

**Women's Reflections on the Strategies They Used to Protect their Children in the Face  
of Domestic Violence**

By

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## Declaration of Own Work

“I herewith declare that *Women’s reflections on the strategies used to protect their children in the face of domestic violence* is my own work and that all the sources cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

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## Abstract

The unique strategies women use to physically and emotionally protect their children in the context of domestic violence often remain unacknowledged by society. Protective efforts that remains unacknowledged situate abused women in a position where they are perceived as unprotective or as unfit parents, which has significant ramifications for both the mother and her children. The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of women's experiences of maternal protectiveness. It also aimed to explore the variety of protective strategies abused women used to physically and emotionally protect their children in the context of domestic violence. This qualitative study was undertaken from a phenomenological position. Three participants were selected from The Potter's House, a shelter for abused women, using a purposive participant selection process. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Three super-ordinate themes and 14 sub-ordinate themes were generated from the data. The findings suggest that abused women find it important to protect their children, despite their experience of mothering in the context of domestic violence to be difficult. Women use different strategies to protect their children physically and emotionally from domestic violence. Additionally, the study found that the protective strategies women use is significantly related to circumstances and resources available to women.

*Keywords:* Domestic violence, maternal protectiveness, physical protective strategies, emotional protective strategies, child protection, women, mothering, qualitative research, phenomenology, interpretive phenomenological analysis

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## Chapter 1: General Orientation of the Study

*“Every person has the right to freedom from all forms of violence.”*

*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, section 12(1)(c)*

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a brief outline of the dissertation. The background information sets the scene for the introduction of the research question, the problem statement, as well as the justification, aims, and objectives of this study. A summary of the research design, in terms of the paradigmatic framework and methodology employed follows. The structure of the paper is then outlined, before ending the chapter with a conclusion. Furthermore, reflective boxes throughout the chapters of this dissertation provide additional insight into the researcher’s journey in the process of conducting this study.

### 1.2 Research Background

The women participating in Peled and Gil’s, 2011, study of abused women’s mothering perceptions, defined maternal protectiveness within the context of domestic violence as creating a buffer between the children’s world and the violent world. (Peled & Gil, 2011)(Peled & Gil, 2011)Maternal protectiveness is the strategies used by women to prevent and reduce domestic violence, as well as to compensate for the dysfunctional home environment that domestic violence creates for children (Margolin, Gordis, Medina, & Oliver, 2003; Peled & Gil, 2011; Wendt, Buchanan, & Moulding, 2015). Abused women often compensate for the effects of domestic violence on their parenting by being more nurturing, attentive, and sensitive to the needs of their children (Letourneau, Fedick, & Willms, 2007; Sullivan, Nguyen, Allen, Bybee, & Juras, 2000). Protective strategies are the actual methods used by abused women to reduce and protect their children from domestic

violence and its impact on them (Margolin et al., 2003; Peled & Gil, 2011). Leaving domestic violence has been identified in the literature as the ultimate way of protecting children (Buchanan, Wendt, & Moulding, 2015b; Douglas & Walsh, 2010). However, leaving might not always be the ultimate protective strategy as it has been shown that abusive behaviour continues or in some cases even escalate after women have ended the relationship (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000). Abused women also employ a wide variety of other well-organised protective strategies based on their children's needs that do not necessarily include leaving the abusive relationship (Haight, Woochan, Linn, & Swinford, 2007). Therefore, any behaviour women employ to reduce and prevent children from being exposed to domestic violence or being emotionally or physically impacted by it can be classified as a protective strategy (Wendt et al., 2015).

A substantial percentage of existing research that explores maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence tends to view and describe abused women through the lens of a “deficit model”. The “deficit model” is defined by Lapierre, 2008, as an approach in which the problems displayed by children after domestic violence exposure is considered to be the results of ‘deficiencies’ in women’s mothering. At the core of the “deficit model” lies society’s overwhelming concern for the negative impact domestic violence exposure pose to children (Lapierre, 2008). Together with this concern, is the finding that women’s mothering is a significant resilience factor for children and greatly influence to what extend children will be affected by domestic violence exposure (Lapierre, 2008). These two factors, independent from one another, may seem harmless. However, marry these two factors and one gets a social weapon that “fires” blame at abused women’s mothering practices for the adverse reactions children often experience after domestic violence exposure (Lapierre, 2008). Furthermore, it has been noted that mother-blaming is not a new occurrence. The tendency for mothers to be blamed for whatever goes wrong with their offspring has been present for

many years, predating 1970 (Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985). Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale, 1985, conducted a study investigating the incidents of mother-blaming in 125 articles in major clinical journals for the years 1970, 1976, and 1982 and found that mother-blaming is a common practice in clinical journals. Furthermore, their investigation highlighted a pattern in which a mother's "activities" or actions is highly likely to be blamed for children's problems. Interestingly, it was also noted by Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale, 1985, that neither the sex of the author(s) nor the year of publication had any effect on the presence of mother-blaming tendencies in the clinical journals they investigated. The tendency for both men and women, to lay the blame for children's problems at the doorstep of mothers, may be a reflection of a patriarchal system infused by biased gender norms (A. G. Johnson, 2014). The "deficit model", therefore, indirectly state that when a child displays problems, it most probably means that his or her mother is not functioning adequately, with no consideration to the actions that might have been taken by women to protect their children (Lapierre, 2008; Risley-curtiss & Heffernan, 2003).

As the "deficit model" pathologise abused women and their child-rearing practices, it shifts the attention of men's violence and its consequences, onto the shortcomings of abused women (Humphreys, Mullender, Thiara, & Skamballis, 2006; Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Wendt et al., 2015). To this end, maternal adequacy is best judged as a function of a child's outcomes after domestic violence exposure (Lapierre, 2008). Consequently, abused women's competencies in child care, and a variety of previously unrecognised effective protection methods go unnoticed (Sullivan, Nguyen, Allen, Bybee & Juras, 2000). In Humby and Bible's, 2009, opinion, literature often view women's child caring practices through a "deficit model" lens, which interpret certain protective behaviours displayed by abused women as dysfunctional or passive, totally discarding the potential protective value within these behaviours. An example given by Humby and Bible, 2009, is how literature interpret a

woman's non-disclosure of domestic violence as the woman being in "denial" or as having some other "cognitive distortion". However, very little to no consideration is given to the possibility that women might dis-identify with domestic violence victimization as a strategy of impression management in order to minimise and protect children from social stigmatization and shame associated with being identified as a victim to domestic violence (Hamby & Bible, 2009). Not leaving an abusive relationship is interpreted as women failing to protect their children, however, neglecting to acknowledge that leaving may cause more damage to children and women's safety and wellbeing than in the case of staying in the abusive relationship (Hamby & Bible, 2009). Prayer and spiritual strategies are another protective strategy that is often interpreted as "passive" or "avoidant". However, prayer and other spiritual resources, especially cultural specific practices, can serve as significant source of strength and healing for both abused women and their children (Hamby & Bible, 2009).

It is suggested that in South Africa, as in some other countries, the "deficit model" is rooted in gender and power dynamics, which include social and cultural constructions of womanhood, motherhood, and what is in the best interest of the child (Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015; Rasool, 2015). The social and cultural expectations of womanhood and motherhood are ingrained in the hearts of most South African women and men (Rasool, 2015; Rasool & Hochfeld, 2005; Rasool & Suleman, 2017). The gender and power dynamics present in South Africa, and the social and cultural expectations of motherhood influence women's experiences of domestic violence, as well as maternal protectiveness (Rasool, 2015). The societal and gender norms of femininity and masculinity tend to reinforce women's positions as the protectors of children, more so than men, with the sole responsibility for protecting, caring for and raising children being allocated to women (Hooker, 2016; Peled & Gil, 2011). Furthermore, it is suggested that when the responsibility for childcare and child protection mainly falls on women, the normative role for mothers - even more so for abused mothers -

becomes rooted in unrealistic expectations (Buchanan et al., 2015b). Women who are abused are expected to cope simultaneously with the impact domestic violence have on them, keep the perpetrator happy and satisfied, fully protect children from domestic violence or any other impact it can have on them, while having to face the restrictions domestic violence create in a woman's support system and resources (Hamby & Bible, 2009). When a woman fails to successfully master all these tasks simultaneously, she is judged as a poor mother or a bad wife, without any form of acknowledgement for what she did succeed in (Buchanan, Wendt, & Moulding, 2015a; Hamby & Bible, 2009). Furthermore, these expectations are unrealistic in that perpetrators often strategically place their partners in such positions where they won't be able to succeed (Hamby & Bible, 2009). For example, it has been found that perpetrators withhold financial resources from their partners, however, when a partner is not able to provide sufficient food or proper clothing for children, perpetrators accuse their partners of being poor mothers (Hamby & Bible, 2009). These unrealistic childcare expectations express little consideration for the mothering challenges domestic violence creates (Buchanan et al., 2015b). Domestic violence creates challenging barriers to women's resources and their confidence to meet their children's needs (Jaffe & Crooks, 2005). Consequently, when responsibility for childcare is mainly placed on mothers, it creates room for child protection services to hold abused women accountable for the exposure to and impact of domestic violence on their children (Douglas & Walsh, 2010). This, in turn, leads to accusations of "failure to protect" their children (Kantor & Little, 2003; Powell & Murray, 2008; Rasool, 2015). The notion of "failure to protect" is complicated by the "best interest of the child" discourse, which suggests that it is in the best interest of the child to be in an environment where the father is present (Edelson, Hokoda, & Ramos-Lira, 2007; Rasool, 2015). It is seen as the woman's responsibility to preserve this form of family (Hargreaves, Vetten, Schneider, Malepe, & Fuller, 2006).

Adding to the unrealistic mothering expectations abused women are expected to fulfil, is abusive partners who specifically, and intentionally target a woman's role as a mother (Jaffe, Johnston, Crooks, & Bala, 2008; Lapierre, 2010b). Previous research, conducted by Mullender et al., 2002, suggested that most abusive partners are aware that being a mother is a source of positive identity for women, and will try and preserve women's role as mothers above all else. Therefore, mothering in the context of domestic violence can automatically become an area of vulnerability (Bancroft, Sliverman, & Ritchie, 2012; Mullender et al., 2002). Abusive partners exercise control and domination over women's mothering by limiting their economic resources (Kaminer, du Plessis, Hardy, & Benjamin, 2013), and their social support (Radford & Hester, 2006). Furthermore, abusive partners make mothering difficult by inciting the children against the mother and imposing various restrictions to undermine her maternal functioning and mothering skills (Jaffe et al., 2008). On top of this, mothering is made even more challenging for abused women by the immediate and long-term negative physical and emotional consequences of the violence on their wellbeing (Cerulli, Poleshuck, Raimondi, Veale, & Chin, 2012; Peltzer, Pengpid, McFarlane, & Banyini, 2013; Plichta, 2004).

Therefore, it can be said that abused women are potentially set up for failure and difficulty. They are held responsible to preserve a family environment where the father is present in children's lives, even when the father is abusive. At the same time, they are held responsible to protect their children from the abuse and its impact (Edelson et al., 2007; Rasool, 2015).

However, despite the challenges to maternal protectiveness abused women face, which is discussed in detail in chapter 2, they still employ multiple strategies to cope with the physical and emotional effects of living with an abusive partner (Margolin et al., 2003; Radford & Hester, 2006). Abused women also employ a variety of well-organised strategies



to prevent, protect and reduce violence and its impact on their children (Margolin et al., 2003; Peled & Gil, 2011; Radford & Hester, 2006). These strategies can, in some cases, enable abused women to parent just as effectively as some non-abused women (Casanueva, Martin, Runyan, Barth, & Bradley, 2008).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The great measure of literature viewed through the “deficit model” lens, combined with limited research exploring maternal protectiveness from abused women's perspective, leaves a gap in the comprehensive understanding of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Buchanan et al., 2015b; Lapierre, 2008). This gap in research portrays abused women as unfit parents (Lapierre, 2010b; Sullivan et al., 2000). Unfortunately, this stigmatisation extends beyond the academic realm, negatively influencing the effectiveness of service providers, especially child protection services (Ateah, Radtke, Tutty, Nixon, & Ursel, 2016; Semaan, Jasinski, & McKenzie, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2000). Service providers often consider abused women as unprotective when they protect their children in ways they do not understand (Rivera, Zeoli, & Sullivan, 2012).

In many cases, service providers do not have a thorough understanding of the multitude of creative maternal protective strategies abused women need to employ to protect their children from domestic violence (Rivera et al., 2012). This lack of holistic understanding causes women's protective efforts to remain unacknowledged (Rivera et al., 2012). Child protection services, such as police and court services, who perceive women as ‘unprotective’, or as ‘unfit parents’ often withhold essential practical and emotional support from abused women who desperately need it (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Lapierre, 2008; Semaan et al., 2013).

Furthermore, children are often removed from their mother's care based on the notion of 'failure to protect' and placed in the care of the father, who has a history of violence against the mother (Douglas & Walsh, 2010). The stigmatisation of abused women, combined with the ineffectiveness of service providers, results in the oversight of the larger problem of the impact and consequences of male violence on the safety of women and children (Ateah et al., 2016). A comprehensive and fresh understanding of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is desperately needed to effectively assist abused women to protect their children from domestic violence (Rivera et al., 2012).

This research study acknowledges that abused women may encounter more psychological difficulties than women who are not subjected to violence (Briere & Jordan, 2004; Woods, 2005). However, the researcher is of opinion that it is unfair to conclude that abused women are incapable of protecting their children just because they experience psychological challenges. It should not be assumed that all abused women show deficiencies in their parenting behaviour (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008). It has been demonstrated that women exposed to domestic violence can parent as well as non-battered women, regarding positive interaction and behavioural management (Casanueva et al., 2008; Letourneau et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2000). In some cases, despite the obstacles they face, abused women are more attentive, sensitive, nurturing, and show greater maternal protectiveness of their children than women in non-abusive relationships (Casanueva et al., 2008; Letourneau et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2000).

The intention of this study is *not* to totally reject the "deficit model". However, the researcher disagrees with the implementation of the "deficit model", as presented in existing literature regarding practices employed by child protection services. The researcher disagrees with the tendency of the "deficit model" to either judge women's protective strategies as either protective or as failing to protect their children. The researcher considers the "deficit

model” to be a rigid, unfair and overly simplistic measure of maternal protectiveness which leaves no room for the consideration of external factors. Rather, the researcher considers child protection to exist on a continuum from failing to attempt to protect children to protecting children to a satisfactory level. A satisfactory level of maternal protectiveness can be determined in each case individually, after a thorough and holistic consideration was given to the interplay of circumstances, factors, and resources available to each woman. For the researcher, a perspective that places child protection on a continuum creates room for external factors to be considered, as well as for each woman’s strengths and weaknesses, rather than just judging them as protective or not. Therefore, with this study, the researcher desires to provide a more comprehensive understanding of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence in order for abused women to be better assisted by service providers, especially child protection services.

#### **1.4 Research Question**

The research question is: What are women’s reflections on the strategies they used to protect their children in the face of domestic violence? This research question is answered by using the following two sub-questions:

- What are the protective strategies abused women adopt to physically protect their children in the context of domestic violence?
- What are the protective strategies abused women adopt to emotionally protect their children in the context of domestic violence?

*Reflective Box 1: Researcher's Motivation*

Therapeutically working with Emma, my first client in my capacity of student therapist, challenged me on my own socially biased beliefs of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. As many others do, I had a shallow understanding of maternal protectiveness. I was of the opinion if a mother really loved her children and wanted to protect them, she would take her children and leave the abusive relationship. However, in Emma's situation, no matter how much she loved her children, leaving was not an option, and she stayed for the sake of her children's safety. If Emma had left her abusive husband, she and her children would have had to live on the streets without food or money for her children to attend school. Furthermore, if Emma's attempt to leave her husband with the children had failed, she and her children would have been at risk of severe physical abuse or of being killed by her husband. This made me want to gain a deeper understanding of maternal protectiveness and the variety of protective strategies women use to safeguard their children amid domestic violence.

### **1.5 Justification, Aims, and Objectives**

In reviewing existing South African literature relevant to my research, limited data was found on the question of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. South African research on mothering, in general, is even more scarce, with practically no focus on mothering in the context of domestic violence, or on the subjective experiences of abused mothers (Kruger, 2006). It was also noted that there are limited international research focusing on understanding maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Buchanan et al., 2015a; Lapierre, 2008). Adding to this drift of research, even less research exists that captures in-depth, contextually rich data about abused mothers' unique mothering experiences (Semaan et al., 2013). Thus, generally, research explicitly focusing on abused mothers' subjective experiences and viewpoints in the context of domestic violence is limited (Lapierre, 2008, 2010b; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001).

Therefore, the aims of this research study are:

- The general research aim is to explore the different protective strategies women adopt to physically and emotionally protect their children in domestic violence circumstances.
- The paradigmatic aim is to focus on abused women's subjective experiences and their viewpoints of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence circumstances through a phenomenological lens.
- The methodological aim is to understand the different protective strategies women use to protect their children, as well as the subjective experiences of maternal protectiveness as it occurs in each participant's specific domestic violence context.

These research aims were accomplished through the following research objectives:

- To describe the strategies used by the women interviewed for this study to physically protect their children in the context of domestic violence, as described by the women themselves.
- To describe the strategies used by the women interviewed for this study to emotionally protect their children in the context of domestic violence, as described by the women themselves.
- To explore the context-specific reasons why the women interviewed in their study used the strategies they used when protecting their children in the context of domestic violence.

*Reflective Box 2: Scope*

The scope of this research is to explore the ways in which women attempt to protect their children from domestic violence. It does not judge or evaluate the effectiveness of the protective strategies used by the participants.

## **1.6 Research Design**

Research design refers to the basic structure and plan for integrating and executing the different components of this research study in a coherent manner (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). This research study makes use of a qualitative research methodology with a phenomenological approach as the paradigmatic point of departure. A phenomenological approach studies a specific phenomenon as lived by people (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The phenomenon being studied in this research study is the phenomenon of maternal protectiveness. Furthermore, this study uses an interpretive phenomenological analysis as data analysis method. A theoretical summary of the paradigmatic framework and research methodology used in this study is provided in the section below, while the practical application of the research methodology is extensively described in chapter 3.

### **1.6.1 Paradigmatic framework**

A phenomenology study aims to generate a detailed, in-depth and contextually rich description of participant's lived experiences of a particular phenomenon from the personal perspective of each participant (Kafle, 2011; O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013; Willig, 2013). An interpretive perspective allows the researcher to move beyond merely describing participants' subjective experiences, to finding and interpreting the meaning underlying their experiences in the context in which it occurred (Finlay, 2009; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Interpretive phenomenology was therefore employed in this study on the basis of

wanting to understand women's lived experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence as well as how they make sense of their experiences (Finlay, 2009; Morrow, 2007).

### **1.6.2 Research methodology**

A qualitative research methodology prioritises the rich descriptions of research participants by providing them with a platform to describe their unique experiences in their own words (Gray, 2004; Sandelowski, 2000). Furthermore, a qualitative research methodology allows research participants to be understood in their natural surroundings (Morrow, 2007). A qualitative research methodology was therefore used in this study, as it allowed abused women's voices to be heard and acknowledged. As such, it allows this study to produce rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence.

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as the research method, allowing a dual facet approach that includes the reflections of both participant and researcher (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify three participants. Data was accumulated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, data analysis was done through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), using ATLAS.ti as a data management system. The participants' experiences, as discussed during the interviews, were constructed in terms of three super-ordinate themes and 14 sub-ordinate themes. The identified themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Abused women might find voicing their experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence challenging and painful, as they are often silenced or pathologised, magnifying, rather than lessening their experience of shame (Hague, Mullender, & Aris, 2003). Therefore, this study found it crucial to adopt an empathic attitude

towards the women, to prevent women from feeling blamed or further victimised. This study also prioritised the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence. This ensured that this study did not cause any of the interviewed women any harm. Furthermore, credible, transferable, dependable, confirmable and reflective research practices ensure the trustworthiness of this research.

## **1.7 Overview of Dissertation Structure**

Chapter 1, in which the nature, context, and aims of this research study is discussed, is the introductory chapter of this study. The remainder of the dissertation is structured as follow:

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature. The first part of Chapter 2, reflects on the keywords related to maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. The second part of Chapter 2, provides a summary of the keywords related to the theoretical point of departure, on which this study is built.

The first part of Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed in this study, as well as the rationale behind employing this specific research methodology. The second part of chapter 3 addresses strategies used to ensure research quality. The last section of chapter 3 reports issues of research ethics and reflexivity.

Chapter 4 presents the results of this study in terms of the super-ordinate themes that emerged from the participants' unique experiences.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion in which the results of this study are married to relevant literature to provide an integrated understanding of the results obtained. This chapter continues by discussing the research recommendations and limitations, after which the researcher's reflections are presented.



## 1.8 Conclusion

In the current chapter, an overview of the present study is provided in terms of the research background, research problem, research question, as well as the justification, aims, and objectives of this study. Furthermore, a summary is given of this study's research design in terms of the paradigmatic framework and research methodology, followed by an outline of the remaining chapters. Existing literature relevant to maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is discussed in detail in the following literature review section. The following chapter also discusses the theoretical foundations of phenomenology.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review serves as the background as well as the foundation of the current study. Throughout this chapter, the researcher explores the relevant literature available on the keywords used in this study. Firstly, domestic violence is defined in a South African context, as well as why this study focuses on women, and specifically those who are mothers. Thereafter, women's experiences of mothering amid domestic violence is discussed, followed by an exploration of the variety of strategies women adopt to protect their children in the context of domestic violence circumstances, according to existing literature. An introduction to phenomenology as the theoretical point of departure is provided, as well as clarification regarding the researcher's theoretical position.

### 2.2 Defining Domestic Violence in the South African Context

The phenomenon of maternal protectiveness is investigated in this research study; however, the investigation is conducted within the specific context of domestic violence. The context in which a phenomenon is experienced should be understood, as the context gives meaning to experiences of the specific phenomenon under investigation (Langdrige, 2007). Therefore, the following section gives a more detailed description of domestic violence as the context of the study.

The World Health Organization (2002) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (p. 5). This definition include all acts of violence, private and/or public, reactive in response to previous events and/or

proactive in cases of anticipation, criminal and/or noncriminal (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). The World Health Organization (2002) divides violence into three broad categories, namely; (1) self-directed violence referring to violence a person inflicts upon themselves; (2) interpersonal violence referring to violence inflicted by another individual or by a small group of individuals; and (3) collective violence referring to violence inflicted by larger groups such as organised political groups, mob violence and terrorist organization. Furthermore, violence can be classified in four groups according to the nature of the violence, which include violence physical in nature, sexual in nature, psychological in nature and/or violence involving deprivation or neglect (Krug et al., 2002). Considering the definition of violence, the different types of violence and the nature of violence, as provided by the World Health Organization (2002), domestic violence can broadly be defined as interpersonal violence, physical, sexual, psychological or depriving/neglectful in nature, that is happening in the domestic sphere (Krug et al., 2002; Walsh, Spangaro, & Soldatic, 2015). Domestic violence can also be defined as any pattern of controlling and coercive behaviour with the aim to limit, shape, and direct a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Almeida & Durkin, 1999). Johnson (2011) defines domestic violence as terror in the home, whereby a person exerts power, control, and domination over another person by creating a climate of fear.

Considering the high prevalence of domestic violence in South-Africa, the South African Government took a noteworthy step towards domestic violence through the development and implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 116 (1998). This act aims to give victims maximum protection from domestic violence by providing an all-encompassing legal definition of "domestic violence" and outlining a broad-ranging criteria for a "domestic relationship" (Smythe, Artz, Combrinck, Doolan, & Martin, 2008). The South African Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 (DVA) Section 1 (viii) (South Africa, 1998) defines domestic violence as any physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal or economic

abuse, intimidation, harassment, stalking or damage to property of any person by their partner, spouse, or family member living in the same house or a different house.

The most common types of domestic violence in South Africa are physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse (Abrahams, Jewkes, Laubscher, & Hoffman, 2006; Dunkle et al., 2004; Rivera et al., 2012). Physical abuse includes behaviour such as slapping, kicking, stabbing, and murder (Abrahams et al., 2009, 2006). Sexual abuse includes any form of unwanted sexual acts (Bogat, Levendosky, & von Eye, 2005). Psychological abuse includes behaviours such as threats, harassment, degrading and isolating women (Bogat et al., 2005; Rivera et al., 2012). Furthermore, economic abuse can be defined in terms of behaviour such as controlling access to economic resources, diminishing victims' capacity to financially support themselves, and forcing victims to be dependent on the perpetrator (Abrahams et al., 2006; Shannon, 2009). The South African study conducted by Jewkes in 2002, found that in some South African cultures, domestic violence is a socially constructed behaviour for both men and women. This finding aligns with the findings found in a study conducted by Yoshihama, 1999. Yoshihama (1999) suggests that domestic violence is differently defined by different cultures. What a woman might experience as domestic violence, or whatever specific meaning she attaches to her partner's behaviour is partly grounded in her viewpoint shaped by her socio-cultural background (Yoshihama, 1999). Therefore, some South African cultures tolerate violence against women under certain circumstances, especially cultures who highly value the maintenance of the male-female family structure (Jewkes, 2002). Domestic violence, as socially constructed acceptable behaviour under certain conditions, consequently results in the normative use of violence against women (Jewkes, 2002). Furthermore, the way in which South African women experience domestic violence is complex, as experiences are also influenced by multiple external factors including unemployment, under-employment, uneven distribution of power in traditional African

marriages, and poverty (Davies & Dreyer, 2014; Mazibuko & Umejese, 2015). Additionally, women's experiences of domestic violence can also be influenced by a woman's financial dependence on a man (Mazibuko & Umejese, 2015), on the idea of perfect love and forever-after marriages, as well as unresponsive social systems (Rasool, 2015; Rasool & Hochfeld, 2005).

The fact that the South African government has both recognised and taken action against domestic violence in this way is an extremely positive step (Nixon, Tutty, Radtke, Ateah, & Ursel, 2016). However, it is equally noteworthy that many legislative and policy-driven interventions have not been put into effective practice (Nixon et al., 2016). Therefore, to establish how effectively victims of domestic violence are protected, it is important to turn the attention to what is happening on the ground, since the law can only protect victims of domestic violence to the extent that those who enforce the law are willing to do so (Bendall, 2010). Attention will be given in later sections of this chapter to several of the most significant challenges women face when dealing with child protection services.

### **2.3 Women as Mothers in Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is highly gendered and greatly influenced by patriarchal beliefs of heterosexual relationship (Gass, Stein, Williams, & Seedat, 2012; Walsh et al., 2015; Wendt et al., 2015). Research has shown that victims of domestic violence are primarily women, as women are three times more likely than men to be exposed to a range of violent behaviours (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). It is also found that the likelihood of mothers being exposed to domestic violence is three times higher than that of childless women (Buchanan, Power, & Verity, 2014). The high prevalence of domestic violence directed towards women, and even more so towards mothers, can be considered to be a manifestation of the highly gendered patriarchal views held by many South African men and women (Boonzaier & van

Schalkwyk, 2011; Fakunmoju et al., 2015; A. G. Johnson, 2014). Furthermore, culturally appropriate biased gender norms adopted within a patriarchal society serve as a platform through which the deficit model and mother-blaming can prevail (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Fakunmoju et al., 2015; K. Miller, 2010; Rasool & Hochfeld, 2005).

It has been suggested that domestic violence is better understood from a historical and cultural context of marriage and family (Walsh et al., 2015). One of South Africa's historical occurrences which greatly shaped women's experiences of womanhood, motherhood, and domestic violence is South Africa's history of apartheid (K. Miller, 2010). The majority of women during the apartheid era lived lives stained by racial oppression, poverty, and an absence of rights (K. Miller, 2010). Acknowledging that South Africa significantly transformed since apartheid, it has also been acknowledged that South Africa remains highly unequal, with most women continuing to experience the effects of apartheid (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011; K. Miller, 2010). A significant aspect of apartheid that continues to persist is the patriarchal views of heterosexual relationships (Walsh et al., 2015). Patriarchy can be defined as a system of society that promotes male privilege and is organised around power and control, in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it (A. G. Johnson, 2014). Therefore, a key aspect in a patriarchal society is the oppression of women, creating power differences between men and women. A patriarchal society also promoted male dominance which promotes the idea of men being superior to women (A. G. Johnson, 2014).

It is important to note that patriarchy is not just a different way of referring to men, but rather a kind of society in which men and women participate (A. G. Johnson, 2014). When patriarchy is considered as a kind of society in which men and women participate, a correlation possibly exists between a patriarchal system and the deficit model. For example, in a patriarchal society both men and women often hold the socially and culturally

constructed view that women are the primary, if not exclusive, person responsible for raising and protecting children (Peled & Gil, 2011). Therefore, when a child do experience behavioural or emotional problems, a woman's mothering capacity is automatically questioned (Risley-curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). Furthermore, a woman is burdened with accusations of failure as a mother and blamed, without due consideration given to other factors possibly contributing to the development of problems experienced by children (Risley-curtiss & Heffernan, 2003). With this said, a patriarchal society is not the same word for the deficit model. However, in this research study, a patriarchal society greatly influence the existence and continuation of the deficit model through which abused women are pathologized.

Furthermore, male dominance does not mean that all women are powerless (A. G. Johnson, 2014). When considering domestic violence, some women previously have acknowledged that they are not "pure victims", constructing themselves as coproducer of the violence they experience (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). Women viewing themselves as constructors of the violence they experience distance their own identities from being an entirely "passive victim" and the possibility of being labelled as an "abused woman", an identity which has negative connotations to it (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). One of these connotations is closely related to patriarchal views, in which violence towards women are justified as being a disciplinary act over "disobedient" woman (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). For some women being labelled as an "abused woman" create intense feeling of shame, as the identity of an "abused woman" closely relates to descriptions of the "bad woman" who is "deserving" of the abuse she is experiencing (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). Therefore, the term "abused woman", as used in this document, aim to refrain from labelling abused women in any form or ascribe any judgement over them for being abused. The term "abused woman", as used in this document, is a neutral,

unjudgmental term, merely to describe a certain population under investigation. This population being individual's female in gender, who has been exposed to acts of violence by intimate partner who is male in gender.

The World Health Organization (2002) identified multiple factors contributing to women experiencing domestic violence which includes the concept of male dominance in the family, traditional gender norms, structural inequalities between men and women, resistance towards women assuming non-traditional roles and weak community resistance against acts of domestic violence. Although patriarchy is not specifically stated as a factor, all the factors contributing to domestic violence, as identified by the World Health Organization, closely relate to patriarchal constructs of relationships (Bendall, 2010; Krug et al., 2002; Kubeka, 2008).

A review of South African studies on domestic violence suggest that gender and patriarchy are central to the high prevalence of domestic violence found in South Africa (Bendall, 2010; Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; P. J. Davies & Dreyer, 2014; Kubeka, 2008). Research also suggest that a significant portion of the South African population belongs to cultures invested in a patriarchal belief system (Bendall, 2010). In patriarchal cultures, children are socialised from a very young age into traditional gender roles (Kubeka, 2008). Boys are taught masculinity which is typically associated with characteristics such as dominance, aggression, assertiveness, and self-assurance (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Furthermore, children are taught that men are supposed to be the head of the household, be the breadwinners, and make the decisions in the family (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; Wood, 2001). Boys learn from a very young age that they should protect women and children and that they are fully entitled to do so the way they find it fit (Wood, 2001). However, this 'protection' of women are often expressed in terms of 'discipline' which can include acts of violence, either provoked by the woman's 'insubordination' or with the aim to resolve



conflict (Boonzaier, 2008; Wood, 2001). They believe they have the right to power over women and children (Davies & Dreyer, 2014). Therefore, patriarchal protection is often experienced not to be about what is in the best interest of women or children's safety and well-being, but rather expressed by men as a form of dominance and power over women and children.

On the other hand, girls are taught culturally appropriate feminine traits which include submissiveness, passivity, and nurturance (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Furthermore, the role of the woman is one of support and being subordinate to her husband (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Additionally, these culturally scripted perspectives on feminine traits that are held by many men and women in South Africa presume the blameworthiness of women for relational conflict, regardless of the type and severity of the abuse women experience (Hargreaves et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the idea held by many men and women that it is 'culturally' acceptable to beat women under certain circumstances leads to domestic violence being experienced as socially acceptable (Rasool & Hochfeld, 2005). Domestic violence is to a certain extent normalised in society and, (Kubeka, 2008; Rasool, Vermaak, Pharoah, Louw, & Stavrou, 2002). Participants in Kubeka's (2008) study stated that children were taught from a young age, through corporal punishment at home, that violence directed toward loved ones is justified. Some seem to excuse violence as part of a normal 'loving' relationship in which perpetrators show their affection for the abused.

#### **2.4 Mothering in Domestic Violence**

The following section explores the impact domestic violence can have on abused women's mothering. Mothering can be defined as a socially constructed set of activities in nurturing and caring for children (Kruger, 2006; Wendt & Zannettino, 2015). Furthermore,

this section will address how the stigmatisation of abused women's mothering can negatively impact their capacity to care for and protect their children.

#### **2.4.1 Effects of domestic violence on abused women's mothering**

The exposure to continuous domestic violence has immediate and long-term negative emotional and physical health consequences for women (Cerulli et al., 2012; Gass et al., 2012; Peltzer et al., 2013; Plichta, 2004). The emotional and physical strain of being abused can cause women to demonstrate weak parenting skills (Kubeka, 2008). Participants in the Mullender et al. (2002) study experienced that their mothering was negatively affected by their high levels of anxiety and depression, which undermined their ability to care for and protect their children. Women exposed to domestic violence also exhibit high levels of shock, disbelief, anger and/or fear (Rasool et al., 2002). The climate of fear in domestic violence relationships can limit maternal protectiveness when women are preoccupied with pleasing their partners to prevent or to control anticipated violence (Mullender et al., 2002; Wendt et al., 2015).

More severe emotional effects that can influence abused women's mothering include heightened extents of trauma symptoms, self-harm, low self-esteem, and high levels of psychological distress (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). Some abused women are also challenged with substance abuse (Gass, Stein, Williams, & Seedat, 2010), post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation (Coker et al., 2002; Radford & Hester, 2006). In many cases, abused women experienced the pervasive and constant nature of abuse to be exhausting, often leaving them with less energy to protect and attend to their children's needs (Mullender et al., 2002). Therefore, abused women's mothering can include negative emotions, insecurity, unhealthy bonding, as well as a lack of emotional sensitivity and responsiveness (Casanueva et al., 2008).

Furthermore, women are often physically disabled by the severity of the violence they experience, causing them to be temporarily unable to care for and protect their children (Humphreys, 2006; Radford & Hester, 2006). Physical violence can lead to hospitalisation, as well as a variety of physical and mental disabilities (Nguyen et al., 2013). Additionally, their partners can prevent them from seeking medical treatment, making them vulnerable to several long-term physical health problems (Campbell et al., 2002; Radford & Hester, 2006). As a result of continuous domestic violence, abused women experience an increased risk of lowered health status, lowered quality of life, and heightened utilisation of health services (Coker et al., 2002; Gass et al., 2010). Domestic violence, on its severest level, can cause the death of both women and children (Campbell, 2002; Campbell et al., 2002; Radford & Hester, 2006).

The co-occurrence of women and child abuse makes mothering significantly more challenging for women, as they have to manage the impact the abuse has on both them and their children (Fish, McKenzie, & MacDonald, 2009; Radford & Hester, 2006). Additional stress is placed on women's mothering when abusive partners set unrealistic housekeeping and childcare expectations, while simultaneously refusing the resources required to meet these expectations (Abrahams et al., 2006; Buchanan et al., 2014). More often than not, abused women also have to face and overcome poverty, the partner's substance abuse, and limited social support (Huth-Bocks & Hughes, 2008; Radford & Hester, 2006).

Many women interviewed by Buchanan et al. (2014) disclosed that they were confronted with a lack of support from their abusive partners, as well as with an atmosphere of hostility. The hostile behaviour of abusive partners was directed at the mother-child relationship with the goal to undermine this relationship. Abusive partners also strategically isolate women from family or other social support structures, which prevents outside

assistance to help ease their mothering challenges or to help meet the unreasonable expectations set by partners (Buchanan et al., 2014).

On the contrary, some abused women feel they manage quite well, without the abuse having any negative effects on their parenting, or on their relationship with their children (Radford & Hester, 2006). Some abused women are even able to parent just as effectively as women who did not experience abuse (Casanueva et al., 2008). Abused women who internalised healthy parenting methods that predated their abuse can provide appropriate protection of and care for their children despite the challenges they face (Holt et al., 2008; Iwi & Newman, 2011). Casanueva et al. (2008) found that abused women exhibited greater positive disciplinary methods over a period of time, compared to women who did not experience domestic violence.

In many cases, motherhood is a significant source of strength, hope, and purpose (Kelly, 2009; Lapierre, 2010b; Peled & Gil, 2011). Boonzaier and de la Rey (2003) found in their study that, most of the time, abused women were determined to overcome the abuse, trying not to allow their partners' abuse to destroy them. Barbara, a participant in Boonzaier and de la Rey's, 2003, study explained how she refused to become dependent on medication as a means of coping with the abuse. Barbara was persistent to find more adaptive alternatives for coping with the abuse she experienced.

Radford and Hester (2006) similarly found that the women in their study tried a variety of coping strategies to deal with the domestic violence. They also found that women physical trapped in an abusive relationship, mentally 'blanked out' the abuse, pretending to their children and the world that all is sound. Mentally 'blinking out' the abuse helped these women cope from day to day, allowing them to 'escape' from the abuse in the smallest way in order to attend to their children.

Another participant, Belinda, in Boonzaier and de la Rey's, (2003), study, explained how she decided to write short stories every night instead of committing suicide. Belinda did not want to expose her children to more trauma, and therefore used her story writing time to reflect on how the abuse affected her children. Women's evaluation of the extent to which the abuse affected their children often guides their decisions and actions in domestic violence relationships (Radford & Hester, 2006).

Furthermore, it has been shown that abused women are able to use their difficult parenting situation to create something positive for their children (Letourneau et al., 2007). The ability to create positive aspects out of domestic violence circumstances occurs through the negotiation and renegotiation of coping strategies, allowing women to cope with their immediate circumstances and daily constraints (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003).

Despite the mothering challenges domestic violence creates, many abused women can still effectively parent and protect their children (Fish et al., 2009). A study conducted by Humphreys et al. (2006) found that mothers were the most significant source of help and support to their children, even when the mother-child relationship did not survive untouched.

Furthermore, they found that children can positively gain from their mother's ability to protect and parent under the harsh conditions of domestic violence. Abused women often compensate for the effects of domestic violence on their parenting by being more nurturing, attentive and sensitive to the needs of their children (Letourneau et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2000).

From the discussion above, it is clear that women are challenged on multiple levels by domestic violence which shapes their experience of mothering as well as their mothering practices. However, although women's mothering is often challenged by domestic violence, it does not mean they are not acting in various ways to protect and care for their children

(Mullender et al., 2002). It merely means protecting and caring for children are more challenging than what it would have been without the domestic violence (Mullender et al., 2002).

#### **2.4.2 Mother-blaming for “failure to protect”**

The presupposition that women are mainly responsible for childcare causes women to be held accountable for their children’s exposure to domestic violence (Radford & Hester, 2006). Being held accountable for children’s exposure to abuse leads to women being accused of “failure to protect” their children (Kantor & Little, 2003; Powell & Murray, 2008; Rasool, 2015). Women who accept the role of the primary caretaker are prone to internalise the accusation of “failure to protect”, and to experience and engage in self-blame behaviour themselves rather than to ascribe it to the violent state of affairs (Moulding, Buchanan, & Wendt, 2015). Previously, in the case of non-abusive mothers being accused of “failure to protect” their children from domestic violence, it has been considered a result of a system that fails to hold the real perpetrator of violence accountable (Silverman, 2008).

Mother-blaming has also been found to be a significant strategy used by abusive partners to estrange children from their mothers (Moulding et al., 2015). Mother-blaming is used to consistently belittle and insult women’s mothering capacity in front of children, aiming to undermine their value and self-respect, as well as the authority needed to confidently mother (Humphreys, 2006; Mullender et al., 2002). Mother-blaming, as used by abusive partners, intensifies when children openly join their fathers in mother-blaming practices (Moulding et al., 2015).

Contributing to mother-blaming are child protection workers who are equally guilty of constructing women as the parent mainly responsible for childcare and for their children’s wellbeing (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Fish et al., 2009). Child protection workers, including

the police, social workers, psychologists, and child custody mediators often point fingers at women for the occurring abuse and for the consequent “failure to protect” their children (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Radford & Hester, 2006; Rasool, 2015).

Women and child protection services have a significant and central responsibility in meeting the needs of abused women and their children (Hague et al., 2003). However, those influenced by the view that women are mainly responsible for childcare and their children’s wellbeing often increase the challenges faced by abused women (Fish et al., 2009).

Women participating in Douglas and Walsh’s (2010) study explained that child protection workers who blame women for the abuse, or for “failure to protect” children often deny women the support they need. Therefore, many abused women do not readily seek help from formal systems, as they fear to be victimised once more rather than to be supported (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Rasool, 2015). Women are also resistant to engage with child protection authorities, fearing their children will be removed from their care (Davies & Krane, 2006). Child protection services can be and are often responsible for undermining women’s effort of maternal protectiveness (Moulding et al., 2015). Negative attitudes toward abused women and their mothering are damaging, as they increase the likelihood of ongoing trauma, not just from partners but also from different service providers (Hague et al., 2003).

The mother-blaming tendencies found in domestic violence, with the more specific accusation of “failure to protect” can cause women and children to be further sucked into the violence (Hague et al., 2003; Moulding et al., 2015). Mother-blaming neglect the safety of both women and children (Hague et al., 2003; Moulding et al., 2015). The term “failure to protect” is rather a harsh definition that fails to recognise the responsibility of the perpetrator and blames the victims of the violence (Humphreys et al., 2006; Moulding et al., 2015).

Furthermore, to define “failure to protect” in terms of women’s behaviour may be an error in attribution, informed by the underlying societal presumptions that women are the primary caregivers (Kantor & Little, 2003). An approach that blames a mother for failing to protect her children is unlikely to address the perpetrator’s violence (Douglas & Walsh, 2010), meaning that the violent cycle of domestic violence is most likely to endure (Douglas & Walsh, 2010).

### **2.4.3 “Best interest of the child”**

Gender and cultural presumptions about family and the home tend to complicate mothering in domestic violence and shape women’s approaches to maternal protection (Moulding et al., 2015). Such a gender and cultural presumption in some South African communities is the notion of the “best interests of a child” (Rasool, 2015). The “best interests of a child” concept is centrally linked to presumptions about family, motherhood, and fatherhood (Rasool, 2015). One of these presumptions suggests that the interests of children are best served in an environment where the father is present (Rasool, 2015), regardless of the quality of fatherhood.

Another presumption is that women are responsible to preserve this form of family (Hargreaves et al., 2006), and at all cost. The explanation “but he is their father” is a common hurdle that abused mothers need to face and overcome (Kantor & Little, 2003). Attempting to overcome this hurdle, women are challenged by the belief that the batterer loves the children, often with conflicting evidence available, and that the children love the batterer, which is often true (Kantor & Little, 2003). Some of the women who participated in Douglas & Walsh’s (2010) study experienced how some child protection workers believed that their partners could be abusive towards women, but still be good fathers.



The “best interest of the child” discourse, in a cruel way sets abused women up to fail. Abused women are held responsible for the ‘best interest of the child’, which include children’s safety (Edelson et al., 2007; Rasool, 2015). On the other hand, they experience extreme pressure to ensure that fathers are present in their children’s lives due to the notion that children need their fathers (Edelson et al., 2007; Rasool, 2015). This trap leads women to sacrifice themselves by staying in an abusive relationship believing that their children are more important than their own wellbeing or safety (Rasool, 2015). Furthermore, the underlying presumption of the “best interest of the child” contributes to a protective double bind where women are damned if they leave, because they ‘break up the family’, and damned if they don’t, because they stayed and put their children at risk (Moulding et al., 2015).

## **2.5 Maternal Protectiveness in the Context of Domestic Violence**

It has previously been found that women who find themselves and their children in domestic violence circumstances are aware that their children need additional attention and protection (Lapierre, 2010b). These women make considerable effort to prevent, protect from and reduce violence and its impact on their children (Margolin et al., 2003; Peled & Gil, 2011). They employ a variety of creative and well-organised protective strategies (Haight, Shim, Linn, & Swinford, 2007; Lapierre, 2010a), highly influenced by what they think is best for their children’s physical and emotional wellbeing (Kelly, 2009; Lapierre, 2010b).

Past international research frequently recognises leaving an abusive partner as the only valid maternal protective strategy in domestic violence (Campbell & Mannel, 2016; Douglas & Walsh, 2010). Consequently, mothers in domestic violence circumstances are often perceived as unprotective when they don’t leave the abusive relationship (Douglas and Walsh, 2010). However, researchers recently began exploring the variety of methods women use to protect their children from domestic violence in ways that often went unrecognised in

the past. Therefore, understanding maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence has become nuanced beyond the simplistic concepts of leaving or staying.

### **2.5.1 Strategies used to physically protect children from domestic violence**

Women protect their children in different ways depending on the circumstances present (Buchanan et al., 2014). Abused women often have years of experience in coping with and managing the abusive behaviours of their partners, therefore they are in the best position to identify and decide which methods work best to protect their children (Buchanan et al., 2014; Rivera et al., 2012). Women employ a wide variety of well-organised protective strategies based on their children's needs, which do not necessarily include leaving the abusive relationship (Haight et al., 2007). Both proactive and reactive protective strategies are used that vary in degree of success (Buchanan et al., 2014).

Leaving domestic violence has been identified in the relevant literature as the ultimate way of protecting children (Buchanan et al., 2015b; Douglas & Walsh, 2010). There is a general assumption that leaving the violent relationship will end the abuse and lead to increased safety of both the woman and her children (Fleury et al., 2000). This assumption may be true for some women, however, it has also been shown that abusive behaviour continues or even escalates after the relationship was ended (Fleury et al., 2000). In some cases, women find it safer for both themselves and their children to remain in the abusive environment rather than to leave (Davies & Krane, 2006). Abused women may decide to leave a violent household for the sake of their children's safety, or to stay 'for the sake of the children' when the material circumstances are more advantageous (Radford & Hester, 2006).

Many women's decision to leave or to stay is greatly influenced by their perception of what would be best for their children (McKay, 1994; Radford & Hester, 2006; Rasool, 2015). Some of the most prominent reasons abused women in South Africa remain in abusive

relationships are limited resources and low socio-economic status, which provide little opportunity to relocate to a safer community (Kaminer et al., 2013). Without the ability to provide sufficient finances, fear of becoming homeless, or the possibility of starving children keep women in abusive relationships (McKay, 1994). Abused women also remain in abusive relationships to physically protect their children, as abusive partners often harm the children when the women leave (Rivera et al., 2012).

Strategies used to protect children from immediate physical harm include separating children from the violence, calling a third party for help, and avoiding abusive partners where possible (Haight et al., 2007; Wendt et al., 2015). Some women teach their children a safety plan in case of violent situations (Nixon et al., 2015). Others signal their children to warn them to stay away from imminent violence (Haight et al., 2007).

At times women also contact the police for assistance and/or file protection orders (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Nixon et al., 2015). Another strategy women use is withholding themselves from arguing (Haight et al., 2007). Women remain silent during abusive episodes, as well as about the abuse, in general, to prevent triggering or escalating abusive episodes (Morris, 2010; Moulding et al., 2015). Sometimes women take the blame to prevent abuse from occurring, or to avoid abuse being directed towards the children (Moulding et al., 2015).

Remaining silent or taking the blame might be protective in the short-term, however, women risk creating a platform for children to engage in mother-blaming, and for partners to justify their abuse (Moulding et al., 2015). Furthermore, women try to anticipate harm to their children, and after a violent incident, they try to ensure everything is in order as preferred by the partner to avoid further verbal and non-verbal abuse (Buchanan et al., 2014).

It is also found that women try to calm their partners by pleasing them (Haight et al., 2007; Wendt et al., 2015). Some women prioritise their partner's unrealistic expectations to

ensure that the mother-child relationship is less threatening to their partners, thus trying to spare their children any harm (Buchanan et al., 2014). Lastly, women also incorporate long-term protective strategies, such as temporarily or permanently sending children to visit or to live with relatives (Nixon et al., 2015).

### **2.5.2 Strategies used to emotionally protect children from domestic violence**

Women attempt to protect their children's emotional wellbeing. Women try to emotionally compensate for the effects of domestic violence on their children by being more nurturing, attentive, and sensitive to their children's needs (Letourneau et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2000). Reassuring and supportive strategies such as expressing love, instilling hope and reassuring children when they are afraid are also found in women's repertoire of protective strategies (Haight et al., 2007).

Furthermore, women encourage their children not to dwell on the abuse. They also respond to their children's emotional needs after witnessing violence by trying not to leave children alone with the abusive partner (Lapierre, 2010b). They also try to spend more quality time with their children on a more regular basis (Nixon et al., 2015).

Some women try to separate their spousal and parental roles by presenting domestic violence to their children as an adult problem and by maintaining a 'good' image of the abusive father to protect children from confusion, disappointment, and trauma (Haight et al., 2007; Wendt et al., 2015). These women try to maintain a 'good' father image by not speaking ill of the abusive father, or by explaining and downplaying the father's abusive actions (Peled & Gil, 2011).

Women also avoid communicating about the violence and they limit truth-telling to prevent young children who are not yet capable of making sense of the violence from being further traumatised (Haight et al., 2007; Peled & Gil, 2011). At times, abused women try to

normalise the violent behaviour with phrases like “He is tired.” or ‘He is not mad at you.’” (Haight et al., 2007). Other women try to help their children to avoid violence by labelling it as wrong (Haight et al., 2007).

Furthermore, abused mothers try to prevent their children from continuing the cycle of violence, either as the victim or as the perpetrator in their future relationships (Lapierre, 2010b; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, & Semel, 2003; Nixon et al., 2015). This is done by educating children on relationship violence, positive conflict resolution, and the prevention of violence in their own adult lives (Haight et al., 2007).

In many cases abused women employ personal resources and seek outside assistance by using social and legal resource, assistance from family or friends, and attempt to obtain support from religious institutions (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Although abused women face a number of social constraints, they do exercise agency and make attempts to end the violence in their lives (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Some women experience mothering as positive and fulfilling, striving to be good mothers (Lapierre, 2010b; Peled & Gil, 2011). As women strive to be good mothers, they serve as a resilience factor for their children (Howell, Graham-Bermann, Czyz, & Lilly, 2010).

Having discussed literature relating to maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, this chapter now proceeds to discuss the theoretical point of departure of this study. A significant portion of existing literature relating to maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence was conducted from a feminist standpoint (Boonzaier, 2008; Fakunmoju et al., 2015; Lapierre, 2008, 2010b; Moulding et al., 2015). However, little research captures the in-depth, contextually rich data of abused women’s subjective experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Semaan et al., 2013), especially in South Africa (Kruger, 2006). In order to understand abused women’s

subjective experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, a phenomenological approach is useful since it argues for contextual knowledge based on the lived experiences of participants (Shinebourne, 2011).

## **2.6 Theoretical Point of Departure**

This following section positions this study within a phenomenology paradigm from an interpretive approach (interpretive phenomenology). It also clarifies the presuppositions underlying the interpretive phenomenological approach, as well as the researcher's theoretical position.

### **2.6.1 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology can be considered as an umbrella term consisting of both a philosophical movement, as well as a range of research approaches concerned with how things appear to us in our experiences (Kafle, 2011; Shinebourne, 2011). Although various approaches to phenomenology have been established, all phenomenologically informed approaches focus on exploring the lived experiences of individuals from their subjective viewpoints as a fundamental principle (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Shinebourne, 2011). As described in Chapter 1, the paradigmatic point of departure of this study is phenomenological, using an interpretive approach.

Phenomenology is the systematic study of the subjectively lived experiences of humans, and the way in which these experiences are perceived and described as it appears to the personal consciousness (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002; Creswell, 2014; Langdrige, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011). The focus on consciousness is important, as phenomenology embraces the notion that we can only perceive and experience an object or phenomenon when it enters the human consciousness (Langdrige, 2007). Phenomenology tries to understand

conscious experiences by attempting to understand the person's conscious thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the world (Barker et al., 2002; Langdrige, 2007).

Our perceptions of a phenomenon give rise to what we think, feel and do (Barker et al., 2002). Therefore, phenomenology argues that research should not consider the phenomenon of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence independently from abused women's subjectivity and their perceptions of it (Langdrige, 2007). Furthermore, phenomenology has the potential to infiltrate deep into abused women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, allowing the researcher to better understand the world of abused women as it is experienced by the women themselves (Creswell, 2014; Kafle, 2011).

The phenomenological movement started with the work of Edmund Husserl in the early 1900's (Kafle, 2011; Shinebourne, 2011). The core idea of Husserl's phenomenology is the rejection of the assumption that natural science methods can be applied to human issues, and that there is something underlying or more important than experience (Ashworth, 2003; Lavery, 2003). He was concerned with a philosophy which studies a phenomenon as it appears to humans through consciousness, and he placed lived experiences in the centre of the stage (Langdrige, 2007; Lavery, 2003). Conscious awareness is the starting point in building knowledge about reality, as something can only be known when it comes into consciousness (Langdrige, 2007; Lavery, 2003). He was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling, and thinking about the world, where human beings were optimality understood as knowers (Lavery, 2003).

Husserl's phenomenology, which later became descriptive phenomenology, was created around the idea of reduction, also referred to as bracketing. Reduction, which suggests that by suspending personal prejudices one can gain insight into universal essences,

which, in turn, represents the true nature of the phenomenon being investigated (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Therefore, the primary objective of Husserl's phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of a phenomenon as it is consciously experienced, without invoking theories of its causal explanation (Bowling, 2007; Finlay, 2011; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Thus, Husserl's main focus of phenomenology is the description of the essences of a phenomenon before it is reflected on or understood in context (Bowling, 2007).

It is at this point where Heidegger (1889 – 1997), a student of Husserl, dissociated himself from Husserl's philosophical discipline which focuses on consciousness and the essences of a phenomenon, toward a hermeneutic (interpretive) dimension (Finlay, 2009). Heidegger placed more emphasis on understanding a phenomenon than merely describing it (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). He wanted to understand people's interpretations of their experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). He saw the process of interpretation as critical to understanding, and that interpretation is a natural part of being human (Lavery, 2003; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Heidegger also builds on the stance that people's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and interpretations of the world can only be understood in historical, cultural and personal context (Barker et al., 2002; Langdrige, 2007). While all phenomenological approaches are descriptive in the sense of aiming to describe rather than explain (Finlay, 2009), interpretive phenomenology aims to go one step further by interpreting these described experiences from the context in which they occur (Barker et al., 2002; Langdrige, 2007).

### **2.6.2 Interpretive phenomenology**

From Heidegger's work, built on the principles of Husserl's work, developed the interpretive phenomenology stance employed in this study (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar &



Swanson, 2007). Interpretive phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on gaining an understanding of the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Benner, 2008). An understanding was gained by making each women's unique experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence the focus of inquiry (Finlay, 2009; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Interpretive phenomenology rejects the notion that one true reality exists (Barker et al., 2002; Gray, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Instead, reality is seen to be based on a person's contextual internal subjective experience of a phenomenon (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Therefore interpretive phenomenology has a mind ontology, meaning reality is found within each individual, leading to multiple, however, equally valid social realities (Barker et al., 2002; Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Interpretive phenomenology is seen to have a subjective epistemology (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Knowledge within a subjective epistemology framework is obtained through personal experience and the subjective interpretations of these experiences (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Reality cannot be observed and discovered but must be interpreted (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Therefore, one true knowable reality about maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence does not exist, but only the women's perceptions and how they experience maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence and the world they live in (Langdrige, 2007).

Furthermore, interpretive phenomenology views people as permanently a 'person-in context' and therefore rejects the notion that people can be fully understood in isolation from the context in which they live (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). People are part of reality and their realities are invariably influenced by the context in which

they find themselves (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Therefore, people's realities are open to change over time as context changes.

Interpretive phenomenology also allows the researcher to learn more about the contextual interpretations of the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, as they are embedded in the world of language and social relationships (Finlay, 2009; Smith et al., 1999). Contextual knowledge allows the reader to decide whether the research findings are applicable to them or not, as well as the degree of applicability (Willis, 2007). The interpretive phenomenological approach also created room for the researcher to try and understand and describe the meanings the women attached to their experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, as well as how these meanings influenced their choices (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

In addition, interpretive phenomenology emphasises the interaction between the researcher and the participant and allows for the inclusion of the researcher's voice (Lavery, 2003; Morrow, 2007). The researcher's presuppositions or pre-understanding are seen as valuable guides to the inquiry, and that the co-creation by the participants and the researcher is what makes the interpretations meaningful (Langdrige, 2007; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Therefore, the meanings the researcher arrived at are a blend of the information and meanings articulated by the women participating in the study, the researcher's understanding of the phenomena and data obtained from other relevant sources (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The knowledge that is created, is interpreted knowledge (Morrow, 2007). The researcher's values are assumed to influence the

research process, however, interpretive phenomenology still sees it as important to make the researcher's preconceptions explicit through a reflexive journal (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

*Reflexive Box 3: The Researcher's Theoretical Position*

As a researcher, I relate to the interpretive approach to phenomenology. There are two main reasons I see myself part of the interpretive phenomenology team. Firstly, because I believe people create their own subjective realities based on the available information at a specific time when meaning is given to an experience. Furthermore, I believe how people interpret experiences and events is greatly influenced by biological factors, upbringing, past experiences, and current circumstances. My personal beliefs about how reality is constructed closely correlates with the subjective reality and contextual presuppositions the interpretive phenomenology approach holds. Secondly, considering that the researcher is interested in exploring and obtaining a better understanding of women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, the researcher found interpretive phenomenology to be an appropriate theoretical point of departure that will allow the researcher to obtain her aims.

## **2.7 Conclusions**

This chapter took a closer look at the available literature relating to maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. From the literature review, it is clear that maternal protectiveness is a complex phenomenon that needs to be better understood. A better understanding of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence can possibly lead to less mother-blaming, and allow child protection and social services to better assist women and children who are trapped in domestic violence circumstances. There is no doubt that women in domestic violence face more challenges in protecting their children, however, they still take several steps to protect their children. Accusing women of "failure to protect" is inaccurate in many cases.

Furthermore, phenomenology as the theoretical underpinning of this study was introduced. Making use of phenomenology provided the women with a platform to voice their rich experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. It also allowed the researcher to better understand maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence as it was experienced by the women. The following chapter addresses the methodology used for this research to come to a better understanding of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

*There is no such thing as objective reality or 'the real world'. There are no absolutes. The face of your greatest enemy might be the face of my finest friend. An event that appears to be a tragedy to one might reveal the seed of unlimited opportunity to another.*

*(Sharma, 2004, p. 44)*

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the practical application of the qualitative research methodology used in the current study is discussed. First, a summary of what the qualitative research methodology entails is provided. The researcher continues by discussing the participant sampling, data collection, and the data analysis process. Thereafter, the role of the researcher within an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework is clarified, followed by a discussion on the measures implemented to ensure research trustworthiness. Lastly, before concluding the chapter, the ethical considerations and procedures that were focused on in this research study are brought forward and discussed.

### 3.2 Qualitative Research

The researcher adopted a qualitative methodology as it holds an ontology that wants to understand the subjective, lived experiences of participants (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Qualitative research seeks to understand how the world is constructed for the participants by trying to understand their subjective, lived experiences of maternal protectiveness (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; McLeod, 2001). It also strives to understand participants' lived experiences of maternal protectiveness as it is experienced in the natural environment of domestic violence (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on exploring the interaction between the participants' lived experiences of maternal

protectiveness and the context of domestic violence in which it occurs (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

Qualitative research values the understanding and interpretation of the meanings participants attach to their lived experiences within their social world (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Therefore, this study focuses on exploring, understanding and describing the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence (Creswell, 2014; Howitt & Cramer, 2011).

Qualitative research is ideal for exploring the complexities involved in maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Howitt & Cramer, 2011; J. A. Smith, Bekker, & Cheater, 2011). It allows for a deep and rich understanding of maternal protectiveness through the implementation of methods using spoken language as a tool to generate in-depth and contextually rich data not observable or obtainable through questionnaires (Barker et al., 2002; Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005; Morrow, 2007).

The use of spoken language as a data gathering tool makes qualitative research effective in obtaining culturally specific information (e.g. values, opinions, and behaviours) of specific populations (Mack et al., 2005). Qualitative research can provide new, in-depth contextually rich insight into maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Morrow, 2007; Smith et al., 2011). Therefore, the focus will be on understanding the complexities and providing rich descriptions of the participants' experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Research literature focusing on qualitative research identified a variety of qualitative research designs, including narrative research, case studies, grounded theory,

phenomenology, discourse analysis, participant action research, and constructionism (Creswell, 2013). In more recent times, Jonathan Smith developed the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach in conducting interpretive phenomenological research. The IPA method enabled the researcher to obtain the desired detailed exploration of the participants' lived experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Howitt & Cramer, 2011). IPA explores the psychological processes underlying lived experiences (Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Smith & Eatough, 2006). IPA moves beyond merely describing participants experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence towards interpreting their experiences to render it more meaningful (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). IPA is therefore used in this study, as it is capable of answering the current research question of women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence.

### **3.3 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

In the following section, the researcher addresses the specific methods used to conduct this study. Firstly, a description of the context in which the research was conducted is provided, as context is an important mediator of meaning (Willis, 2007). Thereafter, the participant selection and data gathering procedures are discussed. The methods of data analysis and data management follow, concluding with an explanation of the role of the researcher in IPA research.

#### **3.3.1 Research context**

This study was conducted at The Potter's House, a shelter for abused women and children in Pretoria. The Potter's House provides shelter for up to six months for women and children who are survivors of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The Potter's House ensures that women and children's basic needs are met by providing shelter, clothing,

toiletries and three meals a day. Various programmes are in place to facilitate healing and empowerment, including counselling, therapy, spiritual nurture, and skills development. The Potter's House also offers schooling support, after-school care and holiday programmes for the children. It is a place where women and children are empowered to discover their full potential and to be re-integrated into society.

### **3.3.2 Selection of research participants**

IPA research requires a relatively homogeneous group of participants (Creswell, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). A homogeneous group of participants refers to the extent to which participants share the experience of a particular phenomenon (Willig, 2013). For this research, a homogeneous participant group include a group of women who all experienced the phenomenon of having to protect their children in the context of domestic violence. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify a homogeneous participant group. The purposive sampling method also allowed the researcher to select women who were likely to have the information sought, and who were willing to share it (Kumar, 2011).

Participant selection was conducted at The Potter's House. IPA is generally conducted on a small participant sample size as IPA is committed to a detailed account of each case included in a research study (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Furthermore, Smith and Osborn (2008) recommend that students doing IPA for the first time use three participants in their study to keep it manageable. Therefore, three participants were selected for this study, as this allowed the researcher access to in-depth engagement with each participant's story (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Participants included in the study were mothers who were in a heterosexual relationship, who experienced domestic violence and who used strategies to protect their children in the context of domestic violence. Participants also had to be fluent in English, as this was the language in which the research was conducted.



The participant selection process consisted of two phases. The first phase included screening for potential participants who would meet the inclusion criteria. The screening process was conducted by The Potter's House social worker using shelter intake forms. After the social worker completed the screening phase, the researcher was provided with a list of potential participants, leading to the second phase. The second phase of the participant selection process included the researcher arranging meetings with potential participants through the social worker. The researcher met with the potential participants one by one. When the researcher met with the potential participants, she introduced herself and explained the reason why contact was made. She also enquired whether the potential participant made use of strategies to protect their children from the domestic violence. When the researcher enquired to whether potential participants did make use of protective strategies, she approached the question with no judgement and sensitivity. Rather than directly asking potential participants whether they tried to protect their children from domestic violence, the researcher rather used the whole introduction discussion to screen whether protective strategies were employed. Potential participant was also asked at the end of the introduction session whether they will be able to provide the researcher with information regarding the different strategies they used to protect their children in the face of domestic violence. If potential participant acknowledged the use of protective strategies to protect their children from domestic violence, they were asked whether they were interested in participating in the research study. All three women acknowledged that they made use of protective strategies to protect their children from domestic violence and stated that they were interested in participating in the current study. If a potential participant was interested in participating in the research, the researcher thoroughly discussed the informed consent letter and provided the potential participant with the opportunity to ask questions. If a potential participant was still interested in participating in the study after discussing possible questions, the participant

completed and signed an informed consent letter. After the informed consent letter was signed, the participant had an option to immediately continue with the formal research interview or to schedule a suitable interview time.

The selection of one participant was completed before the researcher continued to conduct the second phase of selection with the next potential participant. The first three potential participants who signed the informed consent letter were used as participants for this study. Care was taken to ensure that the social worker understood the nature, purpose, and processes of the research. The role of the social worker and the researcher's expectations were also clearly communicated to the social worker.

*Reflective Box 4: Selection of Research Participants*

During the participant selection and data gathering process, I mistakenly allowed Anastacia to participate in the study, only to realise afterwards that she was 62 years old, older than what the inclusion criteria stated. After I consulted with my research supervisor, I decided to include Anastacia in the study, as she had already given consent and had shared her experiences with me during an interview. This decision was based on the ethical considerations of justice, beneficence, and non-maleficence.

Based on the mentioned ethical principles and my professional judgement, I also rejected, in a sensitive and empathic manner, the participation of a potential participant who had been very emotional during the pre-interview session. The impression I had of her was that her emotional need was to engage in a therapeutic relationship rather than in a research relationship. Therefore, I felt if I engaged in a semi-structured research relationship, where my need for specific information took priority over what she brought to the session, the potential for further emotional harm would have been a significant possibility.

### **3.3.3 Data collection procedures**

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were used as the data gathering technique (Smith & Eatough, 2006). Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the flexibility to place their unique experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of

domestic violence central stage (Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Smith & Eatough, 2006). An interview schedule (Appendix IV) consisting of open-ended questions were developed before the interviews were conducted (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the participants to freely respond in ways that were meaningful and culturally salient to them (Barker et al., 2002; Sandelowski, 2000).

The questions included in the interview schedule were used to build the basis for a conversation which addressed various topics that spoke to the research question (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The questions in the interview schedule were addressed in the same sequence for each participant, enabling the data gathered to be more reliable and consistent (Henning, van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The following broad, open-ended questions were used to guide the interviews:

1. Experiences of mothering in domestic violence;
2. Strategies used to physically protect children from domestic violence; and
3. Strategies used to emotionally protect children from domestic violence.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher and the participants to engage in dialogue that allowed the researcher to probe interesting and important areas raised by the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The nature of this type of dialogue permitted the researcher to dwell in the immediacy of the participants' lived experiences through continuous engagement, participation, and observation (Benner, 2008).

During the dialogue with participants, the researcher moved among situations within the participants' world, examining the foreground and probing the background meanings (Benner, 2008). The flexibility of the interview questions allowed the researcher to obtain complex and in-depth, contextually rich descriptions of how each participant experienced

maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Howitt & Cramer, 2011; Maree, 2007).

The interviews were conducted in a private office at The Potter's House. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the amount of information the participants wished to share. Interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken during and after each interview, with the participants' permission (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

### **3.3.4 Data analysis**

This study followed an inductive data analysis process using the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method as proposed by Smith and Osborn (2003). An inductive data analysis process permitted the researcher to establish the research findings by developing a set of themes and a conceptual framework that captures the main ideas present in the data (Barker et al., 2002). The IPA method created room for the researcher to concentrate on interpreting the meaning participants attached to their experiences, and how they made sense of it (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Due to the importance of interpretation in IPA, a two-stage interpretation process (also referred to as double hermeneutics) was followed (Langdrige, 2007). The first interpretation phase focused on how the participants tried to make sense of their own experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; J. A. Smith et al., 1999; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). The first phase also attended to the meaning the participants attached to their lived experiences (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008).

During the second interpretation phase, the focus was on how the researcher made sense of the participants trying to make sense of their situation (Langdrige, 2007; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). The joint reflections of the participants and the

researcher enabled the co-creation of the knowledge and understanding present in this study (Laverty, 2003; J. A. Smith et al., 1999).

However, the raw data produced by the participants was in ordinary language, which needed to be analysed first before it could be reported on (Barker et al., 2002). The analysis of the participants' data began on the individual level (person-by-person), where after it proceeded to the group-level (comparing the participants' data) (Callary, Rathwell, & Young, 2015). The data analysis of the research data was done by the sequential method described below.

#### ***3.3.4.1 Phase 1: Looking for themes in the first case***

During this phase, the researcher transcribed the interviews. Interviews were transcribed with accuracy through the inclusion of significant events such as the occurrence of pauses, hesitation, resistance, miss-hearings, and apparent mistakes. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read and re-read numerous times each participant's interview transcript, as well as the field notes for the researcher to become as familiar as possible with the data (Smith et al., 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Reading and re-reading each participant's transcribed interview in isolation, as well as in comparison with the other participants' interview data was helpful, as it gave the researcher a global impression of the content of the interviews (Henning et al., 2004).

Thereafter, a contextual analysis was done, as the researcher had made comments in the left-hand margin about any significant thoughts, observations, reflections, and meaning of particular transcript sections (Langdrige, 2007). Attention was given to the language participants' used to describe their experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence circumstances (Shinebourne, 2011). Attention was also given to the context in which

participants' experiences happened, as well as the participants' interpretations of their experiences, as it was embedded in the transcribed data (Shinebourne, 2011).

During this stage of the data analysis procedure, the aim was simply to state what was actually presented in the transcript data, staying close to the meaning inherent in the text (Langdrige, 2007). While doing this, the researcher attempted to 'bracket' her presumptions and judgements in order to focus on what was presented by the data transcripts and to understand participants' lived experiences as given by the participants. This stage was repeated a second time, maximising the likelihood of the researcher accurately capturing the meaning in the transcribed text.

#### ***3.3.4.2 Phase 2: Looking for themes and connections***

During this phase the researcher returned to the transcripts, starting with the first participant's transcript, to transform the initial notes into emerging themes (Shinebourne, 2011). Emerging themes were documented in the right-hand margin (Langdrige, 2007). Initial notes (in the left-hand margin) were first transformed into more meaningful statements or concise phrases that aimed to capture the essential quality of the findings in the text (Smith & Osborn, 2008). While still focusing on the immediate transcribed text, the scope broadened, reflecting more theoretically significant concerns (Langdrige, 2007).

Thus, the statements and phrases created by the researcher remained grounded in the participant's transcribed text, but also included enough abstraction to propose a more psychologically conceptual understanding (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Statements and phrases created in this phase were not fixed and were likely to change during the next phase, when transcribed text from the other participants were looked at together (Langdrige, 2007).

#### ***3.3.4.3 Phase 3: Connecting each analysis with other cases***

During this phase, for each transcript independently, the researcher examined the emerging themes listed in the right-hand margin that related to the current research question (Langdrige, 2007). Thereafter, the researcher sought connections between emerging themes in each isolated transcript, grouping them in clusters according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label (Fade, 2004; Shinebourne, 2011). In this process, commonalities and distinctions were sought (Benner, 2008). The task of looking for patterns among emerging themes was helpful in highlighting converging ideas, as well as to identify the more super-ordinate themes (Benner, 2008; Shinebourne, 2011).

Importantly, as themes were restructured, the researcher continuously returned to the transcribed text of each participant to check the emerging analysis (Langdrige, 2007). The researcher was consciously aware of and reflected on her own presumptions, while still expecting new assumptions to be uncovered and previously described assumptions to possibly be challenged (Benner, 2008).

#### ***3.3.4.4 Phase 4: Creating a table of themes***

This phase can also be seen as the writing up phase. During this phase, the researcher aimed to produce a list of super-ordinate themes with coherent sub-ordinate themes related to women's maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Langdrige, 2007). It was important that themes emerging from the data highlighted the main features and concerns identified by the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Illustrative data quotes that best captured the essence of the participants' thoughts and emotions about their specific experiences were extracted to highlight main features and concerns raised by participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Finally, following the extracted quotes of participants were the analytic comments of the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). At this stage, some themes

were excluded, as they were not relevant to the research question, or did not add a great deal of value to the analysis (Langdrige, 2007).

#### ***3.3.4.5 Moving on***

Once the above four stages had been completed for one case, the researcher moved on to the next transcript, repeating the process for each participant. It was assumed that the analysis of the first participant's described text would influence further analysis (Shinebourne, 2011). However, it was crucial to look at each case on its own terms, trying to 'bracket' the concepts and themes that emerged from the previous cases. In following the above four IPA phases separately for each participant, it was important to keep an open mind to allow new concepts and themes to emerge from each case (Langdrige, 2007). The IPA process is cyclical and interactive and therefore earlier transcripts were reviewed by regularly returning to the data to check the meaning and to confirm the interpretations (Langdrige, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011).

#### **3.3.5 Data management**

ATLAS.ti, a leading data management system for analysing large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data, was used to assist the researcher with data analysis (Lu & Shulman, 2008). ATLAS.ti benefits the researcher in terms of speed, consistency, rigour, and systematic analytic methods not possible by hand (Benner, 2008; Friese, 2014).

ATLAS.ti includes two levels of text interpretation, including interpretation on a contextual level and a conceptual level (Brito et al., 2017; Muhr, 1991). The first level is the contextual level (Brito et al., 2017; Muhr, 1991). During the contextual level, the researcher created a hermeneutic unit, defined as an entity in which all the relevant data of a particular study is included (Muhr, 1991). It is similar to creating a folder on your computer. After the



hermeneutic unit was created, the primary documents (transcribed interviews and observations) were uploaded into the hermeneutic unit.

Three interview transcripts, as well as the researcher's field notes, were uploaded. From the hermeneutic unit, the researcher extensively studied all primary documents, where after quotations were identified, data was coded and memos were written (Brito et al., 2017; B. Smith, 2002). The researcher highlighted 155 quotations, which yielded 235 codes. During the second level, the conceptual level, the researcher moved one step further by linking codes to create semantic networks and code families, which allowed for interrogation across cases and conceptual domains (Muhr, 1991). Three super-ordinate themes and 14 sub-ordinate themes were created, where after many links were established and a variety of networks created to generate the current research results.

### **3.3.6 The role of the IPA researcher**

IPA is a dynamic interactive process and therefore an active role was taken by the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher took a central role in the co-construction of the phenomenon under investigation and therefore did not advocate the use of bracketing (Finlay, 2009; Langdrige, 2007; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Thus, it was important for the researcher to maintain a reflexive attitude throughout every step of the research project, as well as making these reflections explicit (Morrow, 2005). Honest reflections of the researcher's own motivations, assumptions and biases added to the trustworthiness of the research study (Morrow, 2007). It is also acknowledged that the interpretations and meanings acquired from the data analysis are influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, consciously or unconsciously. Furthermore, close attention was given to interpretations made to ensure that final interpretations were grounded in the data provided by participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2006).

Another important role of the researcher was to build rapport with the participants (Gray, 2004). Building rapport was important as dialogue and understanding is central in in-depth IPA data gathering (Benner, 2008). Furthermore, good rapport is important as personal experiences such as domestic violence are wholly intrusive, making the creation of flowing dialogue challenging at times (Crozier, 2003).

As an IPA researcher, the researcher strived to develop a positive, respectful, and collaborative relationship with participants, which can only be brought on by trust (Morrow, 2007). The main values that guided the researcher in building a trusting collaborative relationship with participants were equality, cultural sensitivity, respect, empathy, and genuine interest (Morrow, 2007). The researcher was aware of the level of rapport that needed to be built, since too little rapport can cause respondents to become disengaged, and too much rapport can place the researcher in the role of a counsellor (Gray, 2004).

### **3.4 Strategies Used to Ensure Research Quality**

In this section, the researcher discusses the methods used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. The trustworthiness of this study was ensured by implementing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability strategies (Kumar, 2011), as well as reflexivity (Malterud, 2001). This research study was also reviewed by the researcher's research supervisor, who continually engaged with this research study. The researcher's research supervisor also provided alternative or confirming suggestions relating to the procedures and the data. The above-mentioned strategies ensured that the possible influence of the researchers' bias was reduced during the research process.

#### **3.4.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree to which the findings are convincing and believable (Vicent, 2014). The researcher's credibility strategies ensured that the representation of

truthful research findings drawn from the participants' original data were correctly interpreted according to participants' unique views (Vicent, 2014). A strategy used to ensure credibility was the persistent observations in the field which was regularly making entries in the researcher's dairy (Morrow, 2005).

Member checks were implemented during the interviews to ensure that the researcher correctly understood what participants communicated (Pitney, 2004). Clarification questions and reflections were used in each interview to check the researcher's understanding. Frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and her supervisor were also conducted (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, the researcher's supervisor revised the research findings in terms of the research question, as well as the conclusions drawn from the findings.

*Reflective box 5: Member Checks*

The researcher planned to conduct member checks after the interviews were transcribed and analysed to help ensure credibility (Pitney, 2004). However, the researcher was not able to conduct the member checks as planned, since the women had left The Potter's House due to their contracts expiring.

### **3.4.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which research results can be applied to other contexts or participants (Bitsch, 2005). Qualitative data cannot be said to be generalisable in a conventional sense as seen with quantitative data (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Thus it is important to highlight that this research study does not imply that the research findings and conclusions can be generalised to other populations or situations (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004).

However, the idea of transferability was not rejected in total. Transferability was achieved by the use of purposeful sampling, that allowed for a fairly homogeneous participant sample (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Vicent, 2014). Transferability was also attained through the rich and comprehensive descriptions of the data gathering and data analysis procedures, as well as the context of the fieldwork site (The Potters House), and the participants' unique contextual circumstances (Pitney, 2004; Vicent, 2014). This is all documented throughout the final report of this research study. Rich and comprehensive descriptions of the research setting enable the reader to decide on the degree of applicability of the research results obtained (Shenton, 2004).

### **3.4.3 Dependability**

Dependability can be defined as the stability of findings if the study were to be replicated over time with the same or similar participants in a similar context (Bitsch, 2005). Dependability was ensured by keeping an audit trail consisting of thorough descriptions of all procedures followed during the research study (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The audit trail tracked the development of the research design, operational detail of data gathering, and situations that occurred throughout the research process (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). All procedures are documented stepwise in the final report of this study.

### **3.4.4 Conformability**

Conformability deals with the researcher's bias and prejudices (Bitsch, 2005). It also checks whether research data, interpretations and findings can be confirmed by other researchers apart from the current researcher (Bitsch, 2005). Conformability was achieved by an audit trail and keeping a reflexive journal throughout the whole research process (Morrow, 2007; Vicent, 2014). An audit trail, consisting of a detailed methodological description

guided the researcher to consistently follow research procedures, and enables the reader to trace the course of the research step by step (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006; Shenton, 2004).

An audit trail also enables the reader to determine to what extent data and constructs brought about by this study can be accepted (Lietz et al., 2006; Shenton, 2004). Reflexivity is also a practice that contributes to research confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Reflexivity is discussed in more detail under the subheading 3.4.5. Furthermore, conformability was ensured by continuous engagement in research supervision throughout the research process. During supervision, different aspects of the research project were discussed, by which the researcher was encouraged and challenged to critically evaluate her own research.

### **3.4.5 Reflexivity**

The researcher acknowledges that she was a subjective partner throughout the research process and therefore values reflexivity practices (Mays & Pope, 2000; Shenton, 2004). A reflexive journal was used to explicitly state the researcher's biases, such as assumptions, motives and preliminary hypotheses which might have influenced the research processes, interpretations, and findings (Berger, 2015; Morrow, 2005). Explicitly stating the researcher's biases and acknowledging their possible influence on the research process helped the researcher to avoid misinterpreting participants' experiences (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). The researcher included reflexive boxes throughout the final report, allowing the reader insight into the researcher's personal presuppositions and experiences of this study. The researcher tried to remain open to new knowledge, as she tried to incorporate different perspectives, so that the viewpoint of one group is never presented as the sole truth (Mays & Pope, 2000).

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues are an undeniable aspect of qualitative research throughout the entire research process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). This study provided ethically sound research, as the researcher focused on implementing four well-established ethical principles namely, autonomy, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence (Ellsberg & Heise, 2002; Orb et al., 2000). Furthermore, the researcher adhered to the ethical principles required by the University of Pretoria.

Ethical principles attended to in this study include: obtaining permission to conduct the current research study, voluntary participation, and obtaining informed consent from participants. The ethics of informing participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time, keeping data confidential and anonymous, minimising harm, and creating opportunities for participant debriefing were also attended to. Attention was given to correctly citing sources as well, and acknowledging authors whose measures were used in this study. The applicability of these components to the research study is explained below.

#### **3.5.1 Research approval**

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the research study. The ethical approval letter can be found in Appendix I. Permission was also sought from the Potter's House to conduct this study at their institution. The letter of approval from The Potter's House can be found in Appendix II.

#### **3.5.2 Participant informed consent**

Research participants received informed consent letters prior to the commencement of the data gathering process (see Appendix III). The informed consent letter is in line with the guidelines provided by the Postgraduate and Ethics Committee of the Faculty of

Humanities at the University of Pretoria. The informed consent letter contained an explanation of the purpose, nature and process of the research study. It also contained appropriate information explaining confidentiality, participant rights, as well as possible benefits and risks. Furthermore, it addressed the use of research results and data storage. Participants were clearly informed that their participation is voluntary, that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, and that these choices will not affect them negatively in any way. The researcher respected all participants and their choices (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted only after participants had voluntarily given verbal and written consent to participate in the research study and have their interviews audio recorded (American Psychologist Association, 2017; Willig, 2013). Signing the informed consent letter was a non-negotiable requirement before the women were allowed to participate in the research study. All the research participants were fully aware of what the research entails and what was expected of them. All the participants were older than 18 years and could therefore legally consent to participate.

### **3.5.3 Beneficence and non-maleficence**

The subject of domestic violence is a private and sensitive matter often combined with negative emotional connotations. As such, possible harm to participants would mainly be of an emotional nature, and therefore interviews were delicately done. Participants who became distressed during their interviews were given the opportunity to stop the interview and reconsider their participation. Interviews were immediately terminated in the case where the researcher felt that the continuation of the interview could cause emotional harm to a participant (Gray, 2004). Distressed participants were referred to the 24-hour toll-free National Counselling Line, as well as Itsoseng Clinic which provides free psychological services to deal with possible harm caused by this research (Orb et al., 2000). Distressed

participants were also encouraged to talk to a registered psychologist, if available at the shelter.

*Reflexive box 6: Participant Beneficence*

David (2004) states that the purpose of research is to collect data and not to change participants and their opinions. However, he also acknowledges that a good interview can be therapeutic and can help participants to discover more about themselves and their situation than they knew before. This research did not aim to have therapeutic value. However, two participants stated they therapeutically benefited from their interview.

Rose found that talking about being a mother opened her eyes “*toward a lot of things.*” Rose realised that she “*have rights*”, that she is allowed “*to say no to violence*”, and that she has “*the right to talk*”. Rose felt that it was important to be able to talk as “*keeping the problems inside*” emotionally “*damaged*” her causing her to become “*like crazy sometimes.*”

At the end of Anastacia’s interview, Anastacia explained the knowledge she became aware of during her interview:

*You know, it’s strange, normally when I talk about it [abuse] I end up crying buckets and I get emotional. I also think it’s a breakthrough for me as well, having this conversation with you, because I never cried, if I just talk about my life I end up crying and then I am uncontrollable. But this is like I am improving.*

#### **3.5.4 Participant privacy**

One of the important rights of research participants is participant privacy (Allan, 2011). Participants were informed that they have the right against researcher intrusion, which implies that participants have the right to withhold any information they aren’t comfortable sharing with the researcher (Allan, 2011; Gray, 2004). Participant privacy was also ensured by conducting the interviews in a private office. The interviews were then transcribed and



stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected and only accessible by the researcher.

### **3.5.5 Participant confidentiality**

Participants have the right to confidentiality which refers to the researcher's obligation to withhold participants' information from third parties (Allan, 2011). Confidentiality also requires that research results be published without referring to specific individuals (Allan, 2011). The researcher took all the necessary steps to ensure confidentiality by making use of pseudonyms, and to change the identifying details of the participants and their children (Allmark et al., 2009). Furthermore, participants were informed that the researcher is a student psychologist and that feedback will be given to her supervisor, which can lead to the disclosure of information (Kumar, 2011). However, when information was disclosed to the researcher's supervisor, the identities of both the mother and the child/children remained protected and confidential.

### **3.5.6 Research data storage**

During the period in which the research was conducted all the project data (audio recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, and field notes) were stored by the researcher on her personal, password-protected computer. With the completion of the research study, the researcher placed all the raw research data (audio recordings, transcribed interviews, and field notes) in a folder and stored it on floor 11, room 11-24 in the Humanities Building of the University of Pretoria. The data will be stored for a minimum of 15 years for research and teaching purposes. After safely storing all the research data in room 11-24, the researcher will delete all research data from her personal computer, except the final research report.

### **3.5.7 Dissemination of research results**

Research findings are reported in the form of a mini-dissertation as required by the University of Pretoria for the completion of the researcher's MA Counselling Psychology degree. The dissemination of research results will be made available to the University of Pretoria, the public, and the research participants in the form of a master's research dissertation, scientific articles, and/or conference papers.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter was used to discuss the practical application of the qualitative research methodology using an IPA framework. A qualitative research methodology using an IPA framework allowed the researcher to access the participants' subjective, lived experiences of maternal protective strategies in the context of domestic violence. It also allowed the researcher to move towards finding and interpreting the meanings underlying participants' experiences. Following from this, the researcher provided a summary of the methods used to ensure research trustworthiness, after which an overview was given of the strategies used to ensure that the researcher produced ethical research.

Chapter 4 provides an exploration of relevant super-ordinate themes and sub-ordinate themes provided by the participants. The focal area of interest lies in participants' experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence, as well as the strategies they used to protect their children from domestic violence.

## Chapter 4: Research Findings

*“Everyone is trying to be in a peaceful place.”*

*~ Lily (participant)*

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher sets out to present the participants’ lived experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, hoping to give the reader a glimpse of the participants’ lives. This chapter commences with a brief description of each participant interviewed, as well as an understanding of each participant’s context. After the introduction of the participants, the themes that emerged from the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) are presented and verified by relevant quotations extracted from the participants’ interviews.

### 4.2 Description of Participants

Phenomenology recognises that understanding is mediated by the context (e.g. historical, cultural, and personal) in which experiences occur (Langdrige, 2007; Shinebourne, 2011). Therefore, the understanding of each woman’s lived experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence can only be understood in the wider circumstantial context in which it was experienced (Langdrige, 2007). Each woman’s unique domestic violence context and her wider circumstantial context will influence her experiences (Langdrige, 2007). Considering the influence context can have on each woman’s unique subjective experiences of maternal protectiveness, this study provided a contextual description of The Potter’s House. Furthermore, a description of each woman participating in this study is provided, which include contextual factors as highlighted by each woman. Each

participant's description is accompanied by a table presenting the codes and sub-ordinate themes derived from their respective data transcripts.

#### **4.2.1 The Potter's House: A shelter for abused women and children**

Research participants were selected from The Potter's House, a non-government organisation (NGO) located in Pretoria. The Potter's House serves a multitude of people who are exposed to domestic violence and cannot afford their own accommodation or pay for private services, the majority being women. All the participants, and some of their children, were residential at The Potter's House. Lastly, the participants were interviewed in the comfort of the study room in The Potter's House.

#### **4.2.2 Participant information**

Participant information is provided in regards to age, exposure to domestic violence, the number of children, as well as employment status. The age of the three participants ranged between 27 years of age to 62 years of age. All three participants were exposed to physical and emotional abuse by their partners. However, only one woman's children were also exposed to physical and emotional abuse. Only one of the participants were married to her abusive partner, also being the participant remaining in the abusive relationship the longest. One participant had only one child with her abusive partner. Another participant has two children, with the biological father of her youngest son being her abusive partner. The third participant has two children and is currently pregnant with her third child, with the abusive partner being the biological father of her eldest son. All the children of the women who participated in this study are boys. Furthermore, only two participants matriculated and only one participant continued with tertiary studies. However, none of the women are currently employed or financially independent.

*Other contextual information is also provided in cases where it is considered to have influenced a woman's experience of maternal protectiveness. This information was elicited during the interview session. Furthermore, it is important to note that pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants to ensure participant privacy. 4.2.2.1 Participant one: Rose*

Rose is a 30-year-old, single mother of two children. Her first born, Kenan, is nine years old and her second child, Peter, is five years old. Rose is currently pregnant with her third child. All three children have different biological fathers. Rose was in a physically and emotionally abusive relationship with Kenan's father for two years, where after she left the relationship. Kenan's father is also physically and emotionally abusive toward Kenan.

Rose is currently unemployed and has been residential with her two sons at The Potter's House since September 2017. Rose also explained that, as a child, her mother used to abuse her, and currently still does. Rose has a poor relationship with her mother, as her mother refused she and her children move back home, and treats Rose and her children badly when they do visit. Rose's biological father passed away when she was a young girl, where after she often had to take care of her younger sisters, preventing her from completing secondary school.

Therefore, Rose's experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is influenced by other contextual factors such as; low socio-economic status; current unemployment; abusive family history; poor educational history; the number of children; the nature and duration of the abuse; as well as her children also being victim to the domestic violence. The maternal protective strategies Rose used are also influenced by these contextual factors, influencing the codes and themes derived from Rose's data transcript. The codes and themes derived from Rose's data transcript are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Emerging themes and sub-ordinate themes derived from Rose's data transcript

<b>Experiences of Maternal Protectiveness in Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Views of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence	~A feeling of love for children. ~It's important to protect children.
Experiences of mothering in domestic violence	~Mothering in domestic violence is difficult. ~When my child is abused, I m abused.
<b>Methods to Used Physically Protect Children from Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Leaving the abusive relationship	~Leaving for the sake of the children. ~Choosing between the abusive partner and children.
Removing children, and negotiation of age-appropriate contact	~Refusing contact between a child and their abusive father. ~Limited contact between a child and their abusive father.
Attending to children's basic physical needs	~Esuring food. ~Using violence to keep children physically safe. ~Ensuring financial income. ~Ensuring shelter. ~Approaching a shelter for abused women.
<b>Methods Used to Emotionally Protect Children from Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Showing children that they are loved	~Creating space for healthy identity development. ~Telling children that they are loved. ~Allowing children to engage in age-appropriate activities. ~Ensuring children that they will be looked after. ~Quality time with children. ~Show an interest in children's academics.
Faith and religion	~Attending church with children. ~Praying for children's safety. ~Teaching children to pray.

Approaching a psychologist or social worker for emotional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Approaching a psychologist for emotional support.</li> <li>~Approaching a social worker for emotional support.</li> <li>~Approaching a social worker to invest in children’s emotional wellbeing.</li> </ul>
Preventing the intergenerational cycle of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Discipline children when they are fighting with their brothers.</li> <li>~Being honest with children.</li> <li>~Discouraging fighting.</li> </ul>
Constructing a new more positive reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Instilling hope.</li> <li>~Constructing a new, more positive reality.</li> <li>~Encouraging forgiveness.</li> <li>~Spoiling children.</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.2.2 Participant two: Anastacia

Anastacia is a 62-year-old mother of one son, Josh, who is currently 27-years-old. Anastacia’s father passed away when she was a young girl, where after her mother had to provide for them. Anastacia’s mother became a dressmaker and had to work long hours to keep them alive. Anastacia was therefore, mainly raised by her grandmother. Anastacia got married to her husband when she was 18 years old. Shortly after their wedding, Anastacia’s husband became physically and emotionally abusive toward her. However, her husband was never abusive towards Josh.

For Anastacia, cultural and religious customs significantly contributed to her husband’s abusive attitude towards her. Anastacia explained that in a “*Muslim home a man is the king, you got to be subservient, there is no equal rights*”. “*No matter what you earn, no matter who you are, you still have to be the doormat.*” Anastacia also relayed that in the Muslim culture, based on religious values, “*a woman is not supposed to stand up to her husband*”, and she can be punished for it.

Anastacia is educated on a tertiary level but, for most of her life, she only engaged in voluntary work for her husband, who is an Amman, without pursuing her own career.

Anastacia is currently unemployed with no access to her savings, as her husband is in control of all the bank accounts. Furthermore, it should be noted that the greatest part of Anastacia’s parenting was done before the implementation of the domestic violence Act (1998).

Anastacia lived with her husband for 42 years before, in August 2017, she left to seek shelter at The Potter’s House.

Therefore, Anastacia’s experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is influenced by other contextual factors such as; gender, culture, religion, her financial dependency on her husband, her work experience; the passing of her father; the absenteeism of the domestic violence act when she was a young mother; as well as her son not being a direct victim of the domestic violence. The maternal protective strategies Anastacia used to protect her child are also influenced by these contextual factors, influencing the codes and themes derived from Anastacia’s data transcript. The codes and sub-ordinate themes derived from Anastacia’s data transcript are presented in Table 2.

*Table 2: Emerging themes and sub-ordinate themes derived from Anastacia's data transcript*

<b>Experiences of Maternal Protectiveness in Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Views of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence	~Giving-up everything to ensure a child’s wellbeing. ~It’s a mother’s right to protect her children.
Experiences of mothering in domestic violence	~Mothering in domestic violence is challenging.
<b>Methods Used to Physically Protect Children from Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Attending to a child’s basic physical needs	~Blocking out the abuse, to be physically and emotionally available to a child.



Methods Used to Emotionally Protect Children from Domestic Violence	
Sub-ordinate themes	Emerging themes
Ensuring that the child experience a normal and happy family structure.	~Staying for the sake of the children.
Shielding children from the truth	~Hiding the aftermath of the abuse. ~Keeping the child preoccupied. ~Pretending to be happy. ~Denying the truth. ~Avoiding the child. ~Confirming excuses that are not true. ~Lying.
Faith and religion	~Praying for a child not to be exposed to the abuse.
Preserving the father-son relationship	~Encourages the child to build a relationship with his father. ~Preserving the father-son relationship. ~Taking a child's beating in silence
Showing children that they are loved	~Showering a child with love. ~Spoiling a child. ~Emotionall attention. ~Allowing a child the freedom to discover their own identity.
Preventing the intergenerational cycle of violence	~Defying cultural customs to raise a gentleman. ~Unconditional love. ~Shielding a child from the truth to prevent the cycle of abuse. ~Breaking the cycle of domestic violence.

#### 4.2.2.3 Participant three: Lily

Lily is a 27-year-old, single mother of two boys; Jadon who is six years old and Clark who is two months old. Jadon and Clark have different biological fathers. Clark's biological father was Lily's abusive partner. Jadon was born out of a previous relationship. Jadon has been living with Lily's mother, in Cape Town, since the end of 2016, which was when she

met Clark’s father. Clark’s father is two years younger than Lily and comes from a wealthy background. Lily dated Clark’s father for a year and few months. However, he became abusive towards her shortly after they started dating. It started out as inordinate jealousy, where after it escalated to emotional and physical abuse. Lily experienced the relationship “*not as all bad*”, as he spoiled her with a “*lifestyle*” she “*was not used to*”. Lily left the abusive relationship shortly after she fell pregnant with Clark (2017). She came to The Potter’s House early in 2018 with Clark, while Jadon is still living with her mother.

Therefore, Lily’s experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence are also influenced by other contextual factors such as; current socio-economic status, unemployment status; support available; and the age of her children. These contextual factors also influence the protective strategies she used to protect her children from domestic violence, influencing the codes and themes derived from her data transcript. The codes and sub-ordinate themes derived from Lily’s data transcript are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Emerging themes and sub-ordinate themes derived from Lily's data transcript

<b>Experiences of Maternal Protectiveness in Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Views of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence	~A mother does not wish for her children to be exposed to domestic violence. ~My child keeps me going.
Experiences of mothering in domestic violence	~At that time you believe that you are doing the right thing.
<b>Methods Used to Physically Protect Children from Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Leaving the abusive relationship	~Moving away. ~Leaving the abusive relationship is the best cure for domestic violence. ~Choosing between children and a partner. ~Being blamed and judged for decisions.

Refusal or negotiation of age-appropriate physical contact	~Preventing physical contact between children and partner/father. ~Age-appropriate physical contact. ~Limiting contact to telephone conversations.
Fear of the unknown	~Fear of the unknown.
<b>Methods Used to Emotionally Protect Children from Domestic Violence</b>	
<b>Sub-ordinate themes</b>	<b>Emerging themes</b>
Shielding children from the truth	~Lying ~Withholding of information. ~Avoiding children. ~Providing age-appropriate information.
Preserving the father-son relationship	~Maintaining a positive image of the abusive partner.
Spending quality time with children	~Increased mother-child communication.
Preventing the intergenerational cycle of violence	~Raising children in a positive home. ~Teaching children how to treat a woman. ~Preventing an abusive mentality

### 4.3 Themes Derived from Data Analysis

Smith's (2008) IPA method of data analysis was used as guideline and to set the framework for the reading of the transcripts. Transcripts were read repeatedly during which the researcher developed wide-ranging and unfocused notes that reflects the initial thoughts and observations made regarding the data gathered ( Smith & Osborn, 2008; Willig, 2013). Thereafter, the researcher identified emerging themes, aiming to capture the experiential quality of what participants described (Willig, 2013). The researcher identified 87 emerging themes from the participants data transcripts. The researcher then considered the emerging themes in relation to one another, clustering the emerging themes which share meaning or references together, creating sub-ordinate themes (Willig, 2013). Sub-ordinate themes developed during this stage of the data analysis is in relation to the original data provided by

the participants. Thereafter, a summary of the sub-ordinate themes that captures valuable aspects of the participants experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, together with quotations to justify the sub-ordinate themes were developed. During this stage, some sub-ordinate themes not well represented in the data transcripts or which contributed little value to the investigation of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence were excluded (Shinebourne, 2011; Willig, 2013). The researcher identified a total of 20 sub-ordinate themes of which only 12 sub-ordinate themes were found to make valuable contributions to the investigation of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. Finally, the sub-ordinate themes of each of the participants data transcripts were merged in order to identify super-ordinate themes, capturing the core of the participants experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Shinebourne, 2011; Willig, 2013). Three super-ordinate themes and fourteen sub-ordinate themes were identified from the participant's interviews. The three super-ordinate themes extracted for the women's data transcripts are; the experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence; methods used to physically protect children from domestic violence; and methods used to emotionally protect children from domestic violence.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that although certain themes are highlighted, each woman's story is unique, relating to their unique experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. It is also acknowledged that these themes were not the only themes that emerged, but they were the themes the researcher found to be significant in the unfolding of the lived experiences of the women in this study. The three super-ordinate themes with each of their sub-ordinate themes are discussed below and accompanied by verbatim quotations of the participants. A summary of the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes derived from the women's data transcripts is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes derived from participants' data transcripts

Super-ordinate Themes	Sub-ordinate Themes
Theme 1: Experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Views about maternal protectiveness in domestic violence.</li> <li>~Experiences of mothering in a situation of domestic violence.</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Methods used to physically protect children from domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Leaving the abusive relationship.</li> <li>~Removing children, and the negotiation of age-appropriate physical contact between children and the abusive partner.</li> <li>~Attending to children's basic physical needs.</li> </ul>
Theme 3: Methods used to emotionally protect children from domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~Preserving the father-son relationship.</li> <li>~Shielding children from the truth.</li> <li>~Constructing a new, more positive reality for children.</li> <li>~Showing children they are loved.</li> <li>~Faith and religion.</li> <li>~Approaching a psychologist or social worker for emotional support.</li> <li>~Preventing the intergenerational cycle of abuse.</li> </ul>

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence**

The first super-ordinate theme provides an in-depth look at the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence. This is done by providing a thorough description of the two sub-ordinate themes that shaped this super-ordinate theme. The first sub-ordinate themes address the views the women hold about maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. The second sub-ordinate theme covers the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Views about maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence***

All three women expressed similar views regarding the importance of protecting their children from domestic violence. The women's views about maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence circumstances revolve around the unique perceptions they each hold about themselves as mothers.

Rose explained that she experienced it to be *“very important to protect”* her children and to care for them *“because no one will ever love them as”* she loves them. Anastacia experienced maternal protectiveness similarly to Anastacia, as she experienced protecting her child, not just to be important, but also that *“as a mother”*, it was her *“right to protect”* her *“child from all these ugly things [abuse] that happened”*. For Anastacia, her son is her *“live”* and she would give *“everything”* for her son to *“have the best of everything”*.

Lily could also relate, generalising her opinion to all abused women. Lily believes *“that each and every mother wouldn't want their children to be actually in those [abusive] situations”*. *“It's not what she [a mother] wishes for”* her children. Lily also believes that women *“are trying to actually protect them [children] in certain ways, probably in their own ways”*. Lily explained that she did what she could *“to protect”* her children. Lily feels that *“everyone is trying to be in a peaceful place”*.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence***

This sub-ordinate theme captures the women's subjective experiences of mothering in the context of domestic violence. All three women revealed that they experienced mothering in the context of domestic violence to be difficult. Despite it being difficult, all three the women also experienced themselves as being protective toward their children to the best of their ability. Both Rose and Lily acknowledged that sometimes they made mistakes or that their protective efforts were not as effective as they hoped for. However, their shortcomings

in maternal protectiveness were never intentional, but often due to harsh contextual factors the women had to face while trying to protect their children.

Anastacia experienced mothering to become “*more of a challenge*” in the context of domestic violence. Anastacia also experienced maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence to be anxiety provoking. Anastacia explained that the abuse made her “*overprotective*” of her son. She disclosed how she used to get “*panic attacks*”, especially when she was ignorant of her son’s whereabouts, or when he was not “*back by 3 o’clock*” in the morning from a social gathering. Anastacia also disclosed how she experienced being a mother in the context of domestic violence to be “*very lonely*”, especially because her “*world*” and her “*son*” saw her as being “*in a happy relationship*”.

Rose also experienced mothering in domestic violence to be “*really difficult*”. For Rose, mothering was made “*really very difficult*”, as she did not have her “*own shelter*”, “*was suffering to find a job*”, and she was “*suffering finding food for*” herself and her children. Furthermore, Rose explained that for her it was very “*painful*” and “*hard, because, when Kenan was abused, I [Rose] was abused too*”.

However, although Rose experienced protecting her children very hard and not always adequate – “*I need more*” – she still tried her very best to provide for them and to protect them above all else. Rose revealed:

*No. I couldn't [always protect her child] but, I was trying. I was trying. I was really trying... Yes. So, I'm trying all my best that they must be happy.... Yeah, I'm trying, I am really trying... Yeah, it wasn't easy, even if I was doing the right thing, for me I was like, oh, this is really hard.*

Lily also faced challenges as a mother in domestic violence. Lily explained how her decisions as a mother weren’t always “*the best decision, or it wasn't best at that time*”, but at

the time she thought she was “*doing the right thing*”. Lily also revealed that she experienced her children as a source of strength, that kept her going during difficult times, especially when she made mistakes. Lily explained:

*Like, okay, I am doing this for my children ... I am still trying to deal with it [challenges after leaving the relationship]. I am not going to say it is easy, but yes. Just having in mind what is the reason [children] why I chose what I chose. I think that is the best thing that keeps me going.*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Methods used to physically protect children from domestic violence**

This super-ordinate theme takes an in-depth look at protective strategies women employ to physically protect their children from domestic violence. These strategies take on diverse forms, depending on circumstances such as socio-economic status, employment status, social support, as well as the nature and duration of the abuse. All three women employed methods aimed at ensuring their children’s physical safety, however, some methods more so than others. The physical protective strategies reported by the women were leaving the abusive relationship, removing children and the negotiation of age-appropriate physical contact between children and the abusive partner, attending to children’s basic physical needs . These will be illustrated in more detail below:

##### ***4.3.2.1 Leaving the abusive relationship***

Two participants spoke about their experience of having to choose between their partners and their children. Rose explained that in her abusive relationship she had to “*choose kids or a man*” but she could not “*choose both*”. Rose revealed that for her and her children “*the solution is to go out [leave the relationship]*”. Rose, chose to rather “*go out with*” her children “*than be a slave*” to her abusive partner.



Lily made it clear that she too experienced having to choose between her partner and her children. At the beginning of the relationship Lily hoped her partner would change but had “*to choose at the end*”, as he did not change. Lily clarified that she would choose her “*children over everything*”. Similar to Rose, Lily defined leaving the abusive relationship as the best “*cure*” for the abuse.

Lily also stated that “*moving away*” was the best way to protect her children. Lily explained if she “*stayed in the relationship*” she would have gotten her “*children exposed to this kind of unhappiness and violence [caused by the abuse] that is going to be happening in the house*”. Lily explained that one of the aspects she considered when deciding to leave or stay in the relationship, was whether she wanted her partner to be the person to whom her child looks up. Lily answered this question for herself when she stated:

*Is he the person that I want my child to look up to? Obviously, I saw that was not what I wanted for my child and any other child to go through.*

Lily explained how she experienced that the “*women who stays and the women who actually leave the relationship*” are “*judged*” for their “*situations*” and “*decisions*”. She continued, “*there are always going to be the rights and the wrongs that the people would judge*” women for. For example, Lily was accused that it was her “*fault*” the abuse was happening. She was also told she “*have to try and stay in the relationship*”, to “*keep*” her “*man*”. Lily was also of the opinion, if a woman decides to stay in an abusive relationship, she, “*stay for different reasons*”, which aren’t always simple.

#### ***4.3.2.2 Removing children, and the negotiation of age-appropriate physical contact between children and the abusive partner***

Rose was the only woman who spoke about removing her child, Kenan, from his abusive father. After Rose left the abusive relationship, Kenan stayed with his father.

However, when Rose found out that Kenan's father was physically abusing him she "*decided to take Kenan back*". Rose explained that removing Kenan from his abusive father was the way she "*protected him*", as this kept Kenan "*away from a lot of things*" and no one was "*shouting at him*" or "*beating him*" anymore. Rose also promised Kenan that she will "*never*" let him return to his "*dad's house*" again but that he "*will stay with*" her.

Furthermore, two participants rejected the suggestion of physical contact between their children and their abusive partners. Rose "*stopped*" all forms of physical contact between her son, Kenan and his father. However, removing Kenan from his father's care was not simple, as he threatened Rose if she takes Kenan, "*Kenan, is going to die*" and that "*he will kill*" her too. Rose was too afraid of the possible consequences of removing Kenan on her own, therefore she "*called the police*" and "*went to the police station*" to get them to assist her in removing Kenan from his father's care. Rose also made use of the "*social worker*" assigned to her case to help her remove Kenan from his father's care.

Lily's experience with her first-born son, Jadon, was somewhat different from that of Rose, as her "*first child wasn't even his [abusive partner's] child*". When Lily was asked whether she would allow Jadon to have physical contact with her abusive partner, she rejected the proposal with a strong "*No, no, no!*". She revealed that she "*wouldn't want him [her son] to be in contact with him [abusive partner] or anything like that*". Lily limited their contact to occasional telephone conversations.

Lily explained that with her second son, Clark, it wasn't as easy as simply refusing any physical contact, since her abusive partner is Clark's biological father. Nevertheless, Lily is not willing for Clark to visit his father "*until he [father] gets help*" as she is not sure whether "*he [father] is capable of hurting*" Clark. Therefore, Lily takes "*precaution*" by only allowing age-appropriate contact between Clark and his father. Lily clarified that when Clark

is “*eight months or nine months, he [father] can actually come and visit and then probably some family member would be there*” for supervision, as Clark is still a small child. Lily continued by explaining that as soon as Clark “*is old enough to speak*” he can visit his father alone, “*because then he is able to say he [father] beats me here, or whatever*”.

#### ***4.3.2.3 Attending to children’s basic physical needs***

Two women mentioned strategies to provide in their children’s physical needs, or to ensure they are capable of attending to their children’s physical needs. Rose was significantly challenged by a lack of financial income resulting in multiple shelter and food difficulties. Rose explained how she tried her very best not to sleep on the streets, and to make sure her children have food to eat by committing herself to people. Rose explained:

*Yes, I was trying. I was really trying. Like, when it is in the morning, I have to think where I have to go ask for food because if the baby didn’t eat he would cry, cry, cry, cry. Then, I will make sure that I would commit myself to people, being nice to them. Others they will offer you food, others they will offer you maybe two days of sleeping. You know. I was trying my best not to sleep in the streets.*

Rose revealed how she would “*use to date different kind of people*” to protect her children. When Rose was asked what she meant by “*dating different kinds of people*” she stated: “*sleeping around, using myself to protect my kids*”. Rose was “*sleeping around for money, sometimes for shelter*”, as she did not want her children “*to sleep without eating*”. Sleeping around for money’ was Rose’s last resort, so she also used other methods of ensuring financial income, including “*cleaning people’s houses*”, “*helping at church*”, and “*begging*”. Furthermore, Rose revealed she would go to the extreme to keep her children physically safe. This was made clear when Rose stated:

*I will make sure that my kid, nothing is coming to tear or do anything [harm to her son], because, I would kill that person.*

Anastacia's protective strategy was more cognitive in nature, as she mentally blocked out the abuse. Blocking out the abuse enabled Anastacia to pretend to be happy, so she could be physically and emotionally available to her son. Anastacia noted:

*I try to act normal. I shut that part of the abuse. Like, I learned to work with my mind, that certain part of the time I'll push all the ugly incidents out and then I will act happy ... The whole thing was acting on my part. Besides the love that I have for my son, every other part of my life was acting. It was a charade ... But then I will still laugh. I'll smile, going out the room, laughing with the children, being with the children.*

Furthermore, all three women reached out to a shelter for abused women. However, only Rose explicitly mentioned reaching out to The Potter's House as a protective strategy. Rose researched out to The Potter's House as she didn't want her "kids to grow staying in the streets" and wanted them "to have a home". The Potter's House provided Rose's sons with "school uniform, clothes, and the warm clothes" and allowed them to attend "school at Potter's House". The Potters House also provided Rose with a "job" opportunity.

### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Methods used to emotionally protect children from domestic violence**

This theme takes an in-depth look at the strategies the participants employed to emotionally protect their children from domestic violence. All three women employed methods to prevent or limit the negative emotional impact of exposure to domestic violence on their children. Protective strategies used by the women to emotionally protect their children from domestic violence were; preserving the father-son relationship; shielding

children from the truth; constructing a new, more positive reality; showing children that they are loved; faith and religion; approaching a social worker or psychologist for emotional support; and preventing the intergenerational cycle of abuse. These will be illustrated in more detail below:

#### ***4.3.3.2 Preserving the father-son relationship***

Two participants found it important for the children to maintain a positive image of the father [the abusive partner] for the sake of the children's future relationship with their fathers. Lily believes that for Clark's emotional wellbeing it is best "*not talking bad about*" his father as an abusive partner, hoping to prevent Clark from seeing his "*real father, that his father can be a monster (Silence)*".

For Anastacia it was very important for her child to have both parents present in his life. She was even willing to stay in the abusive relationship with her husband to ensure this type of parental presence in her son's life. Anastacia captures this as follows:

*I never had a dad. My dad passed away when I was five. So, I promised myself that when I have a child, that I will make sure that there is bonding between my son and the father or my daughter and her father, because growing up not having a dad, you miss that. You really miss that ... So, I made a promise to myself, when I have children I will make sure that that child has both the mother and the father.*

Due to Anastacia's need to preserve her son's relationship with his father she "*never ever told him*" about the abuse, as she feared it might have "*affected him to such a degree that he would have hated his father*". She didn't want her son "*to ever hate his father*" and therefore she went out of her way to encourage her son to "*spend time with him [his father]*". Anastacia disclosed that, at times, she also encouraged her son to spend time with his father

to protect herself from getting a beating, as she knew if her “*son refused*” to spend time with his father, she would “*get a beating*”.

For Anastacia preserving the father-son relationship was so important to her that she was willing to take her sons beatings in silence. Anastacia explained, using a previous experience:

*Then my [Anastacia’s] mom told me, the [Anastacia’s] daughter in law is going to have a baby any time now ... So, I said “Okay”. When I went home and I told my husband. I didn’t tell him when we were going. When we got home, I told him. And there I got a beating... Yah, I use to get beaten for every time my son did something or did not do what my husband wanted, I would get beaten for it.*

Although Anastacia was often “*beaten for things he [Josh] did or did not do*”, she “*never ever told him that because of you.*” Anastacia was afraid that if she did tell Josh the truth “*it would have had affected him to such a degree that he would have hated his father*”. and Anastacia wanted to preserve her son’s relationship with his father.

#### **4.3.3.3 Shielding children from the truth**

Two of the women mentioned using different strategies to prevent their children from finding out that the abuse existed. Anastacia communicated that “*shielding him [Josh] from the truth*” was the best way she could protect her son, therefore she used different methods to prevent her son from finding out the truth.

Anastacia explained how she used to “*lie*” about getting “*hurt on the door*” to cover up for the “*knob on the head*” and her “*blue eye*”. Anastacia made up lies to avoid her son from noticing she had been abused. Anastacia would also lie about going “*out for a meeting*” to get herself out of the house. Anastacia would then just take her “*car and go sit at the beach*” to “*relax*” her “*mind*” and to “*put makeup on*”. Anastacia also explained how she

would often “*hide in the bedroom*” wanting to “*save*” her “*child from seeing*” the aftermath of being abused.

Anastacia beautifully summarised her lying patterns when she stated that “*it becomes a continuous web of lies*”. Anastacia also used “*migraines as an excuse*” to “*avoid*” being seen by Josh as “*he would not come and interfere or mommy this or mommy that*” when she was sick. Anastacia’s housekeeper was aware of the abuse Anastacia experienced and often “*cover up for*” Anastacia. The housekeeper also monitored when Josh was coming home or leaving. When Josh came home, the housekeeper knocked on the bedroom door to warn Anastacia that her “*son is coming*”, so when she exits her room she would be “*looking happy, glowing*”. Anastacia explained her motivation behind her behaviour as wanting to “*protect*” Josh from seeing her in any state she “*felt was not right for him*”.

Anastacia also used other methods, such as denying the abuse when her son, Josh, confronted her about the possibility of her being abused. Anastacia explained how she would deny that the abuse “*is true or that it really happened*”, instead questioning Josh’s interpretation of what he heard from other people. Keeping the children occupied was another strategy Anastacia used to distract Josh from becoming aware of the abusive circumstances.

Similarly, Lily stated that protecting her child from the truth was important, as she wanted to protect him from any “*emotional abuse*” the truth could cause. Lily motivated her opinion by explaining that “*reality says it [abuse] would have an impact on him*” and she did not “*know what’s going to be happening in a child’s mind*” if she tells him all these things. Furthermore, Lily clarified she wanted to “*protect*” her “*child’s emotions or whatever impact that is unknow could have on him*”. Therefore, she “*never let him see it [abuse] or he never had to hear about it*”. She would normally make “*an excuse that probably something*

*happened at work*” or that she *“just had a long day”*. Lily clarified that she wasn’t against all forms of disclosure, however, disclosure needed to be age-appropriate.

Lily was of opinion that she would disclose some information when her children are older and have a better capacity to rationally understand; when her children can learn from the information she gives them, rather than be traumatised by it. Lily explained her reason for being willing to disclose only age-appropriate information in a positive light when she clarified:

*If he was probably in a more older age, that you know that you can actually explain properly [the truth about the abuse]. Now, this is a small child. If you tell him its abuse and then he portrays abuse as this way. Probably he will have hate or something and then he won’t see when you are trying to make him learn. From that, he won’t actually learn because he is a small child.*

For Lily, the abuse often made her unhappy, and she would be *“spending time like crying”*. Lily did not *“want the child to actually feel that negative or that emotions”* she was experiencing, believing that *“children sometimes can sense”* when their parents are unhappy. Lily did not want her children to know she was unhappy; therefore, she rather avoided her son when she was emotionally unwell.

#### ***4.3.3.4 Constructing a new, more positive reality***

The actions of both Rose and Anastacia spoke to creating a better, more positive reality for their children, a reality which they did not experience as children themselves. For Rose, she wanted to show her children that their circumstances have changed for the positive. Rose explained that she was, *“trying to let this picture of we were suffering, to let it go”* and to help her children realise that things were *“better”*. Rose told her children that *“this is the end of the road of suffering”* and that they *“need to forgive and forget, even those people who*



*hurt*” them. However, she also reassured that even if they forgive those who have hurt them that they will never have to go back to their “*dad’s house*”. Furthermore, Rose tried to give her children hope by complimenting them about how “*clever*” they are and that they “*will be something*” one day as there “*are still more thing coming*” their way. Rose wanted her children to “*feel better*”, wanting to show them that things have changed by taking “*them out to KFC*” and to “*surprise*” them by taking them “*to the storeroom*” where The Potter’s House “*give them clothes*”. Rose also spoke about how she will take “*them out to the zoo*”, allow them to “*meet other people, kids*”, and take them “*to museums*”.

Anastacia was the only participant who stayed in her abusive marriage for the sake of her son, Josh, as her husband was not abusive towards Josh. Anastacia stayed, as she desired her son to grow up in a “*normal family*” where he could say that his “*mom and dad are perfect*” and that they “*are living happily*”. She also wanted her son to “*have the best of everything*” and her “*husband could give him the best*”. Anastacia stayed in order for her son to have a “*safe comfort zone*”

#### **4.3.3.5 Showing children they are loved**

Two participants spoke about how they reassured and showed their children that they were loved and special. Rose explained that she “*always tells*” her children that she “*love them both*” and that she “*love them both the same way*”. Rose also tells her children that “*they are beautiful*” and that “*there is nothing*” in which she won’t give her best for them. Furthermore, Rose explained that she is currently just giving her oldest son, Kenan, “*the chance to play, because Kenan didn’t have any chance to play*”. “*He was always taking care of the stepmothers’ child*”. She also encourages her children “*to meet other people, kids*”. Rose continued to explain how she gives her children the freedom to develop their own

opinions and identity as well as respecting the decisions her children make in terms of the freedom she gives them. Rose provided an example:

*When I am like with them, we talk, they say today we are going to the barbershop.*

*“What do you want?” “I want a mohawk”. I’m like, “Mohawk it suits you.”*

Anastacia was able to relate to Rose as she explained how she “*showered him [Josh] with a lot of love, with a lot of attention, and buying him things*”. Furthermore, Anastacia also found it important for her son to have his own identity and engage in a career that he is interested in instead of just following in his father’s footsteps. Anastacia captured it as follows:

*I think the most part was when he [husband] felt like that he, my son, is changing, he is developing into his own identity and my son was supposed to follow in his father’s footsteps in becoming a priest and I didn’t want that. I wanted him to go to university, get a degree, and that was the first cuss that we had about things. I put my foot down and my son wanted to study.*

Another strategy all three women used to make children feel loved was spending more time engaging with their children either through increased activities together or communication. Rose revealed that she spends more quality time with her children talking “*about what did they learn in school*” before they go to bed at night. Lily expressed how she too would talk to her son “*more often than before, like every day after school*” about “*everything*”. She continued to explain how her son also “*reports everything on recorded messages*” and send it to her.

Anastacia could relate to Rose and Lily to some extent as she used to “*overcompensate*” in time with her son as an emotional protective strategy for the times she was avoiding him or being absent as a result of the abuse. Anastacia explained:

*Until I calm myself and I am in a better feeling of mine, I would go to him and say, “What’s your homework”? Or, okay, we are doing this today or you want to do something? And then he would most probably tell me, “no, I would just like to sit with you” or “okay, mommy let’s do a movie tonight”.*

#### **4.3.3.6 Faith and religion**

Two of the women spoke about prayer and faith being a source of strength and hope when they were faced with the domestic violence. Both participants also used prayer as a method to protect their children. Rose relayed how she used to pray to God to protect Kenan during the time she was not able to take him into her care. During that time, she thought that *“the only way to protect him [Kenan] was by praying”*. Rose continued to explain how she was really thankful to *“God for saving”* them and helping her to realise that *“there is a future for”* her and her children. Therefore, Rose finds it important to teach her children to pray every night before they go to sleep. Rose also reported observable improvement in Kenan’s capacity to cope due to the implementation of this strategy. Rose explained:

*I make sure that I teach them to pray before we sleep, even if when there is noise or kids are fighting ... He [Kenan] is really coping because now we go to church, we attend church. He is no longer thinking negative things.*

Anastacia could relate to Rose as she explained how she too prayed to God, asking that Josh *“mustn’t see”* and *“mustn’t hear”* the abuse his father is inflicting on his mother. Anastacia continued to explain how she learned from her mother-in-law:

*That you put a veil over your feelings and show the world that no matter what it troughs at you, you can handle it, but at night you can sit and cry to God.*

#### ***4.3.3.7 Approaching a social worker or psychologist for emotional support***

Rose was the only women who approached a social worker and/or a psychologist. Rose experienced intense feelings of “*stress*” and “*depression*” as she had to mother within the context of domestic violence together with having little resources available to protect and care for her children. Rose explained that “*the stress was overtaking*” her and therefore, she sought help from a “*social worker*” and a “*psychologist*” to help her cope emotionally better with her “*family problems*”, “*boyfriend problems*” and accommodation problems as she had “*nowhere to go*”.

Rose also made use of a “*student social worker*” to invest in Kenan’s emotional wellbeing as he was acting out the abuse he experienced from his father onto a doll. Rose continued by explaining that after the student social worker worked with Kenan, “*he has become better*” and that he is “*coping*” in school. For Rose, Kenan “*is fine now*”.

#### ***4.3.3.8 Preventing the intergenerational cycle of abuse***

All three women spoke about employing methods to prevent their children from learning that violence is an option for problem-solving or from becoming aggressive towards others. Rose is discouraging fighting through teaching her two sons not to “*fight*” as they “*are brothers*” and that brothers should live together in peace. Rose continued to explain how she always told her sons when they “*see people... or friends fighting*” they should “*stay away from the fights*”. Furthermore, Rose admitted that she will “*beat both*” her sons if they fight with one another in order to discipline them. Unlike Anastacia and Lily, Rose preferred to be honest with her children when they do ask questions about the abuse. Rose wants her children to understand that when life becomes difficult they can ask for help as there are people who will help them. Rose wants them to understand that they can’t become abusive toward others when they experience problems. Rose captures it as follows:

*The reason for me to be honest with them, they are going to grow up, when they grow up, when they see life now is difficult, they can't reach there [abuse] because of the problems. So, I am teaching them, for now, that even if they grow up they need to be strong and say there is always a chance to live. And then if you speak out people they could listen, others they will help you.*

Lily also wanted to protect her children from being exposed to the abuse believing that *“the outcome for them [children] is not going to be good”*. Lily feared that if her children are exposed to the abuse *“they will grow up, having that hate”* that will *“affect”* them negatively. Lily continued by explaining that she does not want her children to grow up and learn the *“mentality”* of behaving in an abusive manner to get what you want. Lily captures this as follows:

*Yes [trying to prevent her child from becoming abusive towards others], he's seeing, probably he felt sad because he didn't feel this way that's why he beats mommy, because he wanted things his way, that's why he beats mommy. So, he will have that, Okay, for me to get what I want or whatever answer I want I have to be winded, so that the person would be submissive or something like that. So, I don't want him to grow up with that mentality.*

Lily did not want her children to be like *“those kinds of people”* who learn in their family home that violence solves everything and therefore decided on *“moving away”*. Lily's decision to move away to a more positive environment was also based on her reasoning that, *“the more you try to have a child to be raised in a positive and loving home, the better the child's upbringing”*. Lily wanted to give her children a positive, domestic violence free upbringing. Lily also suggested that she would probably *“teach”* her children *“how to treat a woman”*.

Adding to Lily, Anastacia was also of opinion that “*children learn from what they see*” and therefore “*all the children from broken homes are doing the same things [abuse], it’s a cycle*”. Anastacia “*wanted to break the cycle*” in her relationship with her son as she did not want her son to “*grow up thinking that it’s fine to abuse a woman*”. She went on to explain the most important strategy she employed in preventing her son to continue with this abusive cycle was “*shielding him from the truth... because, if he saw the abuse he would have thought it was normal*”. Anastacia continued that she believes that her attempts to break the abusive cycle was successful as her son “*turned out to be a perfect gentleman that loves and adores and respect women and he will never harm a woman*”. Furthermore, Anastacia explained that she “*still believe, that if you love your child unconditionally and protect him then he would actually be a king to his wife*”. Anastacia provided an example of how she used to try and make her son feel unconditionally loved:

*In our custom you are not allowed to lie on the bed with your son but, I would do that. And sometimes, like my husband comes in and he’ll find us on the bed lying and holding each other... And then he will tell me when my son is gone like, “but you are pampering him, you are spoiling him, how will he relate as a man?” And then I used to say to him, “you know by me being nice to him, I want him to be a gentleman, I want him to be good and kind to his wife”. “But you are trying to say that I am not kind to you” and there the fight would start.*

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter the researcher presented the research findings in the form of three superordinate themes and 12 sub-ordinate themes. The themes focussed on bringing the participants and their lived experiences of maternal protectiveness as communicated by them to live. From the themes discussed above it is clear that the experience of maternal

protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is a complex phenomenon, influenced by multiple factors. Nevertheless, all three participants expressed care and concern for the health and safety of their children. All three participants found it important to protect their children, physically and emotionally, from domestic violence and the possible after-effects of being exposed. Some participants used similar protective strategies where some used different strategies to protect their children. However, the participant's decisions regarding what protective strategies needs to be implemented rested on both what strategies were available to the women as well as what the women experienced to be in the best interest for their children's wellbeing and safety.

The following and final chapter will provide interpretations of the findings by merging it with relevant literature. Following the interpretations of the research findings, the strengths and limitations of this study will be declared as identified by the researcher. The recommendations for future research and practice will then be addressed. Before concluding, the chapter will provide a short summary of the researcher's personal reflections regarding the research process.

## Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

*It is critical that when our children look into our eyes, regardless of the circumstances they are facing, what they see is somebody that believes in them*

*~ Unknown*

### 5.1 Introduction

In the final and concluding chapter, the researcher discusses the findings related to the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence that ascended through the study. As findings are discussed, they are married to existing literature to enable a better understanding of the lived experiences of the women that took part in this study. Furthermore, the limitations to the current study are provided, followed by recommendations for practice and future research. The researcher's personal reflections are explored where after the chapter concludes.

### 5.2 Discussion of Results: Super-ordinate Themes

Three super-ordinate themes and 12 sub-ordinate themes relating to maternal protectiveness in domestic violence were generated during the analysis, which is discussed next. The findings are presented in terms of the three super-ordinate themes while integrating the findings with existing literature. Integration and discussion of findings are done, keeping in mind the aims and objectives of the current research study. The super-ordinate themes are discussed in the same order the findings were presented in the previous chapter (see Table 4).

#### 5.2.1 Women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence

The current findings are that most women find it important to protect their children from domestic violence. Furthermore, it was found that domestic violence has an impact on



maternal protectiveness. However, the impact differs from woman to woman, depending on multiple contextual factors. Contextual factors also influenced women's decisions to use the specific strategies they used, rather than others.

#### ***5.2.1.1 Views about maternal protectiveness in domestic violence***

All the participants in the current study found it important to physically and emotionally protect their children from the impact of exposure to domestic violence. This finding strongly correlates with the findings that child protection is highly prioritised in abused women's minds, even during times they were being abused (McGee, 2000). Furthermore, it appears that the participants' view of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence revolves around the unique perceptions the participants hold about themselves as mothers. Similar to other studies, the participants saw child protection, consciously or unconsciously, as a mother's responsibility (Buchanan et al., 2015b; Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Lapierre, 2010a; Wendt & Zannettino, 2015).

One of the participants felt, as a mother, it was not just important to protect her child, but it was her right to protect her child from the abuse. This is in line with the South African Children's Act 38 of 2005 (s.19), which state that, the current participant, as the biological mother of her child, has full parental responsibilities and rights in respect of her child. Furthermore, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (s.7) state that, a child has the right to be protected from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by the exposure of any family violence involving the child or any family member of the child.

Another participant generalised her opinion about maternal protectiveness, believing that no mother would want her children to be exposed to any form of domestic violence. However, a study conducted by Kubeka (2008) disagrees with this participant, as the study found that some children suffer abuse at the hands of their abused mothers. The current study

can relate to some degree with the findings of Kubeka (2008), as one of the participants reported that her mother abused her as a child, suggesting that children can also be abused by their mothers.

Continuing, it appears that the participants, as women, took on the responsibility to protect their children themselves. It also appears that the abusive behaviour of the women's abusive partners did not leave them with any other choice, but to take responsibility for children's safety. However, whether women willingly take on the responsibility for child protection, or forced by their partners' abusive behaviour, it places women in a position of being solely held accountable for their children's safety. Women solely responsible for child protection are unfortunately set up for being blamed for "failure to protect" their children (Humphreys et al., 2006).

It appears that some of the participants valued their responsibility for child protection as it gives them meaning and a reason to continue the fight of overcoming domestic violence. These findings are confirmed by other studies that found children to be a significant source of strength and purpose for abused women, and keeps them going during challenging times (Lapierre, 2008; Peled & Gil, 2011). It can be speculated that abused women tend to value their responsibility for child protection, as this significantly contributes to their identity as 'good' mothers. The participants left the impression that being a mother was something that could not be taken from them by their abusive partners. Therefore, they valued not just being a mother, but also being a 'good' mother. Similarly to other research findings, the women defined the act of protecting children as part of being a 'good' mother (Lapierre, 2010b).

Furthermore, adding to existing literature, the current study found that although most abused women found it important to protect their children, they construct 'child protection' differently from one another. In other words, 'child protection' might be uniquely defined by

each woman, their definitions influenced by their unique past experiences, current context, and their social and cultural beliefs of motherhood. Therefore, the way in which women protect their children is not a one-size-fits-all method, but vary from woman to woman. One participant beautifully summarised this concept when she explained that “*every mother, including herself, try to protect their children in their own ways they find best*”.

#### ***5.2.1.2 Experiences of mothering in domestic violence***

All the participants in the current study emphasised that the experience of mothering was more difficult in the context of domestic violence. Abused women’s mothering is made more difficult by a variety of obstacles created or intensified by domestic violence circumstances.

The obstacles to maternal protectiveness, as experienced by the current participants, which correlates with previous research, includes poverty and a lack of social support (Huth-Bocks & Hughes, 2008; Radford & Hester, 2006), as well as emotional and physical health consequences (Coker et al., 2002; Mullender et al., 2002; Radford & Hester, 2006). However, from the findings, it appears the participants experienced these obstacles differently and therefore were also impacted differently, and to different degrees. For example, two participants experienced poverty, making mothering and protecting children more difficult. Women faced with poverty are particularly vulnerable to experience domestic violence from intimate partners (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). Women who experience poverty are also subjected to other social challenges such as lack of access to health care, food, shelter, and other resources, as seen in some of the women’s accounts (Boonzaier & van Schalkwyk, 2011). From the women’s accounts, the lack of access to finances, health care services, shelter, food and other resources makes it more difficult to cope with the abuse they are experiencing, which furthermore appears to have a direct impact on their experience of

maternal protectiveness within the context of domestic violence. One of the participants experienced the lack of safe shelter to be very disruptive and stressful for both herself and her children (Bostock, Plumpton, & Pratt, 2009). This was especially marked when the participant had to “sleep around with different people” in order to prevent her children from sleeping on the street or from starving.

Within the current study it is furthermore seen that the amount and quality of social support abused women have to their availability also influence their experience of the violence directed towards them, as well as their psychological well-being. These findings are congruent with other studies that have found that higher levels of social support can significantly reduce the risk of adverse psychological health outcomes among abused women (Coker, Smith, Thompson, McKeown, & Bethea, 2004; Paranjape & Kaslow, 2010; Tanschriner, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995). Two of the three participants reported a lack of social support from their family and wider community. These two participants experienced more emotional challenges, including anxiety, panic attacks, depression and suicidal ideation, when compared to the third participant who did not report experiencing lack of support. Therefore, it appears that the lack of social support, especially family support, does not just minimise women’s resources to cope with the effects of domestic violence, but also cause additional psychological health problems (Bostock et al., 2009; Paranjape & Kaslow, 2010). The reduction in resources and the escalation in psychological challenges significantly influence the women’s experiences of domestic violence and maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. The reduction in supportive resources left some of the women with the experience that mothering and maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is very difficult and almost impossible. Furthermore, one of the participants experienced the increase in psychological challenges to be overwhelming and unable to cope alone with the demands of being a mother and having to protect children from domestic violence. Therefore,

as found in many other studies, the experience of financial hardship, homeless, and the lack of social support can significantly influence abused women's experience of mothering and maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence (Bostock et al., 2009; Coker et al., 2004; Paranjape & Kaslow, 2010; Tan-schriner et al., 1995). From the current findings, it can be speculated that not one specific obstacle creates barriers for maternal protectiveness, but the combination of the obstacles a particular woman experience. This speculation is strengthened by the findings of Hague et al. 2003, who found that the protective strategies employed by the women in their study varied according to the context in which women found themselves at a specific time. Considering the barriers to maternal protectiveness, it was also found, as in Hague et al. 2003, that the resources each participant had to their availability significantly influenced their experience of maternal protectiveness and the protective strategies they used.

Despite abused women's contextual challenges, they are still often labelled as "bad mother" or blamed for "failure to protect" their children, without much regard for the limited resources they have or the reason why abused women experience protecting and caring for children in the context of domestic violence difficult and painful (Gotlib, 2010). Furthermore, from the participants experiences it appears that abused women at times, due to the lack of resources, cannot realistically engage in significant protective strategies as often expected of them, instead having to decide what actions will cause the least harm to their children. In some cases, abused women are accused of "failure to protect" their children, even in situations where they were not capable of protecting their children (Silverman, 2008).

Furthermore, continuous exposure to domestic violence has a significant impact on women's emotional functioning (Cerulli et al., 2012; Peltzer et al., 2013; Radford & Hester, 2006). Some consequences of domestic violence on the emotional wellbeing of women, as similarly experiences of two of the current participants, included anxiety, stress, depression

and suicidal ideation (Coker et al., 2002; Mullender et al., 2002; Radford & Hester, 2006).

The emotional impact experienced by the participants in relation to domestic violence exposure, placed a significant strain on their capacity to mother, which makes caring for and protecting children more difficult (Cerulli et al., 2012; Kubeka, 2008; Lapierre, 2010a; Mullender et al., 2002). Two of the current participants revealed “that they experienced their mothering being negatively impacted by a lack of energy to promptly attend to their children’s needs. One of the participants also experienced panic attacks in the absence of her son, due to fear that something might happen to him.

A participant in the current study revealed that her reasoning was also affected, especially when she found herself stuck in the abusive relationship. She disclosed that sometimes decisions were taken with the belief that they were the right thing to do at that time. However, when reflecting on these decisions, the participant acknowledged that her decisions might not always have been the best. In other words, her intention to do her best to protect her child was pure, with the subjective experience that it was the right decision. However, when an external individual evaluates the decision and the protective action through a deficit model lens or a social expectation lens, the decisions and actions might be considered to not be the best protective strategy, or to actually be harmful to the child.

The participants presented with good mothering and protective qualities, however, some participants, simultaneously, presented with qualities that have a negative impact on their mothering and their ability to protect their children. Therefore, this study suggests that women should not be judged as either being a ‘good’ mother or a ‘bad mother’ or as being protective or failing to protect their children. Instead, each abused woman’s positive qualities and their less positive qualities need to be acknowledged, and addressed accordingly, without judgement.

## **5.2.2 Strategies to physically protect children from domestic violence**

The current study presents evidence to support the notion that abused women do not only find it important to protect their children but they actually do try, as best as possible, to protect their children from domestic violence. Furthermore, the current study, as many other studies did, found that women make considerable efforts to implement a variety of strategies to physically protect children from domestic violence (Kantor & Little, 2003; Margolin et al., 2003; Peled & Gil, 2011). The following section discusses the practical strategies the women in the current study used in an attempt to physically protect their children from domestic violence.

### ***5.2.2.1 Leaving the abusive relationship***

A physical protective strategy that two of the current women used was leaving the abusive partner for the sake of their children. This finding is in line with a qualitative study conducted with 17 abused women in South African shelters that found women's decision to remain in abusive relationships or to leave, is influenced by their evaluation of what is in "the child's best interest" (Rasool, 2015).

The two women who left their abusive partners early in their children's lives were of the opinion that an abused woman has to choose between her abusive partner and her children. Both women chose their children above their partners. For women, their children's wellbeing and safety are primary considerations when deciding whether to leave or to stay (Rasool, 2015). One of the women made the decision to leave as she did not want her children to be exposed to the unhappiness domestic violence creates in a home. She also did not want her partner to be the person to whom her child looks up. Both the women who left the relationship with their children felt that leaving was a significant protective strategy. They defined leaving as "*the best cure*" for the domestic violence.

Although the findings of the current study agree that leaving an abusive relationship is a significant protective strategy, it disagrees with literature arguing that leaving an abusive relationship is the only legitimate protective strategy. The current study observed more than a one-size-fits-all solution, but found the current participants employed multiple strategies to protect their children. One of the women in the current study found staying in the abusive relationship was the best way to emotionally protect her son from the impact of domestic violence, as her son was not abused by his father.

Therefore, the current researcher is of the opinion that it is not fair to label a woman as unprotective just because she did not leave the relationship. Instead, the current research findings recognise the existence of multiple protective strategies with the importance and effectiveness of strategies often determined by circumstances.

There is a widely held belief that leaving the abusive relationship is the only legitimate form of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence (Campbell & Mannel, 2016; Douglas & Walsh, 2010). However, this research findings confirmed that leaving the abusive relationship does not necessarily mean the abuse will stop (Fleury et al., 2000). Findings from the current study confirm that abusive behaviour can continue after a woman and her children leave.

After she had left the abusive relationship, one participant's abusive partner threatened to kill her and her son if she should attempt to remove her son from his care. Confirming the findings of Rasool, 2015, the participant overcame her fear of her partner as soon as she became aware of the severity of the abuse her son was experiencing, and she decided to seek help. She approached both the social worker assigned to her case, as well as the police to assist her in removing her child from her abusive partners.



### ***5.2.2.2 Removing children, and the negotiation of age-appropriate physical contact between children and the abusive partner***

After two of the current participants had safely left their abusive partners with their children, they limited physical contact between their children and the abusive partner. The two participants made use of different strategies to limit the children's contact with their abusive partners. Strategies mentioned by the two women included refusing any form of contact between the children and the abusive partner (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Wendt et al., 2015) and sending children to temporarily live with relatives and limiting contact to telephonic conversations (Nixon et al., 2015).

Findings from this study that appear not to have been reported in existing research that investigated maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, is the negotiation of age-appropriate contact between children and the abusive partner. The negotiation of age-appropriate contact is constructed as the negotiation between a mother and her abusive partner about the nature of acceptable contact between the children and the abusive partner. Age-appropriate contact is constructed as contact between a child and the abusive partner, where children are capable of either informing a significant other of abuse, or able to defend and protect themselves against abuse.

In addition, if a child is not able to do either of the prementioned self-protective strategies, the child needs to be consistently accompanied by a responsible individual who can act on behalf of the child for the child's safety and best interest. As seen in the current study, women who fear being pulled back into the abusive relationship by their partner can arrange for children's visits with the abusive partner to be supervised by someone the women trust. In this way, women are safe from their abusive partners, and children can continue to have a relationship with the partner, who in many cases is their fathers. The negotiation of

age-appropriate contact might be the proverbial golden midway between the social expectations that women have to leave an abusive relationship to protect children and the belief that it is in the best interest of children to have their fathers present in their lives.

### ***5.2.2.3 Attending to children's basic physical needs***

From the current findings, it appears that one of the women constructed maternal protectiveness in terms of providing in the children's basic needs for shelter and food only. This finding is similar to the findings of previous research conducted by Rasool, 2015, who found that some women in South Africa define "the best interest of the child" in terms of only providing shelter and food for their children.

It can be speculated that abused women who face extreme poverty might define maternal protectiveness in terms of only providing shelter and food for their children due to domestic violence often being entwined with poverty (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Domestic violence readily limits women's resources to meet their children's basic human needs for shelter and food (Jaffe & Crooks, 2005). Many women are also challenged by poverty, simultaneously creating more challenges and significantly limiting women's resources to care for and protect their children (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003; G. Miller, Clark, & Herman, 2007). Therefore, when considering the horrifying rates of domestic violence and the depressing levels of poverty in South Africa (Kubeka, 2008), the current findings speculate that a great number of abused women in South Africa might define maternal protectiveness in terms of only providing in their children's basic human needs.

### **5.2.3 Strategies to emotionally protect children from domestic violence**

The current findings confirm that women do not only employ strategies to physically protect children, but also strategies to protect children from the emotional impact of domestic violence (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Kantor & Little, 2003; Lapierre, 2010a; Peled & Gil,

2011; Radford & Hester, 2006; Wendt et al., 2015). The finding that women employ strategies to physically and emotionally protect their children is no new discovery. However, the current findings unexpectedly suggest that physical protection takes priority over emotional protection, which seems not to have been reported in previous literature. It appears that physical protection takes priority to ensure that children physically survive.

This is not to say women do not use any emotional protective strategies while having to physically protect children from domestic violence. Rather, it means once the women and their children are physically safe, women can more extensively engage in different strategies to reduce the negative emotional impact of exposure to domestic violence. For instance, right from the start, one of the women in the current study used more emotional protective strategies, as her son was physically safe from abuse by his father. To the contrary, another woman first employed multiple physical protective strategies until her children were safe and living in The Potter's House, which left her with more time and energy to emotionally attend to her children.

#### ***5.2.3.1 Staying for the sake of the children***

In accordance with the present results, previous studies also show that one of the key reasons women remain in abusive relationships is for the benefit of their children (Radford & Hester, 2006; Rasool, 2015). One of the participants in the current study remained in her abusive relationship for many years as she felt it was in the best interest of her child. Contributing to her decision to stay for the sake of her child was her need to preserve a socially acceptable family structure for her son, allowing him to grow up in a 'normal family' (Rasool, 2015). A 'normal family' for her was constructed not just as the presence of both parents, but also in terms of parents being perfect and happily living together. As noted in previous studies, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and gender role expectations regarding

motherhood were rooted in the heart of this woman, making the option of leaving unattractive (Rasool, 2015). In her culture, this 'normal' family structure needs to be preserved by women as it is believed to be in the best interest of the child, and a 'good mother' is seen to always act in the best interest of her child (Rasool, 2015).

#### ***5.2.3.2 Preserving the father-son relationship***

The findings of this study are also consistent with those of other studies that found some women try to preserve the father-son relationship (Peled & Gil, 2011; Wendt et al., 2015). Two of the participants were resistant to disclose the existence of the abuse to their children, as they feared their children would view their father in a negative light, or hate the father. One of the women believed children need their father and did not want her child to grow up without a father (Rasool, 2015). Strategies used by the participants to preserve the father-child relationship included silently taking the abuse by the partner whose anger was triggered by the child's actions; encouraging children to spend more time with their father; pretending everything was in order at home. Correlating with previous research, one of the participants limited truth-telling, as she wanted to uphold a 'good' father image (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Wendt et al., 2015). As found by other studies, the women wanted to uphold a 'good' father image to avoid confusion, disappointment and trauma for young children who could not yet make sense of, or rationally reason about the abuse (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007; Peled & Gil, 2011; Wendt et al., 2015).

One of the participants used her own body to protect her child from the possibility of being abused. The current participant silently allowed her partner to beat her whenever her son was in the wrong to prevent her son from being beaten and to preserve the child's relationship with his father (the abuser). These findings are in line with the findings of other studies which found that some women sacrifice their own safety for their children's safety

and for what they believe is in the “best interest” of their children (McGee, 2000; Rasool, 2015).

### *5.2.3.3 Shielding children from the truth*

The current findings support previous research into maternal protectiveness that identified limited truth-telling as an emotional protective strategy (Humphreys et al., 2006; Morris, 2010; Wendt et al., 2015). Two of the participants in the current study wanted to shield their children from the truth as they feared the possible negative emotional impact the truth would have on their children. The participants, therefore, employed multiple strategies to prevent their children from finding out the truth. Strategies used by the participants included physically avoiding children to hide the aftermath of the violence, lying about and making excuses for strange behaviour, building an alliance with the housekeeper to validate lies and to assist in preventing children from witnessing the abuse.

Other strategies identified by the participants include denying the possible existence of the abuse when confronted by children; pretending to be happy; only disclosing age-appropriate information to children as needed. One of the participants explained that it had become a continuous web of lies; a charade of pretence. Keeping quiet about the abuse might be a short-term protective strategy, but it has the potential to increase mother-blaming by both the abusive partner and the children (Moulding et al., 2015). Furthermore, silence can exacerbate the existing power dynamic present in abusive relationships, unconsciously allowing the abusive partner to exploit a woman’s silence as a way of self-justification to continue with the abuse (Moulding et al., 2015). Furthermore, silence can exacerbate the existing domineering power dynamic in abusive relationships, allowing the abusive partner to exploit a woman’s silence as self-justification to continue with the abuse

#### ***5.2.3.4 Constructing a new, more positive reality***

One of the current participants did not attempt to ‘explain away’ or lie about the violence, as her child had physically and emotionally also experienced the abuse. The violence was part of her and her children’s reality, whether she wanted it to be or not. Therefore, she placed emphasis on creating a more positive reality for her children after they had been removed from the abusive partner. In accordance with the present results, previous studies also demonstrated that the ending of the violence may be all that is needed to allow women to re-establish a positive and violence-free environment for their children (Iwi & Newman, 2011; Peled & Gil, 2011).

A positive reality was created by the participant by reassuring her children that their suffering has ended and that they are safe, never having to return to their abusive father again. These results are in line with previous findings that many women try to reassure their children they are safe, especially when children express feelings of fear (Radford & Hester, 2006). Furthermore, the participant tried to create a more positive reality for her children by spending more time with her children to travel and explore, by spoiling them with luxuries they had been deprived of during the abuse, and allowing them to meet other children and to engage in age-appropriate activities. Attempting to create a more positive reality with less violence and suffering has the potential to automatically create positive results for children and their emotional functioning (Letourneau et al., 2007).

#### ***5.2.3.5 Showing children they are loved***

Two of the participants reassured their children they were loved and special. As found in Haight et al., 2007 this was done by women expressing affection and communicating to their children that they are special. Both participants spoiled their children with material things to show them they are loved. They also created space for their children to develop their

own identity and to participate in age-appropriate activities. They made extra effort to engage in activities with their children (Wendt et al., 2015). The current findings also support the notion that women tend to spend more quality time with their children in an effort to make the children feel loved (Nixon et al., 2015). One of the participants overcompensated for the times she had been emotionally and physically unavailable, by spending much quality time with her child. These findings agree with other findings that show women try to compensate for the negative impact domestic violence has on their mothering by being more nurturing and attentive to their children's needs (Letourneau et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2000).

Research has also previously found that spending time alone with mothers and/or talking with mothers is a significant emotional protective factor for boys (Nichols, 2010). The women participating in this study have used different methods to have their children experience that they are loved, however, all the different strategies came down to spending more quality time with children and the mother's being interested in their children. Furthermore, considering that quality time and communication has been found to be a significant protective factor, one should be careful to assume that the more complex or drastic the protective strategy, the more effective the strategy will be in protecting children from domestic violence. Therefore, it is important not to underestimate or judge smaller or more simple protective strategies to be less effective or not effective at all.

#### ***5.2.3.6 Faith and religion***

Two of the participants in the current study tried to "*fight and overcome*" the negative impact of domestic violence on their mothering, as well as on their children (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). through faith. Both participants used religious practices such as praying and going to church to "*fight and overcome*" some of the negative effects domestic violence had on their mothering. They used religious practices to give them strength and hope to continue fighting the battle with domestic violence.

Furthermore, a protective strategy that appears not to have been identified in previous literature is mothers praying *for* children, praying *with* children, and guiding children on a spiritual path. Two participants in the current study prayed for the safety of their children, especially when they were restricted or unable to engage in other protective strategies. One of the participants found it very helpful for her children's emotional wellbeing by consistently engaging in prayer with them and attending church with them.

#### ***5.2.3.7 Approaching a social worker or psychologist for emotional support***

Only one of the participants approached a social worker and a psychologist to help her manage and overcome depression and stress caused by the abuse. The participant experienced the support of the social worker as helpful and effective. This finding, as reported by the current participant, disagrees with existing findings that all child protection workers partook in mother-blaming practices and withheld essential support from abused women when judged as 'unprotective' (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Hague et al., 2003).

Some child protection workers might judge women as not acting in the best interest of the child, or failing to protect the children. However, child protection workers should still provide the support the mother needs, because, by supporting the abused mother, the child protection worker acts in the best interest of the child. Therefore, it can be considered that the difference between child protection workers who are supportive and those who are not supportive, is not whether they judge women as protective or not, but rather whether child protection workers are acting on their personal judgment and beliefs, or acting in the best interest of the child.

One of the participants, after having lived on the streets for some time, was fortunate enough to be informed of The Potter's House, a shelter for abused women, that she could approach for shelter and food. Being assisted by The Potter's House, the current participant



not only realised there were more effective ways of protecting her children from domestic violence, but also understood the dangers of living on the streets. The woman acknowledged that she had stayed on the streets with her children, struggling to survive, for as long as she did, because she did not know about shelters for abused women. Another study also acknowledged that resources for women trapped in domestic violence are insufficient and were poorly advertised, as all their resources were often already allocated to needy women (Davies & Dreyer, 2014). From the current findings, it appears that the participating women, through their own journeys of domestic violence, realised there was not only a desperate need for more resources to assist women and children in abuse, but also for more effective advertisements.

One of the current participants also found it important for her child to attend therapy sessions with the social worker at The Potter's House, as her child was acting out the abuse he had been exposed to. The participant found that the therapeutic intervention her child had engaged in positively contributed to his emotional wellbeing, as he was emotionally coping better at school.

#### ***5.2.3.8 Preventing the intergenerational cycle of abuse***

Lastly, as found in many other studies, all three women implemented protective strategies to prevent their children from continuing the intergenerational cycle of violence, in general, and in the children's future relationships (Lapierre, 2010b; Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, & Semel, 2003; Nixon et al., 2015). This was done by educating children that violence is not normal, that it should be seen as wrong (Kubeka, 2008), and by teaching the children positive conflict resolution skills (Haight, Shim, et al., 2007). The women did not want their children to believe that it is normal to use violence against women and children, or

any other person, to get what they want. The women encouraged their children to avoid other people fighting, and disciplined their children when they fought with others.

Furthermore, in many cases, as found in this study, abused women employed personal resources to protect their children, and sought outside assistance by using social and legal resources, assistance from family or friends, and attempted to obtain support from religious institutions (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Although the women faced a number of social structural constraints, they also exercised agency and made attempts to end the violence in their own and their children's lives, hoping to create a more positive environment for their children (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2003). Two of the participants attempted to create a more positive and caring environment, as a specific strategy to prevent the intergenerational cycle of violence in their children's lives. One participant moved away towards a more positive environment, reasoning that the more positive and loving a child's environment is, the better a child's upbringing. The other participant wanted to create a loving and violence-free environment for her child, as she believes that children will act in the same manner they observe their parents acting. Furthermore, the participant believes that children learn normal behaviour from their parents and therefore, tried to love her child unconditionally, and to protect him, hoping he will do the same for his family. However, only one of the participants explicitly stated that she believes that she had successfully broken the intergenerational cycle of abuse in her family, as her sons is a "*perfect gentleman*" that would never hurt his family.

### **5.3 Limitations**

The following limitations, identified in the current research study, need to be considered when interpreting the research findings. The current limitations also need to be considered in future research. The limitations present in the current study include:

- As this study aimed to provide a detailed account of the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness within domestic violence, the sample size was kept small. Perhaps a bigger sample could have enriched the data in a different manner. Furthermore, the small sample size provides a subset of multiple experiences rather than general experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence. Although this is in accordance with the phenomenological approach and aims of the study, the applicability of the findings has to be interpreted and understood within context. Therefore, this research results cannot be generalised as it is difficult to infer findings to broader populations or to draw general conclusions from the findings (Gray, 2004; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).
- All the women participating in this study were recruited from the same shelter for abused women. Furthermore, all the children of the women who participated in this study were boys. Although the study provides unique accounts of the women's experiences, it lacks views from different genders, races, cultures and economic groups. It is also acknowledged that women who still live with their children in the context of domestic violence might differently experience maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, adding alternative themes and more richness to the findings.
- Lastly, it is recognised that the themes presented in this dissertation do not cover all the experiences of the participants, since themes were selected based on their relevance to the research question.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The following section addresses the research recommendations for future research, as well as for practice. It is important to continue researching maternal protectiveness in

domestic violence circumstances, as it will help women to be better supported and equipped by social services. Furthermore, it will allow service providers to logically plan and to individualise interventions from an understanding of each woman and child's unique situation, enabling them to attend more effectively to the unique needs of women and children besieged by abuse.

#### **5.4.1 Recommendations for future research**

It is recommended that a similar study is conducted with mothers still living in the context of domestic violence. It can be assumed that their experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence will be different from those who have left the relationship.

Furthermore, children in different developmental stages express different parenting needs (Holt et al., 2008; Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009), resulting in them being affected differently by the exposure of domestic violence (Buckley, 2007; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Osofsky, 1999). Thus, the participants' experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence might possibly have been influenced differently, depending on their children's developmental stages. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers consider interviewing women with children in different developmental stages to compare whether women use different protective strategies during different child developmental stages. It is likely that experiences of maternal protectiveness in a domestic violence context will differ for women whose children are in different developmental stages.

Additionally, future research can benefit from interviewing women who are mothers of girls, as the children in the current study were all boys. The experiences of maternal

protectiveness in domestic violence might be different for women who need to protect boys than for those who need to protect girls from domestic violence.

It is also recommended that this study is researched further by interviewing a greater number of women who find themselves and their children in domestic violence circumstances, to expand on the experiences discussed by the three women in the current study. Furthermore, future research should aim at incorporating women who have to protect their children from domestic violence through various private organisations and governmental social developmental programmes.

Moreover, it is recommended that future research investigates how institutional responses, such as attitudes and policies of organisation, affect women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence. A better understanding of abused women's perceptions and experiences of attempts or lack of attempts to protect their children from the abuse might help professionals to better understand the difference between theories and assumptions (Kantor & Little, 2003).

Lastly, future research needs to investigate what women need from helping professions for these professions to better assist abused women and children who seek help.

#### **5.4.2 Recommendations for practice**

The researcher is of the opinion that it is important to develop creative solutions to better facilitate and provide support for women who have to mother in domestic violence circumstances. The findings of the current research can be used by helping professions to better understand and support women who find themselves and their children in domestic violence circumstances. This could be in terms of providing women with adequate information regarding a variety of strategies they can use to protect their children from domestic violence.

When considering intervention in the best interests of the child, helping professions need to take into consideration the frequency and severity of the violence, parental and child injury, the impact of domestic violence on women's mothering, as well as the women's experience of domestic violence and her efforts to protect her children (Kantor & Little, 2003). Furthermore, men need to be held accountable for their violence, which might result in better outcomes for women and their children (Radford & Hester, 2006).

Additionally, it appears that there exists a lack of awareness regarding available resources and services for women and children who find themselves in domestic violence. Therefore, it is recommended that health professionals familiarise themselves with the available services for abused women and children to appropriately refer them when needed. Due to the high prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa and the limited resources available to abused women and children, it is also recommended that health professionals maintain a comprehensive understanding of maternal protectiveness. When health professionals hold a balanced and inclusive understanding of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence, they can psycho-educate women regarding maternal protectiveness and possible strategies to physically and emotionally protect children.

Lastly, as noted in chapter 3, two of the women found talking about their experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence helpful. It is suspected that women will appreciate and benefit from interaction with other women and their children in the context of domestic violence. Thus, formalised support group intervention can prove useful for them to share their experiences with one another. In this way, mothers and, ultimately, their children can benefit from ongoing social support.

## 5.5 Reflections

In the following reflection section, I share impressions from my own journey as the researcher as during this study. The researcher first provides highlights of personal experiences throughout the research process. Thereafter a discussion regarding the relevance of the current research to the profession of counselling psychology is provided, hoping to give clarity regarding the underlying social justice theme.

### 5.5.1 Personal reflections

The research process impacted me in various ways. Firstly, it has been a great privilege to conduct this research with the three women represented in this study. Without their bravery and willingness to share their experiences with me as the researcher, this project could not have taken place. Very early on in the process, as I read on mothering and protecting children in the context of domestic violence, I realised I tend to get passionately frustrated when people think of domestic violence as being normal and socialised. For me, besides self-defence, no form of violence should be seen as acceptable. Therefore, I had to be vigilant during the interviews to remain neutral and to prevent personal bias as far as possible.

On a more professional level, I believe the interpretive phenomenological approach challenged and developed me to become a more thorough psychologist. It developed to a satisfactory level my skill of understanding experiences in context, and to seek for meanings and essences of experiences as I engage with my clients.

In addition, I was challenged by excluding themes that did not directly relate to the research question, as I felt all the themes are important to fully understand the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence. At this point, supervision was

helpful in assisting me to narrow my themes to only those who spoke directly to my research question.

Lastly, in terms of the IPA approach, I thought the information in the interviews was going to be given by the participants in a clear and ordered manner. I very quickly realised this was not the case, as participants only give you pieces of the puzzle, which the IPA researcher then often has to put together. It was not a 'neat' process, but a rather 'messy' process, yet beautiful and a privilege to experience. It is a process from which I learned a lot.

### **5.5.2 A social justice stance**

Social justice is a fundamental part of counselling psychology, especially in South Africa with its high levels of inequality and oppression on both the individual and system level (Goodman et al., 2004; Rasool, 2015; Ratts, 2010). Inequality and oppression are harmful to wellbeing and quality of life, as it often causes negative health and psychological outcomes for individuals subjected to it (Ibrahim & Jianna, 2016; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016; Vera & Speight, 2003).

Furthermore, social justice is an important factor for counselling psychology, as psychology recognises that individuals do not exist independently from their society, culture and immediate context (Goodman et al., 2004). Psychology emphasises the significant influence of environmental factors on individuals' wellbeing and their mental health (American Psychological Association).

addition, counselling and psychotherapy only serve a small portion of those in need (Vera & Speight, 2003). Thus, if counselling psychologists only practice social justice on an individual level, without any effort to promote systematic change in our society, the work of counselling psychologists is destined to be only partially successful (Vera & Speight, 2003).



Therefore, it is important for counselling psychologists to also advocate for social change and not just for their individual clients (Goodman et al., 2004; Ibrahim & Jianna, 2016).

As a practitioner in the field of counselling psychology, I believe in the possibility of an enlightened and healthier society. I acknowledge that, due to my professional position as a counselling psychologist, I am in the advantaged position of being exposed to the multiple perspectives and experiences of a diverse population, which can help me to better advocate for social change. With this research, from a social justice perspective, I want to advocate for women who are oppressed by their partners. I want to help raise their voices, as they are unduly silenced.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the interaction between myself, as the researcher, and the research participants was of a “privileged counsellor-marginalised client” nature (Ratts et al., 2016). Therefore, I was vigilant of the nature of the researcher-research participant relationship, making every effort not to consciously or unconsciously abuse the social power I have as a privileged researcher. However, in this research process, I tried to use this power to advocate on behalf of the research participants.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore women’s subjective experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, through a phenomenological lens. An in-depth exploration of the experiences as it is lived by the women who took part in this study was provided, by answering the following over-arching sub-questions related to the women’s experiences; what are the protective strategies abused women adopt to physically protect their children in the context of domestic violence? what are the protective strategies abused women adopt to emotionally protect their children in the context of domestic violence? IPA was considered to be the most suited research method to address the research aims, based on

its focus on lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women, where after three super-ordinate themes emerged during the data analysis process. The three super-ordinate themes reveal the richness and complexity of the women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence.

All three of the participants experienced maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence as challenging and difficult. Contextual factors that influenced these women's experiences of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence, included the women's socio-economic status, employment status, social support structure, cultural norms and religion. Nevertheless, it was found that all three participants, despite the obstacles they faced, felt that, as mothers, it was important to protect their children. The participants constructed maternal protectiveness in terms of physical and emotional protective strategies.

All three participants found it important to physically and emotionally protect their children from domestic violence and the possible after-effects of being exposed to abuse. Some participants used similar protective strategies, while some used different strategies to others. The physical protective strategies employed by the women to protect their children from domestic violence was leaving the abusive relationship with their children, removing children from the abusive relationship, the negotiation of age-appropriate contact between children and the abusive partner, attending to children's basic physical needs, and taking a child's beating. It was also important, for all three women, to emotionally protect their children from domestic violence. Emotional protective strategies used by the women was staying in the abusive relationship for the sake of the children, preserving the father-son relationship, shielding children from the truth, constructing a new, more positive reality for children, showing children that they are loved, making use of faith and religious practices,

approaching a psychologist or social worker for emotional support, and preventing the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

Findings from the current study demonstrated that abused women more readily engage in physical protective strategies to ensure the physical survival of their children, before they intensively engage in emotional protective strategies. Once abused women and their children are physically safe, they engage more extensively in emotional protective strategies to protect children from the emotional impact of domestic violence. However, the participants' decisions regarding what protective strategies needed to be implemented rested on which strategies were available to the women, as well as on what was best for their children's wellbeing and safety. This study also found children to be a significant source of strength and hope for women, especially during challenging times.

The experience of maternal protectiveness in the context of domestic violence is a complex phenomenon, influenced by multiple contextual factors. Therefore, abused women's maternal protectiveness should rather be considered to exist on a protective continuum, influenced significantly by contextual factors, rather than either being protective or not. Understanding a woman's protective strategies in context, will also allow child protection services to better assist women and their children.

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## Appendix I: Ethical Approval Letter from the Humanities Faculty Research

### Ethics Committee



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

28 July 2017

Dear Ms de Nysschen

**Project:** Women's reflections on their strategies used to protect their children in the face of domestic violence  
**Researcher:** T de Nysschen  
**Supervisor:** Dr NT Pule  
**Department:** Psychology  
**Reference Number:** 16289120 (GW0170708HS)

Thank you for the **well written** application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** at a meeting held on 27 July 2017. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely


**Prof Maxi Schoeman**  
**Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Ethics**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za**

CC: Dr N Pule (Supervisor)  
Prof D Maree (HoD)

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Dr L Blokland; Ms A dos Santos; Dr R Fassell; Ms KT Govinder; Dr E Johnson; Dr C Panebianco; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Dr M Taub; Prof GM Spies; Prof E Taljard; Ms B Tsebe; Dr E van der Klashorst; Dr G Wolmarans; Ms D Mokalapa



## Appendix II: Permission to Conduct Research



# TSHWANE LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

Working with Churches and Communities for Urban Transformation

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STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP  
AND RECOURCES FOR

WOMEN & GIRLS IN CRISIS  
CHILD PROTECTION AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
HOMELESSNESS  
HEALTH DEVELOPMENT  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
URBAN MINISTRY FORMATION  
ADVOCACY

DIRECTORS:

WILNA DE BEER (CEO)  
TINUS NIENABER  
(CHAIRPERSON)  
JOEL MAYEPHU  
LUKAS VAN DER MERWE  
FLORINCE NORRIS  
PETER MARUPING  
OCTAVIA EPHRAIM  
DON MCDUGALL

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NPO no. 028-040-NPO

Reg. No. 2013 / 034434 / 08

PBO No: 930 045 091

ESTABLISHED IN 1983 AS  
PRETORIA COMMUNITY  
MINISTRIES

Vestine Ntakirutimana

PO Box 11047,  
The Tramshed,  
Pretoria, 0126  
vestine@tlf.org.za  
12 May 2017

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

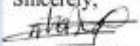
Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT POTTER'S HOUSE**

The purpose of this letter is to grant Tania Boshoff, at the University of Pretoria permission to conduct her research titled, "Women's reflections on their strategies used to protect their children in domestic violence circumstances", at The Potter's House. Permission is granted for the research as stated in the current research proposal and any major changes to the proposal needs to be communicated in advance to The Potter's House management.

It is also required that Tania Boshoff provides The Potter's House with a printed copy of the research dissertation with completion.

The Potter's House reserves the right to stop Tania from continuing the research any time in case she goes against their research policy.

Sincerely,  
  
Vestine Ntakirutimana  
Coordinator  
Women and girls  
Tel: 012 3202123/ 012 3261211  
Cell: 082 9789020  
[www.tlf.org](http://www.tlf.org)

We see healthy and vibrant communities  
flourishing in God's presence.

### **Appendix III: Information Sheet and Consent From**

#### **Dear Mother**

You are kindly invited to take part in a study exploring the protective strategies you as a mother in domestic violence circumstances use/used to protect your children from domestic violence and its effects. This study is being completed by Tania Boshoff, a Masters student in Counselling Psychology at the University of Pretoria. The Ethics committee of the University of Pretoria has approved that mothers who were/are in domestic violence circumstances may be approached to participate in this study. The following section will give clarification regarding the research (e.g., purpose and procedure).

**Title of Study:** Woman's reflections on their strategies used to protect their children in the context of domestic violence.

#### **Study Purpose**

There is currently limited research regarding the understanding of maternal protectiveness in domestic violence circumstances. For this reason, I am interested in learning about the strategies that you use/used as a mother in domestic violence circumstances to protect your child/children, physically and emotionally, from domestic violence and its negative effects.

#### **Study Procedures**

If you choose to participate in this study, you will meet with the researcher, Tania Boshoff, individually for about 90 minutes in a private room (the TV room will be used) at The Potter's Place. During this time, you will be given free space to talk about your personal experiences of being a mother in domestic violence and how you have tried to protect your children from domestic violence and its negative effects.

### **Possible Risks**

There is a possibility that talking about your personal life and the violence you have experienced that it may be distressing or unsettling. If this is to happen, you will be referred to the National Counselling Line, which is a 24-hour toll-free counselling service to prevent any harm the research might cause. You are also encouraged to talk to any qualified psychologist at The Potter's House self, if possible.

### **Possible Benefits**

There is a possibility that talking about the ways you tried to protect your children in the context of domestic violence can help you develop a clearer understanding of how you tried to protect your children and tried to be a good mother. It is also possible that you might not personally experience advantages during the study, however your stories and information shared might be beneficial to others. The information you share during the interview will be included in a final report by the researcher that will be available to other students and professionals. This report will contribute to the understanding and evidence that domestic violence does not necessarily impair maternal parenting, which will allow for more comprehensive understanding of abused mothers lives. Should you wish to see the final report, a copy will be left with The Potter's House.

### **Participants Rights**

You can choose whether you want to participate in the study; participation is completely voluntary. If you change your mind about participating in the study you can feel free to withdraw from the research at any time. Your decision whether to participate or not, or to withdraw from the study at any time will not affect you negatively in any way.

### **Confidentiality**

Your identity will be kept confidential at all times. To help the researcher do this, you are encouraged to choose another name that you feel comfortable for the researcher to use instead of your own name. Your real name will be removed from the interview transcript, and replaced by the name of your choice. This can also be done for your children, if you wish to keep your children's identities confidential. Please think of a name that you would like to use for yourself and your children.

The interview will be recorded to help the researcher understand and remember your story of how you tried to protect your children. The information you give in the interview will only be available to the researcher and her supervisor. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and stored on a password-protected computer.

The interview might involve talking about your children and other people in your life. The only limit to confidentiality is that if you tell the researcher that your children are at risk of abuse or neglect, the researcher will have to inform Ms. Shabangu, the social worker at The Potter's House.

Additionally, the findings may be used for future research and teaching. However, your and your children's identities will NOT be identifiable. If you wish to withdraw from the research your interview will be destroyed.

### **Use of data**

The interviews that have been recorded on tapes will be transcribed. Transcribed data will then only be used by the researcher to write this research dissertation. The dissemination of research results will be made available to the University of Pretoria, the public, and the research participants in the form of a master's research dissertation, scientific articles, and conference papers. Data will not be used for further research. Research data (tapes and

transcriptions) will be stored in a folder on floor 11, room 11-24 in the Humanities building of the University of Pretoria, once the research has been completed.

### **Rights of access to the researcher**

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you might have regarding the study at any time. The researcher will gladly answer your question(s). Should you have any concern about the research study you can contact the researcher, Tania Boshoff, or her research supervisor Miss. Neo Pule at the University of Pretoria.

Tania Boshoff: 0721447573 / [tndnsschn@gmail.com](mailto:tndnsschn@gmail.com)

Dr Neo Pule: 0827159703 / [Neo.Pule@up.ac.za](mailto:Neo.Pule@up.ac.za)



## CONSENT

I have read the above pages and I am satisfied with my understanding of the study, its possible benefits and risks. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw my participation at any stage, without it causing me any harm.

I hereby agree to participate in the study about my strategies I used as an abused mother to protect my children in the context of domestic violence.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I also give permission for the interview to be recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix IV: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

### Research Title

Women's reflections on their strategies used to protect their children in the context of domestic violence.

### Introductory paragraph (5 minutes)

Hi Ms. xxx, my name is Tania Boshoff, the researcher that will conduct the interview with you today. I am glad to see that you could make it and is participating in my research. I see on your consent form that you have consented for the interview to be recorded. The information you give in the interview will only be available to me and my supervisor. Is it alright with you if I turn on the audio tape now?

So, to start off, you are here at the facility today because you are or have been in an abusive relationship in which you have/had to parent and take care of your children. What we will be talking about today is what strategies you have used to protect your children physically and emotionally from domestic violence and its negative effects. We will also talk about what made it difficult to protect your children and how did you overcome these challenges. If you have any questions regarding the research (e.g., confidentiality, the research procedure or meaning of words), or any related matter, I will be glad to assist. Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary, that you have the right to withdraw or temporarily stop the session, and that your withdrawal will not affect you negatively in any way. Confidentiality is ensured and pseudonyms or initials will be used for both you and your children. I believe that no harm will arise from participating in this study. However, if you, as participant, feel distressed and want to talk further about what it is like being a mother in domestic violence, you will be referred to appropriate psychological services.





**Demographic Information (This section will be filled in by the researcher) (5-10 minutes)**

1. Name (Pseudonym/Alias): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Birth date of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Ethnicity of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Current relationship status to the abuser:

Married	Unmarried	Divorced
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5. Employment status (employed/unemployed)

If employed: Title/duration/working hours:

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6. Information about children (how many/sex/how old are they/pseudonym):

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**The following questions and probes will be utilized when necessary:**

**1: History of the abusive relationship? (10 minutes) (opening question)**

1. Briefly describe your relationship with your partner
2. When did your relationship start to become violent?
  - a. When did your partner become abusive towards you?
  - b. Has your partner ever been abusive towards your children?

**2: Experiences of mothering in domestic violence (10 -15 minutes)**

1. How do you experience mothering in domestic violence?

**3: Strategies used to protect children physically (25 -30 minutes)**

1. What strategies did/do you use to protect your children physically?
2. What makes it difficult to protect your children physically?
3. What makes/made it easier to protect your children physically?

**4: Strategies used to protect children emotionally (25-30 minutes)**

1. What strategies did/do you use to protect your children emotionally?
2. What makes it difficult to protect your children emotionally?
3. What makes/made it easier to protect your children emotionally?

**5: Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about being a mother in a violent relationship. (5-10 minutes)**

**6: Concluding reflections and summary (5 min)**

1. Reflect back to the participant what you heard and understood about her interview/stories.
2. Show gratitude for her willingness to participate in the research.