed by the way premarital counselling was conducted and by the use of the proverb under study.

On the contrary, some participants felt using the proverb during premarital counselling empowered them with positive elements which assisted them to endure and become more resilient in their marriages. These women accepted that even though they were exposed to the harsh realities of marriage, they had to adhere to the proverb which clearly prescribed commitment to marriage and perseverance in all respects. The positiveness elicited in women by the proverb in premarital counselling aligns to the “bosadi” and positive elements of African culture (Masenya 2004:123) which are also aligned to Wittmann-Price’s (2004:441) assertion that once individuals or groups are able to recognise and be aware of oppression, they should be able to progress towards emancipation if they apply the Critical attributes (see discussion in section 5.5.4). As part of the the positive reinforcement, the significance of the family was raised by women who said they were supported by

family members and were therefore able to endure in their relationships irrespective of the oppression and unequal power relations embedded in patriarchy.

Based on Wittmann-Price (2004:441;2006:378;) theory of emancipated decision-making, the participants recognised and were aware of the oppressive elements identified, namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women and stress. Regarding the aspects of trapped women, the participants felt they were trapped as a person, in a relationship and in a family. During the process of being trapped they experienced sufferings, stigma, being stereotyped, physical and mental abuse – but also hope. They said the hardships caused them stress; however, those who clung to hope were encouraged to persevere and becoming resilient in their relationships. Being trapped in their relationships because of living in a patriarchal society impacted on their health and caused immense strain in the form of physical and psychosocial stress as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, sections 3.6 and 4.2.3.

According to Wittmann-Price (2006:378), the third step in the emancipated decision-making theory is *Critical attributes*. Discussing critical attributes, Wittmann-Price (2006:378), asserts they [critical attributes], must be present in women for emancipation in decision-making to occur. The critical attributes described by Wittmann-Price (2006:378) link to the fourth and last theme of the study findings (awareness) and its sub-themes (empowerment of women, education, support, and the emancipation of women).

The attributes developed for the theoretical framework (Figure 5.1) need to be read according to how they appear in the framework. This means the interpretation of the attributes must start at the beginning of the arrow till where the arrowhead ends at the process of emancipated decision-making, namely, reflection, personal knowledge, awareness of social norms, flexible environment, empowerment, and emancipated decision-making. A description of the critical attributes is given in detail in section 5.5.3.

### 5.2.2 Wittmann-Price's emancipation theory

With the advanced technology of today healthcare consumers have easy access to all kinds of information. They are also more knowledgeable about healthcare thus enabled to make informed healthcare choices (Wittmann-Price 2006:377).

The findings of the study indicated the indigenous African women participants were challenged by oppression because they lived in a patriarchal society. Among the participants there was a mutual feeling of being trapped. Some felt trapped in their relationships because they were afraid of being stigmatised if they left or divorced; others felt trapped because family, society and the tradition of “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” encouraged, and to a certain extent forced, them to persevere and be resilient in relationships and marriage. Women of today live in societies where they are expected to abide by cultural rules but also by the rules of modern tenors. This is a precarious situation which can often create social challenges for them. Therefore, it is imperative for these women to be supported to face such challenges and obstacles with dignity, integrity and without losing their own self.

Wittmann-Price (2006:377) developed healthcare frameworks to assist women in making decisions about their healthcare. These frameworks specifically focus on issues concerned with social norms such as experiencing suffering and oppression, aspects of trapped women and stress which compromise their health status. These frameworks enabled Wittmann-Price (2004:437) to develop and define the concept ‘emancipation’ for the promotion of women to make decisions about their own healthcare.

According to Wittmann-Price (2004:437) ‘emancipation’ is a nursing concept that originates from nursing history and the oppression of women in the profession. In essence, emancipation reflects the promotion of women’s decision-making with regard to their own healthcare. Many sub-concepts of emancipated decision-making have been explored by Wittmann-Price (2004:437) including reflection, personal knowledge, social norms, a flexible environment, empowerment, and emancipated decision-making. These sub-concepts applied to awareness as the fourth theme in the study findings and are discussed in this chapter in section 5.5.4.

### 5.2.3 Feminism and Africana Womanism

Hudson-Weems (1993:44) reports most Africana women do not identify themselves as feminists. They argue feminist as a term does not reflect the reality of their struggles. Feminism evolved from an ideology of which the agenda was to meet the needs of a particular group of liberal white women in the United States of America (USA) (Hudson-Weems 1993:47). Masenya (2004:4) agrees the groundwork for feminist theory was laid in Western history and therefore only applies to white women's concerns. Hudson-Weems (1993:48) argues the term "woman" by extension is "womanism" which is far more inclusive and meaningful where gender differences are concerned than the term "feminism" because "only a female of a woman race can be a woman".

Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of indigenous African descent and is grounded in indigenous African culture (Hudson-Weems 1993:48). The reason for using the term 'Africana womanism' is that 'Africana' identifies the ethnicity of the woman under consideration thus establishing her cultural identity; the term also relates directly to her ancestral land which is in Africa (Hudson-Weems 1993).

In a study on African-centred (Africana) womanism, Karenga and Tsuruta (2012:1) argues African-centred or Afrocentric womanism provides an exploration of understanding African-centred womanism as a culturally distinct, self-determined and self-standing domain. Masenya (2004:120) admits existing similarities between feminism and womanism have been noted; however, she emphasises African women must recognise and accept that their framework must be African-oriented. Chilisa (2012:262) concurs with Masenya (2004:120) that postcolonial indigenous feminist research requires researchers to use non-Western research frameworks and that the expressions of patriarchy differ in the different contexts in which it is practised. Since the current study was indigenous in nature, an approach relevant for indigenous women and supported by womanist scholars was used to describe the theoretical framework developed in this study.

Cultural and societal expectations have been linked to changes in women's health in the current study. It is argued that women, and girls in particular, are vulnerable to

human rights abuses and poor health outcomes and as a result they require special attention when issues of global health are planned for (Davidson et al. 2011:873). These authors state despite efforts being made to create gender equality, women remain vulnerable to abuse which impacts negatively on their health.

The findings of the current study indeed indicated that indigenous African women were oppressed into subordination advocated by culture. This finding is supported by Sen and Östlin (2008:4-5) who state men often exercise power over women: men make decisions on their behalf, they control women's behaviour through socially condoned violence, or by threatening violence therefore causing women to experience physical and mental health problems.

Wittmann-Price's (2004:2006) theory of emancipated decision-making and Masenya's (2004) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach as applied to the study findings were used to develop the theoretical framework (see Figure 5.1). The aim with developing this theoretical framework was to make a significant contribution towards nurses' knowledge of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health.

In the following section the analogy of the "proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health and how it contributed to give a deeper meaning to the study findings are presented and discussed in detail.

### 5.3 ANALOGY OF THE "PROVERB LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI"

This section describes the analogy of the "proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" whereby the African hut and the sun was analogically related to the findings of the study to provide a more insightful understanding of how the use and interpretation of the proverb impacted on the participating women's health. The discussion addresses:

- the analogy and analogical reasoning
- reasons for using the analogical reasoning
- the analogical classification framework.

### 5.3.2 The analogy and analogical reasoning

Bailey (2003:132) describes an analogy as “a comparison made between the ideas or things that are different which we use daily in our conversations”. These daily conversations are based on moving from the *known* to the *less known* thus leading to analogical reasoning. According to Gentner and Smith (2012:130), analogical reasoning is the ability to perceive and use relational similarities between two situations. Analogical reasoning is fundamental to human cognition which is an important part of scientific discovery and problem solving. Gentner and Holyoak (1997:32) and Gentner and Smith (2012:130) explain an analogy is a powerful cognitive or thinking mechanism because it enables people to make inferences, generate further inferences, and learn new abstractions. Bailey (2003:133) agrees with the view of Hofstader (1995) (cited in Schwering et al: 2009:175) an analogy involves finding similarities between non-identical relations. This leads to a representation of the domains that view them as similar although they look different at first glance. Analogical reasoning is defined as the “process of identification and transfer of relational structure from a known system/source to a less known system/target” (Vosniadou 1995:298).

In this study the *known* system or source was the African hut and the sun which was analogically compared to the *less known* system or target, namely, the findings of the study: patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress, and awareness (see Figures 5.2 to 5.9). The researcher decided to use the analogy of the African hut and the sun to create a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in human behaviour and to learn about new abstractions dictated by the studied proverb.

### 5.3.3 Reasons for using the analogical reasoning

Orgill and Bodner (2006:1040) conducted a study on the effectiveness of analogies, “An analysis of the effectiveness of analogy use in College-Level Biochemistry textbooks”. The authors found analogies are often used to assist scholars in using information they already understand to develop an understanding of new information. In this study the analogy of the proverb under study and the African hut and the sun was mapped with the findings of the study to develop new knowledge about how the findings impacted on the participant’s health.

The analogical relations of the African hut and the sun to the findings were structurally mapped to arrive at the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under scrutiny (see Figures 5.2 to 5.9) leading to a common relational structure. By using analogical mapping, the researcher had to firstly determine the similarities between two situations (the *known* system or source and the *less known* system or target) and thereafter bring across further inferences from the *known* source (the African hut and the sun) to the *less known* target (the findings of the study). For analogical research to take place, Gentner (1993) (cited in Gentner & Smith 2012:131) maintains structure mapping principles have to be considered because it aligns the two situations based on their commonalities – especially their common relational structure – and the projected inferences from the base to the target.

- **Alignment**

Alignment is “when two situations are being compared and aligned on the basis of the relational structure” (Gentner & Smith 2012:130). Analogy entails finding a structural alignment or mapping the representations and projecting inferences from one analogue to the other. When the two situations are aligned, there has to be matching of large, deeply-connected systems and not only simply making relational matching of one pair of items but also establishing correspondence (Bach 2012:350; Gentner & Holyoak 1997:32). Bach (2012) further notes when aligning two representations, a common relational structure with corresponding arguments usually emerges.

Alignment implied in this study that the African hut and the sun were compared and aligned on the basis of their relational structure even if they were not similar in structure. Finding the structural alignment by comparing the African hut and the sun with the findings assisted the researcher to establish relationships while systematic correspondence and their corresponding arguments were also matched (see Figures 5.2 to 5.9).

- **Inference**

Analogies allow researchers to make “new inferences or new knowledge about the target relating it to the domain or base/source” (Gentner & Smith 2012:132). Furthermore, inferences that are consistent with the matching structure between the

base and the target are preferred because once the base and target has been aligned the inference will bring new meaning. Gentner and Holyoak (1997:33) state mapping allows analogical inferences to be made about the target; therefore, it creates new knowledge to ensure better understanding of both the target and the source.

The implication for the study is that the researcher compared the African hut and the sun to the study findings and made inferences by relating them to the findings of the study to understand the findings better. Specifically comparing the structure and purpose of the African hut to the findings allowed for inferences to be drawn, for example, the roof, poles, thatch and ropes were compared to patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress and awareness. The relational similarities were done and it brought new insights into understanding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health.

- ***Reason for using the African hut as an analogy***

The legacy of the African hut is widely acknowledged among the African inhabitants of the continent. For centuries a hut was not only the dwelling place for all the members of a family, but it also provided them with shelter. With walls made from the very earth people live on, it provides a living space and protects them against the wind, sun and rain (Steyn 2013:241).

Many African societies proudly preserve their traditional dwellings which consist of a number of circular, domed, single-room buildings (Steyn & Roodt 2003:205). A typical hut (also known as a ‘rondavel’) has a thatched roof, is constructed of earth walls and has a thick wooden framed door. Because of its shape, it is often referred to as “cone-on-cylinder” house type (Naudé 2007:216). This author reports huts (‘rondavels’) are still erected and inhabited in the northern interior of South Africa. It is the most universal form for traditional houses in Africa; in South African these are the homes in which most indigenous black families live (Naudé 2007).

The second reason for using the structure of the African hut as an analogy is its resilience as an African settlement. Its physical configuration has the capability to respond to and accommodate different environmental and cultural contexts (Steyn & Roodt 2003:208). The complex value systems in which customs and family values are honoured and transferred through generations are depicted in the location, arrangement and structure of the huts in a community (Steyn 2006:24). It offers protection against the different climates and also the various quick climatic changes that occur in the country.

The resilience of the hut was used to explain the inherent power women have which enable them to be the cornerstones of their families. A hut has been the home of a woman for hundreds of years. As the home, it has always had and still has significant meaning to all family members who live in it and who share the same familial values and norms. Although in present times many women do not reside in huts (but in modern establishments), the traditional African hut was used as a reminder of inherited cultural norms and values and what it means to women of African descent. The indigenous African women in the current study did relate to the origin of the ancient proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”; some appreciated its meaning while other participants experienced it as discriminating against women because its meaning instructed them to be committed and persevere in the presence of abuse.

Steyn (2013:242) explains families live in a hut of which “walls are formed on sticks neatly plastered over with a composition of sandy clay and fresh manure from the cattle-compounds or grass cut into small pieces”. Sometimes it does not have windows. It has only one thick wooden door. The hut provides a meeting place for family members who come together whenever there are family functions to observe their culture and perform different activities. Socialisation, in the context of the current study particularly the transfer of cultural beliefs and values, takes place through the practise of cultural norms, values and beliefs such as proverbs and sayings which are inculcated to family members in the privacy of their own hut. Steyn (2013:247) asserts a hut has an intrinsic allocation of gender-based responsibilities and spaces. The family hut also provides the privacy which each family requires for carrying out their own rituals if they want to.

- **Reason for using the sun in the analogy**

The sun gives life to humans, animals and plants. Moan et al. (2008:668) state the sun provides people with vitamin D which is essential for prevention of diseases such as cardiovascular and neurological diseases among others. According to Holick (2006:49), vitamin D (known as the ‘sunshine vitamin’) “has been recognized for almost 100 years as being essential for bone health and also provides calcium and phosphorus for the skeleton”. Therefore, the more people are exposed to the sun, the more vitamin D is absorbed. Moan et al. (2008:671) are in agreement with Stanton et al. (2004:369) that moderate exposure to the sun’s rays has more beneficial than adverse effects on a person’s health.

Deciding to use the analogy of the sun, the researcher opted to focus on its brightness rather than its health-related quality – she used the bright, life-giving sun as an analogy to resemble a positive, bright future filled with happiness which is related analogically to the increased awareness, empowerment, support and emancipation of women.

#### **5.3.4 Analogical classification framework**

The researcher used the following analogical classifications of Orgill and Bordner’s (2006:1051) framework to further guide the analogical reasoning for using the African hut and the sun and relating them to the findings of the study:

- the presentation format
- the level of abstraction of the analogy and target concepts.

In this study the hut and the sun were mapped to invoke relational similarities. Although they did not have the same attributes as the findings of the study, the principle that good analogies do not require compared items to be attributionally similar advocated by Bach (2012:349) was applied when mapping the hut and the sun. The analogy was used to see how situations were similar and bringing further inferences from the *known* source (the African hut and the sun) to the *unknown* target (the study findings). The main themes of the findings, namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress, and awareness are depicted in Figures 5.2 to 5.9.

- **Presentation format**

Orgill and Bodner (2006:1055) point out analogies contain pictorial representations of the analogy. They add there is only one analogy in both verbal and pictorial format. In this section the verbal and pictorial representations depicting the African hut, the sun and the findings (patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress, and awareness) are presented in an analogical format. Gentner and Smith (2012:130) establish that during the presentation of an analogy, analogical mapping occurs in either of the base or the target and that the inferences are made from the base or source from where the explanatory structure is drawn.

In this study the analogical inferences were drawn from the most familiar domain (the African hut and the sun) and the less familiar target (the findings of the study) (Schwering et al. 2009:175). These two dissimilar domains were seen as similar based on their relational structure: in other words, integrating the various cognitive abilities of the dissimilar domains together as similarities resulted in learning and transfer. To support the reasons for the use of the analogy to derive new knowledge, Duit (1991), Gentner (1983) and Glyn (1991) (cited in Harrison & de Jong 2005:1136) argue when an analogical model is used to construct new knowledge, the analogy or source usually refers to processes carried out daily that map on to structures or processes in the target or scientific concept encouraging scientific inquiry. The source and the target were mapped in the graphical presentations using Masenya's (2004:120) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach to produce some inferences.

- **Level of abstraction**

The analogies presented in this chapter are all considered concrete. According to Orgill and Bodner (2006:1051), an analogy is considered concrete when it is easy for the readers to see, hear or be able to touch, read and use it. To further clarify the analogies presented in this chapter all themes have been mapped into a picture format representing the analogy of the proverb under study using the African hut and the sun based on findings of the study (Orgill & Bodner 2006:1051) (see Figures 5.2 to 5.9).

#### **5.4 GUIDE TOWARDS THE USE OF MASENYA'S (2004) "BOSADI" (WOMANHOOD) APPROACH IN THE ANALOGY**

Masenya's (2004:120) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach was used to formulate the analogy of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its relation to the African hut and sun to the findings of the study. The researcher chose some of the main aspects of Masenya' (2004:123) comprehensive perspective to guide the analogical development from a comprehensive perspective:

- "bosadi"(womanhood) and oppressive elements of African culture
- "bosadi" (womanhood) and positive elements of African culture
- "bosadi" (womanhood) and the significance of a family

##### **5.4.1 "Bosadi" (womanhood) and oppressive elements of African culture**

When discussing the "bosadi" approach, Masenya (2004:124) criticises the oppressive elements of African culture. She states culture has been sexist for millennia; from even before the challenges of colonialism surfaced during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ross 2008:3). According to her, colonialism only further complicated the lives of women who were already experiencing difficult social conditions under the pretext of culture.

Masenya's "bosadi" or womanhood approach was aligned with the study findings which identified patriarchy, aspects of trapped women and stress as the main sources of women's challenges in marriage. These identified challenges were presented in the form of findings and are identified and explained in the analogical reasoning (see Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.6).

##### **5.4.2 "Bosadi" (womanhood) and positive elements of African culture**

The "bosadi" approach deals with indigenous African women's liberation from African cultural aspects. Although the study findings included many oppressive elements of the African culture, Masenya (2004:123) explains each culture contains both positive and the negative elements which are generally accepted by communities. For this reason, the positive aspects of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" are described under the concept of the "bosadi" approach as a phenomenon that has

positive elements of the African culture (Masenya 2004:122). These positive elements are highlighted during premarital counselling and are experienced by some indigenous women as bringing about positive reinforcement in marriage (see Figure 5.5).

#### 5.4.3 “Bosadi” (womanhood) approach and the significance of a family

The significance of the family is also described as a positive element of African culture because the family plays an important role in African families (Mbiti (1989) cited in Masenya 2004:124). Some of the participants indicated the importance of family support. They said it was only through the support of their families that they were able to persevere and have resilience in their marriages. This is discussed thoroughly in section 5.5.1.1 (see Figure 5.5).

### 5.5 ANALOGY

An overview of the analogical four processes comprising the four components of the African hut and the sun and how they analogically related to the findings of the study to provide a more insightful understanding of how the use and interpretation of the proverb impacted on the participating women’s health is summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Brief description of the overview of the analogical processes depicted in Figure 5.2

COMPONENTS OF THE AFRICAN HUT AND SUN	THEMES AND SUB-THEMES
<b>5.3.1 Component 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The roof with big and small poles</li> <li>• Thatch fastened to the poles with ropes</li> </ul>	<b>Patriarchal system:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Origin of the proverb</li> <li>• Oppression of women</li> <li>• Pre-marital counselling</li> </ul>
<b>5.3.2 Component 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughter-in-law trapped inside the hut</li> <li>• Wooden heavy door locked</li> <li>• No windows</li> </ul>	<b>Aspects of trapped women:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a person</li> <li>• In a relationship</li> <li>• In the family</li> </ul>

<p><b>5.3.3 Component 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The door still locked and the woman is trapped inside causing her stress</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stress:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical</li> <li>• Psychosocial</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.3.4 Component 4:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sun is shining on all inhabitants of the house indicating awareness</li> <li>• The heavy door is opened</li> <li>• All inhabitants including the daughter-in-law are outside the hut</li> <li>• Trapped woman is able to use critical attributes of Wittmann-Price leading to emancipated decision-making, namely, reflection, personal knowledge, awareness of social norms, flexible environment, and empowerment of women towards decision-making</li> </ul>	<p><b>Awareness:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment of women</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Emancipation</li> </ul>

### 5.5.1 Overview of the analogy

The four themes and nine sub-themes identified in the findings are analogically depicted in pictorial format in Figures 5.2 to 5.9. Every component of the African hut and sun used as analogy and how it relates to the themes and sub-themes presented in Table 5.1 are discussed in depth.

Figure 5.2 depicts in pictorial format an overview of the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”.

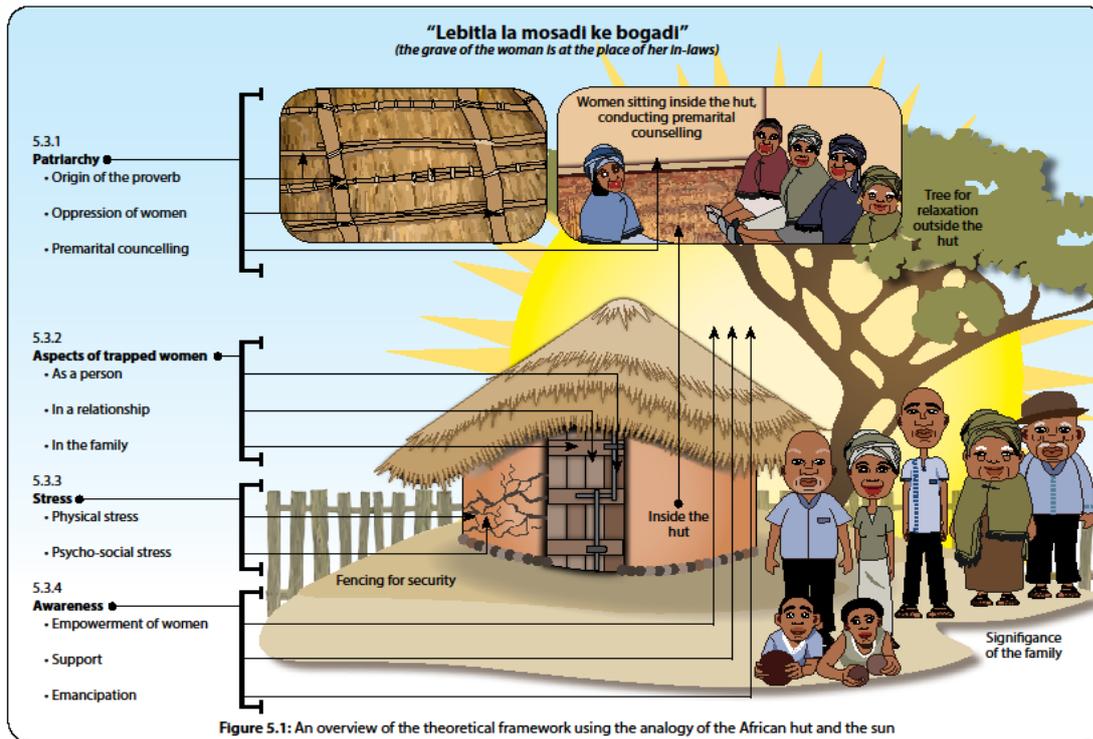
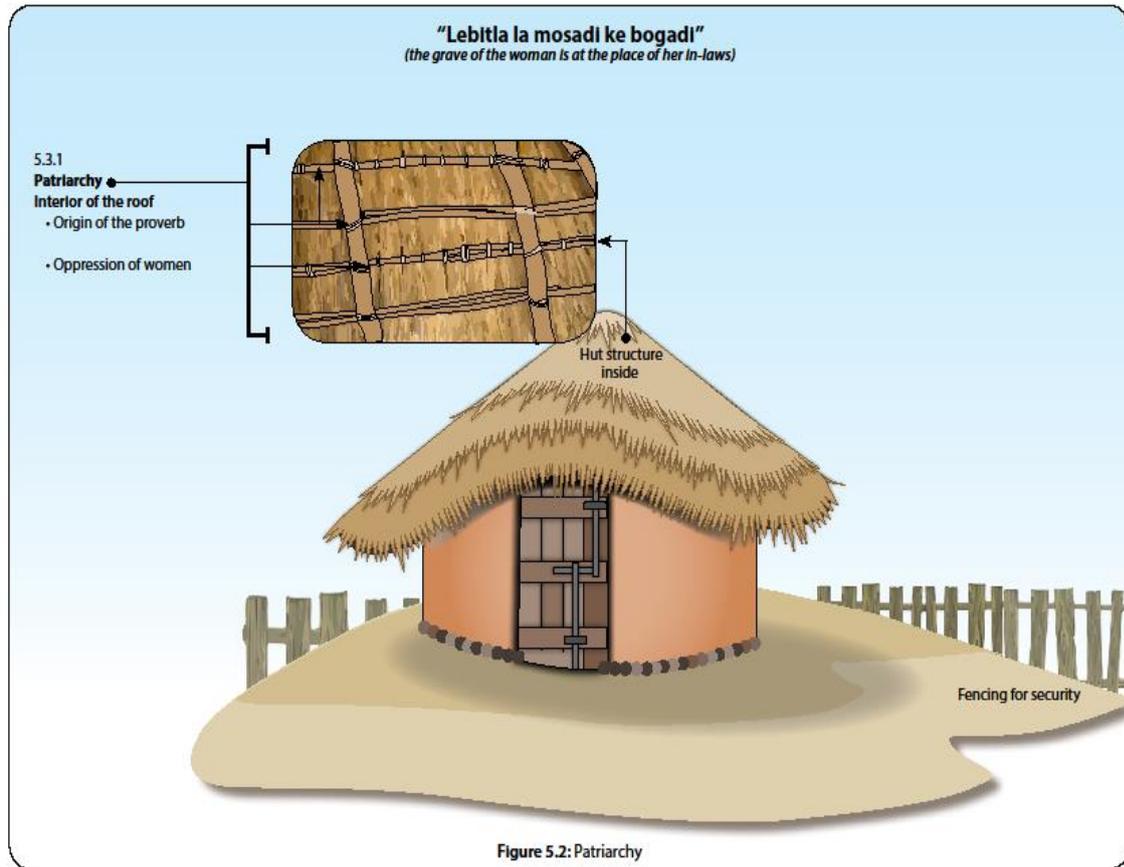


Figure 5.2: Overview of the analogy of the “proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”

The analogy of proverb under study is depicted by the African hut and the sun which is the source or base in relation to patriarchy (Figure 5.3) which is the analogical target (Gentner & Smith 2012:130).

### 5.5.1 1 Patriarchy



**Figure 5.3: Patriarchy**

In the analogy, patriarchy is mapped as the interior part of the hut where all the cultural issues are practised under one roof (see Figure 5.3). The shadowing and overarching shape of the hut is viewed as a part of the structure of the hut that analogically resembles the patriarchal system; a system of male authority oppressing women through its social and cultural expectations. The roof infers to patriarchal rules that are difficult to penetrate, thus leading to oppression of women due to the inequality between men and women.

The target (findings under patriarchy) has sub-themes, namely: *the origin of the proverb*; *oppression of women* and *premarital counselling* (the latter comprises negative as well as positive reinforcement). This analogical mapping of the hut, patriarchy and the sub-themes describes the “bosadi” (womanhood) approach and the oppressive elements of African culture on women as indicated by Masenya (2004:124).

### **5.5.1.1.1 Origin of the proverb**

The interior poles support the roof of the hut just as many proverbs protect African cultures and support the patriarchal system. The thick, long and thin, short poles in the interior analogically depict the origin of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”. All the poles are intricately tied together to form a strong framework supporting the roof. Similarly, societal expectations and familial rules and belief systems (thinner poles) are intertwined with age-old cultural traditions including adherence to the prescriptions of ancient proverbs such as ‘a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband’ which was seen by participants as promoting inequality and subordination of women. The thick, strong poles also indicate some of the cultural rules originated many decades ago. They cannot be reconstructed because they have been operational for a long time in societies. These as well as the thinner poles infer to biased stereotypes used against women which impacts on their self-worth leading to health consequences which are linked to endurance, anxiety and increased stressed levels. The poles are essential parts of the roof structure; if they are weak the roof will collapse or be blown away by strong winds. The inference is that patriarchy is upheld by culture just as the roof is kept up by big and small poles (Sternberg & Rifkin 1979:197).

Ragni and Strube (2014:39) state an analogy assists researchers to think about the relational patterns and transfer knowledge from one domain to the other. Therefore, as signified in the findings of this study, in a patriarchal society ancient cultural rules are still used to encourage women to persevere in their marriage despite unbearable challenges. When they persevere they often do so at the expense of their own health. They can develop acute and chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus and depression – especially those who are dependent on their husbands for support (see Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.1). This finding aligns with Masenya’s (2004:138) approach that proverbs were created to favour men and do not consider women’s needs (see Figure 5.3). Hudson-Weems (1998) (cited in Shamble-Ebron & Boyle 2004:16) confirm patriarchy remains the bedrock of indigenous communities and resolving it will take a collaborative effort by both women and men.

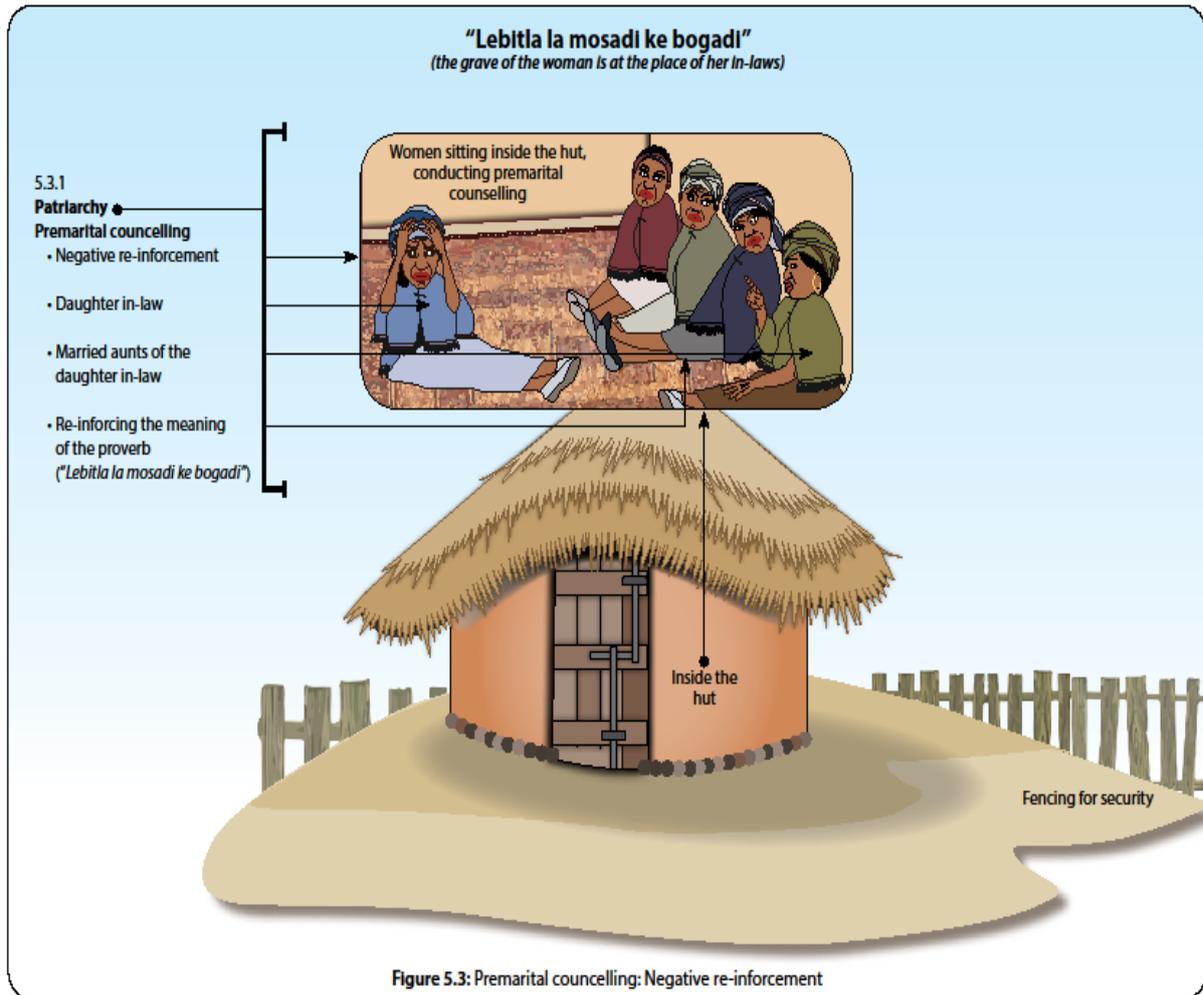
### **5.5.1.1.2      *Oppression of women***

When women are oppressed and undermined they tend to be depressed, develop a low-self-esteem and are vulnerable to abuse. They develop physical, emotional and psychological conditions which can affect their well-being (Ondicho 2013:106). Analogically, Figure 5.3 represents the oppression of women which is depicted by the ropes used to tightly fasten the grass to the poles. Without these ropes the grass will be blown away by the wind. The roof is neatly woven with ropes in such a way that it does not leave holes, therefore ensuring that nothing can come in through the roof. The roof thus protects the contents and the inhabitants from external forces such as rain, wind, heat, and others. The ropes used to fasten the poles are analogically related to societal expectations or the rules in a patriarchal society which dictate the low position of women and their subordination to men through proverbs and other means.

The inference is that the policies promoting subordination and inequality of women to men are seen to be oppressive to women and make them feel inferior. Most participants experienced cultural rules and regulations as oppressive because they were sometimes forced to conform to expectations as prescribed by the proverb under study. Promoting the superiority of the husband (male), the participants felt the proverb contributes to women feeling inferior, insignificant and unworthy thus emotionally abused (see Chapter 4, section 4.2.1.2). The participants further indicated a woman oftentimes becomes so involved in her many duties that she forgets about herself. This leads to exhaustion, fatigue and stress because she is also culturally expected to take care of all others in the household (the in-laws and other family members) as well as her household chores.

### **5.5.1.1.3      *Premarital counselling***

The study findings revealed premarital counselling was experienced by the majority of participants as negative while some perceived it as the positive reinforcement of women's perseverance in marriage. Firstly, Figure 5 depicts premarital counselling as a negative reinforcement.



**Figure 5.4: Premarital counselling and its negative reinforcement**

*i) Negative reinforcement*

Figure 5.4 depicts the analogy of the African hut with the bride sitting face down and deep in thought about what she is being told by elders (elders, married aunts) during premarital counselling. The door of the hut is closed indicating premarital counselling takes place in privacy, behind closed doors to ensure what is being discussed is heard only by those involved in the counselling of the bride. Nobody can enter from the outside inferring modern tendencies or people who do not follow traditional rules are locked out. The fence around the house reinforces this aspect.

Some participants reiterated “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” emphasises that no married woman can return to her maternal home or divorce her husband but has to stay at the place (home) of her in-laws until she dies. The participants experienced this as negative and oppressive to women. They also felt the proverb deprived

women of their rights. In her “bosadi” approach, Masenya’s (2004:125) discusses other oppressive forces which are similar to the negative effects of premarital counselling such as sexism and the African culture. Masenya (2004:124) states further women have been disadvantaged by culture for decades. Preaching perseverance and obedience in marriage as prescribed by the proverb is in line with Nash’s (2006:197) findings that wifely submission is associated with appeasing religious commitments and also earning the husband’s respect.

The new “makoti” (bride) sits alone in front of a row of elders and aunts are all instructing her on how to behave in marriage (Figure 5.4). Forming a row indicates they are all of a similar status with regard to upholding traditions and being knowledgeable about it. It further implies they are unified in their belief that, in marriage, the bride has to be obedient and submissive. This submissiveness is also present in the fact that all are sitting on the floor on the same level as the “makoti” which shows as a bride she is joining the ranks of mature married women who is expected to follow traditional rules just as they have to.

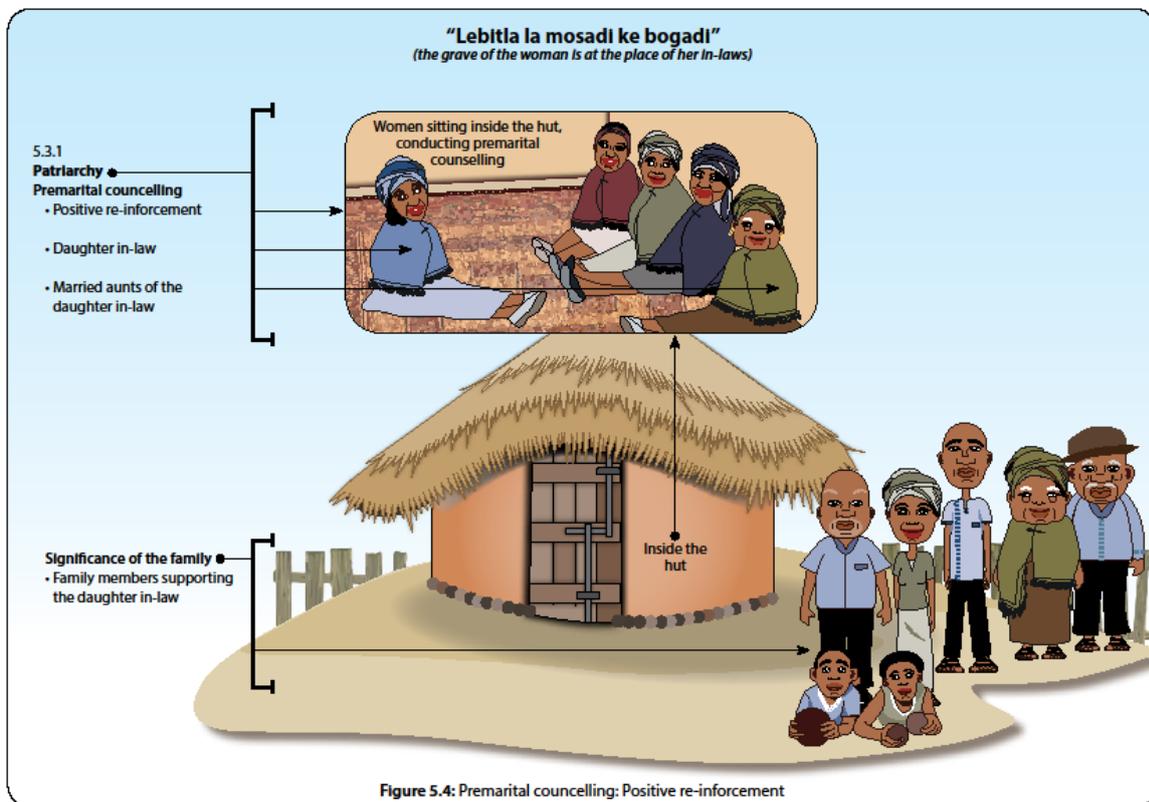
When a married woman is disempowered by the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” to deal with the oppressive forces in her marriage she has no other option but to endure it. She can develop acute and chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, stress, depression as well as exposure to HIV and AIDS (Chitando 2003:151). The patriarchal system allows her no control over her life; she cannot make her own decisions, is not allowed to give input in any family matters and has no bargaining power to ensure safe sex.

As seen in Figures 5.3 and 5.4, the hut is surrounded by a fence. Analogically, the fence reflects her isolation from her neighbours, her own family and society. She lives in a lonely world behind closed doors where nobody can see her suffering and unhappiness. These two analogically mapped sketches (Figures 5.3 and 5.4) testify to the fact that the proverb under study was used to inculcate issues of obedience, commitment and perseverance in marriage in all circumstances and under all conditions while keeping silent about it.

The “makoti” also analogically appears worried about the instructions she receives; she turns her face to the side and holds her hands to her head as if to avoid her bleak future. She may be alarmed by being told she can never come home because they fear stigma and embarrassment should she return. She may therefore feel she is being deserted by her own family.

ii) *Positive reinforcement*

Figure 5.5 analogically depicts premarital counselling as a positive reinforcement for the bride to keep her marriage vows.



**Figure 5.5: Premarital counselling: Positive reinforcement**

In Figure 5.5 the aunts are not sternly instructing her, but seem satisfied. The new bride seems more relaxed and positive about her marriage because she has the support of the family. This is in line with Masenya’s (2004:123) view of positive reinforcement where the “makoti” perceives the proverb as bringing hope (a positive element) into her life. Some participants shared the proverb had a positive influence in their lives and brought harmony into their homes.

In Figures 5.2 and 5.3 a strong roof protects the inhabitants against the elements of nature from the outside. This is analogically similar to the cultural principles cherished by some women who view it as a positive element helping them to uphold the sanctity of marriage. The findings of the current study evidenced many abused women felt trapped in their marriage (or relationship) because they were financially dependent on their husbands (or partners) (Ondicho 2013:109). Practising the perseverance and resilience embedded in the meaning of the studied proverb helped them to move away from their pain, focus on the positive aspects of their lives and finding happiness in the fact that they are living up to the cultural expectation of a married woman (O’Leary 1998:426). The participants who had the support of friends and other support systems shared that they experienced less stress and were able to bounce back with fewer health problems and a better quality of life (Hegarty et al. 2013:255).

As part of the roof which represents the patriarchal system, positive reinforcement of pre-marital counselling is analogically similar to the grass or thatch (see Figure 5.3) used to layer the roof of the hut (Gentner & Holyoak 1997:33). The inference is that the grass creates an impenetrable layer as it has been put together using thick buds with their long ends facing downwards to allow the free flow of water. One bunch of the grass is put on top of the other and fastened to the poles with strong ropes; it is tightly woven in a way that prevents leaks or anything from outside to penetrate it. This represents premarital counselling which is guided by the use of language and proverbs to seal the process of marriage and encourage commitment throughout marriage.

Culture is solely practised during this process. The delegation of elders (usually aunts) carrying out the procedure of premarital counselling are all married and experienced about traditional cultural practices. Allowing them to conduct the premarital counselling ensures that the teachings given to the bride are culture-based and well respected. The premarital counselling further demonstrates the extent to which culture is respected and practised by all before, during, and after the wedding ceremony.

Taking counsel inside the hut is analogically related to the preparation of the roof of the hut which requires thorough planning and hard work to make sure that it is strong and will protect the family living inside. This analogy is in line with Ellece's (2011:43) assertion that a woman who has not gone through the ritual advice is not considered a real woman. Premarital counselling is therefore regarded as pivotal because it brings positive reinforcement to the marriage and ensures that couples have a solid foundation to base their relationship on. The positive reinforcement of the proverb was mentioned by some participants as bringing hope to women who experience marital problems; also persevere because they are prepared to uphold the cultural values related to marriage as signified by the tough, strong roof. Such women, according to the participants, were prepared to stay married despite the challenges they faced which rendered them vulnerable to physical and psychosocial diseases and illnesses.

#### **a) *The significance of a family***

According to Mbiti (1989) (cited in Masenya 2004:124), the concept "bosadi" (womanhood) elevates the importance of the family and still plays a significant role in African culture. Figure 5.5 depicts the significance of the family with the mother- and father-in-law, brothers- and sisters-in-law and the children representing the family who provide support to the daughter-in-law. Premarital counselling is taking place inside the hut and the new "makoti" shows signs of happiness and appreciation because she has a new family to care for.

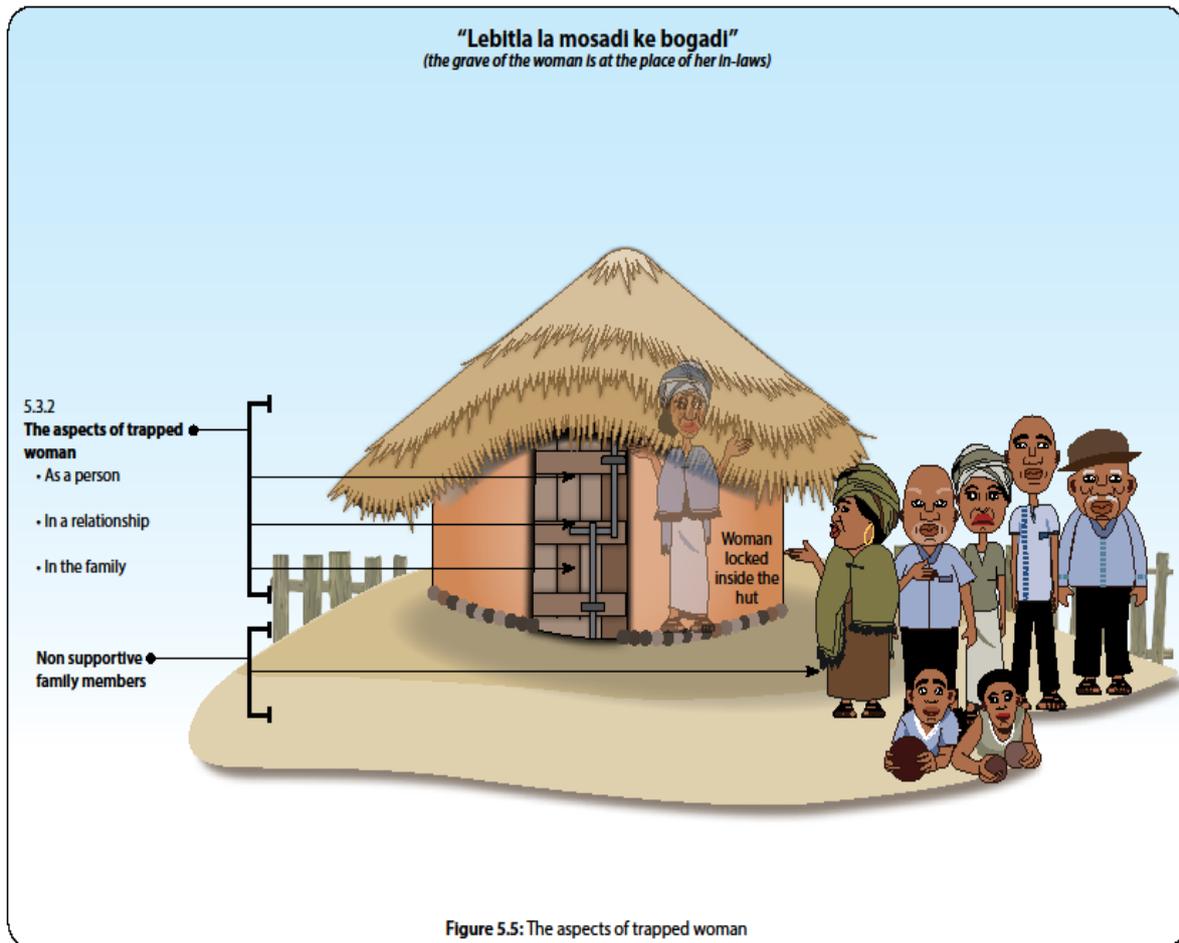
Acknowledging that the new "makoti" is happy about her commitment to her marriage, Masenya (2004:124) raises the issue of the sacredness of marriage in her "bosadi" approach by emphasising that acceptance and support of the daughter-in-law will promote the sanctity of marriage. Conversely, if the new family shows disdain and abuses her, it can lead to bitterness and disharmony in her marriage as well as in the family circle. The participants shared many indigenous African women expected to encounter difficult times in their marriage because they witnessed it in their mothers' lives, yet they were ready and willing to build their own families because they believed in holding fast to the culture of perseverance and endurance as prescribed by "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi".

Those participants who had a support system in the form of friends and family members could persevere in their marriage and relationship marriage (Hegarty et al. 2013:255). Masenya (2004:124) explains family relationships are necessary and important support systems in societies and to be married and have a family is viewed as having prestige in African culture. Some participants confirmed Masenya's stance by highlighting that their in-laws were helpful and supportive during troubled times therefore they were able to survive and endure.

### 5.5.2 ASPECTS OF TRAPPED WOMEN

The theme aspects of trapped women identified *trapped as a person, in a relationship, and in the family* as sub-themes. In Figure 5.6 non-supportive family members are depicted on the side of the house while the daughter-in-law is trapped inside the hut. The aspect of trapped women has been aligned with Masenya's (2004:124) oppressive elements in African culture which she ascribes to the fact that African women have historically always been marginalised on the basis of, for example, ethnicity and sexual discrimination. In the current study, some indigenous African women were abused and experienced suffering.

The identified three aspects of trapped women are discussed in sections 5.5.2.1, 5.5.2.2 and 5.5.2.3. Figure 5.6 depicts the aspects of trapped women.



**Figure 5.6: Aspects of trapped women**

### 5.5.2.1 As a person

Figure 5.6 represents the entrapment of the married woman locked behind a wooden door in the hut with no windows. The inhabitants of this hut are the husband, the in-laws and the daughter-in-law. With the heavy door which cannot be easily opened and no windows there is very little or no ventilation. Analogically, it creates a stifling environment which may have a physiological effect on the indigenous African woman’s life predisposing her to poor health. Inside there are certain expectations from her husband and the in-laws (based on culture and the expectations of society) about how the married woman should behave in marriage as a person. Because of these expectations, the in-laws and sometimes the husband act as a barrier to the daughter-in-law’s (wife’s) ventilation and causes her as a person to suffocate inside the hut which compromises her health.

The daughter-in-law is shown as a shadowy single figure inside the hut signifying an isolated and entrapped person. Being trapped as a person was described by the participants as having been exposed to physical and psychological suffering, experiencing social stigma, gender stereotypes and perseverance/resilience as well as widow inheritance. The suffering that goes on inside the hut affects the daughter-in-law's health. She cannot go out of the locked door to seek help from either her family or friends. No other huts are in the vicinity thus emphasising her isolation from her family, the community and friends. She therefore has to carry her burden alone. Participants shared they had no support in the form of friends, family or support structures.

It was indicated by the participants there were times some contemplated suicide; suicide attempts or the wish to die were also mentioned. It was further shared that abused women who were pregnant had repeated abortions due to stress. Gender stereotypes directed towards the daughter-in-law causes her to continuously suffer alone inside the hut which led to anxiousness and fear resulting in a low self-esteem and having no self-worth. Conversely, in other cases perseverance and the hope that sometime in the future her life will be better, keeps women in their marriages. The aspect of being trapped as a person supports Rakoczy's (2011:34) argument that the home of the married woman, which should be a safe haven and secure place for her, often turns out to be a dangerous place. This oppressive atmosphere is due to violence perpetuated by patriarchy and by Christian families who abide by biblical verses specifically used to oppress women.

### **5.5.2.2 In a relationship**

Figure 5.6 depicts an analogic picture of a woman who is trapped in her relationship because she was counselled and informed about the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi". She has a non-supportive family including her husband and is locked inside the hut with nowhere to go. Her environment is ruled by a patriarchal system and cultural stereotypes prevail inside the hut. Cultural stereotyping is complex and cannot be changed overnight. This situation leaves the new bride as well as many women who have been married for a longer time feeling trapped because they cannot challenge cultural stereotypes but are forced to live up to traditional cultural expectations.

Facing continuous disrespect and abuse the situation inside the hut compromises the daughter-in-law's health. When her suffering escalates, she can be severely hurt or even killed. She is unhappy and not assertive in her relationship with her philandering husband and therefore highly vulnerable to contract STIs and HIV and AIDS. She feels hopeless and intimidated and is angry, filled with resentment and constantly anxious about her sexual health. The cultural intimidating environment inside the hut adds to fears and worries about her health. For example, her anxiety of being infected with HIV and AIDS never abates because is not allowed to refuse sex even if her husband is unfaithful and may be infected with the HIV virus.

The daughter-in-laws' agony is kept alive through language; proverbs and songs about praising gender inequalities and the submissive role of the daughter-in-law are used during premarital counselling and sung at weddings. The use of songs and proverbs is aligned to Ellece's (2011:47) statement relating to marriage where "a wife's tolerance is reinforced in the wedding songs which forewarn the bride of the hardships she will encounter in marriage".

Once the woman is inside the hut (married) there are unwritten laws and rules prescribed by culture and patriarchy which she must abide by. These include "never disobeying or arguing with the man, questioning him about money or girlfriends, not having food ready on time, not caring adequately for the children or the home, refusing to have sex" (WHO 2002:16). Masenya's (2004:142) "bosadi" approach also alludes certain proverbs warn women to keep silent about what happens in their relationships. These proverbs advocate women are inferior to men; therefore they must blindly follow rules, never ask questions, and demonstrate total obedience despite abuse. This they have to endure in silence and never share it with anyone else.

The participants shared when a woman has to face all the physical and emotional challenges in her marriage constantly alone and without sharing, it makes her feel powerless and humiliated. According to the WHO (2002:16), "controlling behaviours such as isolating a person from family and friends or restricting access to information and assistance" forms a major part of interpersonal domestic violence.

If the abuse continuous over long periods (which is the expected scenario depicted by 'a woman's grave is at the place/home of her husband') and she cannot escape, she intentionally or unintentionally develops other ways to help her cope. In support of the finding, Chaundri, Morash and Yingling (2014:156) state women resort to varying strategies to address abuse. It includes keeping silent, avoidance, hiding the fact that they are contemplating suicide, and sometimes they decide to seek help.

### **5.5.2.3 In a family**

Figure 5.6 analogically depicts the daughter-in-law trapped alone inside the hut. The locked door forces her to stay inside while all the other family members are outside. The mother-in-law stretches her arm towards the hut where her daughter-in-law is. The palm of her hand faces up in an enquiring gesture as if to indicate that she, as an older woman who has persevered, does not understand her daughter-in-law's unhappiness. Alternatively, this gesture may also mean that she is complaining to the rest of the family about her daughter-in-law's behaviour or saying to her son he cannot only provide for his wife but must see to his mother's needs first.

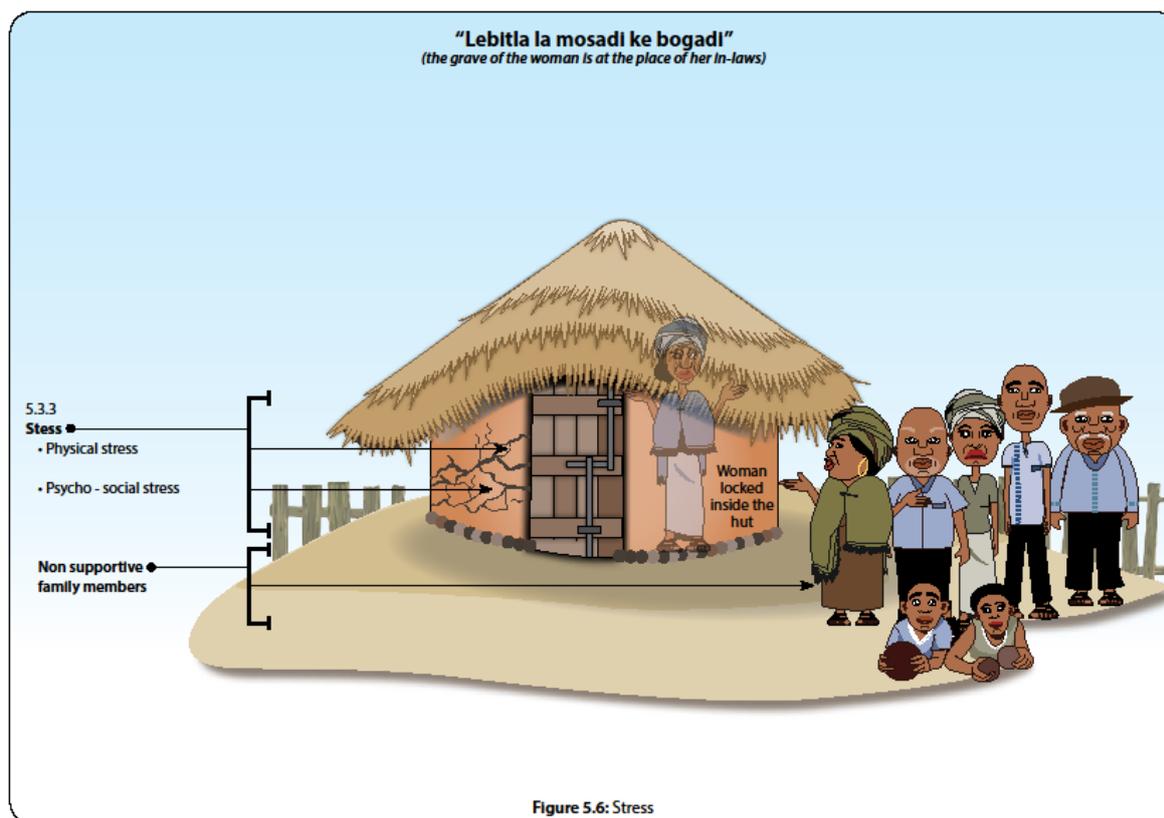
The daughter in-law stares at her in-laws and extended family members. Yet, there is no window and they cannot see each other. This can be interpreted as a huge communication gap between the older woman (who understands and follows cultural rules and laws) and her daughter-in-law (who suffers because of these same rules and laws). A married wife is not allowed to have a life of her own because culturally she 'belongs' (acquired through the lobola or the bride money paid). She cannot go out to find work and become financially independent or make friends but has to rely on her husband for money and her in-laws for companionship. Unfortunately, staying trapped inside the hut also exposes the daughter-in-law to exerting herself to please her in-laws and she ends up with physical exhaustion and mental stress.

In order to have her own children, a wife endures oppression. The daughter-in-law therefore often resigns herself to her circumstances. She perseveres in an environment which keeps her captive so that she can have her own family. Sadly, if a woman is unable to conceive, she and not the son, is blamed for a childless marriage.

The participants shared stories about discrimination in the form of verbal or physical abuse by mothers-in-law. In some instances sister(s)-in-law also participated in physical abuse because they expected the wife to do all the chores. Mothers-in-law also tended to make excessive financial demands. Their argument was that they brought him up to take care of them in their old age. Therefore, it was the expectation that the husband had to take care of his parents (mother) first before providing for his own family. This is similar to the “bosadi” approach of Masenya (2004:136) which indicates oppressed women are victims of financial and social persecution. Financially they depend on their husbands while the in-laws mistreat them and offer little or no emotional support. They therefore have no other option but to persevere under even the most traumatic circumstances.

### 5.5.3 STRESS

Figure 5.7 analogically depicts the hut with no windows and a stressed woman locked up inside. These aspects represent the oppressive elements of African culture and how they are reflected in the “bosadi” approach of Masenya (2004:125). When a woman is exposed to excessive strain due to factors oppressive to her, she may develop health conditions relating to stress. *Physical stress* and *psychosocial stress* emerged as the sub-themes of stress.



**Figure 5.7: Stress**

The hut is the home of all in the family including the different family members and the daughter-in-law. Inside this hut there are patriarchal hierarchies, rules, norms and beliefs which are to be obeyed by all but mostly by the wife who ‘belongs’ to the family because lobola has been paid. As seen in Figure 5.7, the walls on one side of the hut are cracked analogically resembling the familial anarchy which is going on inside the hut. It also represents the ‘cracks’ in the wife’s emotional (and physical) health due to oppression.

As mentioned before the mother-in-law’s body language indicates she seems perplexed about her daughter-in-law who is “expected traditionally to behave according to the cultural rules because it is believed that a woman should always keep silent and not question the authority of a man” (Balogun 2013:562). What the mother-in-law suggests contributes to the oppressive elements, namely sexism and marginalization mentioned by Masenya (2004:124).

### 5.5.3.1 *Physical stress*

Due to their physical stress, some participants said they developed illnesses such as asthma and allergies. One developed a fear of dying from her asthma and leaving her children alone. The study findings revealed women who are abused develop severe stress-related conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes, which could lead to heart failure or a stroke. Abayomi et al. (2013:58) confirm the findings but add that in some societies, despite the significant social contributions they make to the society, women who live in a community or society where patriarchy rules still afford them a status inferior to that of the men simply because they are of the female gender.

A major stressor was the transmission of STIs and HIV and AIDS. Jackson and Abosi (2007:34) state stress in a woman rises if she is in a relationship with a man who believes in the dominant and superior role of the male. This translates to having the special right to physically abuse his wife and having sexual intercourse without protection if he wants to. Confirming this Khan (2000:3) adds some women continue to suffer throughout their lives. They are battered, raped and even murdered at the hands of intimate partners. The WHO (2002:16) states acts of physical aggression include hitting, kicking and “violence by intimate partners includes forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion”.

Familial abuse inside the hut is directed at the daughter-in-law who, although she respects the culture which is protected by patriarchal principles, is nevertheless helpless against oppressive behaviour. The mother-in-law, sister(s)-in-law or the senior wife may discriminate against her by playing the leading role in the household. On the other hand, as verbalised by the participants, they expect her to do all the household chores and cater to everybody’s whims and needs, for example, making special food for the mother-in-law. Such ongoing extremely stressful circumstances may affect the physical well-being of the married woman and she may present with physical signs such as gastrointestinal problems, burnout and continued tiredness. Some participants in the current study reiterated that repeated exposure to worry, fear and stress exposed them to chronic conditions such as body pains, headaches, and forgetfulness. Obvious visible signs of domestic abuse reflect, for example, marks on her body, broken bones or cracked ribs.

Abayomi et al. (2013:58) state in some societies, despite the significant social contributions they make to the society, women living in a community or society where patriarchy rules are still afforded a status inferior to that of the men simply because they are of the female gender. Linking this statement to the oppression occurring inside the hut where the daughter-in-law (wife) is treated less human than the son (husband) often result in the victims feeling they are to blame for the mistreatment or deserves it. To remedy the situation, the victim is not herself but becomes submissive and obedient. Living with constant feelings of inferiority and self-blame brings feelings of frustration and unworthiness which can reach the point where the oppressed women's physical health simply deteriorates.

### **5.5.3.2 Psychosocial stress**

Psychosocial stress is analogically depicted in Figure 5.7 by the cracked walls of the hut with the woman locked inside the hut. This analogy of stress also represents the oppressive factors which are alluded to by Masenya (2004:124). Constant feeling of disrespect creates a state of vulnerability if the marriage is in danger of disintegrating, especially when the environment in the hut becomes hostile leading to the psychological or emotional abuse of the woman.

The participants asserted if a woman is financially dependent on her husband just for her own (and her children's) survival, but she is unable to protect her marriage, it leaves her feeling defeated, having complete lack of self-worth and self-esteem which in turn results in psychosocial stress. Economic instability occurs because she is not employed but fully depends on her husband for her and her children's livelihood. If this happens it may result in the women suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome. In support of these findings, Khan (2000:4) asserts "victim survivors report that on-going psychological violence, emotional torture and living under terror is often more unbearable than the physical brutality, with mental stress leading to a high incidence of suicide and suicide attempts".

On the one hand, excessive worry occurring from the hostile environment they experience in the hut may result in women to become more committed and thrive in their marriage. On the other hand, being vulnerable in the hut may prevent the

daughter-in-law from surviving the relationship leading to a poor quality of life. Some participants in the current study reiterated the repeated exposure to worry, fear and stress made them forgetful and they were in a constant state of anxiousness.

Khan (2000:9) asserts violence against women leads to many health consequences, for example, physical ill health, headaches, asthma, and STIs and HIV infection. Living in times where the HIV and AIDS disease is particularly rife among vulnerable groups such as women and children, one of the major challenges faced by many women is infidelity on their partner's side. In a polygynous marriage, submissive women are unable to negotiate for safe sex and they are therefore extremely vulnerable to contracting HIV and AIDS from the husband. Some participants indeed said they were not allowed to negotiate for condom use and this resulted in them living with extreme anxiety on a daily basis. According to Ushie et al. (2010:75), many women in their study were powerless to negotiate condom use to protect themselves with a partner who abused alcohol and this left them vulnerable to STIs, HIV and AIDS.

#### **5.5 4 AWARENESS AS LINKED TO CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES OF WITTMANN-PRICE'S THEORY OF EMANCIPATED DECISION-MAKING**

The researcher was able to recognise oppressive elements in the lives of participants as these elements were identified during the conversations and dialogue she had with them. Wittmann-Price (2004:441) asserts recognising oppression is a type of awareness which indicates something is not right for an individual or group; in fact, according to this author, awareness of this feeling is essential to understand oppressive forces. Chinn and Kramer (2008:77) ascertain it is a human ability to recognise social issues causing injustice or inequity in order to change the situation to improve peoples' lives.

Figure 5.8 depicts the hut and sun as the target or the most familiar domains related to awareness. Awareness is analogically known as the base which is, in fact, the less familiar (or *known*) domain. In Figure 5.8 the heavy door of the hut is open to allow the woman to reach out for assistance. Analogically the door which leads to empowerment has been opened for her. There are no cracks in the walls indicating that her stress level has been reduced.

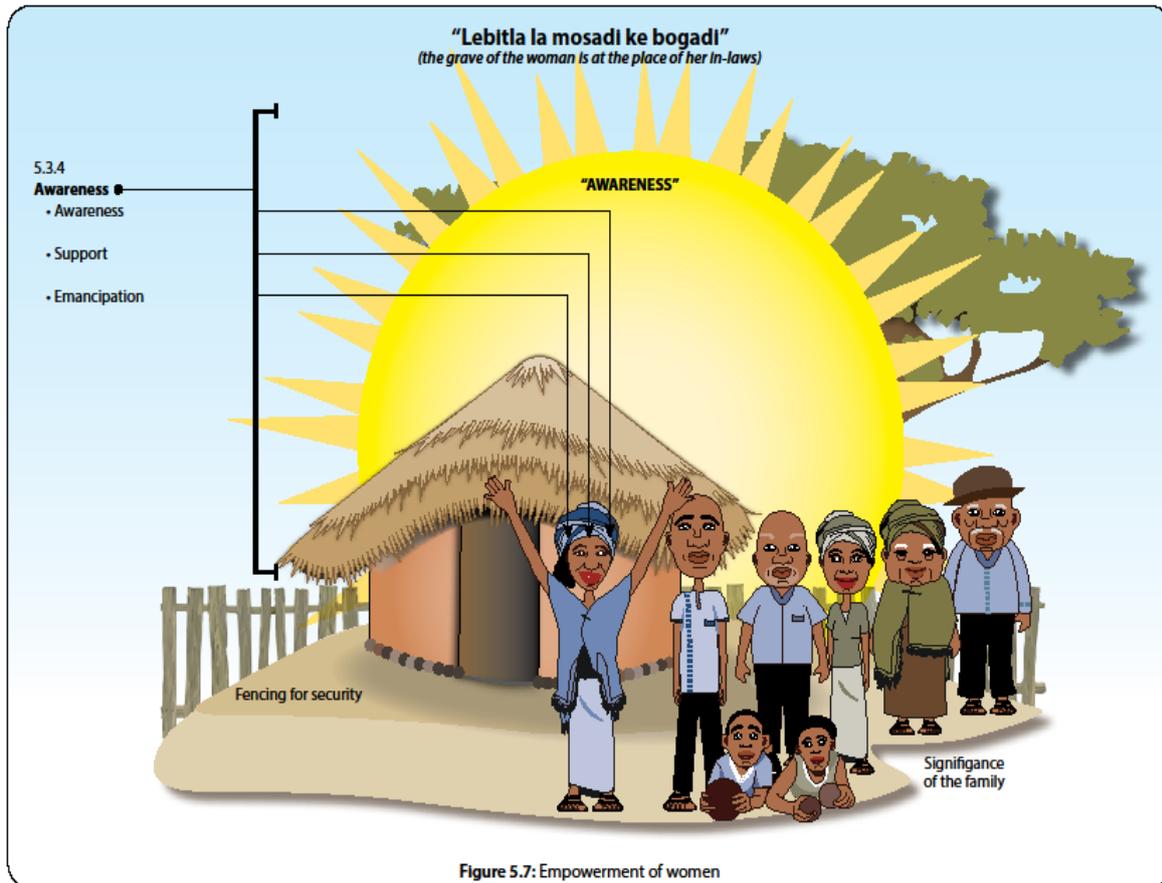


Figure 5.7: Empowerment of women

### Figure 5.8: Awareness and empowerment of women

Moreover, in Figure 5.8 the daughter-in-law is standing outside the hut with her family members and her hands are raised and stretched out above her head to indicate there is awareness among the family members. In the figure the sun is bright and shining on the hut and on all the family members; this represents awareness, empowerment, education, support and emancipation. The sun as the target provides illumination, brightness and happiness to the daughter-in-law and all other family members. Masenya (2004:124) observes the significance of the family in the maintenance of peace, support and emancipation of women as emphasised by the happy family depicted in Figure 5.8.

Awareness is further discussed in relation to the critical attributes identified by Wittmann-Price (2004:441) in her study on emancipation in decision-making in women's healthcare. These critical attributes, namely, *reflection*, *personal knowledge*, *awareness of social norms*, *a flexible environment* and *emancipated*

*decision-making* are unpacked and linked to awareness and to how this awareness can be realised by oppressed women.

#### **5.5.4.1 Reflection**

Reflection is considered as critical and innovative thinking (Pierson 1997:165). It is further described as stepping out of oneself and understanding oneself better (Penny & Werelow (1999) cited in Wittmann-Price 2004 :441). Reflection emphasises the conscious way of perceiving society and its oppressive nature and is seen as a way of knowledge and a way of thinking. During the data collection, there was self-reflection by each participant and reflection was also done within the focus group interviews on how women should be empowered and supported. Harden (1996) (cited in Wittmann-Price 2004:441) suggests reflection alone may not be enough to emancipate, but of importance is that the person has made a true reflection and can therefore develop an intentional action towards emancipation.

#### **5.5.4.2 Personal knowledge**

Personal knowledge refers to the ability to understand oneself and being aware of one's feelings (Wittmann-Price 2004:441). In the current study the participating women reflected on their personal knowledge during the discussions. They all contributed to the dialogue and readily raised important issues regarding the use of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi". They suggested some recommendations on what should be done, for example, establishing women forums and educating people in society on how to prevent violence against women. It was evident that the participants possessed self-knowledge regarding the gender issues affecting women. The rich information they contributed to the discussions was regarded as a type of true and important knowledge because it originated from their own experience (Polanyi (1958) cited in Wittmann-Price 2006:381).

Analogically, the sun which is the target (*known domain*) is related to personal knowledge which is the base (*less familiar domain*). In this scenario, embedded in oneself is self-knowledge which, in all human beings, is watered by the sun (*known domain*) thus bringing up a cognitive structure and reflection on self-knowledge which is unique to one's experience. According to Polanyi (1958) (cited in Wittmann-

Price 2004:441), personal knowledge is considered objective because it makes a person aware of how knowledge affects situations around her or him. In her further definition of awareness, Wittmann-Price (2004:441) asserts self-knowledge is considered as awareness in a woman. It shows that she has thought about alternatives presented in healthcare in relation to her health needs.

#### 5.5.4.3 Awareness of social norms

When women are emancipated they become more aware. They become observant of the resources availed to them through reflection on their personal and/or professional knowledge and their empowerment to make appropriate decisions about their social lives regardless of the societal expectations (Wittmann-Price 2004:442). Figure 5.8 analogically depicts the excitement brought along by awareness. The analogy of the sun as the source of illumination indicates awareness will provide intellectual illumination for the women in the external environment. The hut still remains the dwelling place, but the woman and the family are outside; happy and ready to use the available resources for empowerment in the external environment.

Some participants in the current study felt oppressed, trapped and stressed but were willing and ready to make use of the available resources in society to bring about awareness in their families and significant others through empowerment, support and emancipation irrespective of the socially promoted choices (Wittmann-Price 2006:381). These participants focused on positive awareness such as attending forums during which dialogue enables women to express their verbal and non-verbal, acceptable and non-acceptable choices regarding socially expected norms (Wittmann-Price 2006:381). Social norms are set standards which are sometimes difficult to uphold and change (Cody (2000) cited in Wittmann-Price 2004:442). This is in line with the study findings which revealed ancient proverbs were still used and were therefore not easy to change; in fact, its influence is still noticeable in the lives of women today.

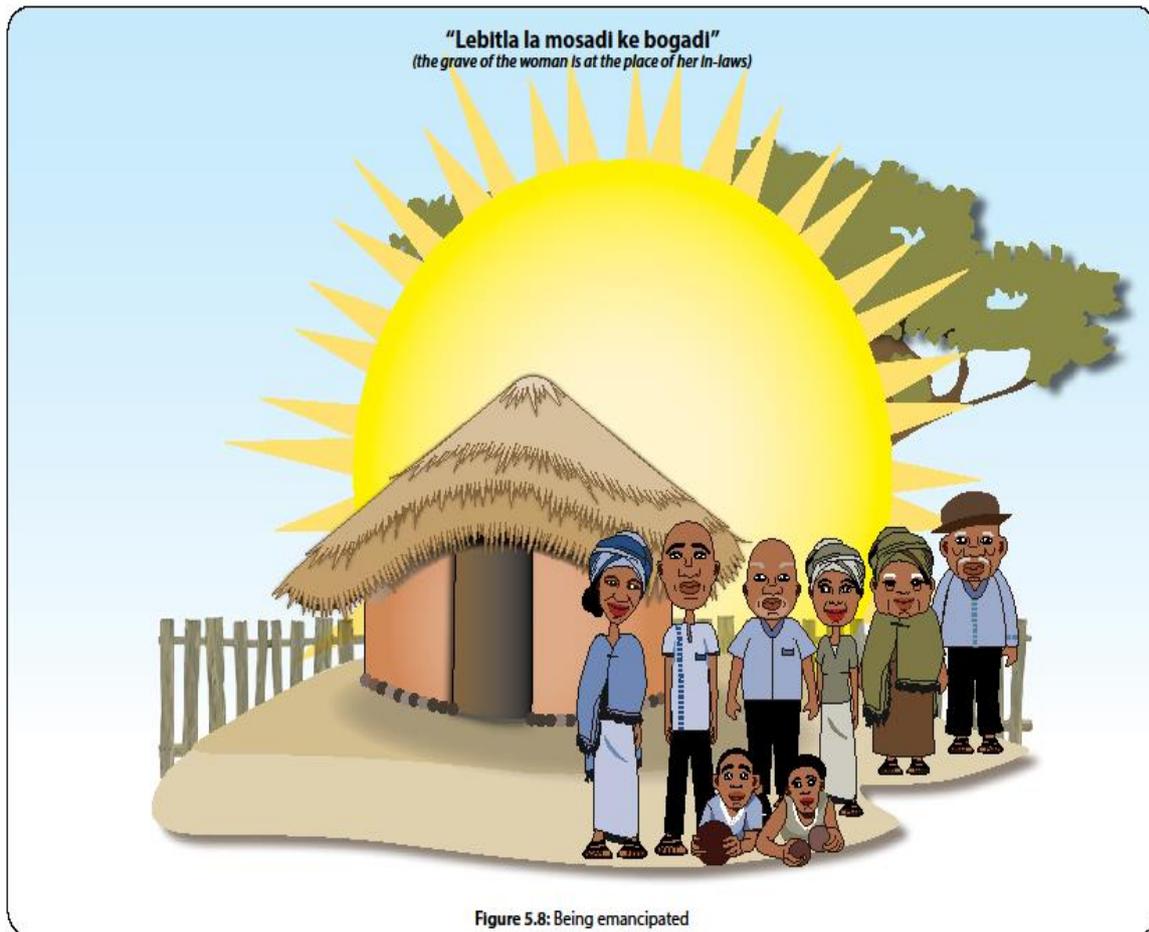
Being aware of the social norms as women is also aligned to the positive elements of the African culture in Masenya's (2004:124) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach that

family is still important today and they still play a significant role in a woman's life. Modern women rely on the significance of the family for support. Although the participating women received family support, they were also ready to attend forums to gain information about social issues affecting women.

Through dialogue with the participants, it was noted that emancipation involves recognising that knowledge development occurs in the social context or external environment where women live. The social context influences the transfer of information and how women perceive the information (Wittmann-Price 2004:442). Women in the current study lived in a patriarchal environment which exerted unequal power and influence over the knowledge they had gained in the social context. Thus, patriarchy influenced their perception of knowledge regarding awareness of social norms (Wittmann-Price 2006:378).

#### **5.5.4.4 Flexible environment**

The environment depicted in Figure 5.9 shows the new structure of the house. The analogical explanation is that the hut has changed over time to become a modern house for current times. Even the previous fence which surrounded the hut is mostly hidden behind the large sun and the brilliance of the sunrays.



### Figure 5.9: Being emancipated

The woman, her husband and family members are happy and willing to be exposed to awareness processes through available campaigns. This is happening in the external environment of the new house where members of the family feel free to attend workshops and campaign on human rights including women rights issues. They are ready to be knowledgeable and empowered.

The sun is depicted as bright and shining on everyone, analogically making the environment conducive for learning. The woman, her husband and extended family are open and receptive to acquire new knowledge regarding cultural and women issues. According to Wittmann-Price (2004:442), a flexible environment should not be judgemental but promote free choices – if it is judgemental it will create a situation which is oppressive.

Women in the current study reported that they wanted to be involved in forums where they could share their experiences with others through discussions centred around cultural and women issues. Dialogue pertaining to cultural and women issues during the forum must not be judgemental, and all women should be given opportunities to make choices about issues affecting their lives. Having the freedom to make choices is supported by Wittmann-Price (2004:442) who states a flexible environment encourages freedom to make choices; it is considered to be responsive to change which in turn lead to personal benefits for individuals and the society.

#### **5.5.4.5 Empowerment**

The indigenous African women participants raised the issue of supporting each other which they believed will reduce the burden of cultural and societal oppression of women issues. The fully open door of the new house in Figure 5.9 analogically relates to the empowerment of all members of the family who will support each other if and when needed. Empowerment is also shown by the brightness of the sun and its rays which reflects campaigns and forums where culture and women issues are discussed through dialogue. Empowerment is also aligned with the positive reinforcement of the African culture and significance of the family (Masenya 2004:124) whereby, as the “bosadi” approach dictates, support for each other is pivotal

Wittmann-Price (2004:441) states empowerment is a positive process because it promotes autonomy and independence. Also, it is believed that through knowledge some power is shared. The women in the current study believed there should be workshops focusing on strategies for the prevention of violence against women as well as education programmes foregrounding cultural issues and respect for each other. Conducting workshops on issues of support and respect aligns with Masenya’s (2004:124) affirmation that the attributes of support and respect are positive elements of the African culture and are needed to create empowerment and awareness. When individuals are emancipated, they have their internal and external demands balanced; this means they are able to make free choices and feel liberated in mind (Wittmann-Price 2004:442).

The door of the new hut is open signifying all family members are free to attend workshops, campaigns and forums. There are no cracks in the walls of the hut signifying no stress among the family; also, they stand together in a group thereby showing support for each other.

#### **5.5.4.6 Emancipated decision-making**

Figure 5.9 analogically depicts a united, happy family as a result of the availability of programmes promoting awareness. No stress is present or exhibited by the family members' body language. The door to the hut is open; analogically it is a mind inviting in openness. The family is standing closely together thereby demonstrating support for each other. The sun is enormous and bright, analogically providing all the tools for empowerment and emancipation such as campaigns, forums and interaction with the nurses as healthcare providers.

Through reflection which occurred during dialogue with the self and other individuals or groups, the participants developed critical thinking related to their situation of living in a patriarchal society (Wittmann-Price 2006:378). This also linked to Masenya's (2004:123-124) womanhood approach stressing the positive elements of African culture and the significance of the family whereby women are encouraged to attend forums and share information during dialogue. The participants became aware of the social norms occurring in their daily lives which exerted unequal power between them and men. This awareness impacted on their perceptions about their situation which was influenced by a non-judgemental environment.

Finally, Figure 5.9 depicts an empowered woman who is encouraged to develop emancipated decision-making skills. The emancipation is linked in the figure to the bright sun with the woman and her family happy and smiling about education, forums and family meetings which generate awareness, empowerment and emancipated decision-making.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter the development of the theoretical framework was guided by the Wittmann-Price (2004;2006) theory of emancipated decision-making in healthcare

and Masenya's (2004:120) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach based on the findings of the study. The analogy of the "proverb lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" was developed and inferences and generalisations were made to provide a deeper understanding of the proverb under study.

The next chapter presents an overview of the study findings, recommendations are made, the implications of this study is outlined and the limitations are noted. The chapter ends with a final conclusion.

## 6 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the study findings and its implications. Recommendations are suggested and the limitations of the study are addressed followed by a conclusion to the study.

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 comprised of the research design and methods. Phase 2 focused on the development of the theoretical framework based on the study findings. The theoretical framework was developed using Wittmann-Price's theory of emancipated decision-making, Masenya's "bosadi" (womanhood) approach, and the analogy of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" based on the findings.

### 6.2 OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The objectives of Phase 1 focused on exploring and describing the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health. The following objectives directed the first phase of the study:

- to explore and describe the meanings and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" as experienced by indigenous African women
- to explore and describe the implications of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" as experienced by the indigenous African women on their health.

The phenomenon of the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health was described by the participants in their own context and related to their unique experiences.

### 6.2.1 PHASE 1: EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

Phase 1 explored and described the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its impact on indigenous African women’s health. This phase was directed using the first two objectives of the study mentioned in Chapter 1, section 1.6.

To achieve this aim, hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the research method. The following four themes emerged from the conversations with indigenous African women:

- Theme 1: Patriarchy
- Theme 2: Aspects of trapped women
- Theme 3: Stress
- Theme 4: Awareness

The themes reflected the phenomenon of the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under scrutiny as experienced by married indigenous African women in their marriages and single African women in their relationships. (As mentioned, although only married women were originally targeted as participants, single women were also included as participants because they had also been exposed to “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”).

#### 6.2.1.1 Theme 1: Patriarchy

The study discovered that patriarchy was the root cause of the women’s social and health problems in marriage. While they were surviving in a patriarchal system, they realised men were awarded more power to dominate in all spheres of life. The participants perceived patriarchy as an obstacle towards gender equality. They experienced the proverb and songs used during premarital counselling as mostly directed towards women only. The proverb further demanded women to be obedient and submissive and to keep their marriage together. Culture and religion were believed to have led to the origin of proverbs used as the linguistic resources to perpetuate inequality between men and women.

It was found the proverb was used widely in culture to inculcate commitment, perseverance, submissiveness, and resilience in women and marriage. The study discovered proverbs originated decades ago, were based on language and culture and therefore all people had to obey them. More importantly, obedience to traditions and culture was specifically expected from women and especially demanded from them. Every woman had to be married to avoid being considered an outcast in the community. Derogatory words were used should a woman fail to get married. By working extremely hard as a married woman was the only way a woman could prove her womanhood.

Most participants felt their lives and destiny were determined by language and culture which favoured men over women. Participating women experienced the use of the proverb under study as demeaning to women's integrity because it meant women could not make decisions about their own lives. Despite the feelings of unhappiness, adhering to the cultural demands of the proverb was common and it was alarming to observe it was reinforced by women on other women. The indigenous African women felt the proverb brought about negative but also positive reinforcement in their married lives. Some women shared despite its challenges, the proverb brought sanctity into their marriages.

### **6.2.1.2 Theme 2: Aspects of trapped women**

Some of the indigenous African women felt trapped in their marriage because they were instructed to persevere by the proverb emphasising endurance and resilience. These women experienced suffering, stigma, gender stereotypes, perseverance/resilience, disrespect and abuse, an discrimination by in-laws. For some the proverb represented hope and they therefore persevered in their marriage despite facing many challenges.

The proverb strictly prescribes tolerance and perseverance. The findings reflected that enduring disrespect and abuse from their partners and in-laws left oppressed married women in a continued state of anxiety, unhappiness and loneliness resulting in chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure and stress-related mental conditions. The participants felt they lacked the physical and mental strength to

make decisions about their lives and this left them feeling depressed and feeling unfulfilled. Although not many women were in polygynous relationships, those who were in such marriages found it to be a significant source of their unhappiness; they felt unloved, neglected and disempowered. Widow inheritance also created challenges for some women who ended up feeling extremely ignored and disrespected. Women who felt trapped suffered chronic physical illnesses and psychological conditions aggravated by continued stress, anxieties and ongoing depression.

### 6.2.1.3 Theme 3: Stress

Some participants experienced constant stress which caused their physical and mental health to deteriorate. Physical abuse led to bruises and sometimes injuries for which they had to receive emergency medical attention. It was found some feared for their life because of the extreme physically violent and abusive behaviour of their husbands. All the participants presented with chronic diseases including emotional distress. Some suffered from extreme depression and stress-related anxieties.

Having a low self-esteem and morale was a common finding. The majority participants described how they developed chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels due to persevering in their stressful marriage where they experienced continuous physical and mental abuse, disrespect and mistreatment. Other chronic conditions that surfaced in the discussions and were attributed to prolonged abuse were cancer and heart diseases. The fact that they were often not included by the family in decision-making, especially affected the participants' self-esteem and self-worth. The participants attributed being oppressed to a low self-esteem and being regarded as inferior with regard to the decision-making in marriage. They were especially concerned about their powerlessness to negotiate for safe sex because they knew their husbands were unfaithful. Living with the never-ending fear that they were extremely vulnerable to HIV and AIDS and other STI infections left them in a continual state of angst and despair.

General ill health was associated with abuse where the women could not make the decision to save themselves from persistent stress by returning to their maternal

home. Furthermore, fearing stigmatisation and being judged by their own families and society should they go back home as well as embarrassing their own families if they divorced, subsequently resulted in women enduring mistreatment and abuse in their marriage. This also led to mental problems such as anxiety and depression.

Some participants attributed psychosocial stress such as forgetfulness and fear of poverty to being trapped in an abusive relationship. Because some of the women were unemployed, they were dependent on their husbands for financial support. The findings further indicated the chronic exposure of women to stressful conditions led to psychological problems such as anger and the wish to commit suicide. Depression and anxiety attacks also presented in most of the participants due to consistent physical and mental violence and abuse from their husbands and/or in-laws; they had nowhere to go, had no support and therefore felt trapped as a person, in the relationship, and in the circumstances.

#### **6.2.1.4 Theme 4: Awareness**

A need for raising the awareness of all women who are exposed to the proverb including their family members, in-laws and children (male and female) was emphasised by all participants. They reported the empowerment of abused women should be carried out through education campaigns, workshops and forums focusing on gender and literacy issues including women's and human rights issues. Improving the literacy levels of women was also emphasised because women are still living in an era where violence against women is prevalent. Being literate will empower women to make decisions about their own health and lives when necessary. Opportunities for employment will open up to them thus making them financially independent of their husbands.

The education of both female and male children at schools on gender and cultural issues and, importantly, respect for each other, was suggested. The participants felt strongly that behavioural aspects related to gender differences should be addressed from an early age. They believed this would be a positive step towards curbing gender stereotyping and violence against women and creating a culture of tolerance for and acceptance of gender differences.

Support for each other as women surfaced in the form of ‘being there’ for each other (communicating through talking and listening) in order to reduce the burden of violence. Open, honest communication among women about women’s and cultural issues was found to be an important way to relieve stress. Showing support and understanding for each other’s situation emerged as a principal need among the participants; they emphasised women *wanted* support from others in the presence of violence. Having regular dialogue and communication with other women to discuss issues relating to women and culture was highlighted as a supportive measure for abused women. Mutual support could result in liberating women from cultural practices that were oppressive to them and maintaining equality between men and women to alleviate stress and anger. Not all women felt comfortable with the use of the proverb and therefore debates, workshops and forums on issues relating to the emancipation of women from the prescripts of culture were suggested.

### **6.2.2 PHASE 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT AND THE ANALOGY OF THE PROVERB “LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI”**

This phase aimed at developing and describing a theoretical framework for the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health. The objective for this phase was:

- to describe the study’s theoretical framework based on the findings of the study using the Wittmann-Price’s (2004;2006) theory of emancipated decision-making, Masenya’s (2004) “bosadi” (womanhood) approach, and using the analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”.

The development of the theoretical framework was based on the information gained from the empirical phase, Phase 1. The process of developing the theoretical framework was guided by Wittmann-Price’s (2004;2006) emancipated decision-making in women’s healthcare and Masenya’s (2004:10) “bosadi” (womanhood) approach which critically analysed the African culture in terms of “bosadi” (womanhood). The “bosadi” approach is based on the local South African context. The analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” was also developed.

### 6.2.2.1 The process of developing a theoretical framework

The study was culturally based and explored the meaning and interpretations of the proverb under scrutiny and its implications on indigenous African women's health. Since some participants raised the issue of not being included in decision-making because women were viewed as in a subordinate position to men, the researcher decided to use Wittmann-Price's (2004;2006) theory of emancipated decision-making in women's healthcare to guide the theoretical framework development.

Furthermore, to address the sociocultural issues of specifically indigenous African women, it was necessary to accommodate indigenous methods in the development of the theoretical framework to ensure this study made a unique contribution to indigenous social research. The context in which this study was conducted solicited the researcher to acknowledge the local traditions and indigenous knowledge system that inform these systems (Chilisa 2012:161). The theoretical framework was therefore guided by Masenya's (2004:9) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach which explains Africana womanism. Masenya (2004) analysed the African culture and liberated African women who experienced oppression through culture and cultural practices. The perspectives of other scholars who reflect the same opinions, for example, Hudson-Weems (1993), were incorporated into the development of the theoretical framework.

### 6.2.2.2 Feminism and Africana Womanism

The origin of the term 'feminism' was explained. Since the term 'feminism' was coined by white American women it can be perceived as racist in nature due to an exclusivity which advocates for white superiority as it only defines white women's history. In the same vein, Africana womanism was explained as having been specifically created and designed to advocate for the rights and representation of issues concerning all women of indigenous African descent.

'Womanism' requires that one's cultural, linguistic and heritage issues be acknowledged from the beginning of any discussions (Phillips 2006:xxxvi). Hudson-Weems (1993:48) and Masenya (2004:120) are in agreement that Africana womanism differs from feminism because it focuses on the unique experiences and

desires of African women. The ideas of Masenya (2004) and Hudson-Weems (1993) were utilised to describe the theoretical framework developed in the study.

### 6.3 SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study findings revealed women interpret the proverb as entrapment in a patriarchal society where they recognised and became aware of the oppressive forces which were sometimes dehumanising. During dialogue with the researcher these women raised acceptable and unacceptable social norms which influenced the way they made choices about their life experiences which included health choices (Wittmann-Price 2006:378). Masenya's (2004:123-125) "bosadi" (womanhood) approach particularly focuses on women's oppressive and positive issues in the African culture. These two theorists believe there are oppressive elements in societies that need to be recognised by all individuals and groups in society. Individuals' and groups' emancipation can only start when awareness of such oppressive societal elements has been created and its existence has been acknowledged by all. Knowledge of the existence of oppressive elements is considered a sign of being aware of the dehumanising forces; being aware of these forces is an antecedent of emancipation.

The oppressive forces of the African culture were identified as the main themes of the study, namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, and stress which implicated on women's health and comprised their health. Awareness also emerged as a theme which was linked to the critical attributes of Wittmann-Price's (2004;2006) emancipatory theory. The awareness theme was further linked to Masenya's (2004:123) positive elements of African culture and the significance of the family which are seen as aspects liberating oppressed women.

Based on the findings of the current study, awareness through education, support and empowerment were raised as issues that could emancipate women from the unequal powers which are common in patriarchy. Wittmann-Price (2004:441; 2006:378) discusses the critical attributes that need to be present for emancipation in decision-making to take place. These attributes can only begin when individuals or groups recognise and become aware of the oppressive forces. Emancipated

decision-making by women is enhanced when reflection, personal knowledge, awareness of social norms, and empowerment are in place in a healthcare environment which will be non-judgemental and emancipating.

#### **6.4 SUMMARY OF THE ANALOGY OF THE PROVERB “LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI”**

Concepts that emerged from the study findings during the discussions with the participants were used to describe the theoretical framework. The analogy of the African proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” using the African hut and sun was used in order to recognise similarities and differences between what was *new* and what was *already known*. The relational meaning of the proverb is that the woman has to die where she was married. In the analogical instance what happens to the woman during the process of marriage was explored and interpreted.

Analogy is a cognitive mechanism that people use to make inferences and learn new generalisations (Gentner & Holyoak 1997:32). This process of analogy was used to learn new generalisations about the findings of the study which inferred to the African hut and the sun to develop a conceptual growth. The goal of this chapter is to show how the analogy promoted a conceptual change in an indigenous and culturally-based study by making inferences between the African hut, the sun and the study findings.

##### **6.4.1 Analogical mapping of the relationship between the African hut, the sun and the study findings**

The hut has been used by African people since time immemorial as a dwelling place and where they are sheltered against the elements. The African hut signifies the traditions common to African-South African homes and is perceived as resembling indigenous families. In this hut there are family values, customs and cultural expectations. Therefore, using the hut, the core of a family, to depict patriarchy, entrapment, stress and awareness indicates the resilience of indigenous African women as signified by the resilience of the participants who were all indigenous African women.

The analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” using the hut relates to the whole hut: the thatched roof with strong poles fastened with strong ropes; the solid earthen walls which later on shows cracks; no windows; the heavy locked door. The roof represents patriarchy, the solid walls which become cracked resembles the stress inside the hut that wears down the woman’s physical and psychosocial health over time; the lack of windows and the heavy locked door resemble those women who are trapped inside with nowhere to go and no support system. The oppressive situation and abuse inside the hut causes the women profound suffering resulting in chronic illnesses such as headaches, anxieties and depression.

The sun which is bright and beautiful shines on the inhabitants of the hut analogically resembling awareness of all the family members, namely, indigenous African women, their husbands, girls, boys, in-laws and other family and friends of indigenous African women. The awareness is carried out through education and support including care at the different places where they resides.

If the situation inside the hut is not attended to there may be chaos and the (wife/daughter-in-law) may become stressed due to the stressors inside the house. Nurses are usually the ones who come into contact with these women first when the latter need health-related services. The nurses continuously identify these challenges and educate those affected to promote their health and provide relevant treatment if necessary. The nurses also provide rehabilitation in the form of referral to shelters as well as support services to identified women who present with health problems due to domestic abuse and violence.

## **6.5 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS BASED ON WITTMANN-PRICE’S (2004;2006) EMANCIPATION THEORY AND MASENYA’S (2004) “BOSADI” (WOMANHOOD) APPROACH**

The summary of the theoretical framework and the analogy of the African hut and sun are discussed based on the main themes of the study, namely, patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, stress, and awareness.

### 6.5.1 Patriarchy

The following aspects depicted negative and positive aspects of patriarchy.

#### 6.5.1.1 “Bosadi” and the negative elements of African culture

“Bosadi” and the oppressive elements of African culture are mapped analogically as represented in a patriarchal system. Patriarchy is depicted analogically by the roof of the hut. Patriarchy is seen as a system with male authority whereby women are in a subordinate position which often predisposes them to an inferiority complex and anxieties.

The roof of the African hut is made of thatch which is fastened to thin, short and thick, longer poles to keep it erect. The thatched roof overarches the structure of the hut. This roof is analogically compared to the oppressive elements which oppress women. The cultural rules, proverbs and expectations are compared to the impenetrable roof. Women are unable to change perceptions and traditions which have been prescriptive about their fate from ancient times therefore leading to frustration. The long, bigger and short, smaller poles resemble the different cultural values and strict rules of patriarchy. Being forced to abide by these rules leaves the woman emotionally bruised and presenting with physical ailments. Some are killed and others contemplate suicide due to the continuous exposure to abuse brought about by being forced to follow strict cultural laws and rules.

The negative reinforcement is depicted analogically with the bride not showing signs of happiness. The proverb dictates women must be obedient and submissive. These expectations of how a married woman must behave are analogically depicted as big and small poles supporting the roof so that it does not cave in. Analogically thus, women must obey the norms, values and beliefs prescribed by patriarchy thereby upholding the patriarchal system. When women are mistreated, they tend to develop psychological problems and these are compared to the poles making up the roof; if they are worn out the roof may be blown away by wind or it may leak during rainy seasons.

### **6.5.1.2 “Bosadi” and the positive elements of African culture**

The positive elements of the African culture are analogically depicted as women in a joyful mood inside the hut. The impenetrable roof of the hut is compared to the smooth implementation of the unchangeable and solid rules used during premarital counselling which is guided by proverbs and language used to seal the marriage contracts. In this case the teachings given to the bride are respected. The bride and women feel happy and would like to continue live by cultural proverbs and sayings directing them on how to uphold culture and traditions such as believing in the sanctity of marriage vows.

There can be a feeling of hope for women going through marital problems but it can only be achieved if they persevere to uphold cultural values and are prepared to stay married despite the challenges they experience. Resilience helps them pull through tough times in their marriage and they have to rely on the support they receive from family and friends. Analogically, the roof shows resilience and remains protective of the inhabitants; even during windy and rainy seasons it continues to be smooth and impenetrable.

### **6.5.1.3 Significance of the family**

The hut where family members live is depicted as displaying the significance of the family. The family is expected to live in harmony and the wife to be supported by the family members whenever her marriage causes her distresses. Her distress may, in some way or another, impact on other family members.

The woman is locked inside the hut. Analogically, it means she cannot communicate with the outside world for fear of disclosing or revealing the unhappiness inside the hut and in this way compromise the family values. Also, being locked inside alone with the rest of the family outside analogically also means she is isolated and lonely with no support. Marriage is considered a sacred institution where harmony should prevail. Yet, at times marriages disintegrate resulting in divorce which upsets the social order in a patriarchal culture. This results in stigmatisation of the woman; for her, this leads to feeling mistreated, inferior and results in her experiencing excruciating mental pain. For a married woman to have an unblemished reputation,

once she is married she has to remain married despite the challenges and problems she encounters in her marriage.

The participants, who faced extreme challenges and abuse in their marriages through the use of the proverb, said they experienced the meaning of the proverb as positive, although they also suggested that maybe it could be slightly modified. According to their interpretation, the purpose of the hut was indeed to house whole families and therefore perseverance had to be practiced.

## **6.5 2 Aspects of trapped women**

### **6.5.2.1 *The oppressive elements of African culture***

The majority of women felt trapped in their marriages with nowhere to go. The oppressive elements continued to create uneasiness for women who felt they were suffering. They were afraid of being stigmatised if attempting to leave; they were exposed to gender stereotypes typified by violence and abuse but were still expected to persevere and be resilient in difficult marriages. Many complained of disrespect and abuse, discrimination by in-laws, being in polygynous marriages including having problems with widow inheritance.

There are some expectations inside the hut where the in-laws create barriers to prevent the daughter-in-law's happiness who can then present with chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases and stress. The participants shared Christianity was sometimes used to inculcate commitment and endurance in the marriage.

Analogically, the environment inside the hut is toxic because cultural stereotypes are directed at the daughter in-law who feels she can never change anything because the prevailing culture is respected by all. The situation inside the hut leaves her stressed and anxious due to the many cultural expectations she must fulfil and traditional rules she must follow. Proverbs and songs are used to inculcate respect and commitment; however, some women in the study felt the analogy of the heavy, locked door provided evidence that whenever a woman has entered into marriage she will never be able to be her own self again or go back to her parents' home. This

creates a feeling of being trapped, powerless and therefore acute and chronic health problems set in.

The woman generally feels inferior and unworthy; these feelings are mostly caused by the behaviour of the other inhabitants of the hut who show her disrespect, ignore her, make demands on her and belittle her in front of her husband or others. The husband seldomly stands by his wife's side and is quite often the one who is most abusive. Wives are rarely encouraged to divorce; in fact, just mentioning the word 'leaving' may lead to extreme tension and further abuse. Culturally, traditionally and in society itself a married woman has no say; she cannot make a decision; is not allowed to think for herself and, in any case, divorce is a cultural taboo. Unfortunately, the environment inside the hut can become so toxic that some participants commented they had considered committing suicide; others feared for their life and worried about their children if they should die. Many said they did not have the right to negotiate for safe sex and were thus exceedingly vulnerable to contract HIV and AIDS. As the abuse intensified, their lives were threatened more and more. Obviously they therefore became mentally ill due to the desperate wretchedness of their lives in marriage.

### **6.5.3 STRESS**

#### ***6.5.3.1 The oppressive elements of African culture***

Stress was experienced as another oppressive element of African culture. Analogically, inside the hut there are cultural rules and regulations directed to the married women. In some instances, turmoil occurs inside the hut which may have been caused by cultural stereotypes directed at the married women. This situation is depicted analogically by the cracked walls of the hut. If nothing is done to attend to the situation, the toxicity of the environment may be too much leading to physical and psycho-social stress. In their marital journey, the daughters-in-law are confronted by cultural expectations and stereotypes which affect their health. Being constantly disrespected and belittled by one's husband and in-laws engenders feelings of resentment, anger, depression and self-hate. Feeling unworthy, being intimidated and oppressed can make a woman desperate to escape the situation. These feelings lead to emotional problems and other health-related illnesses and

conditions. The increased stress may lead to family disorganisation/divorce, exposure to HIV and AIDS, and poverty if the woman is unemployed.

#### **6.5.4 AWARENESS**

##### **6.5.4.1 *Wittmann-Price's theory of emancipated decision-making and Masenya's "bosadi" positive elements of African culture***

Wittmann-Price's concepts of emancipated decision-making was explored and related to awareness. Awareness means the participants recognised the oppressive elements in their lives; in other words, through awareness of how it impacted on their lives and health in general assisted them to identify these oppressive elements as patriarchy, aspects of trapped women, and stress. However, there were some women who found just the opposite. Contrary to the proverb under scrutiny being identified as an oppressive element, these women found it brought sanctity to their marriage and encouraged them to persevere and be resilient. Wittmann-Price (2004;2006) believes once individuals recognise and become aware of oppressive elements, they should be able to progress towards emancipation if they can apply the critical attributes as discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.5.4.

Awareness is represented analogically by enormous sun above the roof with its bright rays shining down onto the hut and the whole family standing outside the hut. The sun analogically displays awareness, empowerment, support and emancipation of all the inhabitants of the hut.

The daughter-in-law is happy because she is allowed outside for assistance in case of disharmony in the house. The daughter-in-law shows excitement because of being promised support from other individual women and from the women forums and other groups.

The other family members are also exposed to empowerment strategies through forums and campaigns where gender, cultural and issues of respect for each other can be discussed. The sun analogically displays awareness, empowerment, support and emancipation of all the inhabitants of the hut.

Through awareness, the whole family has been exposed to empowerment through education on gender and literacy issues, human rights issues and how they can be all supported so as to be emancipated. Being exposed to empowerment through education will make women aware of their strengths and weaknesses and thus they are ready to be emancipated.

## 6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presented the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health as experienced by the participants themselves. Clark (2010:449) suggests planning to meet the health needs of women as healthcare users may involve that recommendations are classified as primary, secondary and tertiary level prevention interventions. Allender et al. (2013:19) support Clark (2008) and refer to these three levels as “levels of a prevention pyramid” consisting of primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. Ushie et al. (2010:75) also advocate recommendations on the same three levels.

Therefore, interventions based on the aforementioned three levels of care are recommended and described in sections 6.7.1 to 6.7.3. The sections are based on these three main focus areas. In addition, the presented recommendations have been sub-divided to include nurses, education, and women respectively.

### 6.6.1 Primary level of care/primary prevention

Primary prevention refers to active health promoting activities designed to reduce the likelihood of a specific illnesses from occurring while enhancing overall well-being (Stanhope & Lancaster 2004:52). On primary care level, recommendations for the care of women who have been affected by the proverb are outlined.

#### 6.6.1.1 Recommendations for nurses

- Nurses should acknowledge patriarchal policies and ideologies do result in the abuse of women. It should be added to nurses’ priority list in primary healthcare settings including the accident and emergency units (Collombini et al. 2013:10).

- The lack of knowledge regarding cultural contexts may at times increase the women's vulnerability at primary healthcare settings because they may keep silent and pretend they need care for some illness when they are, in fact, exposed to severe abuse. Therefore, an urgent need exists for nurses to develop awareness regarding cultural issues so that women are better served in primary healthcare settings (Allen 2012:883).

#### 6.6.1.2 Recommendations for education

- The curriculum for basic and tertiary education institutions (schools) should be checked and modified to address culturally relevant programmes which emphasise the prevention of women abuse, human rights and education of the general public in the South African context because of its unique cultures mixture.
- There should be continued mass education for both men and women on how to champion for a violence-free society at all levels of contact with societies (Kimuna & Djamba 2008:341). Furthermore, this education awareness should focus on issues of gender equality, marital roles, cultural issues and societal expectations that promote prevention of cultural-based violence against women.
- There should be a new approach on educating the public regarding religious issues because they are sometimes used to reinforce the suppression of women's rights (Ali et al. 2011:7).
- Primary prevention programmes should also include dialogue and educational intervention strategies which encourage healthy relationships.
- Awareness of gender stereotypes should be heightened through workshops to educators who sometimes unintentionally encourage gender stereotyping (Nkosi 2013:140).
- Empowerment and support of women in society should be promoted through local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the communities so as to reduce violence against women

### 6.6.1.3 Recommendations for women

- It is important that a transformation of masculine cultural issues and the gendered domesticity be urgently addressed which may lead to a more balanced workload in families (Tamale 2004:60).
- It is recommended that women be educated and empowered on human rights issues. Most indigenous African women are denied equal enjoyment of their human rights by virtue of the lower status ascribed to them by culture and patriarchy (Ssenyonjo 2007:39).
- Proverbs that belittle women should be discouraged through workshops for women and men.
- Patriarchy dictates inequality between men and women in favour of men as superiors. Based on this fact, society has to acknowledge that men and women are equal in terms of human rights and they should be treated as such by all (Nkosi 2013:140).
- Women should be taught skills for negotiating safer sex so that they can protect themselves against HIV and AIDS. Women should also be allowed to challenge stereotypes that prevent them from addressing issues bothering them in their marital lives (Ramathuba 2012:80).

### 6.6.2 Secondary level of care

Sociocultural issues were the primary problems encountered by married women. They experienced abuse from their husbands and/or in-laws. Many of the women presented with emotional problems. Collombini et al. (2013:8) emphasise it is important for the healthcare providers to understand the sociocultural determinants of abuse so that they do not focus on physical injuries only when consulting the abused woman. Based on these assertions recommendations pertaining to secondary level of care follow.

#### 6.6.2.1 Recommendations for nurses

- Nurses are to provide support and counselling to the women who are experiencing the impact of the proverb. These nurses need to be trained to have knowledge of the cultural or societal demands which may lead to abuse of women (McGarry & Nairn 2014:5).

- The provision of on-site support for a nurse who has been trained in screening a woman for abuse will enable the nurse to also screen the woman for cultural issues used to perpetrate abuse. If this nurse is available, all other staff members can refer women who are suspected of being abused to her (McGarry & Nairn 2014:5).
- The provision of multiple points of entry to counselling that does not rely only on universal screening whereby bicultural health workers, including the nurses, can provide the necessary interventions (Hegarty et al. 2013:256).
- The Christian church should also critically revisit its interpretation of the Bible which is centred on men and neglecting women because this contributes to the perpetuation of the view that the female is inferior and the man was ordained by God (Masenya 2005a or b:193).
- There should be a systematic referral of women who report with abuse to the healthcare setting. If such a system is in place it will prevent reported illnesses to complicate into chronic conditions such as depression and chronic physical diseases.
- Unemployed women who are in relationships where they are exposed to abuse should be referred to social available services programmes to improve their economic status.
- There should be universal screening programmes in both healthcare and non-healthcare settings such as NGOs where women can report for general health-related problems including abuse
- Nurses are to ensure that women who report with abuse to the health institutions and are HIV positive are to be offered counselling and treatment.

#### **6.6.2.2 Recommendations for education**

- The reconstruction of the oppressive proverbs which are directed to women should be instituted and there should be resistance to these proverbs through education and commitment to responding to women issues (Balogun 2010:31).
- A post-proverbial exercise in the contemporary African conversations is suggested by Raji-Oyelade (1999) (cited in Balogun 2010:32). The suggestion

is that some of the African proverbs could be reconstructed or new proverbs formed with new meanings which promote new values.

### **6.6.2.3 Recommendations for women**

There is a profound need to have support systems offered by only women. The reason being that women sometimes do not feel comfortable or free to disclose their abuse and seek help from male healthcare workers because they fear their abusive spouses (Ali et al. 2011:7). Recommendations pertaining to the secondary level of care for abused women are outlined next.

- Abused women need to be treated with empathy and sympathy. Therefore, nurses attending to these women need to treat them with respect and not be judgemental.
- Women who report to the health centres with health issues and who are suspected of being experiencing abuse should be screened for abuse so that they can be assisted.
- All churches should play a role in supporting women who have been infected or affected by HIV and AIDS.
- Women who have survived abuse may find new meaning in their lives if they are supported by being offered interpersonal and emotional support (O’Leary 1998:431).
- Family and friends have been used as support structure for abused women.
- Parents and neighbours need to be included in programmes and initiatives to gain knowledge on how to support abused women.

### **6.6.3 Tertiary level of care**

Tertiary level of care is the care that “is individualised and more intensive to reduce complications or severity of the problem or behaviour”. The recommendations made to support abused women at tertiary level of care are listed below.

### **6.6.3.1 Recommendations for nurses**

- Support services should include communities or places where abused women can stay and where they are supported by nurses trained in taking care of abused women.
- Nurses should facilitate for the provision of shelters which help women to develop solidarity with other women in their transition to healthy living with no abuse
- All local and national healthcare, public and private structures used to support women should be identified and made known to the public. These structures should collaborate their services in order to achieve their goals of caring and supporting abused women.

### **6.6.3.2 Recommendations for women**

- Women should be encouraged to use all types of healthcare services available and at their disposal to escape and then recover; for example, places of safety for women and children. The women should report to the nurses about how they experience such places of safety.
- Women need to be encouraged to be honest and share their problems with the nurses in order to be assisted.
- The average woman needs to be encouraged to open up about her abuse in order to be assisted.

## **6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the above discussions, the following ideas can serve as possible topics for future research.

- The impact of the relationship of the “makoti” (new bride/daughter-in-law) with her in-laws in South Africa. (There is limited literature available pertaining to this specific area of research.)
- Development of a formal programme to train nurses on how to address and implement the strategies of the theoretical framework on the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its impact on indigenous African women’s health.

- Development of a culturally sensitive health and nursing care policy to address culture and other social stressors affecting the abuse of women.

## 6.8 IMPLICATIONS

The study findings revealed some indigenous African women experienced different health consequences from being trapped in their marriages. Addressing these health consequences may prevent further abuse and may decrease the incidents of ill health occurring due to abuse. Therefore, the following implications on nursing education, nursing practice and research apply.

### 6.8.1 Nursing education

The nursing curriculum should include courses on women abuse or prevention of family violence which are perpetrated by culture and language. A basic forensic nursing course should be added to the curriculum so that nurses can assist women who report to the emergency or health centres with abuse. Specific groups of nurses who will be trained to offer forensic nursing care should also be trained on how to identify cultural influenced abuse. Nurses should also be trained to notice signs of being trapped in the marriage to be able to assess and advise abused women properly.

### 6.8.2 Nursing practice

This study provides nurses and other health professionals with the opportunity to understand the indigenous African women's experiences regarding the implications of proverbs and language in their marriages. Nurses and other health professionals can relate them to practice in order to provide the relevant care.

The following implications will apply to the nursing practice:

- The study showed women were sometimes trapped in an abusive relationship with nowhere to go. It is therefore important to raise awareness in all health professionals who come into contact with these women during consultations for whatever reason to notice the signs of being stressed due to entrapment in their relationships and intervene or refer for further management.

- It is important for the nurses to be aware of the cultural practices which may impact on the women's health and therefore develop support programmes.
- Nurses should provide a supportive environment and counselling to the affected women and health institutions should provide clear guidelines on how to assess abused women without being judgemental.
- Nurses are to apply good communication skills during interaction with abused women because it will encourage the women to talk.
- Nurses who are involved with assessing and supporting abused women are to have debriefing sessions so that they should feel supported throughout the process.

### **6.8.3 Department of Social Services and South African Police Service**

- Unemployed women who are trapped in their marriages are to be assisted with social relief. It will enable them to make informed decisions without thinking of how they will survive without the partner's income.
- The South African police department should have skilled police officers who can deal with cultural complaints and other complaints from women in general. This will assist them to facilitate swift assistance should it be required without being judgemental to abused women.

### **6.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted in one province only (Gauteng) and the probability of the findings being different if it was conducted in other provinces and more rural settings is not disputed. Although the findings add to the phenomena of the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" they are not transferable to a wider population in other areas because it was done in Gauteng only.

The Wittmann-Price (2004;2006) and Masenya (2004) theoretical frameworks were not tested. Therefore it is not known whether it would meet the support of indigenous abused African women who have suffered abuse due to the societal meaning attributed to the cultural expectations promoted by the proverb.

## 6.10 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health. The study was qualitative in nature and used hermeneutic phenomenology to gather and analyse data. Wittmann-Price’s (2004;2006) emancipatory decision-making theory and Masenya’s (2004) “bosadi” (womanhood) approach were used to direct the development of the theoretical framework. The analogy of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” was analogically explained using the African hut and the sun and relating them to the findings.

Issues which emerged and impacted negatively on indigenous African women’s health were patriarchy, feeling trapped, and stress. On the other hand, positive reinforcement of premarital counselling, significance of the family and awareness were seen to have a positive impact on indigenous African women’s lives. These issues were further inferred analogically to the African hut and the sun in order to create new conceptual information.

Recommendations based on the findings of the study have been indicated. The research question of the study was answered and all objectives were achieved.

The study may contribute to the empowerment and support of abused indigenous African women in South Africa. It may furthermore improve the body of knowledge of the nursing discipline regarding caring, support and emancipation of abused women.

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## 8 ANNEXURES

### ANNEXURE A

#### Information leaflet and informed consent

University of Pretoria  
P/Bag X323  
Arcadia  
0007

2012.11.03

**Title:**

**EXPLORING THE MEANING AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PPROVERB "LEBITLA LA MOSADI KE BOGADI" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON INDIGENOUS AFRICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

Dear Participant

#### **1) INTRODUCTION**

I invite you to participate in a research study. This information leaflet will help you to decide if you want to participate. Before you agree to take part you should fully understand what is involved. If you have any questions that this leaflet does not fully explain, please do not hesitate to ask the investigator/interviewer Mrs Salaminah Phiri.

#### **2) THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY**

The aim of the study is to explore and describe the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on indigenous African women's health. You as participant are

a very important source of information on the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on your health.

### **3) EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED**

This is a qualitative study where the researcher will be asking you questions in a group about your understanding of the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” (a woman’s grave is at the place/home of her husband) and its implications on your health. Interviews and focus group interviews will be conducted and audio-taped with your permission.

### **4) RISK AND DISCOMFORT INVOLVED**

There are no risks in participating in the study. Some of the questions I am going to ask you may make you feel uncomfortable, but you need not answer them if you do not want to. The interview will take about 1 hour of your time.

### **5) POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY**

Although you will not benefit directly from the study, the results of the study will enable me to understand the meaning and interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and its implications on indigenous African women’s health. The researcher intends to describe a theoretical framework based on the findings of the study.

### **6) WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time during the study without giving any reason. Your withdrawal will not affect you in any way.

## **7) HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

This study has received a written approval from the Student Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Pretoria. A copy of the approval letter is available if you wish to have one.

## **8) INFORMATION AND CONTACT PERSON**

The contact persons for the study are Mrs Salaminah Phiri. If you have any questions about the study please contact her at a tel. 012 354 1791 Mobile: 0832990829. Alternatively you may contact my supervisors Prof Mavis Mulaudzi at 012 354 2125 and Dr Tanya Heyns at 012 354 2132.

## **9) COMPENSATION**

Your participation is voluntary. No compensation will be given for your participation.

## **10).CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information that you will give, will be kept confidential. Once I have analysed the information no one will be able to identify any names or people who participated in the study. Research reports and articles in scientific journals will not include any information that may identify you or your social network/club/church. Attached herewith please receive the consent to participate in the study which the researcher aims to use for the study.

## **CONTACT DETAILS FOR REVEREND MAPHIKE**

The following people have been asked to provide you with counselling should you require counselling services.

Reverend Maphike  
Hammanskraal Congregation  
United Reformed Church  
Hammanskraal

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**CONTACTS FOR MAIN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA.**

If you wish to contact the ethics committee on any matter concerning the study you are free to contact them at the following:

Faculty of Health Sciences, Research Ethics Committee

Secretary: Ms Manda Smith

TEL (012) 354 1330, FAX: (012) 354 1367/ 08665924

Web Address: [www.healthethics-up.co.za](http://www.healthethics-up.co.za)

Physical: 31 Bophelo Road,  
Medical Campus,  
HW Snyman Building (South)  
Level 2-34.  
Private Bag x323,  
Arcadia, Pretoria,  
0007

I hope my application will receive your utmost consideration.

Yours Faithfully

Salaminah Phiri.....

Date.....

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY**

I confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this study has told me about nature, process, risks, discomforts and benefits of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information regarding the study. I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details, will be anonymously processed into research reports. I am participating willingly. I have had time to ask questions and have no objection to participate in the study. I understand that there is no penalty should I wish to discontinue with the study and my withdrawal will not affect me in anyway.

I have received a signed copy of this informed consent agreement.

Participant's name :.....(Please print)

Participant signature:..... Date.....

Investigator's Name:.....(Please print)

Investigator's signature:..... Date.....

Witness's Name:.....(Please print)

Witness's signature ..... Date.....

## ANNEXURE B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Today we are talking about the proverb **“lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi”**

1. What does it mean to you as a woman?
2. What are the implications/effects of the proverb on your health?
3. What are your experiences regarding the proverb?
4. What can be done in this situation?

Probing throughout the discussions.

**ANNEXURE C:**

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER**

The Research Ethics Committee, Faculty Health Sciences, University of Pretoria complies with ICH-GCP guidelines and has US Federal wide Assurance.

\* **FWA 00002567**, Approved dd 22 May 2002 and Expires 20 Oct 2016.

\* **IRB 0000 2235 IORG0001762** Approved dd 13/04/2011 and Expires 13/04/2014.



**UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA**

Denkers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo lsa Dihalefi  
Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
Fakulteit Gesondheidswetenskappe Navorsingsetiekomitee

**DATE: 7/09/2012**

<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>141/2012</b>
<b>TITLE OF THE PROTOCOL</b>	Exploring The Meaning And Interpretations of the proverb “Lebitla La Mosadi Ke Bogadi” and its implications on Indigenous African Women’s Health: A Phenomenological Study.
<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</b>	Ms S S Phiri <b>Dept:</b> Nursing Science Steve Biko Academic Hospital ;University of Pretoria. <b>Cell:</b> 0832990829 <b>E-Mail:</b> <a href="mailto:salaminah.phiri@up.ac.za">salaminah.phiri@up.ac.za</a>
<b>SUB INVESTIGATOR</b>	None
<b>STUDY COORDINATOR</b>	None
<b>SUPERVISOR (ONLY when STUDENTS)</b>	Prof F M Mulaudzi <b>E-Mail:</b> <a href="mailto:mavis.mulaudzi@up.ac.za">mavis.mulaudzi@up.ac.za</a> Dr T Heyns <b>E-Mail:</b> <a href="mailto:tanya.heyns@up.ac.za">tanya.heyns@up.ac.za</a>
<b>STUDY DEGREE</b>	PhD
<b>SPONSOR COMPANY</b>	Not Applicable
<b>CONTACT DETAILS OF SPONSOR</b>	Not Applicable
<b>SPONSORS POSTAL ADDRESS</b>	Not Applicable
<b>MEETING DATE</b>	5/09/2012

The Protocol and Informed Consent Document & Questionnaire were approved on 5/9/2012 by a properly constituted meeting of the Ethics Committee subject to the following conditions:

1. The approval is valid for 3 years period [till the end of December 2015], and
2. The approval is conditional on the receipt of 6 monthly written Progress Reports, and
3. The approval is conditional on the research being conducted as stipulated by the details of the documents submitted to and approved by the Committee. In the event that a need arises to change who the investigators are, the methods or any other aspect, such changes must be submitted as an Amendment for approval by the Committee.

*Members of the Research Ethics Committee:*

Prof M J Bester (female) BSc (Chemistry and Biochemistry); BSc (Hons)(Biochemistry); MSc(Biochemistry); PhD (Medical Biochemistry)  
 Prof R Delpont (female) BA et Scien, B Curatiosis (Hons) (Intensive care Nursing), M Sc (Physiology), PhD (Medicine), M Ed Computer Assisted Education  
 Dr NK Likibi MBB HM – Representing Gauteng Department of Health) MPH  
 Dr MP Mathebula (female) Deputy CEO: Steve Biko Academic Hospital; MBChB, PDM, HM  
 Prof A Nienaber (female) BA(Hons)(Wits); LLB; LLM; LLD(UP); PhD; Dipl. Datametrics(UNISA) – Legal advisor  
 Mrs MC Nzeku (female) BSc(NUL); MSc(Biochem)(UCL, UK) – Community representative  
 Prof L M Ntlhe MbChB (Natal) FCS (SA)  
 Snr Sr J Phatoli (female) BCut(Fet.A); BTec(Oncology Nursing Science) – Nursing representative  
 Dr R Reynders MBChB (Prét), FCPaed (CMSA) MRCPCH (Lon) Cert Med. Onc (CMSA)

## ANNEXURE D:

### Approval Letter from the School of Health Care Sciences: Research and Post Graduate Committee

Faculty Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of Pretoria



PO Box 677 Pretoria 0001  
Republic of South Africa  
http://www.up.ac.za  
Tel: (012) 354 1980  
Fax: (012) 354 1682

Office of the Chairperson  
School of Health Care Sciences  
Faculty of Health Sciences

To whom it may concern,

**Evaluation of protocol for the following student:  
Student S Phiri (PhD Nursing)**

Title: "Understanding the meaning and interpretations of the proverb "Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" and its implications on women's health: A phenomenological study."

This letter serves to confirm that the abovementioned protocol served on the School of Health Care Sciences: Research and Postgraduate Committee of 6 June 2012 where it was approved and referred to the School Academic Advisory Committee for final discussion.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Mulaudzi', written over a horizontal line.

^ Professor M. Mulaudzi  
Chairperson: School Research and Postgraduate Committee

**ANNEXURE E TRANSCRIPT OF A FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW**

**Focus group interview**

**Duration: 38:48**

Researcher: How do you understand the meaning and the interpretations of the proverb “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” and What are its implications on your health? Yes “lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi” . Anyone who would like to start? How do you understand the proverb, A woman’s grave is at her-in-laws....

Participants: *(All laughing together) but it’s quite no one is saying anything.*

Participant 1	<p>A woman’s grave is at her in-laws to my understanding it means. In our olden days, our parents used, we know that our parents used to stay at their in-laws and take whatever comes to persevere (<i>go kgotlelela</i>). Because that is was said that a woman’s grave is at her in-laws, and irrespective of the challenges that you come across with, you wouldn’t go back home and say I am experiencing 1,2,3, they will still say to you. You are married woman now , you still have to persevere (<i>kgotlolelela</i>) in that marriage. They based it on so many things I think that life has changed now, it’s not like these days when our parents used to persevere.</p> <p>You will find that the husbands have left they’ve gone to work maybe at the mines or cities. And they wives remain at home alone. Even though the men would go back home and check on their wives, but they know they had to perseverance and sometimes they do not come back home at all , but to me I am still saying yes, a woman’s grave it’s at her in-laws place though things are not as easy you see now there isn’t any perseverance anymore in the nowadays....</p>
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Participant 3	<p>Based on that...again in the olden days marriage whether it was tough or easy there was perseverance, and you would persevere because you will think what will people say? And sometimes you persevere because of your children thinking what will my children say? Meanwhile your shoes are getting hot for your feet and you are the one who is getting burned in them. But coming back to today's marriages, eh I think most of our kids try to get married conditionally. Material things are important things when it comes to marriage, because most of them even today we meet ....asking you what are you doing for yourself? Or and you that he want to know which job are you doing, these are material things but why do many marriages never last because after you real that the person you married it's not the one thought he was and the things you thought you will get you don't get them. That's why even if you got married for a year or 2 years, we base our marriages of what does the other bring at home, so that is why a woman's grave is at her in-laws place. You will stay in your marriage for 2 years because your husband is not working and you will find some of them they got married to a person because they were employed but the minute that person lose their job, marriage is over....</p>
<p>Researcher</p> <p>Participant 2</p>	<p>Are you saying there isn't any perseverance in marriages nowadays,</p> <p>Yes that's why you will find that there are many divorces now it's very rare that you find marriages are sustainable. You get married today and in 2 days' time they don't see eye to eye. I think the 50/50 issue also it's an advantage to our marriages now. Because we, women we see each other equal to men. And back in the olden days men were up in the league and the women were down in the league. That is why they persevered in their marriages because of that and before they left their homes the they will be given rules.</p>

Participant 3	<p>Based on that...again with the olden marriage whether it was tough or easy there was perseverance, and you would persevere because you will think what will people say? And sometimes you persevere because of your children thinking what will my children say? Meanwhile your shoes are getting hot for your feet and you are the one who is getting burned in them. But coming back to today's marriages, eh I think most of our kids try to get married conditionally. Material things are important things when it comes your marriage, because most of them even today we meet ....asking you what are you doing for yourself? Or and you that he want to know which job are you doing, these are material things but why do many marriages never last because after you real that the person you married it's not the one thought he was and the things you thought you will get you don't get them. That's why even if you got married for a year or 2 years, we base our marriages of what does the other bring at home, so that is why a woman's grave is at her in-laws place. You will stay in your marriage for 2 years because your husband is not working and you will find some of them they got married to a person because they were employed but the minute that person lose their job, marriage is over....</p>
Participant	<p>Isn't it that most of the women are independent they don't persevere because they can stand on their own (<i>ba ikemetse</i>) themselves. Isn't back in the olden days they couldn't go out or divorce because she will look after her husband, because he is the one who is providing for the kids, because we do do things ourselves you see maybe that is why there is perseverance it's not there anymore and I think, I don't know...personally it's hard for a man who goes to work and the man doesn't play his role to help you even if he is unemployed, without having money but with some other things with you must help each other out you see, then you also have that oomph. This is my husband even though he doesn't have an income, but at least he contributes</p>

	with some other things. Ja...with respect and some other things you see, you will find that as a woman you are a provider, you don't respect, you see so you can't hold on you will say let me have this, let me respect him you see because he is my husband you see....
Researcher	...What are the implications on the proverb on a woman's health? How do you experience it? ( <i>inaudible</i> )...like implications we would like to hear the implications it has, on the woman's health.
Participant 2	Somehow you'll find that the husband is providing more at home but still doesn't give you that respect, so somehow it will definitely affect you, maybe you become hurt and depressed and that is the question on how it does affect you?
Participant 4	Yes, If I may add you will find that you get married to a person and from nowhere then that person decides that they are not working anymore, the man will say I had a fight with my boss blah, blah, blah, in the process why did you come home at this time, why this? And emotionally this guy is abusing you and that is your grave right there because somewhere down the line, you will see yourself having diabetes and your blood pressure getting high then next minute you are dead, after that he gets all your money and some of your things you understand. This is why I am saying that a woman's grave really and truly is at your in-laws place, and men are the ones who are a problem, I might be wrong because maybe all men are not the same maybe its 2 Or 3 that are alright but otherwise under general men are not, you know.
Researcher	What is really the in-laws place? How does that affect the woman
Participant 4	Ahhh ... these days there's no such a thing as at your mothers'-in-law or father-in-law's place. You understand what I am saying, I am talking about the youth getting married these now a days, they run away and leave the in-laws behind, they don't want to

	be committed
Participant 2	<i>(Inaudible) (Speaking but very far from the recorder)</i>
Participant 4	There isn't that in-laws place, they pay lobola and after it has been paid, he takes the bride, you go stay at your own place, there isn't that after they have paid lobola you go stay at your in-laws place. You will see you mother-in-law that day when they have just paid lobola, you understand .....
Researcher	This is a long term...on your own...that you may not see this at that time...ok thank you...
Participant 4	And I again before I forget, to my understanding that a woman's grave is at her in-laws place, it's the issue of you being a woman at all times, you used to provide even when your husband is working, but you provide on your own. He doesn't buy food but when he comes back home he wants food. There must be food in the house and if you fail to cook food for him, then you are dead. These are the things we hear from our friends, families all those things the problems that we have. That is why I always say, we women we always say we are being abused....but you know I think we allow these men to abuse us when he does funny things you allow them to go on and on you know....
Researcher	<i>(Inaudible)</i> Any other experience about the proverb "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi"?
Participant 4	And <i>(laughs)</i> whilst I am still here and you will find that I am unemployed and my husband is paying for the bond, he is paying for whatever and whatever. At the end of the day, he doesn't treat me like a human being in the house, I am nothing, whereby at the end of the day, he can bring a girlfriend to the house and sleep with her, I don't have a choice you understand what I am saying, I am unemployed, I don't have anything so I am at this man's mercy to say that I get out of this house what am I going to

	eat, what am I going to do because at the end of the day, it creates problems for me, we are going to have all sorts of illness, I will have cancer and when you get sick this man doesn't have time. And you end up going home, no isn't it you are married and you have kids therefore you cannot go home. The next minute people will hear that you have passed on in the house because of stress.
Researcher	So a person can die from stress?
Participant 4	Yes and they do they do, they do and I wonder what type of woman can do that to another woman, imagine.....
Participant 1	I think that.....you will find that again the man in the house is abusing his child, the girl sexually, but you as the mother knowing that you are not working, you will....you know that when the child speaks and tells you what her father is doing to her, you become aggressive towards her then you start to break her up. Because you are protecting your man because he is the one who puts food on the table, so that again it's the a woman's grave is at her in-laws place, it seems as if you create your own problems....( <i>inaudible</i> ) the sexual abuse it's happening but because she says she has to keep the family together what will she say, she has nowhere to go....
Participant 4	And I again oh... I talk too much
Researcher	No, no, no....its ok feel free....
Participant 4	And again you find that I personally have a problem why must they dress a woman in black for a whole year when her husband has passed away. When in fact the man don't wear black for the whole year. These are facts we women allow to be abused by other people, other things like for instance if a man can't wear black things for a whole year, why me? But then we allow those things. I will wear them, he is my husband...you see "lebitla la

	mosadi ke bogadi”....
Researcher	Yes, wear them and that time you are alone, perhaps maybe when it comes to recommendation we must ask ourselves and write it down, why do women wear black clothes? For the whole year...is it part of “Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi?.....
Participant 4	You know when my man was still alive, he used to get angry with me, isn’t this is an olden days thing and we find it here, yes I understand we got it here but what is the meaning, because it looks like the meaning it’s on the women side, only it’s not on the man side
Researcher	<i>(Inaudible)</i> ...why is it like that?
Participant 4	Like why? What is the reason?
Researcher	We are looking for the implications are there still there?
Participant 1	I wanted to say another thing when they say a woman’s grave is at her in-laws place. It lowers your self-esteem as a woman, you end up, being a woman you have a low self-esteem because you get abused, there are many things happening to you. It’s like you don’t know that sense of ownership as a person, it becomes difficult because once you lose your self-esteem it becomes difficult to regain that back. Ja, unless you...and uplift yourself again but it’s difficult so it’s true; a woman’s grave it’s at her in laws place but we really need to take care of ourselves, because we have so many illnesses these days and the minute we start concentrating on that aspect we are not going to live long I mean you can even see that most of the people that passes away are young adults instead of grown-up, elderly people because they are many challenges that we go through so even it’s like that but we really need to, well I still believe that women as well we don’t love each other, because a man will come to you and tell you that he is married and you know that he is married to S, but

	you still agree to go out with that person and you take him even if he is S, husband, you know that very well so you see that as a woman, we abuse each other...
Participants	<i>All agree</i>
Participant 1	We don't love each other so I think if we can learn as women to be there for each other, so that if you see somebody's husband that you know really, a friend that you can confront and say hey, I saw this person doing this and that not that you are messing their marriage up but you are helping them to at least communicate and another thing we women, we bottle things inside and we don't communicate...therefore we get sick...
Participants	<i>All agree...yes</i>
Participant 4	I still say that we woman we allow ourselves to be abused, whilst knowing what kind of a person, your man is before you get married he will beat you up and when he asks you to marry him you say yes...when he married you, he is not going to change, he is still going to beat you up and hurt you straight...
Researcher	<i>(Inaudible)</i> ...now we are interpreting and explaining the meaning of the proverb or the grave because, the question says implications on woman's health. In other words I am saying does it have implications/ affect you as a woman? Any other experience about the prover?..
Participant 3	It does affect ones health because you heart is like this ( <i>showing with hands</i> ) anything that goes wrong you want to address it. You want to take it out on your kids. At times you don't even talk to them properly you don't address them properly even if a child talks to you, hi mom can I please, you start (hey, hey you just you..... it created problems, it affects everyone...
Researcher	More of the implications....

Participant 3	Yes, and if this thing is not addressed in the house the kids will go to the uncles outside the home, then it affects the whole family , when the children go there it's no longer affecting one person, it's now affecting every body
Researcher	....What else....
Participant 1	I was going back to saying that we women we allow to be abused because when you reach the age of 17/18 somebody wants to marry you, the only thing that excites your mom is that my daughter got married at an early age. There are many things on the side that will appear at a later stage, she is not thinking about that the child's life of whilst getting married at such an early age will she manage to handle all that comes with it at that time, because at that young age that she is getting married in how old is the guy, he is not finished with his things yet, he could go out and date and so forth, as a fact some of us women have problems too....
Researcher	We women we do what?...
Participant 4	We contribute because we allow our children to be married ealy
Participants	<i>All agree...</i>
Researcher	Ok, what can be done?, At the end of it all, what are we saying about this woman's grave, what can be done about the situation. We started with it from the beginning and the elders say it's the olden thing and the young adults say doesn't work for them...
Participant 1	I think as parents we have to form some forum that we can work and share our experiences and share the challenges. At least when you see that T is going through this then you will realise that ooh, my problems are big...my problems are not that big compared to others networking and having forums where we could share and understand what we women go through. I think

	that it would also benefit us. Ok...
Participant 3	And one other thing , I think that we are parents and we have sons as well, we must educate the young males, that when the grow up and become men, they must know that you need to complement you wife, you mustn't make her your doormat as you wish you see, I think if they can be taught that you must take care of your woman, nature her you see...hmmmm
Researcher	So you say there must respect for each other?
Participants	<i>All agree...</i>
Participants	<i>Laughs</i>
Participant 4	...it contributes in everything; we must have workshops and all of these things. Even if we have workshops some of these women won't attend and some men won't attend and the very same one's that won't attend are the very one's we must target
Researcher	So the women's grave is her in-laws place....So you suggest there should be workshops on the issue?
Participant	<i>All laugh and talk at once</i>
Participant 3	Especially with the young generation the boys when you talk of children they must be taught how to respect each other there's...a say...when we talk generally and we don't see that 10 years down there the starting now...under normal circumstance when we speak to the kids we ignore emphasising respecting women( <i>inaudible</i> )...its only now that it rings the bell that it should start early....
Participant 1	But I also think to teach our kids at the schools, we really need to emphasis on young boys also these young girls because we don't respect each other, when you feel that you working and I am responsible but most of all we get into marriages only to find that already you working, you have all your things, we need to have

	self-respect and communication, we really need to be open, your husband must know that you are together that what it is that you wish for this marriage and all the times you have problems, you have challenges, you really need to consult, although ( <i>inaudible</i> ) it's not easy...
Researcher 1	So far you sound...when you need to network and you form forums they don't come. How can we reach them?
Participant 2	Yes they don't come. It's a serious problem but we have to have means ....
Participant 3	...have you seen a woman being held down at all times...Something needs to be done.....
Participant 4	But it's still happening now "lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi" which means persevere
Participant 3	Yes but it is too much...
Participant 4	You will find a man saying to you, you are not like my mother, my mother doesn't do this and that. And then you ask yourself, why did he get married to me if at all times he talks about his mother. My mom this, my mom that. Women are the ones that need workshops to be encouraged....
Participants	<i>They all agree....</i>
Participant 3	Even if you see what your child is doing you keep on protecting them no it will be fine, it's just that I made him angry...
Researcher	So women keep on protecting their children?
Participant 1	We, women we can't act enough and blood is thicker than water. When your daughter-in-law comes to you and say...T is doing this and that, definitely you are going to hear what she is saying but even if you see that this a problem, even if T is at the wrong you don't say that no, but my child you are wrong, you are wrong, you

	<p>see...and to be a parent enough to go and sit down with them and show them the right way, you are praying, and praying because these nowadays girls they...do not persevere like we did. Today's marriages I think it's the law or what I don't know what to say. It's like people, have to go for counselling, Some go through counselling but it doesn't work out. You may have tried to do so, but what about people who have God within them, those who have God within them can pray, they go to counselling and they also need to pray, to save your marriages. So reaching out to them...but I think really as women we really need to play a big role in our sons lives....</p>
Researcher	And girls too....
Participant 3	And girls too....yes
Researcher	We can the session now. Thank you so much for your contribution. I really appreciate it
	<i>THE END</i>