

THE SELF-CONCEPT OF BATTERED WOMEN: AN ECOSYSTEMIC STUDY

By

EVAH MALEBO MASHABA

**Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

in the subject of

PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR L.J. BALOYI

NOVEMBER 2008

Student number: **4299-347-4**

I declare that “The Self concept of battered women: An ecosystemic study” is my own work and that all the sources that I have quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

Signature

(Miss E.M Mashaba)

.....

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes to the Department of Psychology, which approved my research proposal. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to increase my knowledge in the gender based violence domain.

To Dr. Lesiba Baloyi, my supervisor and mentor, who provided professional guidance and supported me through the hardships of the study; thank you for your patience.

To each and every gender based violence victim, for the time you took to be interviewed; you all have shown passion for fighting gender based violence. Your endeavours are appreciated.

My appreciations also go to the Department of Social development: ODI District for granting me access to the victims. To Bernard Nchindila of the Department of English Studies at UNISA, thank you for your commitment and efforts you made in the process of editing my work.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my family; Paul Patlane Bontsi, Paula Maseko, Mokgadi Miggel Bontsi, and Kenneth ‘Mokopa’ Maluleka, who supported and encouraged me during my studies. Your words of encouragement uplifted my spirit when days were tough. My son, Boipelo, you have been so understanding and I am sorry to have deserted you.

Lastly, I give my thanks to the Almighty God who created all of us with skills and passion for our work to make a difference. Glory be to God!

Kelebogile!

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the self-concept of battered South African women. The ecosystemic approach was used to ground the battering experience. This qualitative framework was exploratory and also included an in-depth analysis of the battering experiences as narrated by abused women. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data obtained were analysed through the use of the hermeneutic method.

The following were the themes that emerged out of the narratives: dominance, control versus loss of control, connection versus disconnection, security versus insecurity, and feelings of degradation.

The study provides a holistic understanding of battering and its impact on women's self-concept.

Key words: women, battering, abuse, self-concept, ecosystemic approach, narrative, hermeneutics, qualitative research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	(iii)
ABSTRACT.....	(iv)
CHAPTER 1.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	1
1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES.....	4
1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS.....	5
1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	5
1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	8
1.8 CONCLUSION.....	9
1.9 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	9
CHAPTER 2.....	10
LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND.....	10
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	10
2.2 WESTERN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON WOMEN.....	11
2.2.1 WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN.....	11
2.2.2 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN.....	14
2.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXTUALISED.....	16
2.4 THE STRUCTURAL DYNAMICS OF BATTERING.....	17
2.5 THE INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS OF BATTERING.....	18
2.5.1 Short term relationship.....	19
2.5.2 Long term relationship.....	19
2.6 BATTERED WOMAN’S SYNDROME.....	20
2.6.1 The effects of battering on women’s self-concept.....	22
2.6.2 Low self-esteem.....	22
2.6.3 Guilt.....	23
2.6.4 Anger.....	23
2.6.5 Stress.....	24

2.6.6 Loss of hope and depression.....	24
2.6.7 Social effects.....	24
2.7 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSED WOMEN.....	26
2.8 ECOSYTEMIC VIEW TO WOMEN BATTERING.....	27
2.9 POSTMODERNISM.....	28
2.9.1 Constructivism.....	29
2.9.2 Social constructionism.....	30
2.10 BATERRED WOMAN AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT.....	31
2.11 COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY.....	34
2.12 ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH.....	35
2.13 CONCLUSION.....	37
CHAPTER 3.....	39
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	39
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	39
3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH.....	39
3.3 REFLEXIVITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	41
3.4 THE APPROPRIATENESS OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM.....	42
3.4.1 Qualitative methods yield in-depth information.....	42
3.4.2 Qualitative methods and ecosystemic theory.....	42
3.4.3 Similarity to process-oriented research.....	43
3.4.4 Qualitative methods bridge the gap between research, theory and practice.....	43
3.5 NARRATIVE APPROACH.....	43
3.6 SAMPLING.....	45
3.7 DATA COLLECTION.....	46
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS.....	47
3.9 HERMENEUTIC METHOD.....	47
3.10 RESEARCHER BIAS, ETHICS AND CREDIBILITY.....	51
3.10.1 Researcher Bias.....	51
3.10.2 Ethics.....	52
3.11 CONCLUSION.....	53

CHAPTER 4.....	54
RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION.....	54
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	54
4.2 PARTICIPANT 1.....	54
4.2.1 Pattern of abuse.....	55
4.2.2 Self-concept and self-esteem.....	55
4.2.3 Family communication.....	56
4.3 PARTICIPANT 2.....	56
4.3.1 Pattern of abuse.....	56
4.3.2 Self-concept and self-esteem.....	57
4.3.3 Family communication.....	58
4.4 PARTICIPANT 3.....	58
4.4.1 Pattern of abuse.....	58
4.4.2 Self-concept and self-esteem.....	59
4.4.3 Family communication.....	59
4.5 PARTICIPANT 4.....	60
4.5.1 Pattern of abuse.....	60
4.5.2 Self-concept and self-esteem.....	61
4.5.3 Family communication.....	61
4.6 CONCLUSION.....	62
4.7 THEMATIC ANALYSIS.....	62
4.8 CONVERGENT THEMES.....	63
4.8.1 Dominance.....	63
4.8.2 Control versus loss of control.....	64
4.8.3 Connection versus disconnection.....	66
4.8.4 Security versus insecurity.....	69
4.9 DIVERGENT THEME.....	70
4.10 SUMMARY OF THEMES AND REVIEWD LITERATURE.....	71
4.10.1 African traditional thought on women.....	71
4.10.2 Ecosystemic approach.....	73
4.11 Researcher’s reflection.....	75
4.12 CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	76

CHAPTER 5.....	78
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	78
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	78
5.2 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY.....	79
5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	79
5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	80
5.4.1 Community and government level.....	80
5.4.2 Therapy level.....	81
5.4.3 Research implications.....	82
5.5 CONCLUSION.....	83
6. References.....	84

CHAPTER 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The high statistics of dysfunctions in South Africa; be they social, political, economic, historical and so forth, cannot be fully understood, for example, by partly viewing them within the imperialist colonial influence of the apartheid regime context. These social ills and challenges need to be situated within the broader South African context for one to comprehend their complexity and diversity. The reason for this is that most of the laws passed in South Africa originate from the apartheid ideology of racial segregation, social superiority, and thus have a western colonial influence. The issue at hand is on the relevance and the applicability of this ideology on the social ills such as women abuse within the multicultural sphere of South Africa. How did these laws for example influence men's thinking about women? Does the western social organisation differ with the African way of being and addressing social problems? With these questions in mind, this study will explore women battering within the South African context. Some factors that have contributed to the abuse of women will be reflected upon. Reference to the migrant labour system should not be understood and interpreted to imply that black males, who are mostly affected by the migrant labour system, are the only women abusers. Women abuse cuts across all races; all cultural groups are capable of abusing their women. A brief reflection on the migrant labour system is motivated by the fact that this study was conducted within black families.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The migrant labour system, built on the structure of apartheid (Simkins, 1981), seems to be one of the contributory factors to women battering. According to Simkins, this system entailed migrant workers, who were mostly men, leaving their own homes, wives and children for a specific period of time. Clarke and Ngobese (1984) further posit that the migrant labour system was based on the premise that a human being can be broken into two parts: a "labour unit", separated from the other part, which is husband, a man with a family, and a social being with feelings, living within a network of human systems. This system was therefore viewed as dehumanizing, disrespectful and disruptive to human

relationships. The husband leaving his family for work while the wife remained at home may be regarded as the "provider" whereas the wife is regarded as the "object". The position a woman occupied was that of being submissive, subordinate, and passive within the family structure and function. This kind of dyadic relationship has created an unequal relationship characterised by tension. As a result violence might surface due to possible tension. Consequently, this form of relationship can be construed as human right abuse on both the wife and the husband. It also deprived children of their right to emotional and social support from both parents. The migrant labour system was not the only social ill of the apartheid era. Traditional social organisation of families where the male was viewed as the dominant and controlling, also contributed immensely to women abuse.

In view of the problems associated with the migrant labour system and traditional social organisation, for many South Africans, post apartheid South Africa was expected to bring hope and change to their standard of living and family lifestyle. The new South Africa brought about the new constitution, which marked a new era for most South African human rights. The South African constitution's aim is to ensure that all citizens' rights are respected, and this includes women's rights as stipulated by the Bill of rights enshrined in the 1994 constitution.

Despite the passing of these human rights in section 10, 27, and 28 of the Bill of rights, violence against women still remains a problem of enormous magnitude. According to NICRO (1998), one in every four South African women is assaulted by their boyfriends or husbands every week. This translates into 25% of women exposed to physical abuse in their relationships. Therefore, with the increasing rates of women abused, it is clear that violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights.

Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, and Daily (1998) argue that historically men have dominated and controlled women. This can also be partly attributed to the influence of the English common law. According to this law the position of women was inferior to that of men. In this framework, a woman had no legal existence apart from her husband. This situation is thus the direct result of the adoption of the English common law, which was subsequently

applied universally. Its universal applicability seemed to have failed to consider diverse cultural backgrounds of other cultural groups of the world. As a result, the English common law must be juxtaposed and understood, questioned and interrogated against the cultural backgrounds within which battering occurs, in this case the South African high incidents of women abuse.

On the other hand most indigenous South African cultures maintain and still view women's positions in the society as inferior to that of men (Sigler, 1989). In these cultures, battering was also used to control women and to display male dominion (NICRO, 1998). As a result it can be inferred that the traditional African family structure predisposes women to abuse. The reason for that is the position given to a woman in the family, that of being a child-rearer and subservient to the man. In the decision making processes, it is the man who is in charge of the final decision.

On the basis of the above outlined scenarios, it is clear that women were not and are still not treated as human beings with decision-making powers and potential. Women were, and are still subjected to their husbands' control and superiority both according to the English common law and the traditional African family structure. As a result, women are disadvantaged on either side of the outlined worldviews. Subsequently, women's rights remain an illusion despite the passing of the Bill of rights. Women's rights are still violated.

According to Olsen (1980), many of the violations occur behind closed doors and are spoken about neither by the perpetrator nor by the victims. Subsequently, women bear the pain in silence. The victims remain either locked into a memory of abuse with a fear of further victimisation or simply endure embattled lives controlled by the abuse they experience in the home on a daily basis. This silence is caused by, and in turn reinforces, cultural and legal norms that sustain an environment conducive to oppressive practices.

Research on domestic violence and woman battering has been conducted both qualitatively and quantitative. Brown (1994), researched on the effects of domestic

violence on women and their children through a quantitative analysis of the violent patterns observed in the process of battering. Qualitative studies as well were conducted with the main focus being on women's process of leaving their abusive partners, (Burk & Frosh, 1994). Browne (1987) researched abused women but mainly focused on their children's needs. From the above exposition one can discern that abuse is not an isolated phenomenon but rather cuts across all cultural and racial groups, locally and internationally. Since abuse is a global problem, in the current study I will first present the two broad epistemologies, that is, the western and African epistemologies to show the prevalence of abuse in both these epistemological paradigms. Secondly, these two epistemologies will be used to facilitate the discussion and to provide a broader understanding of abuse. Such exposition will present an integrative approach to abuse. In the context of this study, the terms battering and abuse will be used interchangeably.

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study is to explore the self-concept of battered South African women.

Objectives of the study

- to expose and explore the types of battering that women experience
- to investigate the effects of these battering experiences on abused women

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are numerous theories of women battering, and none of these theories can claim to provide a comprehensive solution and an agreed upon explanation of women battering. Traditional research on women battering is based on linear explanatory models and does not comprehensively provide a holistic view to women battering. A holistic view to women battering should be inclusive and considerate to the cultural, racial, and social contexts. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will briefly discuss theories which have been used to understand women battering. However, these theories do not provide a comprehensive explanatory pattern of women battering. It is for this reason that in this study, women battering will be viewed from the ecosystemic framework.

The ecosystemic framework views human interactions within the ecological context. This

framework focuses on the patterns of events, collaborative relations between people and the connectedness/networks within a given system of relations. The ecosystemic framework will be discussed in detail in the literature review in chapter 2.

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Battering

Battering is when a person (most often the woman) is continuously hurt and abused by the person (most often a man) with whom they have an intimate relationship. This person is usually her husband, her boyfriend or her lover (De Sousa, 1992). Battering also refers to someone who goes through physical, sexual, economic, verbal and psychological suffering for a period of 12 months and over.

Self-concept

Self-concept refers to one's self-identity, a schema consisting of an organised collection of beliefs and feelings about oneself (Baron, 2000).

Self-worth

According to (Baron, 2000), self-worth refers to ideas people develop about which kinds of behaviour will gain them social approval.

Self-esteem

According to (Baron, 2000), self-esteem refers to the self-evaluation made by each individual; one's attitude towards oneself along a positive-negative dimension.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research

The current study utilises a qualitative, exploratory research design. In-depth analyses of the interviews were conducted.

Sampling

The researcher used a purposive sampling (i.e. non-probability) by conducting interviews with four (4) women who experienced battering on a prolonged scale of twelve (12) months and more. The ages of these women ranged from 35-49 years of age. This age group has been regarded as “the risk group” according to NICRO (1998).

Sampling involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and/ or social process to observe, TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999). A variety of sampling and selection methods are available in qualitative research. Researchers, however purposely, select small samples, which fit the aims of the study. Research participants are selected for a number of reasons, namely because they:

- have personal experience of the topic being researched;
- are able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences; and
- are able to articulate their experiences and be willing to give complete and sensitive accounts (Wilson & Hutchison, cited in Netshishive, 2006, p.53).

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of the battered women. Kvale (1996) defines qualitative interviews as ‘attempts to understand the world from the participant’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations’. The units of analysis to be used in interviews are the following:

- **Self-worth**
- **Self-esteem**

These units of analysis helped the researcher in the composition of questions to be asked during the interviewing process. Interviews were recorded using a tape recorder and later transcribed by the researcher in order to facilitate accurate analysis of information. These units of analysis were central to the questioning process during the interviewing. The reason for this is that units of analysis form one's identity and the feelings that one has about themselves, that is, their Self-concept.

Data analysis

Analysis of information is the process whereby structure, order, and meaning are imposed on the mass of information that is collected in a qualitative research study. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) argue that data analysis issues should be carefully considered when designing a study, since the aim of data analysis is to transform data into an answer to the original research question. Hermeneutics was used as a method of data analysis.

Hermeneutic method

The aim of hermeneutics is to ‘discover meaning and to achieve understanding’ or to make sense of ‘that which is not yet understood’ (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991 p.). The idea of the hermeneutic circle suggests that, in the interpretation of a text, the meaning of the whole can only be understood in respect of its constituent parts. This is conceived as a circular movement between part and whole (Kelly, 1999, p.409). Hermeneutics is based on the following assumptions (Rapmund, 2000):

- 1 People give meaning to what happens to their lives, which is important if others are to understand their behaviour.
- 2 Meanings can be expressed in different ways, not only verbally.
- 3 The meaning giving process is informed by the ‘immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices, and language’ (Netshishive, 2006).
- 4 The meaning of human action is not a fixed entity, it is constantly being negotiated, and changes evolve over time, in different contexts and for different individuals.
- 5 The process of interpretation enables the person to make sense of his or her world.

However, these ideas are informed by the interpreter’s values and therefore the notion of ‘truth’ or correspondence to an objective reality is not an important issue in this approach. Therefore this approach does not adhere to the belief in an objective reality.

In hermeneutics the first step allows the researcher to begin working with text in order to make sense of that world. The second step, involves the researcher’s ability to infer themes that underlie the research material. In step three, similar themes are grouped

together under the same category. The fourth step, involves the researcher's ability to think more clearly about the emerged themes. The researcher searches for misunderstandings, deeper meanings, and alternative meanings moving between elements of the text and the whole text.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study will adopt the qualitative research design, which is exploratory. Exploratory studies employ an open, flexible, and inductive approach to research as it attempts to look for new insight into a phenomenon. This links with the aim of the study which is to explore the self-concept of battered South African women. As a result, it generates speculative insights, new questions and hypotheses, (Flick, 1988).

1.7.1 Qualitative approach

The qualitative research approach is a multi-perspective approach, utilizing different qualitative techniques and data collection methods, to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meanings that subjects attach to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It does not aim to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws but rather to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie every human action.

Qualitative approach fits with the topic as it seeks to listen to the stories women narrate about their personal battering experiences, by providing them with an environment that is empathic, humane, and friendly to tell their stories. It also fits with the ontology and epistemology of the current study. The ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it, whereas the epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known. For this reason, social constructionism will form the theoretical framework for this study. Social constructionism is also consistent with qualitative and hermeneutic approach. They both share the view in cautioning against singular accounts that tend to silence and marginalise people whose stories fail to fit with the dominant traditional discourses. Qualitative

approach and social constructionism attempt to capture the social context in its entirety for the understanding of human experience. It also tries to understand phenomena in a holistic way. In the chapter to follow I will briefly reflect on the Western and African philosophies on women, then move on to the social constructionism as the point of departure in Chapter 2.

CONCLUSION

Abuse is inflicted on an individual but contrary to its personal and intimate occurrence, it affects the whole society in more aspects than one. It affects the family, the community and the economy of the country. In a family the children and other family members suffer emotionally and their confidence, self-esteem and worthiness becomes adversely affected. The community loses a potential person who would add value to the betterment of the community, and the country loses a potential service provider, who would add value to their communities and country.

1.8 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER OUTLINE

The remaining chapters will address the following:

Chapter 2 addresses literature review and theoretical background

Chapter 3 presents the research design and method

Chapter 4 contains results presentation and discussions

Chapter 5 presents the conclusion and recommendations

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon; it has probably existed in families since the beginning of time. The increased number of conferences, research projects, and academic attention to women battering, (Abrahams, Jewkes & Laubsher, 1999), indicates the seriousness of the escalating problem in South Africa and the world at large. Despite this awareness, violence against women is still widespread and perpetuated within our families and communities through relationship networks. In our intimate relationships, we expect and are expected to love, nurture, and empower one another. Yet violence and violent interactional patterns are generally accepted and thoroughly woven into the fabric of these intimate relationships (Cahn, 1996). The problem in this regard should be located within our socialisation network systems. Intervention programs, workshops, research and conferences are held on a daily basis with the view to addressing these social ills. Therefore the question to be posed in this regard is: To what extent are these initiatives effective in combating violence against women?

The fourth world conference on women in Beijing (1995) has led to the realisation that most women all over the world suffer from some kind of discrimination and violent abuse. This recognition of women abuse was also reflected by former President Mbeki, (Abraham et al., 1999) who spoke of the “twilight world of continuous sexual and physical abuse of women and children, which is found in or townships and cities”. Mbeki’s statement reflects an increasing recognition in the ranks of the government and many quarters of civil society that battery, rape and other manifestations of women abuse and violence are very common in South Africa.

Women battering must be understood within a socio-historical context in which men established social approval for controlling their wives and having the tendency to

perceive that as a legal “right” to do so. This can be seen through the patriarchal system in South African cultures where men are given more power over women by being dominant and women being submissive and passive in their family life. South Africa has many diverse cultures which imply different cultures. The diversity of these cultures, races, classes and regional differences, pose difficulties in offering explanations for women battering in South Africa. To understand women battering requires an understanding of the cultural context within which this phenomenon occurs.

2.2 WESTERN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON WOMEN

In this chapter the researcher will explore some aspects of western and African moral philosophy and how it has influenced women’s lives and their place in our societies. In the context of this study women battering will be located within the two broad epistemological paradigms, that is, the African and western epistemologies. The researcher believes that this kind of approach creates sensitivity to cultural conceptions of women battering.

2.2.1 WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN

In western thought, historically the origin of knowledge has been perceived as the domain of men. This thinking has relegated women to a subordinate position. To illustrate this argument, two western classical thinkers, Aristotle and Rousseau associated women with darkness (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). They described women as “that which lacked form; with vagueness, indeterminacy, and irregularity” (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999, p.39). Aristotle asserted that men should rule over their households. He further posited that man’s “rule over his wife is like that of a magistrate in a free state, over his children it is like that of a king” (Mahowald, 1978, p.67). This pattern of thinking has relegated and subjected women to marginal objects, and to a larger extent it has dehumanised women.

In Aristotle’s definition of “man as a rational animal” (Ramose, 2002, p. 14), he regards women’s existence as insignificant. This quote does not include women and further implies that women are not rational beings; that is the reason why women are excluded from a class of “rational beings”. It further demonstrates the discrimination against

women in the western context. In Aristotle's time, women were not respected nor valued to be entrusted with authority and power to be critical thinker; only men were said to be "rational animals". This understanding of human being, especially men, can be seen as totally discarding the existence of women, perceiving them as invisible. Harding and Hintikka (1983) go further to address Aristotle's discrimination against women. In their argument they showed how Aristotle's biology of reproduction, differentiating the anatomical parts of male and female, regarded man as dominant in the reproducing of offspring. As a result of that, they argued that Aristotle regarded a woman as inferior and thus serving little or no function in life. On the contrary a man in this situation maintained a powerful position. According to Aristotle, men were naturally qualified to lead (Mahowald, 1978). Aristotle was of the opinion that women could only be allowed to lead under unnatural circumstances. Even then, older women were preferred to lead under these unnatural circumstances (Mahowald, 1978).

Aristotle believed that a woman's primary task is to be a mother. He referred to a woman's uterus as an incubator 'for concocting and nourishing the embryo' (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). In the act of reproduction a man was seen as an agent, and a woman became a patient. The man's semen was therefore regarded as a giver of life and soul, which was regarded as the source of the human intellect (Mahowald, 1978). As for the woman's egg, Aristotle saw it as the source of the matter (body) (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999).

In the above scenario, we see the absurd and marginal place that women occupied in Aristotle's thought. Men were agents, life givers, and therefore co-creating with the creator. In contrast to this positive view about men, Aristotle saw women simply as objects with no capacity to think. Their role, in his thinking, is simply to give a structure which will nurture the intellect, that is, the man.

Likewise, a French revolution philosopher, Rousseau, believed that women were created to please men. In order to ease men's anger, women had to be submissive and use their charms to constrain men (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). Rousseau advised women to cultivate "their own powers, which lie in cunning, beauty, wit and wiles", and that they

should “rule by gentleness, kindness and tact, by caresses and tears; by modesty, distance and chastity” (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999, p.40). Like Plato, Rousseau maintained that women should not strive to be “sturdy like men but be for them, so that they can be mothers of sturdy males” (Mahowald, 1978, pp 23-24). Rousseau concluded that naturally “women’s right is not to be free and equal but to win love and respect through obedience and fidelity” (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999, p.40).

In Rousseau’s thinking, there is another dimension concerning the role of women in western philosophical thought. According to Rousseau, women’s role was to be passive. While Rousseau recognised the fact that women could serve, however, such service was only for the sake of men and limited to that functional domain only. Women were to be objects of service with no capacity to be critical thinkers. The role of critical thinking was thus exclusively reserved for the male species. This is further described in Aristotle’s famous definition “man is a rational being” (Ramose, 2002, p. 14). In *The Age of Reason*, Ramose (2002) argued that in relation to the conception of a human being by Aristotle, as that which can reason and be critical, women are therefore seen as not rational and critical beings. Ramose’s contention is that women are perceived as not having the capacity to think and are therefore seen by Aristotle as being incapable of reasoning.

It is from the above consideration of Aristotle and Rousseau’s thinking that we can discern that women were epistemologically and ontologically marginalised. Only men were regarded as active objects while women were seen as passive objects whose role was to give birth to matter and to satisfy the needs of men. Aristotle and Rousseau’s writings and teachings contributed to a culture that perpetuates the idea that women cannot be agents since their role is that of giving service to men. As a result, it would be inaccurate to think that Aristotle and Rousseau’s philosophies about women did not influence their contemporaries and subsequently the generations that followed.

From the discussion above, it is clear that in the western traditional thought, women were, and still are, being degraded and continuously subtly abused and discriminated against as a result of the philosophical influences by the “critical” thinkers of that classical era as many western cultures still subscribe to this thinking. It is from such

philosophies that people's thinking is shaped and conditioned to perceive women as inferior and not serving a meaningful function in both their family and social lives.

2.2.2 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN

Africans, both male and female have argued that before colonialism, African women were as free as men were. Women, we are told, were seen as a symbol of care, love, nurturance and family support. It might be safe however to posit that before colonialism, African women were not totally subdued or totally free. There were some ambiguities in the worlds within which women found themselves. There were those women who were partially "free" because of their husbands' positions. Some were respected by men and women because of the charisma they had of foretelling and healing the sick, while many are respected today because of their formal education (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). An example can be that of the Rain Queen, Queen Modjadji, in the Limpopo province. Due to the position and role she holds in her village, she is regarded as free to make decisions and to have power over men. This change in perception of women seems to be infiltrating other social and organisational structures. Women have occupied high positions in governmental sectors, to the extent of independently running their own projects and engaging in international dialogues to free other women from the chain of male dominance.

On the contrary, Edet and Ekeya (1989) argued that Africa's traditional societies were by and large not as fair to women as is told or thought. Sometimes women were regarded as second-hand citizens, and often used and handled like some form of personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. Under colonial rule, women fared no better because all the disabilities of western thought on women were added to the already burden-some African situation (Edet & Ekeya, 1989). Some of these situations, in the South African context are practised as a part of a particular cultural value and to a larger extent seem to contribute to women subjugation.

According to Lebaka-ketshabile (1999), among the Basotho there is a saying that *mosadi ke ngwana* which means that a woman or wife is a child. She never matures to an extent

of being in power over men. There are no important decisions she can make in the absence of her husband or any other male figure. This thinking is almost similar to that of Aristotle and Reason. This is the reason why a woman has to be under male authority at all times. The male had to make sure that the woman does what she is supposed to do and that she behaves appropriately according to male standards. This appropriateness was also to be decided upon by men based on their preferences and choices.

The saying in Tswana *mosadi tshwene o jewa matsogo*, which literally means a woman can be as ugly as a baboon (tshwene) as long as she serves she is fine, suggests that while generally African men marry women because of their beauty, they also have preferences for women who will perform ‘wifely’ duties for the husband and his family. What matters is how well she works, not only for her husband but for the entire family. It is from such cultural connotations on women’s worth that further demonstrate and put women under enormous social oppression and subjugation.

Another important role of women is to bear children, most preferably boys in order to uphold the family name. A woman who cannot have children is considered an insult to her family, her husband’s family and to the community at large (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). She is forever ridiculed and called names such as *moopa* (the barren one) for the period that she cannot bear children. This constitutes emotional abuse and violation of a woman’s rights and dignity of great magnitude. According to Gyekye (1987), in traditional Africa the wife does not belong to the husband alone but to the whole family. The same applies to the bearing of children for the family; the wife has to continuously bear children to be regarded as a ‘woman’ by her husband’s family. Child-rearing in this African context can therefore be seen as abusive, because it tends to put women under pressure to bear children.

It is such cultural expectations found in the Western and African traditional thought that predispose women to battering. In this regard both Western and African thoughts share similar patriarchal cultures. The cultures treat women as subordinates, whose roles are to occupy a peripheral position in the social structure. Therefore, against the backdrop of these two prevalent traditional thoughts on women, the purpose of this chapter is to

conceptualise and present women battering from the ecosystemic framework. The ecosystemic framework gives a holistic view into the context of battering as a social phenomenon. This approach rejects the linear, deterministic, dominating and oppositional view on social phenomena, in this case the position of women in society. In this paradigm, women are seen as co-creators of the social organisation structure, rather than passive participants.

The section that follows will explore the literature relating to the impact of battering on women's self-concept. The section will focus on the Ecosystemic approach to situate women battering within its ecological framework.

2.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXTUALISED

As observed from the above discussion of Western and African thoughts on women, women had to endure different forms of abuse for many centuries. The fact that South Africa is a social system in transformation requires that the process that defines social behaviour also change to accommodate women's rights. Women constitute an important part of this social system and transformation dynamic. Contrary to this social change, statistics have shown that the percentage of women who reported intimate violence to the police rose from 48% in 1993 to 59% in 1998. It is estimated that one out of two women (50%) will be battered at some time in her life by a man who "loves" her (Walker, 1994). The National Coalition Against Violence (NCAV) estimates that a woman is beaten in this country every 15 seconds. According to the Centre for Disease Control, a woman is nine times in more danger of violent attack in her own home than on the streets. Battering accounts for almost one-half of the emergency room admissions for women (Walker, 1994). Therefore it is evident that violence against women can be traumatic to the victims. From the above statistical description, one can further argue that the claim that South Africa is in a state of social transformation is supported.

As a result of this transformation, women would have the opportunity to assume positions of power due to the restructuring of how the system (society) operates and functions. It is therefore critical to understand the social and interpersonal context within which the

battering occurs.

2.4 THE STRUCTURAL DYNAMICS OF BATTERING

Acts of violence that occur among family members violate the “natural growth” (Dobash et. al, 1998) of family members. Acts that form a pattern of battering are conditioned by, responsive to, and creative of structurally violent conditions at the institutional and structural level of organizations in our society. Battering, then, is “rooted in and reflects the degree to which society’s organizational arrangements foster or obstruct the spontaneous unfolding of innate human potential, the inherent human propensity towards development and self actualization” (Lewin, 1986, p. 14).

For many couples, violent battering episodes form a significant feature of their relationship development. Among couples with one or both members working outside the home, these incidents most often occur at the end of the week and in the late-evening or early morning hours (Dobash et. al, 1998). Although there may be considerable time passage between these experiences, they are intense and memorable. The reason for this is the direct result of the deep and painful meanings they have for each partner. In this sense battering experiences do not have a clear ending. “Battering assumes a presence that not only dominates the daily life of each abused woman but also plays a crucial role in framing subsequent violent encounters and the development of the couple’s overall relationship” (Dobash et al., 1998, p.269). To fully comprehend this dynamic symbolic process, between partners and their experience of battering, we need to understand exactly what goes on in each battering experience, the circumstances surrounding it, the meanings and motives involved, and the changes that occur in these experiences over time.

According to Dobash et al. (1998), a thorough understanding of battering requires an examination of at least three important facets of these incidents:

- ***Their nature***- the nature of a battering episode includes the sources of conflict; the type of violence present; the time, location, and duration of the experience; and the presence and reactions of others.
- ***Their dynamic development***- the dynamic development consists of the overall unfolding of the process, from the emergence of violent verbal or physical actions to their cessation, either through escape from the battering partner or through the elimination of his violent behaviour.
- ***Their location within a wider social context***- locating these incidents in a wider social context minimally involves relating them to the structure of political, economic, and legal arrangements and the structure of emotional relationships between intimates. By situating battering episodes within their social context we can identify the sources of violence and describe the realities within which individuals choose their behaviour and create motivations, meanings, and explanations for these choices. It is only in this context that battering episodes and the responses of others to them can be analyzed and understood (Tifft, 1993).

The above facets further raise concern to consider the interactive dynamics of battering. The reason for this is that both or a single partner may be employed, and within their work context they are in constant interpersonal engagements. These engagements may further create tension at home which may end up being projected on to the couple's relationship. Therefore, it is important to attend to the interpersonal dynamics taking place in their relationship.

2.5 THE INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS OF BATTERING

The interpersonal dynamics of battering are best explored as a process (Giles-Sims, 1993). This process is experienced by couples who withstand repetitive battering episodes, by those whose violence is so severe that the battered survivor may suffer "battered woman syndrome." Because of the duration (either short or long term) of the relationship or the lesser emotional commitment or investment of self-identity, "couples that experience battering during courtship live through an emotional process not nearly as extensive as that experienced by couples whose real violence becomes a stabilized pattern

over many years” (Johnson, 1988, p. 48). Because of the diversity of experience, the dynamics of battering can be most fruitfully explored when they become an enduring, yet stabilizing, feature of the interaction of partners who have been together for some time (Giles-Sims, 1993). These forms of relationship can be categorised as short term and long term relationships.

2.5.1 Short term relationship

For couples in this form of relationship, battering becomes conscious through a progressive realization rather than as a result of an isolated event with an undisputed meaning. They also experience leaving the relationship and severing ties as a process (Giles-Sims, 1993). In this process of battering, violent episodes do not seem to have an exact point at which they begin and end; instead they form a continuing, integral part of the relationship (Dobash et al., 1998). In these instances, periods of violent interaction fade into periods of tense interaction scarred by impending violence (Walker, 1984). The duration of these periods varies tremendously from, quite commonly, several weeks to two or three months. There are, of course, couples that are involved in these episodes almost daily and those who go a year or two between them. These differences, along with variances in the severity of physical and emotional injury and dissimilarities in patterns of battering, indicate that battering is a complex phenomenon.

2.5.2 Long term relationship

Among couples whose battering becomes an enduring pattern, relatively peaceful interludes are eventually broken by psychological, sexual, or physical violence. For the battered woman, this violence gives rise to feelings of betrayal (Dobash et al., 1998), shock, fear, anger, bitterness, distress, dependency, and dread. It may also result in physical injuries, the most typical which are bruises and cuts from being repeatedly battered. As a result, the partner may present an apologetic front after the battering. He may offer explanations, apologies, and communicates that he considers the violence and the disputed issue to be over. Initial relational reinforcements, for example, apologies are often accompanied by showers of attention, affection and gifts, which the battered

woman often perceives as attempts to win her back (Walker, 1984). However, these initial relational supports do not ordinarily become an element of subsequent episodes, indicating that the battering processes are dynamic and change over time (Walker, 1984). A cycle of violent battering episodes often continues in spite of the considerable effort most couples make to end it. This can be a result of the emotional attachment and commitment established in that relationship over the years. According to Dobash et al. (1998), when violence erupts again and again, each partner tries to make sense of the situation and the batterer's actions. The battered woman attempts to comprehend her pain and involvement (if any) in the interaction that led to the battering. "These efforts frequently lead to attributions of responsibility, explanations and denials that result in individual and collective bad faith- a fiction that secures a relatively permanent place of violence in the couple's interaction" (Tifft, 1993, pp. 34-35). In this process women may develop maladaptive patterns of shortly leaving and going back to their abusive partners. This pattern is also described in the Battered Woman Syndrome.

2.6 BATTERED WOMAN'S SYNDROME

Battered woman's syndrome is another psychological effect of battering. The Battered Woman Syndrome is similar to "learned helplessness". When a woman is in conditions that undermine her self-esteem, and question her judgment, she may be unable to take actions that seem to be in her power. She may seem illogical, or act out violently, or a variation of any of the violent behaviour that indicates frustration, immobilisation and helplessness.

The Battered Woman's Syndrome happens to many people in environments where there is constant fear, terror, and uncertainty about their well being. In the case of battered woman's syndrome, a woman can develop a pattern of leaving the batterer and going back, again and again. People who are trying to help the battered woman (friends and family) can find themselves becoming very frustrated with the woman who continuously goes back to the batterer (MacDonald, 2002). This poses a double communication because such women ask for help and at the same time try everything to stay within the abusive relationship. This form of communication is confusing. On another level, it is a

paradox because a woman is communicating that she wants out while also communicating that she is in the relationship.

What needs to be remembered about these women is that the batterer is likely to have repeatedly told her that he loves her. Since this man is her companion, best friend, and a person with whom she spends her life, leaving him is a difficult decision to make. To face the fact that she cannot be safe with him is often an extremely hard thing to accept (Macdonald, 2002). As a result women get trapped in this hubris, a sustained hope that the partner will change. Some women say, “Well, he only did it when he was drunk. He was acting that way because of some things I did or said. If I change things (such as stop asking about his whereabouts...) just a little bit he might stop. He just got laid off from his job and he was depressed and that’s why he’s acting out this way. Once he gets a job he’ll stop”. There is always a justifiable ‘reason’ why he battered her.

Although these are all excuses, it does not matter what the reason is, violence against women is regarded as the violation of human rights. Each woman is entitled and protected by such rights. Regardless of this, it is still hard for women who are caught up in these situations to realise that their rights are being violated (MacDonald, 2002). Their worldview is narrowed and to some extent overpasses their psychological wellbeing through their emotional seesaw.

Battering makes the woman to travel a downhill emotional ride which leads to the eradication of self concepts such as self-esteem, self worth, self identity, self confidence and self assurance. Many battered women become depressed when they perceive that their situation is hopeless and unbearable. They regard themselves as failures for being unable to effect change in their life with limited if any, resources at their disposal. When battered women realise that they cannot effect change, many of them may become suicidal and vulnerable to the batterer’s control and emotional abuse. Batterers threaten their partners with committal to mental institution and instil feelings of inadequacy in them (Kirkwood, 1993). This feeling of inadequacy may temper with one’s self concept as well.

Physical abuse may impact on physical, psychological and social injury ability, which leads a woman to having a low self-image. Emotional abuse makes a woman feel unimportant, useless and destroys her self confidence. The effects of psychological abuse are that a woman ends up confused because she often does not really know what brings on the violence.

2.6.1 The effects of battering on women's self-concept

The abuse of women is about control over a woman's life, but it can also be seen as a reflection of men's insecurity within their relationships. It creates fear, breaks down self esteem, and makes women act in ways that they are unwilling to, limits behaviour and movement and physically harms (Dobash et al., 1998). The effects of this form of abuse is that a woman ends up confused because she often does not really know what brings on the violence.

2.6.2 Low self-esteem

Self-esteem is the belief that one is valued and deserves just treatment from others (Kirkwood, 1993). Low self-esteem is usually coupled with feelings of worthlessness and being valueless, and the victim may see herself as unimportant. Women who are physically and emotionally abused, often do not value themselves (De Sousa, 1992), because they are often told that they are incompetent, hysterical and frigid (Cahn, in Cahn and Lloyd 1996). Society also tends to let women believe that they have no value as individuals apart from their men (Martin, 1976). Both the context and the self can be regarded as contributory to the emergence of low self-esteem. This can further impact their interpersonal styles.

Some abused women lose their identity as their self confidence diminished and their self-esteem weakens. Unfortunately, when the battered woman's self-esteem is eroded and weakened, she tends to believe that she deserves to be ill treated because she is a failure or that she asked for it (Kirkwood, 1993). However this does not imply that only battered women have low self-esteem (Wilson, 1997). Even strong women in high leadership

positions also suffer the abuse and display low self-esteem in their relationships.

It should be borne in mind that self esteem is a resource which could be used by women to re-establish their power and to protect themselves against the emotional impact of battering. When a battered woman loses her personal resources like her self-esteem; the batterer gets opportunity to control her actions and she remains with the feeling of personal guilt (Kirkwood, 1993).

2.6.3 Guilt

Authors such as Martin (1976) and Russel (1990) have detected the presence of feelings of guilt on the part of the abused. These feelings are usually instilled by society on one level and by the victims themselves on another level. Some societies do not think it is wrong for men to abuse, harass, intimidate or control women (Moore, 1979). Myths such as believing that the woman provoked her partner, therefore she deserves to be battered are responsible for the woman's guilt by blaming the victim syndrome (Wilson, 1997). Moreover, cultural norms (that men are the heads of families and women should obey them) support unequal family power structure and traditional sex roles (Kantor & Jasinski, 1998 in Jasinski & Williams).

De Sousa (1992:p. 86) supports this view by stating... “.women often blame themselves for the abuse, because they believe the myths around battering”. When women are constantly feeling guilty, they become more vulnerable to abuse and may struggle to cope in violent relationship. Feelings of guilt are most often coupled with feelings of failure. Women have been socialized to believe that the success of their marriage depends entirely on them, so when the marriage fails, they are to be blamed (Martin, 1976). This may further lead to women experiencing depression, anger and/or frustration, as they feel inadequate to handle their marriages.

2.6.4 Anger

Most battered women are afraid to show or express their anger toward the abuser as they seem to aggravate the situation. Their difficulty to communicate their anger may easily

lead to depression. Usually the batterer is not in a position to detect the victim's feelings when they are not expressed at all. Instead of being angry with their batterers, most women become angry at themselves for having allowed the abusive partner take advantage of them. The overwhelming feelings of anger reflect the woman's desperation to effect changes to her situation (Kirkwood, 1993).

2.6.5 Stress

Stress is important for everyone's daily functioning, but too much stress can be damaging. Malan and Parnzee (1994) point out that all individuals have limits to the amount of stress they can tolerate, and that once the coping ability of a person has been exhausted, stress can be damaging. The battered woman lives under tremendous stress, wondering when the next incident is going to occur and the severity thereof. Therefore they live in anticipation and under sustained uncertainty. This over-vigilance is also stressful as the woman is not capable of relaxing properly. Battered women do not choose to be battered because of some personality deficit but they do, however, develop behavioural disturbances because of battering (Walker, 1979). Thereof, it can be assumed that the difficult situation and problems that a battered woman is confronted with may easily create stress for her. Subsequently she ends up losing hope and becomes depressed in the process.

2.6.6 Loss of hope and depression

Loss of hope and depression can also be a result of battering. Many battered women become depressed when they perceive that their situation is hopeless and unbearable. When battered women reach this point, many of them become suicidal and vulnerable to the abuser's control and emotional abuse. Finkelhor and Yllo (1993) assert that most victims of abuse experience the following common traits and result in a similar long-term pattern: "depression, suicidal feelings, self contempt, and an ability to trust and to develop intimate relationships in later life" De Sousa (1992: p.86).

2.6.7 Social effects

Woman abuse may seriously diminish the quality of life for the entire family system. It often precipitates marital dissolution. Researchers such as Dobash et al. (1998) have measured the social impact of partner violence indirectly, by counting the number of programmes that offered services to the victims and their families. Social effects on wife abuse are characterized by factors such as social isolation, victim concealment of injuries and scars, as well as withdrawal from social activities.

2.6.7.1 Social isolation and withdrawal

There are numerous factors responsible for the battered women's isolation. Battered women tend to be isolated in order to preserve their marriages despite the humiliation they go through. Many abused women tend to disengage or shy away from friends and family at the abuser's demand and conceal injuries and behaviours that will reveal emotional instability and scars sustained during the beatings. They avoid other people's company so as not to disclose their problem. They view the success of marriage as their primary responsibility. Usually battered women do not have close personal friends and avoid talking to males other than their spouse for fear of being accused of having extramarital affairs.

Due to the isolation, abused women are usually not actively involved in social activities, because of loyalty to the abuser, lack of confidence, sense of shame, and low self-esteem. In most instances husbands prohibit wives from participating in social activities so that the victim should depend entirely on the abuser and forego their own self-determination. When the abused woman is isolated from external perspectives and support most of the time, the only available perspective to her is that of the abuser (Hoffman, 1990), who then exerts his power and control over her (Kirkwood, 1993). In short isolation keeps women ignorant of available resources (Angless & Maconachie, 1996).

As a result of the above, one can see that women continue to live their lives according to the rules and conditions set by the abuser. This kind of restriction often has an impact on

the interpersonal and communication style of women.

2.7 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF ABUSED WOMEN

It is difficult to interpret psychological portraits of battered wives because there is no clear evidence as to whether these factors had been present before the women were battered or whether they are the results of victimization (Gelles & Cornell, 1990).

Walker (1993) further state that many battered women have no significant psychopathology prior to the abuse and may need only practical assistance, the help of a support group, or a minimum of psychological assistance to return to previous levels of functioning. The following are some of the characteristics of abused women:

- Lacks inner strength and has low/ poor self-esteem.
- Lacks money and other resources and often prevents her from leaving the abusive relationships
- Reluctant to seek legal help as wife beating is often viewed to be a private matter
- Confused
- Cannot leave the abuser because she loves him
- Cannot leave the abuser because she has nowhere to go
- Fear of retribution
- She fears the future without the batterer, as she is often told that they will not survive on their own without the batterer
- Hopes that the batterer will change
- Love-many battered women still love their abusers- indeed; it is often hard to turn your back on someone with whom you fell in love and shared part of one's life with (Dobash et al., 1998).

According to NICRO (1998) violence against women is pervasive, systemic, and global and knows no race, class, political, or cultural barriers. Due to the impact of gender violence on women and society, these practices amount to forms of sex discrimination

that impede the ability of girl children and women worldwide, from toddlers to grandmothers, to participate fully in the society and to achieve equality with men. This constitutes discrimination against women. Discrimination leads to the degradation of the quality of life of the abused.

It is for this reason that the researcher views violence as creating a steep barrier to securing human-centred development goals. It narrows women's options in almost every sphere of life, public and private. It limits their choices directly by destroying their health, disrupting their lives, and constricting the scope of their activity and indirectly by eroding their self-confidence and self-esteem. In all these ways, violence hinders women's full participation in the full spectrum of human development efforts.

With the above exposition, it is clear that women continue to suffer the abuse within their societies and marriages, which also impacts on their family life. Therefore, for the purpose of this current study the ecosystemic framework will be discussed as it will assist in understanding the battering context and interactions which come into play. Women battering will therefore be situated within this ecological framework.

2.8 ECOSYSTEMIC VIEW TO WOMEN BATTERING

Although in some instances women are depicted negatively as evidenced in the Western and African thought on women, experience and statistics prove that women are as competent as men. Women's shortcomings and incapacities are exaggerated partly because they are planted in the "psyche" of people through formal and informal education and due to the discrimination against women which pervades our social structures and "psyche". Therefore, theories that explain women battering must be anchored in their existential realities. Their lived experiences must be rooted and located in their ecologies.

On the basis of what we think we know from our own personal life experiences, there are legitimate reasons to question the validity of theoretical frameworks to be used in explaining women battering. The framework to be used in this study will reflect reality of

how the family is organized, structured, and how it functions on a daily basis through its interactional patterns. The ecosystemic approach will be adopted to reconstruct women battering experiences.

2.8.1 ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH

The ecosystemic approach argues for a way of viewing and locating human functioning within the system network of intricate connections. This form of approach forms part of the second order cybernetics. According to Becvar and Becvar (1996) cybernetics refers to the principles that regulate the dissemination of information. The cybernetics' thinking is divided into two levels. The first form of cybernetics is known as first order cybernetics, which emphasises the observation of patterns and different ways in which events or experiences are organised. The second form is known as the second order cybernetics, which emphasises a move from the cybernetics of the observed system to that of an observing system (Fourie, 1996). The assumption is that the observer can take a position outside the observed system. The influence of cybernetics is evident in the ecosystem approach as it stresses relations and connections, and highlights the study of interactional, recursive patterns between and within systems (Mabena, 2002).

Since the ecosystemic approach falls within the postmodern thinking, for the purpose of this study, I will also discuss the concept of constructivism and social constructionism as examples of the postmodern thinking to give a broader understanding of women battering.

2. 9 POSTMODERNISM

The postmodernistic view of multiple realities encapsulates and accepts a widespread range of belief systems and acknowledges the importance of cultural diversity, differing experience and perceptions in life. This view rejects the dogmatic notion that the therapist sees the world as it really is, while clients distort their picture of reality (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2004). This means that there are no absolutes but multiverse of realities that are valid and meaningful within the context it is construed. Postmodernists argue that what we call reality is not an exact replica of what is out there, but rather is socially

constructed. Postmodernists further emphasise that our beliefs about the world, what constitutes reality, are social inventions and not reflections of the world. Therefore the postmodern models I will discuss below both reject the idea that there is a fixed truth or single reality. Their main focus is on the constructs or subjective perceptions of the truth or reality that people present.

2.9.1 Constructivism

The constructivist epistemology posits that each person involved constructs his or her personalised views and interpretations of what they might be experiencing together (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2004). It offers an epistemological shift and explanations regarding how we construct reality. This approach further argues that each of our perceptions is mostly an exact replica of the world but rather a point of view seen through limiting lens of assumptions that we make about people.

As a result, constructivism is rooted in biology of cognition, more specifically in the neurobiology of Maturana (1978). Maturana (1978) emphasised the limitations in our perceptions in ever knowing what is “out there” because our perceptions are filtered through individual nervous systems. This means that as living beings we bring different perceptions to the same situation as a result of our mental and symbolic process and meaning-making structure.

Constructivists in the realm of ecosystemic thinking believe that people create their own realities through the meanings they link to what they observe (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2004). According to the constructivist view, there can be no question of one correct objective truth or reality. What a person observe does not have an independent, objective meaning, but rather, it takes on the meaning that the observer attributes to it. Bateson’s (in Becvar & Becvar, 1996) concern is that there is no fixed objective reality and that we cannot claim final knowledge of anything, but will always be exposed to an infinite number of alternatives. This means that certain behaviour may be translated into different ways and no one translation is more correct than the other. The controversy around this conceptualisation is that women battering can in other contexts be seen as

acceptable and relevant in certain marital couple's relationships. Depending on a variety of issues, according to constructivism, women's battering is a reality constructed by the couple concerned, and is consistent with the dynamics of that marital system. In this sense it may not be judged to be "wrong".

2.9.2 Social constructionism

Social constructionism on the other hand agrees that none of us sees an objective reality, but what we do construct from what we observe arises from the language system, relationships and culture we share with others (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2004). As a result, our attitudes, beliefs, and emotional reactions arise out of relational experiences. According to Becvar and Becvar (2000), it is through language that we develop fixed thoughts of our society. Therefore in the process of socialization we learn to speak in acceptable ways and share the values and ideology of our language system.

Epistemologically and ecologically an abuser and the abused become part of the system as collaborators because they engage in conversation within the battering social context. This context reconstructs the meaning given to the battering experience. On this basis, the researcher becomes an equal co-investigator in examining the belief systems by which women view the battering. Postmodern thinkers contend that truth is relative and dependent on context and that our belief systems reflect social constructions-points of view, not "true" reality we make about the world (Gergen, 1999).

Within the social constructionist view, as a researcher or therapist one needs to be concerned with the assumptions different women hold about their battering experience. In this process it is also important to reject the customary therapist-client hierarchy by refusing to place one's knowledge regarding clients at a higher rank than client's knowledge about themselves. Rather, the researcher engages the battered women in conversations to solicit their own views and not imposing "truth" or "objectivity" based on established knowledge. It is out of this form of interaction that the researcher examines "stories" that people live by; together with battered women to have a better understanding of the meanings created during battering. This process can be further

viewed as providing an understanding on how battered women are socially constructed. This socially constructed view will be addressed in the section that follows.

2.10 BATTERED WOMAN AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

The battered woman is socially constructed as the type of a person beginning with obvious statements like: “she is a woman experiencing violence. Staying within the relationship ipso facto is defined as unreasonable,” (Loseke, 1992:p.66).

Further, with few exceptions, the construction of the battered woman begins with an attribution: Her unreasonable behaviour is not her fault. The battered woman is constructed as a type of person who is deviant and engages in unreasonable and unexpected behaviour. Yet she is a woman who does not freely choose to be deviant (Loseke, 1992).

Furthermore, the battered woman is socially constructed through common sense and stereotypical associations to the social positions of that particular woman or victim. Most commonly, claim-makers describe a battered woman as a stereotypical and traditional *wife* who has been economically dependent on her batterer (Loseke, 1992). The characteristic of economic dependency is the most common term used to describe this type of woman. From the results presented in Chapter 4, economic dependency has emerged as one of the factors that maintain the battering episode. The participants in this study seem to be struggling to leave their abusive situations due to the dependency already co-created. Also according to research, this characteristic excuses women’s behaviour of staying in the relationship (Loseke, 1992). This characteristic of motherhood serves to magnify the economic dependency. As a result, a woman needs financial support in order to be able to have shelter and take care of the children and for self care. However, there is a powerful image of a type of woman who obviously does not choose to remain in her abusive relationship. This type of woman, who when she attempts to leave, is described as “the wife who grabs her children and flees her violent husband” (Loseke, 1992).

Most typically, the representation of the battered woman has at its core a *wife/mother* who remains within her abuser only because she has no place to go. But since “battered woman” is constructed as a phenomenon crossing all social boundaries, one need to be critical and keeping in mind the following:

First, a battered woman is constructed as a woman isolated from others. Such isolation might be self-imposed since she is constructed as a type of woman who is “embarrassed over her plight,” or her isolation might be imposed by her partner as “control technique.”

Secondly, even if the woman is isolated from others, researchers argue that such a woman should not expect any assistance. Her friends might perceive themselves to be in danger if they help, they might not be familiar with the characteristics of woman battering and believe she created her own victimization. In a nutshell, a battered woman is constructed as a person who cannot rely on friends for assistance (Loseke, 1992).

From the above exposition the “battered woman” is a woman who is alone in her plight. She is defined as a cast out member of the society. Within this construction, such a woman does not want to leave, yet she is unable to gather the resources necessary to do so. Obviously, this is a public problem because social life is keeping her trapped within her continuing victimization. Therefore the construction of the battered woman as objectively trapped begins with the imputation that such a woman does have the motivation to leave. According to Loseke (1992) the battered woman might not be economically dependent, she might not be the legal wife or mother, but regardless and by definition, she is a woman.

A variety of terms are used to describe the femininity of the battered woman. She can often simply be constructed as “traditional” in her beliefs about families and women. Such a woman is constructed as one who believes that divorce is a stigma, that marriage

of any quality is better than no marriage and that children need their father. This form of construction can also result out of the African traditional thought on women discussed earlier. Furthermore, it can be rooted in the patriarchal system practiced within some of the African cultures. According to Best (1987) this construction of the battered woman claims that “woman battering” can happen to any woman, and it is compatible with many feminist constructions labelling all women as “victims of male domination.” Such a construction though, is insufficient for two reasons. First, if the battered woman is not a special kind of person then there is no support for claim-makers who argue that she is a specific kind of victim. Second, since woman battering is explicitly constructed as a specific type of problem, it follows that there would be specific consequences associated with it. In a nutshell, the battered woman is constructed as more than a wife/mother/woman. She is also constructed as a victim of the specific experience known as “woman battering.”

A further construction portrays the battered woman also as “emotionally confused” and this is understandable. This can be due to the fact that woman battering is a label for events having nothing to do with a woman’s characteristic or behaviour. She is routinely abused by her partner in life and therefore she cannot understand this in relation to her self. According to Loseke (1992) each process of the battering serves to reinforce the battered woman’s negative self-image. As a result, the battered woman is characterised by low self-esteem, and her self-concept is affected as well. Such a woman might not attempt to leave because she does not believe she deserves anything better in her life.

From the above discussion, woman battering is conceived as a social construction. Therefore this phenomenon is interwoven in a series of theoretical interpretations and interactions, using different modalities of connections. One such modality of connection is language. Therefore in the current study, battered women will be engaged in a dialogue, narrating their battering experiences.

2.10.1 Language as a form of communication

The ecosystemic approach also recognizes the important role played by the language a person uses when assigning meaning. This approach posits that meaning exists solely in verbal or non-verbal language, which one reveals to himself or herself through internal dialogue, or to others through external dialogue (Efran & Lukens, 1988; Fourie, 1996). Following this, Bateson (in Becvar & Becvar, 1996) acknowledges language as a vehicle through which all meaning is created. According to Bateson, language stresses interaction and it is through language that we transform reality in order to construct explanations. Moore (1979) argues that the arbitrary nature of language is a subjective description of reality that can never be objectively known. Language is a social construction, which offers meaning. Any understanding or co-constructed meanings that we do come to are arbitrary punctuations and partial arcs of a complete recursive whole. Therefore in this current study battering will be put into context in order to understand the meaning and reality created by victims on the basis of their lived experiences.

The reality which is co-constructed in a system is real to that particular system. Therefore it fits with the ideas which participants have about themselves, about each other, and about the world in general (Moore, 1979). The combinations of different view points provide depth, relevance, and greater understanding. The following discussion is on the communication within the family system within which battering pattern occurs and realities are constructed.

2.11 COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY

Communication and information processing are at the core of ecosystemic thinking. According to the ecosystemic approach, all behaviour is seen as communication or information, and information flow is seen as the basic process of social systems such as the family (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Hence, verbal hostility and passive aggression are seen as precursors to battering (O'leary, Malone & Tyree, 1994). They present the language dynamic of such an abusive relationship.

Communication in abusive families is often thought of as unclear, inconsistent, high on “shoulds” and “oughts”, highly critical of other family members and transmitting little information (Geffner, R., Mantooth, C., Franks, D. & Rao, L. 1989). When husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend are deficient in communication skills, and the male is in a less powerful position, each participant’s family communicational pattern reveals that mostly in abusive relationships there is no flow of communication. This pattern is mostly expressed as one directional and not inclusive of the other partner. The more one partner communicates insecurity, uncertainty, fear, guilt, weakness and helplessness, the worse the situation is likely to become. This form of behaviour has meaning in family and marital systems.

One of the principles of communication in ecosystemic thinking is that all behaviour in the context of others has a message value (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). According to Watzlawick, et al. (1965, p. 50), “even sitting silently and not moving conveys a message to an observer”. Systems theories hold that both partners in violent relationships enact fewer positive behaviours (approval, accepting, and responsibility) and greater levels of disagreement, criticism, and put downs than do partners in non-violent relationships (Anderson & Schlossberg, 1999). Such partners, so argue Anderson and Schlossberg (1999), are more likely to exhibit rigid patterns of interaction in which hostile, angry behaviours by one partner would trigger hostile responses by the other spouse.

From the above discussed theoretical approach, an understanding of women battering has been advanced. There are however limitations to the ecosystemic approach which will be briefly discussed as well. The rationale for this is to sensitise practitioners and researchers that the conceptualisation and application of the ecosystemic approach to the understanding of women battering does not mean that women battering is justifiable. It rather illustrates that the ecology within which the battering behaviour takes place also plays an important role in facilitating the battering practices.

2.12 ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH

The ecosystemic approach to understanding battering has been severely criticised, particularly by feminist writers who argue that it obscures the seriousness of the abuse suffered by women (Anderson & Schlossberg, 1999). By assuming a non-linear or non-blaming stance towards all members of the system, the batterer is absolved of full responsibility and the woman is viewed as “co-responsible for the battering (Harway & O’Neil, 1999)”. In addition, feminist writers point out that gender roles are central to the functioning of the family and are inseparable from the broader social, political, and cultural context (Gelles, 1993).

Family system theories are believed to have failed to attend to the power and status differentials that exist between men and women, both within broader cultural and within the family system. Finn (1996) believes that ecosystemic thinking and postmodernism circulate with most ease and authority in academic spheres and are well representative of and among men, taking its bearings exclusively from the authority of men. According to Finn (1996), ecosystemic thinking and postmodernism have limits in considering gender differences. The difference it makes in its use of language is problematic as it presumes to be constitutive of the (post) modern world.

These criticisms have made important contributions to the understanding of battering as discussed by Anderson and Schlossberg (1999). For instance, most family theorists and therapists now hold the punitive view that men be held responsible for their violent behaviours (Sprenkle, 1994). In addition, most family therapists advocate gender-specific treatment for male batterers and their partners (Gelles & Cornel, 1990).

Anderson and Schlossberg (1999) point out that one of the strengths of the ecosystemic approach is that the blaming/non-blaming distinction is inconsistent with the systems perspective, which is more focused on “how people are involved in battering

relationship” than with “who is to blame”. The ecosystemic perspective does not absolve batterers of responsibility for their violence nor does it blame the victim (Sprenkle, 1994). However, it does not take into account the complex set of influences that define each interpersonal encounter and holds each partner responsible for any action that contributes to the abusive interaction.

Since the ecosystemic thinking rejects the idea of unilateral control, its proponents have been criticized for failing to acknowledge the realities of the power relationships that encompass patriarchal society (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Power is considered legitimate when the authority of a partner over a given sphere is negotiated within the relationship and agreed upon by both parties. It is regarded nonlegitimate when it involves efforts to control the other partner or aspects of the relationship without the authority to do so having been given by both partners.

However, the advantage of the ecosystemic thinking is that power is not a property of a person nor is it an inevitable by-product of a particular social or cultural context (Anderson & Schlossberg, 1999). Rather, power is determined by a variety of contextual variables (for example, societal norms, one’s epistemology, cultural background, public policy, family of origin experiences, and of the couple’s previous interactions). These factors explain the individual batterer’s violent actions and the partner’s response. Both participants are viewed as exerting interpersonal power (influencing or attempting to influence the other and both are, at the same time, influenced by external forces over which they have limited or no control (Mabena, 2002). This is perhaps both the strength and limitation of the ecosystemic approach. This approach provides us with an important conceptual tool, but does not provide help in defining the causes of oppression, status inequality, gender discrimination, or family violence.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to provide an alternative exploratory approach to understanding women battering. In this sense, this study provides a context wherein women can dialogue and “story” their battering experience. As White (1995) points out

that “in telling stories, and in the process of interpretation, we derive meanings that have real effects on our behaviours and the decisions we make in our lives, narratives do serve a purpose” White (1995, p. 12). White further mentions that “it is the story or self narrative that determines the shape of the expression of our lived experience. We live by the stories that we have about our lives, that these stories actually shape our lives,, constitute our lives, and that they ‘embrace’ our lives” (White, 1995, p. 13).

White’s (1995) particular emphasis is not on trying to solve problems, but rather on working with people in such a way as to share in their stories and to render “thicker” or more lucid descriptions of their stories. “Stories facilitate the understanding of human experience from the point of view of a person in a social context,” (Rappaport, 1993, p.240). Stories explain people to themselves and others. In addition, they also create identities and influence how people manage their lives. The sharing of stories seems particularly helpful in creating new and healing stories. Narratives are thus inclusive of context which is part of meaning.

White (1995, p.13) emphasises that “there is no single story in life, as there is no story that is free of ambiguity and contradiction. It is in living through the ambiguity that further meaning-making occurs, and sub-stories unfold”. It is within the telling and living of the multi-storied processes of life that therapist/researchers can bring forth and thicken possible alternative stories that do not support or sustain the problems presenting in people’s lives (Geertz, 1978). Within new stories, people create different opportunities to live out new self-images. Consequently new possibilities for relationships arise, and new futures become possible. As a result the narrative approach will be used in the current study in the methodology chapter. It is deemed consistent with the social constructionist view.

The battering experiences of women will be explored to derive the meanings that they have about their lives. This study will also offer a space where alternative meanings and ways of being by “abused women” can be explored. The narrative approach will be discussed in detail in the methodology chapter that follows

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Moon et al. (1990), describe methodology as the nitty gritty pragmatics of research describing exactly how a researcher goes about a particular investigation. In this chapter qualitative research approach will be described as the background to the current study. Qualitative method is suitable for this study since it permits an in-depth exploratory study of the experience of battering. Therefore the research procedures implemented, the sample, data collection and data analysis used will be described in the discussion that follows, using the qualitative approach.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

There are two major approaches to psychological research, quantitative and qualitative. Historically and methodologically these approaches were identified as a result of the nineteenth-century debates about the source of 'truth' (Grbich, 1999). According to Grbich (1999), quantitative researchers presume that there is a singular material 'reality' that exists independently 'out there'. 'Truth' can be found by applying the proposition that independent variables affect dependent variables in a cause-effect manner (Mabena, 2002). These variables can be expressed numerically and processed by statistical analysis to determine the relationship between phenomena (Grbich, 1999).

Most qualitative researchers believe that 'truth' lies in gaining an understanding of the actions, beliefs and values of others, from within the participant's frame of reference. This frame of reference is believed to be socially and historically constructed, and determined by the researcher's views, context and time (Mabena, 2002). Some qualitative researchers, such as constructionist thinkers see truth lying in the reality constructed by the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Kelly (1999) and Moore (1979) rejected the assumption of one correct, objective reality and accepted instead, that multiple realities exist side by side. This means that research is not an attempt to reveal the truth about a reality or to determine whether a particular representation of the reality

is true or correct. It is an exploration of different realities.

The qualitative research approach is a multi-perspective approach, utilizing different qualitative techniques and data collection methods, to social interaction, aimed at describing, making sense of, interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meanings that subjects attach to it (De Vos, 2004). It does not aim to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws but rather to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie battering experience, within a particular context.

In the context of the current study, qualitative approach fits with the topic as it seeks to listen to the stories women narrate about their personal battering experiences. By doing so, this approach will provide victims of battering with an environment that is empathic, humane, and friendly to tell their stories. Qualitative approach also fits with the ontology and epistemology of the current study. Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it, whereas epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known.

Defining qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. According to Moon et al. (1990), qualitative research reflects a phenomenological perspective and researchers attempt to understand the meaning of naturally occurring complex events, actions, and interactions in context from the participant’s point of view. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) also try to understand phenomena holistically. Baloyi (2008) further defines research as a systemic process of knowledge acquisition through which different people in different contexts come to know, represent and reflect their experiences and the world. In Baloyi’s definition, the argument is that “research does not provide rigidly defined rules, but allows and supports various methodological approaches and creates conditions for self-criticism from the

outsider's point of view" (Baloyi, 2008, p. 37).

3.3 REFLEXIVITY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Many recent developments within qualitative research have resonance with those in the systemic field. This includes the incorporation of ideas from social constructionism, constructivism, and an emphasis on the use of self-reflexivity. Guba and Lincoln (1994) have examined different research paradigms to highlight the various assumptions and beliefs researchers bring to their research work. Their emphasis is on the questions of ontology (what can be known about) and epistemology (the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) have postulated that all research is shaped by these fundamental questions, determining how the researcher sets about finding out whatever they believe can be known. The importance of scrutinising one's assumptions and values as a researcher and of examining their impact throughout the research process has been addressed by a number of qualitative researchers (Burk and Frosh, 1994; Steier, 1991; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996). The development and maintenance of self-reflexivity in different relationships and in different contexts is an ongoing challenge within systemic practice.

Qualitative research situated within the social constructionist paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) considers research data, such as the accounts of research participants as 'constructed' within a particular research context, rather than as an objective reflection of 'reality'. It draws on the idea that our ways of knowing are negotiated through social interactions over time and in relation to social structures, contexts, and resources which support or indeed suppress these ways of knowing (Shotter, 1993). This has led to a consideration of the ways the relationship between the researcher and the research participants affect the 'production' of the research material. This is similar to the emphasis in systemic therapy on the therapist's contributions to what is brought forth in therapeutic sessions. The ways in which the researcher is positioned have variations similar to the research participants. This is in relation to culture, class, race, ethnicity,

age, sexual orientation, ability, and the need to be taken into account alongside an attention to context (Fine, 1994). It is with the above discussion in mind that an appropriate research paradigm for the study of this nature can be constructed.

3.4 THE APPROPRIATENESS OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGM

3.4.1 Qualitative methods yield in-depth information

According to Moon et al. (1990), quantitative studies' methods of collecting data and reporting findings would generalise information gathered to the extent that subtle personal issues could be overlooked. However, by using qualitative methods, more specifically, the open questions in in-depth interviews, the "hidden" personal information could be captured. In addition, several ethical issues such as confidentiality, respect and the prevention of harm to the research participants will be taken care of in the study.

Apart from facilitating sensitivity to the research participants and protecting their welfare, qualitative methods allow the researcher to focus on the investigation and to provide information which is both meaningful and clinically relevant to a specific area of study (Baloyi, 2002). In the context of this study, it is also important to outline the link between qualitative approach and the ecosystemic paradigm, as it serves as the theoretical base for the study.

3.4.2 Qualitative methods and ecosystemic theory

Qualitative methods are consistent with this investigation because they resonate well with the ecosystemic theory. Like ecosystemic theory, qualitative research emphasises social context, multiple perspectives, complexity, individual differences, circular causality, recursion and holism. Qualitative methods provide an avenue for examining the experience of battered women from the perspective of the client rather than from the more typical research perspectives of the therapist and/or the researcher (Steier, 1991). In keeping with the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design would provide a holistic, systemic, and scientific way of looking at the context of battering experiences.

3.4.3 Similarity to process-oriented research

Qualitative research has much in common with process research, which emphasises the study of change, and “smaller is better” philosophy (Netshishive, 2006). The principles of process research as enumerated by Moon et al. (1990) include criterion base and theoretical sampling, pattern exploration, observations, and process in context. Viewed from this position, process oriented research forms part of the broader qualitative method paradigm.

Qualitative research may help answer in the process the researcher’s call for a context-specific micro-theory of change because qualitative research is generative, inductive and constructive (Netshishive, 2006). A qualitative research design therefore provides one way of studying a rare and complex event such as women’s experience of battering in context across time.

3.4.4 Qualitative methods bridge the gap between research, theory and practice

According to Moon et al. (1990), a perplexing problem during the past two decades has been the lack of integration between research, theory, and practice. Although certain basic similarities exist between the methods of discovery in clinical work and research, clinicians and researchers tend to divide into two isolated methods, separated by a communication gap. This communication gap can be effectively closed by engaging in narratives.

3.5 NARRATIVE APPROACH

A narrative approach will be used in this study because it allows women to tell their own lived narratives of their battering experiences. According to Cobb (1993, p.250), narratives are material in the sense that they blur traditional distinctions between discourse and action — to tell a story is to act upon the world. That is why participation in narrative processes is so important in the shaping and composition of the social/material world. Dean (1998), Rappaport (1993) and Sarbin (1986) typify the narrative approach as threading together of a set of experiences in a temporal sequence in order to make sense

of them. In most narratives there is a set of characters and a plot of line that carries the reader or listener along. The story or narrative may be told to make a point, teach a lesson, or to provide a moral example. Sometimes narration is for the sole purpose of imparting meaning. Often, in the process of telling stories to other people we create meaning for ourselves. As a result it would seem to impact on the meaning-making of others (Dean, 1998).

Sarbin (1986, p. 3) posits that “a story is a symbolised account of actions of human beings that has a temporal dimension. The story has the beginning, middle, and an ending.” It is held together by recognisable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure is human predicaments and attempted resolutions. From these definitions it is apparent that narratives have certain structural features and they serve various functions. Structural features “include event sequences arranged in context over time” (Rappaport, 1993, p. 249).

A therapist or a qualitative researcher has to work with stories people live as well as their stories about those stories. “In this sense, therapy (research) is a conversation, an exchange of stories,” (Keeney, 1983, p. 195). Bateson (1972) theorises that it is the perception of difference that triggers all new responses in systems. He further showed how the mapping of events through time is vital for the perception of this difference, for the detection of change. Freedman and Combs (1996) describe how the narrative metaphor of White (1995) combines Bateson’s concepts, in that a story is a map that extends through time. White (1995) emphasises that he is not speaking in representational terms, as if he is proposing that a story is a map of the territory of one’s life. He says that he is not talking about stories as if they are descriptions, but, according to him, stories represent the structure of life itself. Therefore battered women’s experiences reflect their existential realities; indeed their battering experiences come with the territory, that is, their reality as depicted by the context.

Women are particularly vulnerable to the dominant discourses, especially discourses that disqualify their voices and womanhood. Therefore, working from a narrative approach,

the researcher creates context, through sharing in women's stories, in which these women's knowledge and skills can be honoured (Moon et al., 1990). Therefore, the saying "not yet said" becomes possible through dialogue with others (Netshishive, 2006). In this current study the narrative approach will be used because it is consistent with the social constructionist view. The narrative approach is also relevant to the current study since it seeks to provide women with the opportunity to language about their experiences.

3.6 SAMPLING

Sampling involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and or social processes that one needs to observe, (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999). A variety of sampling and selection methods are available in qualitative research. Researchers, however purposely, select small samples, which fit the aims of the study. Research participants are selected for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons are because they:

- have personal experience of the topic being researched;
- are able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences; and
- are able to articulate their experiences and be willing to give complete and sensitive accounts (Wilson & Hutchison, cited in Netshishive, 2006, p.53).

In the current study, the researcher will use a purposive sampling (i.e. non-probability) by conducting interviews with four (4) women who experienced battering on a prolonged scale of twelve (12) months and more. These women were selected from the Department of Social Development in the ODI district. They were identified by the social workers as women who reported battering in their marital relationships. The ages of these women ranged from 35-49 years. This age group has been regarded as "the risk group" according to NICRO (1998).

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

In this study data were collected through the interviews. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, through the process of data analysis these

interviews were translated from Setswana to English. The rationale was to help the researcher to analyse and be able to deal with the data. Qualitative researchers seek valid observations, however validity is not defined in terms of the extent to which the operational definition corresponds with the construct definition, but by the degree to which the researcher can produce observations that are believable for him or her, the subject being studied, and the eventual researchers of the study, (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.7.1 Interviews and interviewees

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of the battered women. The interviewer had themes to explore by opening up the opportunity for women to talk of their experience in an unrestricted open-ended manner. The interviewer probed where and when necessary focusing on issues of battering specifically. This is what makes the interviews semi-structured. The nature of battering as a social problem is sensitive and personal. Therefore the interviews were carried out where participants felt comfortable. This was meant to minimise the hindrance of participant's spontaneous responses. The interviews were carried out in their home language, which was Setswana, and tape recorded. The interviews once recorded, were transcribed. These interviews are available on request for record purposes. Prior to the interviewing process the units of analysis were identified. These units of analysis helped the researcher in the composition of questions asked during the interviewing process. These interviews in essence constituted the dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Kvale (1996) defines qualitative interviews as 'attempts to understand the world from the participants' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations'. The units of analysis to be used in interviews are the following:

1. Self-worth

According to Hayes and Orrel (1993), self-worth refers to ideas people develop about which kinds of behaviour will gain them social approval.

2. Self-esteem

According to Baron (2000), self-esteem refers to the self-evaluation made by each

individual about themselves and one's attitude towards oneself along a positive-negative dimension.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of information is the process whereby structure, order, and meaning are imposed on the mass of information that is collected in a qualitative research study. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (cited in Netshishive, 2006, p. 55) argue that data analysis issues should be carefully considered when designing a study, since the aim of data analysis is to transform data into an answer to the original research question.

A careful consideration of data analysis strategies will ensure that the design is coherent, as the researcher matches the analysis to a particular type of data for the purposes of the research and to the research paradigm. Marshall and Rossman (cited in Rapmund, 1996, p.119) described this process as "...a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process."

Hermeneutics method was used in this study to analyse data. This method is consistent with both qualitative research and the nature of data collected in this study.

3.9 HERMENEUTIC METHOD

Hermeneutics as a discipline was initially applied in the interpretation of ancient biblical texts (Mill, 2005) and has been named after Hermes, "...the messenger who changed the message to suit the audience" (Rapmund, 1996, pp.119-120). Modern hermeneutics has been developed as a general philosophy of human understanding and interpretation," (Rapmund, 1996, pp.119-120).

The aim of hermeneutics is to 'discover meaning and to achieve understanding' (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991) or to make sense of 'that which is not yet understood'. The idea of the hermeneutic circle suggests that in the interpretation of a text, the meaning of the whole can itself only be understood in respect of its constituent parts. This is conceived as a circular movement between part and whole (Kelly, 1999a, p.409). Hermeneutics is

based on the following assumptions (Rapmund, 2000):

1. People give meaning to what happens to their lives, which is important if others are to understand their behaviour.
2. Meanings can be expressed in different ways, not only verbally.
3. The meaning giving process is informed by the 'immediate context, social structures, personal histories, shared practices, and language' (Netshishive, 2006).
4. The meaning of human action is not a fixed entity, it is constantly being negotiated, and changes evolve over time, in different contexts and for different individuals.
5. The process of interpretation enables the person to make sense of his or her world. However these ideas are informed by the interpreter's values and therefore the notion of "truth" or correspondence to an objective reality, are not important issues in this approach which does not adhere to the belief in an objective reality.

The hermeneutic method does not have a set of prescribed techniques. The following approach has been adapted from Addison (cited in Rapmund, 2000, p.140) and involves the following steps:

- **Familiarisation and immersion**

This step refers to the process whereby the researcher familiarises and immerses himself or herself in the data by re-reading the text a few times over, making notes and summaries (Mill, 2005). In this stage the researcher will be working with texts rather than with the lived experiences. The researcher needs to immerse herself in the world created by the text so that she can make sense of that world. This means becoming very familiar with the text to the point of knowing where particular quotations occur in it, and getting a feel for the overall meaning and the different types of meaning in a text (Kelly, 1999a).

- **Thematising**

This refers to the process of identifying specific principles, themes or general rules

underlying data. Kelly (1999a, p.409) refers to this process as “unpacking”. It starts with listening themes, drawing mind maps and branching notes of all themes that come to mind as the researcher studies the text. It shows connections between themes, sub-themes, sub-categories and clusters of information. This stage is therefore moving towards looking at material “from the outside” (Kelly, 1999, p.410) but still based on what the participants have shared.

- **Coding**

The process of coding entails “breaking down of data into labelled meaningful pieces, with a view to later cluster the ‘bits’ of coded material together under the code heading and further analysing them both as a cluster and in relation to other clusters” (Terre blanche & Kelly, 1999, p.143). In practice, thematising and coding blend into each other because the themes which we are using tend to change in the process of coding as the researcher develops a better understanding of them and how they relate to other themes. Kelly (cited in Mill, 2005) cautioned that researchers should not focus merely on getting information that they are looking for but also to focus on data that does not fit in the identified themes.

- **Elaboration**

In this stage the researcher explores the generated themes more closely. This enables the researcher to gain a fresh view and deeper meaning than was possible from the original coding system. Dialoguing occurs between what the researcher reads and the context in which the participants find themselves. It also occurs between the researcher and the narrative account, her own values, assumptions, interpretations and understandings (Rapmund, 2000).

The researcher maintains a constantly questioning attitude, looking for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, deeper meanings, alternative meanings and changes over time, as she “moves back and forth between individual elements of the text in many cycles, called the ‘hermeneutics spiral’ (Tesch,1990, p.68). “Analysing is a

circular progression between parts and whole, foreground and background, understanding and interpretation, and researcher and narrative account” (Addison, 1992, p.113).

- **Interpretation**

This refers to the written report of the phenomenon being investigated. The report presents the analysed themes as sub-headings. Although research projects normally lead to new questions, all research projects will need to reach a conclusion. Kelly (cited in Mill, 2005) provides a number of pointers to indicate that this point has been reached namely when:

- New thoughts are not contributing to a deeper understanding that has already been developed.
- All questions that have been asked at the beginning of the research have been answered.
- The interpretation matches the data that has been collected.
- A large number of fundamental questions seem to add to the account rather than break it down.

Kelly (1999a , p. 422) mentioned that the researcher should then be able to claim that he/she had exhausted the interpretation of the data and has reached a point where he/she has “...a satisfactory sense of what is going on”.

- **Integration: The final report**

There should be a balance between the particular and the general in the final report. The challenge at this stage is to draw the individual themes together into the final general report which is the “...researcher’s retelling of what research participants told him or her” (Kelly, 1999a p.422). The construction of the experiences shared by the respondents is written in the third person containing both the actual words of the respondents, the notes made by the researcher and the interpretations (Kelly, 1999a).

Therefore this method of data analysis is consistent with the current study as it constructs and narrates these women’s lived experiences. The hermeneutic method is also consistent with the theoretical model of the current study, whose emphasis is on people’s ontology

and epistemology.

3.10 RESEARCHER BIAS, ETHICS AND CREDIBILITY

3.10.1 Researcher bias

Like all research, qualitative research is biased and subjective. A biased interpretation is one that leans too much on preconceptions (including institutional or cultural norms), and not enough on observation (Stiles, 1993).

Investigators cannot eliminate their values and preconceptions, but they work to make them permeable. The qualitative approach to the problem of bias is thus to increase investigator's and reader's exposure to the phenomenon by, for example using intensive interviews, thick descriptions, and triangulation; responsibly searching for negative instances; and repeatedly seeking consensus through peer debriefing and other elements of good practice. It is argued that closer engagement with participants or text in which interpretations are iteratively stated and refined, promotes a dialectical process by which the observations tend to permeate and change the investigator's initial views.

This response to observer bias represents a sharp departure from the traditional scientific view that the possibility of bias invalidates the research findings (Stiles, 1993).

Since the purpose of this study was to investigate battering experiences and how they impact on the lives of women, the researcher had to exercise caution in making interpretations based on the research findings. Consensus of participants' responses could also reflect conformity to the theory and may not necessarily reflect actual experiences of phenomena. As a result, as a researcher it was important to attend to the ethical practice and implication of conducting research.

3.10.2 Ethics

The qualitative researcher's investment in uncovering the insider's view of a situation may present ethical considerations not often confronted by researchers who are dedicated to maintaining an impartial stance with their study participants. The foregoing validity criteria are vulnerable to distortion by investigators, participants' and readers' expectations and values. For example, (participant) self-disclosure and uncovering could reflect selective perception, selective reporting, or self-fulfilling (Stiles, 1993).

In addition, in surveys and other types of qualitative research, informed consent is routinely given at the beginning of the project and extends across the length of data collection. Although an in-depth interview also typically involves informed consent at the beginning of the project, the participant may reveal sensitive material during the course of the interview that was not anticipated at the time of the original agreement. The participant reserves the right to have any material withdrawn from the recorded version of the interview. Therefore, in this study the research participants will be required to sign a document in which they agree to participate in this study out of their own free will with the assurance that their identity would remain anonymous. This agreement also will ensure that confidentiality will be maintained to the extent that the identity of the participants remains anonymous, thus ensuring that the subjects of the study would be protected.

Another ethical consideration is the fact that there may be considerable role ambiguity for researchers and practitioners in clinical settings. As part of the interview process, participants take the interviewer into their confidence and may seek and experience therapeutic effects during the interview process. The researcher is no longer an "objective outsider" but considered a confidant and potential therapist. Qualitative researchers are advised to recognise their limitation and to give careful forethought to the limits of their involvement with participants (Fiese and Bickham, 1988).

3.11 CONCLUSION

Qualitative research paradigm was used in this study as it is consistent with the aims of the study. It provides an opportunity for the researcher to explore the impact of battering on women. This was carried out through the use of the narrative and hermeneutic methods discussed above. This research paradigm provides in-depth information. Data were gathered directly from the participants. Qualitative research was also deemed appropriate because its designs and techniques are more compatible with the assumptions underlying ecosystemic theory. Furthermore, qualitative methods bridge the gap between research, theory and practice (Moon et al., 1990).

In the following chapter the data collected will be presented in the forms of themes. These themes emerged through the narratives women shared about their battering experiences. The data will then be discussed thereafter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter the results from the recorded interviews will be presented and discussed. The term “participant” will be used in the place of real names for ethical purposes. Each participant will be represented by means of a numerical number. Concise background information on each participant will be given. This will be followed by the themes that emerged on the analysis of the interviews. All themes from different participants will be grouped into categories.

The following criteria will be used to provide a brief background of each participant:

- Pattern of abuse,
- Self-concept and self-esteem; and
- Family communication

From the content of each discussion on the above mentioned categories, the themes that emerged will be outlined. It is important to note that not all participants’ entire conversations are reflected in this text. Themes from conversations deemed to be significant were selected. Fully recorded conversations are available on request.

4.1 PARTICIPANT 1

Participant 1 is a 43 year old female and has studied up to grade 9. She was employed as a domestic worker. She was married at age 23 through customary marriage. In her marriage years she had four children with her husband. The children are aged 14, 13, 11, and 9, composed of three girls and a boy. The participant’s period of abuse was nine years. At the time of the interview the abuse was reported to have subsided.

4.1.1 Pattern of abuse

The participant reported that she started experiencing abuse eight months after her

marriage. Initially her husband was emotionally abusive, calling her names and belittling her in front of her female friends. She reported that she was frustrated because she did not know what she did to make her husband so furious with her. This further led to her husband starting to physically attack her, throwing chairs and utensils at her. She further reported that these attacks at times would land her in hospital casualty unit, due to severe injuries. The participant is still married to her husband irrespective of his abusive behaviour. She reported that her husband is still physically abusing her but not as frequent as in the previous years.

4.1.2 Self-concept and self-esteem

According to Hayes and Orrel (1993), self-concept refers to one's self-identity, a schema consisting of an organised collection of beliefs and feelings about oneself, and self-esteem refers to the self-evaluation made by each individual. It is one's attitude towards oneself along a positive-negative dimension (Baron, 2000). In this study, as the participant narrated her experiences, she expressed feelings of inadequacy and being not *“good enough to be a wife but rather just an object to be used”*. As a result her beliefs and perceptions of herself were challenged by constant emotionally abusive statements by her husband. She reported that her husband would tell her that he did not know what qualified her as a woman yet he married her. As a result this might have lowered her self-esteem and contributed to feelings of being devalued and humiliated.

The participant felt ashamed of herself as a woman and mother of her children. She started to undermine herself and distrust her feelings and capabilities to make it through the abusive relationship. Her self-esteem was lowered by the negative and derogatory remarks made by her husband, belittling her and calling her names on a daily basis. In her story she said *“I do not think that I can be a better woman to anyone, it is even difficult for me to go out and meet with other women because I feel less than they are”*. This statement reflects her struggle in being and interacting with other systems due her feelings of inferiority. This is further a reflection of her self-evaluation as negative and the attitude she has about her life as a woman.

4.1.3 Family communication

The interactional pattern between the participant and her husband was characterised by dominance, control, and intimidation. The participant reported that whenever she was to inform her husband that she will going out with other women from the village, to town, he would say to her *“well I do not think you have the time to go out because I married you to be my wife and mother to my children, not sales person”*. By saying this, he seemed to be making her feel inadequate, and worthless. This form of interaction seems to be a reflection of how the husband expressed his dominance in their marriage.

Whenever we are to communicate he would not finish without reminding me how *“weak”* I am, and that I cannot take the initiative without his approval. The participant felt intimidated whenever she wanted to socially interact with other women, she relied on her husband to choose for her where to go. In this way the husband seemed to believe that he had control over her life.

4.2 PARTICIPANT 2

Participant 2 is aged 43 and has a National Higher Diploma in Teaching. She is currently employed as a Primary school teacher. She got married when she was 20 years old through a customary marriage, and she has two boys aged 16 and 14. The participant reported having been abused for more than 13 years and the abuse was reported to be still continuing at the time of the interview.

4.2.1 Pattern of abuse

The participant experienced three forms of abuse that is physical, emotional and psychological abuse. She reported that her husband was physically abusing and assaulting her with fists all the time. Remembering this experience she said *“he used to hit me like I was her boxing opponent”*. She was severely beaten to an extent that she got bruised. The participant reported that when her husband beat her, he would insult her, degrade her status as a woman, mostly telling her how useless she was.

She reported that she felt emotionally attacked and she could not cope. As a result of this, she regarded herself as emotionally abused. As she puts it, *“it was too much for me to manage family life because I was always emotionally drained”*. The participant reported that the abuse got out of control when she was hospitalised and treated for depression four years ago. She said *“psychologically I got affected, it started with tension headaches then later I could not cope at school because I was never involved with my work and school children”*. She spoke of this experience as being the worst that her husband has ever done to her.

4.2.2 Self-concept and self-esteem

The participant experience of emotional abuse seemed to have had a major impact on her attitude towards life. When she spoke of how her husband degraded her womanhood, she said *“I felt useless and helpless; it was as if I was not there for him”*. She spoke of how her husband used to value, love, and respect her before their marriage and that in recent years he has changed for the worst. *“I have stopped making efforts to keep her happy and to take care of myself; whenever I am standing in front of the mirror I do not see the beauty in me but just pain”*.

As a result of this, her self-esteem was negatively affected as compared to before she got married. She also expressed feelings of being ashamed of herself because her husband had the tendency to insult her while the children were listening and watching. She further said *“I felt like I could just vanish whenever he is to start insulting me with the children standing there”*. The participant reported that she feels uncomfortable being around other women because she does not want her husband to embarrass her.

4.2.3 Family Communication

Communication within this family was mainly characterized by control. The participant reported that she had no room to express her thoughts. She had no say in every decision making relating to their family affairs. She said *“whenever he is to talk to me about something, I am not permitted to respond, if I do he would start fighting me”*. The participant is expected to remain submissive to her husband’s commands. This was reflected when she reported *“he likes saying to me he does not need to remind me that he is the ‘head’ of the house”*. This utterance implied that he is above everyone and no one questions his authority. The effect of this on her was submission. One can say that the communication between them was not in a two-way dialogical exchange but rather flows in a one-way direction. This can be seen as not facilitating the family and individual growth.

4.3 PARTICIPANT 3

The participant is a 44 years old woman. She never studied further than grade 7 as a result of family problems. She has only one child, a girl aged 23 who has a child as well. The participant got married at the age of 19, and the marriage was arranged by both the maternal and paternal families. She has been exposed to abuse for ten years. The participant at the time of the interview reported that the abuse was still occurring.

4.3.1 Pattern of abuse

The participant’s experience of battering was mainly dominated by abusive verbal remarks. She was verbally abused by her husband through the use of vulgar words, being called names and belittling. She reported that she felt emotionally hurt and affected by these verbal attacks. As a result of these insults, she was both verbally and emotionally hurt by her husband. She seemed highly emotional when she said *“his inhumane insults were so harsh that I wished to die because I felt so invisible and useless, what can I say?”* She seemed to have experienced prolonged pain, because she spoke of herself as being there only for her daughter and grandchildren. The experience of this participant

differs with those of participants 1, 2, and 4 in that she was not physically abused but the impact of the abuse she experienced had similar effects and feelings such as being dominated.

4.3.2 Self- concept and self- esteem

The participant described herself as *“having been changed”*. She reported that she was a very confident woman, participating in community outreach for the aged. She further spoke of how she used to feel good when with other people. She said *“I used to think highly and positively about my future and life itself until the monster took that away from me”*. She referred to her husband as the *“monster”* to express how powerful and scary he was towards her in their marriage. The changes the participant pointed out showed that her self-concept had been eroded and her self-esteem had been impacted on by the abuse.

4.3.3 Family communication

Communication within this family according to the participant has never been effective. She reported that communication between her and the husband was mainly characterized by dominance and control. She reported that since she got married her husband has never stopped telling her *“I am the main switch”* meaning that he is in charge, in control of everything and everyone in *“his house”* must listen to him and do as he commands. The phrase *“I am the main switch”* can also be seen and interpreted as a form of a controlling manoeuvre in their relationship. A main switch is regarded as a power device and this is how he saw himself.

The participant also reflected on how her husband *“enjoyed”* making statements that gives him power over her and hence she would feel powerless. Whenever they are to discuss family matters he would not give her the opportunity to have a say: *“he wanted to be the only person talking althrough whereas I listen, he dominated whatever conversation we had”*. The participant’s experience might have also contributed to her self-concept and self-esteem being eroded. The relationship was characterised by one-dimensional form of communication, with the husband in the control position. This

controlling position is commonly referred to as the “one-up” position in systems therapeutic contexts. This is what is described as a complementary definition of the relationship (Haley, 1963).

4.4 PARTICIPANT 4

The participant is a 45 year old retired nursing sister. She got married when she was 20 and has been married for 25 years. The participant reported that she has twins aged 21 and a grandchild. She got married through customary law. The participant had been exposed to abuse for twelve years. At the time of the interview, the participant reported that the abuse was still occurring.

4.4.1 Pattern of abuse

The participant reported how she was misled in her marriage by misinterpreting her husband’s abusive behaviour as a sign of love and appreciation towards her. She said “*I thought that he only hit me because he loved me and he felt jealous that I looked pretty and other men would advance their interests*”. She reported that her husband would hit her body against the wall; he would also hit her with his fists until she got bruised.

In the process of these abusive acts he would keep on mentioning that being a ‘nurse’ meant nothing to him and that when she entered his yard, she must de-role. She further reported that he started calling her names and insulting her. The husband was not only physically abusing her but verbally abusing her as well. As a result, she might have felt emotionally affected because she said “*I struggled to cope at work and that led to my early retirement*”. She was clearly put into a difficult position, that is, that of dividing or behaving in two different roles. This put her in a paradox, hence she was immobilised.

4.4.2 Self-concept and self-esteem

The participant's inability to cope with the abuse was reflected when she decided to take an early retirement as a nursing sister. She expressed her feelings of inadequacy and not worthy of anything positive in life. She viewed herself as useless in her role as a wife and as a result she did not see the importance of being and helping other people in her profession. The participant said *"what kind of a nurse comes to work with bruises every morning? I felt very useless and degrading the status of women by not being the perfect wife to my husband"*. This has been a traumatic experience in that the participant exposure to abuse in her family impacted on her life outside the family as well. As a result she retired from work because she said *"I just could not take it anymore people staring at me and at times asking me questions I could not honestly answer"*. The participant's self-esteem was affected because she moved from being the confident nurse to a retired nurse who is hiding her pain and bruises on her face. She spoke of how her husband *"deconstructed her face"* because she referred to herself before the abuse as very *"pretty"*.

4.4.3 Family communication

The form of communication pattern in this family was characterized by intimidation, derogatory, belittling remarks and dominance. The participant spoke of how her husband constantly made negative and insulting remarks about her profession. These negative connotations made her doubt her capabilities. She reported that her husband would always say to her *"you think people are impressed about you being the only nurse in this village, you are wrong"*. He never appreciated the kind of work I do years after our marriage.

He first started complaining about my uniform that *"I always want my uniform to look pure white, is it because I am seeing other men?"* She further mentioned that he got very jealous of her, *"I felt intimidated to an extent that I had to retire for the sake of our marriage"*. Even after her retirement, the participant reported that she never had a say in family matters, he was the one running all the decision making and driving her around as

he please with his commands. The communication style in this relationship was one-way; there was no reciprocity between the participant and her husbands.

CONCLUSION

From the above description of different contextual experiences, it is evident that abuse not only is a social problem, but an epistemological and philosophical difficulty. The philosophy and epistemology of many communities on women, which is biased towards women, also create a fertile ground for women battering. Women abuse is not a selective phenomenon designated to a certain population, for example, the poor as compared to the middle class population. What has been significant from the outlined background of each participant is the age at which they got married. The participants were married at a relatively “younger” age and this seems to have a direct correlation with dependency observed with all participants. It seems getting married at a “younger” age predisposed participants to spousal dependency. When they got employed (e.g. participants 2 and 4), their husbands could not shift from the provider role, hence they were threatened by change in their wife’s financial and social status. Unable to deal with these changes, husbands resorted to abuse as a way of maintaining the status quo.

Another significant factor is in relation to the pattern of abuse the participants experienced. Despite individual differences in terms of the kind of abuse they experienced (as Participants 1, 2, and 4 differ with Participant 3), all patterns of abuse had the same effects. These abusive acts took away intimacy and love within their marriages. As a result these women might be staying in their marriages for other reasons such as children, and not for their emotional needs. These effects will be illustrated in terms of themes that will be categorised looking at their similarities and variations in the next section.

4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this section, the researcher will categorise and discuss common themes from the four participants' experiences of abuse. Common themes will be grouped as convergent themes. Themes that differ among participants will also be grouped as divergent themes. The themes will be grounded according to the excerpts from the recorded interviews.

4.6 CONVERGENT THEMES

4.6.1 Dominance

According to Wilson (1997), dominance means having control and the ability to surpass. In the current study dominance refers to the feeling of being over-powered and influenced. All women who participated in this study shared a similar feeling of being dominated in their marital lives, and unable to reach out. They experienced their husbands' abusive behaviour as inhibiting in as far as the sense of self is concerned. Participant 1 talked of how she lost herself in her marriage because her husband was dominating and thus felt overwhelmed. When she said *"at times I tended to feel unable to breathe, needing some space or air where I can express myself and feel myself"*. This reflects how she lost her sense of self and rather lived a life headed by her husband. *"He is full of demands, commands, and would instruct without giving me a chance to comment"*. Furthermore this suggests that the participant's life evolved around her husband's ideal way of what a wife should be. On the other hand Participant 2 said that *"whenever he is to interact something to me I am not permitted to respond, if I do he would start fighting me"*. In this case her husband appears to not make efforts to engage her in conversations, especially family matters. *"I remember when we had to decided on buying a house and I wanted to make a suggestion, he just said to me "I will deal with that yours is too cook", and that was it"*.

Participant 2 reported that she felt useless in her marriage as she was never involved in matters concerning their family life. Her husband's hands were full of all the family responsibilities; he wanted to run all matters, *"it was as if I am not his wife"*. The

participant experienced dominance because she was not given the opportunity to be a wife and mother in her family, by her husband. The similar experience was shared by Participant 3 when she reported that since she got married her husband had never stopped telling her *“I am the main switch”* meaning that he is in charge, in control of everything and every one in *“his house”* must listen to him and do as he commands.

In this situation the participant was made to feel worthless and dominated by her husband’s statements. By saying *“I am the main switch,”* he clearly said I run everything, what he says goes. He defined himself as the pivot around which everything revolved. The participant further spoke of how impactful the *“main switch”* phrase impacted on her. She said *“by him saying that to me I felt dominated already that I cannot do thing about anything in our family”*. Her expression of this experience was coupled with feelings of anger as observed from her facial expression although the interview session.

In the case of Participant 4, the effects of her husband’s dominance were affective. They were so intense that she retired from her profession as a nurse. The constant abuse she suffered in the hands of her husband overwhelmed her. She trusted her husband’s remarks about her life and profession. She believed everything her husband said, and for the sake of their marriage she had to retire, *“I had to sacrifice my job for my family’s sake”*.

As a result, the dominance she experienced shaped her aspirations about life; she got derailed from pursuing what she liked. Hence, the participant’s feelings of being dominated in their lives might have been experienced as their lack of control. In this case they had to device strategies to counter the control within their relationships.

4.6.2 Control versus loss of control

According to The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004), control means having the power to make someone or something do what you want. In the context of this study, control refers to a situation in a person’s life whereby one feels in charge of his or her life and being capable of handling situations as they would like them to be, whereas loss of

control is when the person feels not to be in charge and having the power to handle a particular situation.

According to participant 1, she reported that she never thought about control issues in her marriage. With her experience of being both physically and emotionally abused, she thought that if she succumbs to her husband's commands she would keep the situation between them under control. To the contrary, the opposite occurred. By keeping quiet he escalated the abusive behaviour towards her. The participant said *"I used to spend my weekends with him at home without going out to visit friends, cook and do all other home chores, but he would not appreciate my efforts. I had to do all that to minimise the fight between us, I wanted to keep things under control"*.

According to participant 1, despite her efforts to please her husband the fight never stopped, rather it got even worse. Her husband became more aggressive by the day. As a result of this she felt as not being part of the marriage. She felt that there is nothing more left for her to do and gave up. *"I realised that there is nothing I can do to make things better between us, I felt powerless and frustrated"*. This was a reflection of loss of control in maintaining her relationship with her husband.

Participant 2 and 3 shared similar experiences due to the guilt of not being able to meet the needs of their husbands. They also made efforts to please their husbands and to do as they were commanded, but the feedback they got was that no matter what they do, it did not make a difference. Their experience of control was similar in that with Participant 2, her husband was always telling her *"I am the head of the house"* that is, he is the man in control of their relationship. The participant as she spoke about her understanding of this phrase she said *"by her saying those words to me constantly it made me feel useless, no matter what I do it had to run through by him first for approval"*.

Participant 3 mentioned that her husband also had the tendency of telling her that *"I am the main switch"*, that is, whatever he says, it had to be adhered to. Her husband presented himself as the man in control of everything including his wife. In this sense it is

clear that her wife was also seen as a device, an object to be mechanically controlled. Both Participants experienced feelings of lack of control as their husbands communicated the power they had over them. Husbands created the impression that they were in control irrespective of their efforts to succumb to their commands. As a result their experience was coupled by feelings of helplessness and frustration.

In the case of Participant 4, her experience and response of being physically and emotionally abused can be regarded as “extreme”. According to the participant, her husband’s abusive behaviour was impacting on both her family, personal, and career life. She reported *“I could not cope at home with my husband’s behaviour, he made me feel like was selfish and only prioritising my profession over family life”*.

As a result the participant thought of taking an early retirement, with the aim of containing the family crises. She thought that if she retires her husband will be happy and their marriage as well will work out. According to her, she thought her retirement option would bring happiness in their relationship, eliminating the possibility of conflicts and fights. Months after her retirement she reported that her husband’s abusive behaviour escalated. Because she was now unemployed she felt that she had lost control of the marriage. She had to depend on her husband financially and that frustrated her a lot. Consequently, what the participant thought would be the solution to the abuse, actually served the purpose of maintaining the abuse. In this sense, the perceived solution became the problem.

Taking a closer look at these participants’ responses to abuse and their attempts to maintain their marriages, their efforts were rendered useless. They wanted to control the abusive situation, and in turn their husband’s counteracted on it through more escalated abusive means, hence they lost the control. Clearly, the participant’s attempts were ineffective, because they were at the same logical level of interaction with the husband’s physical and emotional abuse. This interactional pattern might have contributed to the participants’ ambivalent feelings of being connected and disconnected to their husbands.

4.6.3 Connection versus disconnection

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004) defines connection as a relationship between things. In the context of this study, connection refers to the feeling of being part of and linked to a particular relational or interactional process. Disconnection refers to the feeling of being excluded and not being part of a particular relational or interactional process.

According to Participant 1 and Participant 4, their feeling of being connected and wanting to connect with their husband was similar to the theme of being in control of their marital life. In sacrificing their social lives to meet the demands of their husbands, this was seen as an ideal situation for them to connect with their husbands. They wanted to make their husbands feel connected to them. According to the Bible's version, marriage means being one, joined together till death do you apart, these women struggled to maintain that connection and oneness within their marriages. The Bible's interpretation and understanding can be seen to be limiting in terms of diversity because not all people view marriage as being one. For example, in some cultures people marry for child rearing, and not necessarily for being one.

Participant 1 reported on how she cut her ties with her female friends to stop him from abusing her. She said *"I remember during the festive season we had to go on an outing with other women in our social club, we were about to leave when he suddenly instructed me to come out of the taxi telling me that I am not going anywhere"*. When she related the experience to the researcher she was tearful, saying that even to this day it still hurts her. This experience is also intertwined with the theme of loss of control as the husband takes away the participant's freedom and autonomy. The participant in this case might have succumbed to her husband's control. On the other hand, in her efforts to feel connected to her husband, she was disconnected from other social systems, for example, from the women in her social club.

Participant 4 sacrificed her career to maintain control in her marriage and to avoid making her husband's feeling of jealousy towards her. She also used this as a strategy to remain connected to her husband. The onset of this strategy was maintained by her worry over the bruises she incurred through the fights she had with her husband. She reported that *"I just could not take it anymore people staring at me and at times asking me questions I could not honestly answer"*. *"I was badly bruised"*. As a result she might have disconnected herself from her career and the society she served. This can be seen as an "imposed" self-isolating style, because it was the husband's abusive behaviour that got her bruised.

The disconnection further played out during the dialogue the researcher had with the participant as illustrated in the following excerpt;

Participant: *I was badly bruised.*

Researcher: *How bad would you describe the pain you suffered as a result of the bruises?*

Participant: *I do not want to think about that, hmm!*

Researcher: *What makes it difficult for you to think about the experience?*

Participant: *Can we talk about my husband; he has been an awful husband towards me!*

The pattern outlined above was also dominant in the interaction between participant 4 and the researcher. The participant's interactional style of self-disconnecting became apparent during the interview.

On the other hand, looking at Participant's 2 and Participant's 3 experiences of disconnection there are similar patterns they share that might have led to the disconnection. Participant 2 shared with the researcher on how her husband dominated their marriage to an extent that there was no communicational exchange between them. Despite her efforts to connect with him, she reported that her husband continued to treat her like his *"boxing opponent"*. When one looks at the word *'opponent'*, one can think of someone not in relation with or not part of the other. In the context of this study it can be

inferred to as disconnection. The participant's husband might have further made his wife feel disconnected by constantly telling her "*he is the head of the house*" and she must just follow. From this case, there was no dialogical engagement, but only the husband's imposed reality.

The use of phrases to make the others feel disconnected was also evident in Participant's 3 experience of abusive behaviour. She reported how she felt *invisible* in her marriage due to her husband's statements. According to the participant, her husband would say to her that "*this is my house whether you bought a door or its frame*". As a result, the participant felt as not being part of their marriage and felt so invisible and disconnected. Her husband was leading their marriage to a '*cal de sac*' as the participant reported. All participants might have experienced the status quo of their marriages as on the verge of collapsing. As a result this might have contributed to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty within their marriages.

4.6.4 Security versus insecurity

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004) defines security as the state of not being likely to lose something or to fail. Security in this study refers to the feeling of being safe in a relationship and insecurity refers to the feeling of not being safe due to lack of security in a relationship. Systematically, when looking at the ecology of relationships the theme of security and insecurity is inevitable, whether one is in a dating relationship or married. The difference can be in terms of its level, how prominent it is, which may vary from one relationship to the next.

All four participants shared a similar feeling of being secure in their marriages before and during the abuse. They had felt that by virtue of being married and having given birth to their children their future was secured with their husbands. The participants seemed confident about their marriage contracts to their husbands. Participant 3 reported "*we share a child together and this child is his blood*". In the case of Participant 2, she spoke of how her 'boys' meant everything in her husband's family. "*They reflect their father and his family name will grow as a result*". All these women expressed similar feelings

of children being valued in their marriages. On the hand they also felt insecure in varied circumstances.

Both Participant 2 and Participant 3 felt insecure due to their husbands' authoritative communication styles. Participant 2 spoke of how her husband referred to himself as the *'head of the house'* whereas in the case of Participant 3 her husband referred to their home as *'his house'*. These words put them in a position whereby they felt that they are actually not secure. They had thoughts and fears about being homeless with their children. As a result they felt that they had to hold on to their marriages and husbands in order to feel secure.

In the case of Participant 1, she felt that due to her marriage the status quo, divorce was inevitable. She reported how she would constantly think of her husband divorcing her and at the same time rationalising. She thought that because of the children he would not divorce her. When she said *"he would not leave his children to suffer"* it was as if the children were a priority to her husband than her. She might have used that thought to hold on to her husband. Similar to Participant 4, participant 1 also felt that she needed to hold on to the marriage as she was now dependent on the husband. She reflected on her retirement as *"having lost a weapon to free myself and to support myself financially"*.

For these women, their marriages were their security. Contrary to this security illusion, the marital context made them feel extremely insecure. This theme of security versus insecurity links us to review and explore the position these women occupied within their marriages. As outlined, the themes of dominance, control versus loss of control bring to the fore the question of the how these women were valued or regarded in their marriages. As a result this will lead us to the theme of feeling degraded.

4.7 DIVERGENT THEME

4.7.1 Feeling of degradation

In The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004) degradation is defined as showing disrespect to humanity. Degradation in the context of the current study refers to the feeling of being treated in a way that shows no respect. The three participants expressed feelings of not being treated with the kind of respect women deserve basically. They reported how they felt not appreciated by their husbands. Participant 1 said that *“at times I felt like I was a five year old child being reprimanded at school. My husband never communicated with me with respect as he would insult me all the when talking to me, I felt embarrassed in front of my children”*.

In the case of Participant 2, she expressed her feeling of being disrespected in terms of not being connected to her husband. She said that *“there was no communication flow between us because whenever he talks to me, he expected me to be quite and not to respond. I felt cut off from him and as his wife I thought it was disrespectful of him to exclude me and to make decisions without asking for my opinion first”*.

On the other hand, Participant 3 experience of disrespect was behaviourally played out. She reported that when her husband started abusing alcohol, he used to come home with his girlfriends in their home. The Participant feeling of being disrespected was evident when she said *“I would ask him why is he bringing home other women whilst I am there as his wife, and he would say to me ‘I do not need your permission to go out with other women and to remind you this is my house and I shall bring whoever I like’; “I felt hurt and disrespected, but because I loved him I would always forgive him”*.

Irrespective of the severity of the impact of the abuse these women suffered, they both are still within their marriages with the belief that one day things will be alright. They also communicated the respect they have to having agreed to marry their husbands. They talked of showing respect to their husbands’ families. On the basis of the above discussed

themes, the researcher will further summarise how the emerged themes and the reviewed literature converge.

4.8 SUMMARY OF THEMES AND REVIEWED LITERATURE

4.8.1 African traditional thought on women

This study was carried out within the African context, in specifically, the South African context. In the discussion to follow, the reviewed literature on African thought on women will be used to explain the participants' experiences of battering in relation to the emerged themes.

Edet and Ekeya (1989) posited that Africa's traditional societies were by and large not as fair to women as we are told or would like to think. They argued on how women were regarded as second-hand citizens, and often used and handled like some form of personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. This can be further argued that women, by the virtue of being married to their husbands *'belonged'* to their husbands. As a result of this, their husbands had the power and control over their lives. In the case of the participants, the control they experienced from their husband was due to their inability to feel in control of their relationship. Furthermore the control was also overtly communicated to the participants, for example, these husbands would say *"I am the main switch"* or *"I am the head of the house"*. This interactional pattern played out as exerting control over women; hence the women in turn felt the loss of control over their relationship with their husbands.

According to Lebaka-ketshabile (1999), among the Basotho there is a saying that *mosadi ke ngwana* which means that that a woman or wife is a child. She never matures to an extent of being capable of being in power over men. There are no important decisions she can make in the absence of her husband or any other male figure. As a result a woman had to be under male authority at all times. This argument can be viewed as a form of male dominance over women. This has been seen as a pattern in the participant's experience of battering. They experienced their husband's abusive behaviour inhibiting

their sense of self. As Participant 1 reflected, she felt lost in her marriage because her husband was dominating and thus felt overwhelmed. She said *“He is full of demands, commands, and would instruct without giving me a chance to comment”*.

This is a clear indication that the man had to make sure that the woman does what she is “supposed” to do and that she behaves appropriately based on male standards. This appropriateness was also to be decided upon by men based on their preferences and choices Lebaka-ketshabile (1999). Another important preference rather the role of women is to bear children, most preferably boys in order to perpetuate the family name. A woman who cannot have children is considered an insult to her family, her husband’s family and to the community at large (Lebaka-ketshabile, 1999). As a result, as the participants reflected on their security and insecurity, they talked of how secure their marriages were because of having given birth to their children for their husbands. In their own expressions the participants said *“we share a child together and this child is his blood”* and *“They reflect their father and his family name will grow as a result”*. This is a clear indication of how they felt connected to their husbands, and their husbands’ families having given birth to their children.

According to Gyekye (1987), in traditional Africa the wife is not the husband’s but belongs to the whole family. This postulation can further raise questions about its implication on the level of intimacy between the husband and wife. Does their marriage exist to meet certain cultural expectations? Other cultural expectations include children born in the family where the wife has to continuously bear children to be regarded as a ‘woman’ by her husband’s family.

Therefore, the themes that emerged can be argued as an indication of the role played by the African traditional practices on women. It is because of the power, control, and authority given to men that predisposes women to battering. This can be seen further as impacting on the women’s attitudes and beliefs about themselves. Their view of themselves is challenged and thwarted both on a personal and psychological level. For example, in the case of Participant 4 who took an early retirement as a nurse to meet her

husband's standards of living. It is therefore important for one to be critical of the context within which battering occurs. This involves acknowledging and appreciating the cultural backgrounds within which battering plays out. In the case of this study, the participants were African traditional women, hence the culture and the patriarchal system in South Africa was relevant as it seeks to address and give an understanding on the position of both men and women within the South African context. It is also important to address the relevance of the ecosystemic approach, as it served as the basic theoretical framework for the current study.

4.9 Ecosystemic approach

According to Becvar and Becvar (1996), the family may be viewed as system of interacting individuals and relationship that exist between members. The family is part of suprasystem as it encompasses individuals, multiple mutual needs, communication patterns, commitments and loyalties – a view shared by Cahn (1996). As a result, families rely on each other to balance the task maintaining the family structure while adapting to internal and external changes.

The ecosystemic approach does not ignore contributory factors to battering. These factors include for example, socio-economic factors, stress, social isolation, one's family of origin experiences, or marital conflict are not thought to cause battering (Cahn, 1996). They rather enhance the likelihood that men will use violence and the family will organise itself around the battering as a strategy for relating to significant others (as in the case of the participants). Anderson and Goolishian (1992) believe that human life is constructed in personal and family narratives that maintain both process and meaning in individual's lives. These narratives are said to be constructed in social interaction over time. In this study, the abuse that all participants experienced can also be viewed as constructed realities with these families. Abuse in this sense is therefore a form of a narrative in the marriage. It can be argued that this narrative is an ineffective form of communication. The intention however, it is not to labour on the ineffectiveness or effectiveness of the communication, but rather, to understand its meaning.

The sociocultural systems in which people live in are the product of social interaction and not the other way round (Bitter & Corey, 2001). As a result, when a family experiences abuse, it is often stuck in a dialogic system that has a unique language, meaning and process related to the identified problem. Therefore, from the ecosystemic approach, the therapist takes a not knowing stance and uses curiosity to create a new story. Therapy is another conversational system that becomes therapeutic through its problem organising and problem dissolving nature (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). The intent of conversation is not to challenge the narrative (in this study, abuse) of the clients, but to facilitate the telling and retelling of the story until opportunities for new meaning and new stories develop: “telling one’s story is a representation of experience; it is constructing history in the present” (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p 27).

According to White (1992) a dominant culture is designed to perpetuate viewpoints, processes, and stories that serve those who will benefit from that culture. On the other side that may work against the freedom and functionality of the individual and the family. Families therefore incorporate the dominant cultural narratives about what a family should be and to the extent that problems can be met and handled within a narrative structure. When the dominant story loses its power to meet the needs and demands of the family life, then the family has a problem. For example, the saying *‘monna ke selepe o lala a adimisiwa bosigo’* (meaning that as a wife one is not supposed to ask the whereabouts of her husband), and *‘monna ke tlhogo ya lelapa’* (man is the head of the house) were dominant stories for the family of participant 2, 3, and 4.

Ecosystemically therefore abuse occurs in a social context in which a number of factors are in operation. This includes the definition of context as abusive, the expectations and attributions of everybody present in the situation, and the interpersonal factors of each individual involved. The ecosystemic approach does not see an individual (husband or wife) as a bad person in the family. Rather, the entire family has the opportunity to examine the interactional patterns that characterises the unit and to participate in finding the solution. Abuse from the ecosystemic approach can be understood as a ritual around which certain behaviours organise themselves. For these husbands in order to assert

themselves they maintain the status quo, that is, they continue to exercise the dominant role.

4.10 Researcher's reflection

My experience of dialoguing with these women was that the women seemed to be having difficulties in interacting and relating their stories to the researcher. They seemed not to trust the researcher as they spoke of how intrusive the dialogue may be. As a result, this evoked in the researcher feelings of uncertainty and anxiousness. The concern was mainly on the impact of the feelings on the research process. It was with this awareness that the researcher was able to contain the process.

As they narrated their experiences, participants provided the researcher with a context whereby she can reflect on her beliefs and experience about battering. This helped the researcher to comprehend some of the struggles experienced by battered women. Contrary to the researcher's initial fears and anxiety, what the researcher appreciated in these narratives was that these women appreciated the space the researcher provided for them to talk about their battering experiences. They also expressed how they found it difficult to talk to their husbands, as a result the researcher was also observant to any behavioural or physiological reactions evoked by the intensity of the dialogues. As a result, the interviewing process was contained.

Concluding remarks

Abuse as a phenomenon of social concern can be viewed as detrimental to the discourse of human relationships. In relationships, numerous contextual factors need to be taken into consideration, for example, one's epistemology, the role played by individual's cultural backgrounds. The exploration of woman battering and its impact thereof has brought to the fore the unveiled secrecy of abusive relationships. The communicated experiences of battering by the participants seemed not only to be a reflection of their experiences, but rather in their narratives their husbands' experiences within their marriages seemed to be reflected as well. From the language used by the abuser, one can discern that psychologically abusive men are the ones feeling inadequate, insecure, and

threatened by the position women occupy. Hence, they assert themselves through their abusive behaviours.

As a result of this abusive communicative pattern, the participants seemed to have developed some ambivalence towards their husbands, that is, wanting to be with their husbands, though not wanting to be with them, yet being with them. This behavioural pattern as a response to abuse has been ineffective, and to have further maintained the abuse. In this sense, the maintenance of the abuse and women staying within abusive marriages can be regarded as serving a function. Within the South African context, the participants' cultural practices seemed to have been influential. Among the Sotho speaking there is a saying that *'lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi'* meaning that once a woman gets married she has to live forever with her husband despite the difficulties, and that is where she has to die. This form of practice seems to also to be contributing in shaping women's perceptions about whether to stay in abusive relationships or not. These women also had to bear in mind that in their culture *'go tlhala'* (to divorce) is seen as a taboo; therefore they had to remain with their husbands.

These abusive marriages are viewed as inhibitory to women's needs and interests. It further takes away one's pride and self-respect; as a result it leads women to experience feelings of low-esteem and low self-concept.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

From the findings presented in Chapter 4, it is evident that there are multiple factors contributing to the abuse of South African women. The current study established that women who are abused are prone to developing negative self concepts. Regardless of the period and pattern of abuse the effects are similar, hurtful and affect the self concept of the victim negatively. Research has shown that violence against women is pervasive, systemic, and global and knows no race, age, level of education, class, political, or cultural barriers.

Meta-reflection

This study has also unveiled and addressed the cultural and historical influences that seemed to play a role in the exacerbation and maintenance of women battering. These influences were understood based on the exploration of the African traditional and the western perspectives on women as discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, the ecosystemic approach adopted provided this study with a broader understanding of the contextual facets breeding violence. As a result the interpersonal dynamics of the participants' families was explored. The implementation of the narrative and hermeneutic approaches allowed the participants to tell their own lived narratives. The dialogical nature of these approaches exposed and brought to the fore the complexities embodied in the communication and interpersonal patterns of abusive relationships. Therefore, it is clear according to the social constructionists that epistemologically and ecologically an abuser and the abused become part of the system as collaborators because they engage in conversation within the battering social context

From the narratives in Chapter 4, battering experiences did have a negative impact on the abused women's self-concept. Although the current study was not inclusive of men, it is

important to note that the battering episodes were also significant in the batterers' lives. From the narratives of the participants, batterers seemed to be abusive in order to assert themselves against women; this was evident in cases wherein women were independent and self-reliant. One can discern that the abusive behaviour served the purpose, at least for men, to be in control and dominating in their relationships.

In this concluding chapter the researcher will evaluate the strengths and limitations of this study. This will also encompass the recommendations based on the findings of the study.

5.2 Strengths of the study

The following are the strengths of the study as guided by the research process:

- The interviews were voluntary and the researcher used indigenous languages which the participants could understand. The participants' language of preference was used by the researcher.
- The researcher and participants shared the same black indigenous background.
- Qualitative research is more meaningful than the use of questionnaires as a result of its in-depth acquisition of data.
- The study unveiled issues that may not be apparent to the majority of psychologists due to their western-oriented background.

5.3 Limitations of the study

It was difficult to get participants for the study as most women did not regard themselves as abused or ever been abused. Participants felt that some questions were too personal and intrusive. The study was not broad enough as it was limited to women and not inclusive of men, and should have also included the background information of the participants such as their family of origin, cultural values, and their childhood upbringing.

Another limitation relates to the validity that surrounds qualitative research. The self-reporting methods of gathering data and the language used are subject to interpretation errors and unintended distortions of what is reported. However, it has been generally

accepted that because of the shame in South African society linked with being abused, distortions that lessen the abuse are more common than those that escalate the extent of abuse in intimate relationships. Due to the limited nature of the current study, participants' partners were not included, which made it complex to comprehend abusive episodes between men and men.

The above outlined limitations are balanced by the rich multi-textured data that emerged from the interviews. The approach adopted in the current study served the purpose of the study, which was to explore the Self-concepts of battered women.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Community and Government level

The following recommendations are made emanating from the research findings:

- The society needs educational programmes and workshops on gender based violence As this research was being conducted there was a campaign of 16 days of activism against violence against women and children in South Africa and the campaign highlighted the need for men to be involved in this reconstruction and deconstruction of the concept of violence and its different forms and levels of manifestations..
- The government should:
 - fund and set up programmes to research about violence against women and other gender related incidents. These programmes should fully involve men as part of the co-creators of this reality.
 - ensure that gender equality issues form part of school curriculum at primary through to high school level, to socialise both girls and boys to issues of diversity in a dialogical learning context;

- provide counselling services for abusers and the abused;
- support communities, clinics, family planning centres, and other groups to run programs and campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women. This campaign must deal with the meanings associated with such violent behaviour; and
- establish training programmes on interpersonal and communication skills for couples prior and post marriage.

5.4.2 Therapy level

In the current study, the researcher did not suggest any specific approach as more useful than the other. It is important for the therapist to recognise diversity and to shape therapy to fit the client's world. This includes taking into account the social and cultural context of the client and the way these contexts affect women and men engaged in the abusive behaviour.

Therapists in offering treatment should include the whole family and take into consideration the roles prescribed within the family. For example, in the African culture, there is a hierarchical way of communication between men and women. This form of communication can have an impact on the family system and reduce the possibility for psychosocial development. Therefore it is also important when conducting therapy (couple's therapy) to bear in mind that the narrated experiences have been told and re-told for some time, as a result they may be reshaped into different stories.

Important to note is the emotional involvement of men in the South African culture. Most men have been socialised not to openly express their feelings as this may be perceived as a sign of weakness. This can be further illustrated by the saying that "*monna o lelela ka fa gare*" meaning that a man does not show his suffering or pain but rather has to suffer in silence. Therefore it might be difficult for the therapist to understand the abuser's side of the story. As a result taking a "one-down" position and allowing the man (in couple's therapy) to occupy a "one-up" position might facilitate the therapy process. The

inclusion of men in therapy will also help in addressing the issue of control and dominance in order to change the patterns of abuse.

As Mills (1998, p.22) argues,

No intervention that takes power away from the survivor can possibly foster her recovery, no matter how much it appears to be in her immediate best interest.

Good therapists are those who validate experiences of their clients and help them take control of their lives rather than trying to control them.

5.4.2 Research implications

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that future research studies on women be inclusive of men. This can be seen to be broadening the field of exploring, observing and understanding violent patterns in marriages and families. As this study did not include men, there seemed to be a gap in comprehending the interpersonal dynamics at play between men and women. Conceptualising and understanding women battering in a linear-problem-solution fashion have been advanced by many theories and studies for many decades. This approach has failed to curb women battering. A more inclusive and ecologically sensitive praxis reconstruct and deconstruct realities about violent relational patterns between marital couples. This form of approach is consistent with the ecosystemic paradigm in viewing an individual not in isolation but within his or her ecology of relationship networks. As a result, one cannot work with battered women without exploring their relationship within the context in which they live.

The inclusion of the nuclear and extended family members is also recommended to understand the behavioural and interactional patterns in a particular family. The reason for this is that violence against women impacts on both the family system and the community at large. It is therefore important to consider the problem maintaining behaviours that exacerbates violence in the family system.

5.4.3 CONCLUSION

The current study, through qualitative research has explored a group of black women's battering experiences and factors that are contributory to abuse. The result presented highlighted both convergent and divergent themes experienced by abused women. As discussed in Chapter 4, despite women's efforts to situate themselves in their marriages, their efforts were rendered ineffective by their husbands. Therefore emphasis has to be put on education and awareness in order to change the pattern.

Out of the furnished narratives of the four participants in the study, the researcher hopes that the information provided will contribute to the body of future research on battered women. For as long as women remain in oppressive and dehumanising conditions, the elimination of patterns of abuse will bear no fruits for both research and social stability.

References

- Abrahams, N. Jewkes, R. Laubsher, R. (1999). *“I do not believe in democracy in the home”*. Men on relationship with and abuse of women. Medical Research Council Technical Report, Medical Research Council: Tygerberg.
- Addison, R.B. (1992). Grounded hermeneutic research. In V.J. Rapmund (ed.). *Enhancing student’s personal resources through narrative*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Anderson, H, & Goolishian H. (1992). The client is the expert: A not Knowing approach to therapy. In S. McNamee & K.J Gergen (eds.). *Therapy as social construction*, pp 25-39. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Anderson, S.A. & Schlossberg, M.C. (1999). Systems perspectives on battering: The importance of context and pattern. In: M. Harway & J.M. O’Neil (eds.). *What causes men’s violence against women?* Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Angles, T. & Maconachie, M. (1996). *Battered women: problems and proposals*. In Glanz, L.E. & Spiegel, A.D. (Eds.). *Violence and family life in a contemporary South Africa*. Research and policy issues. Pretoria: HRSC Publishers.
- Baloyi, L.J. (2002). *Class discussion on qualitative research and group process*. Unpublished discussion. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Baloyi, L.J. (2008). *Psychology and psychotherapy redefined from the viewpoint of the African experience*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- Baron, R.A & Byane, D. (2000). *Social psychology*. 9th ed. London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Becvar, D.S., & Becvar, R.J. (1996). *Family therapy: a systemic integration* (3rd ed.). Needham Heights, M.A: Allyn & Bacon.
- Becvar, D.S. & Becvar, R.J. (2000). Human development as a process of meaning making and reality construction. In W.C Nichols, M.A. Pace-Nichols, D.S. Becvar, & A.Y. Napier (eds.) *Handbook of family development and intervention*. New York: Wiley.
- Beijing (1995). *The fourth world conference on women, Beijing*. Cape Town: CTP Book printers.
- Best, J. (1987). "Rhetoric in claims-making: Constructing the missing children problem." *Social Problems* 34(2): 101-121.
- Bitter, J.R. & Corey, G. (2001). Family systems therapy. In G. Corey (ed.). *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Psychotherapy* (6th ed.). Australia, US: Brookes/Cole.
- Brown, J.C. (1994). *Because of the angels: Sexual violence and abuse*. London: SCM Press.
- Browne, A. (1987). *When battered women kill*. New York: Free Press.
- Burk, C. & Frosh, S. (1994). Research process and gendered reflexivity. *Human Systems*, 3: 109-122.

- Cahn, D.D. (1996). *Family violence from a communication perspective*. In Cahn, D.D. & Lloyd, S.A, (Eds.). *Family violence from a communication perspective*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cahn, D.D. & Lloyd, S.A, (1997). *Family violence from a communication perspective*. London: Sage Publications.
- Clarke, L. & Ngobese, J. (1984). *Women Without Men*. Institute for Black Research. Durban.
- Cobb, S. (1993). Empowerment and mediation. A narrative perspective. *Negotiation Journal*, 9(3), 245-259.
- *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2004). Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Dean, R.G. (1998). A narrative approach to groups. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 26(1), 23-37.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2003). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- De Sousa, J.P. (1992). *Behind closed doors: Guidelines for battered women and raising Community awareness*. Cape Town: Catholics Welfare Bureau.
- Dobash, F., Dobash, W.R., Wilson, K. & Daily, S.E. (1998). *Rethinking violence against Women*. London Sage.
- Edet, R. & Ekeya, B. (1989). Church women of Africa: Theological community, in with passion and compassion: Third world women doing theology. Fabella

Virginia and Mercy Oduyoye (eds.). New York: Orbis Books.

- Efran, J.S., Lukens, M.D., & Lukens, R.J. (1988). Constructivism: What's in it for you. *The family therapy networker*, 12(5), 27-35.
- Fiese, B.H. & Bickham, N.L. (1988). Qualitative inquiry: An overview for pediatric psychology. *Journal of pediatric psychology*, 23(2), 79-86.
- Fine, M. (1994). Working with hyphens: reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Finkelhor, D. & Yllo, K. (1993). *License to rape: Sexual abuse of wives*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Finn, G. (1996). *Why Althusser killed his wife*. Essays on discourse and violence. New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Flick, U. (1988). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Fourie, D.P. (1996). The research/practice gap in psychotherapy: From discovering reality to making sense. *Journal of contemporary psychotherapy*, 26(1), 7-22. South Africa: University of South Africa.
- Freedman, J. & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.
- Geertz, C. (1978). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geffner, R., Mantooth, C., Franks, D. & Rao, L. (1989). A psychoeducational, conjoint therapy approach to reducing family violence. In P.L. Ceaser & L.K.

- Hamberger (eds.). *Treating men who batter: Theory, practice, and programs*, pp 103-133. New York: Springer.
- Gelles, R.J. & Cornel, C.P. (1990). *Intimate violence in families*. 2nd Ed. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
 - Gelles, R.J. (1993). Through a sociological lens: Social structure and family violence. In R. Gelles & D. Loseke (eds.). *Current controversies on family violence*, pp 182-196. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
 - Gergen, K.J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
 - Gil, D.G. (1977). "Societal violence and violence in families," pp/ 14-33 in John M. Eckelaar and Sanford M. Katz, eds., *Family Violence*. Toronto: Butterworths.
 - Giles-Sims, J. (1993). *Wife-battering: A systems Theory Approach*. New York: Guilford.
 - Goldenberg, I. and Goldenberg, H., (2004). *Family therapy: An overview*. 6th ed. Australia: Thomson Brook /cde.
 - Grbich, C. (1999). *Qualitative research in health: An introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
 - Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
 - Gyekye, K. (1987). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

- Haley, J. (1963). *Strategies of Psychotherapy*. New York: Grune & Stratton, Inc.
- Harding, S. and Hintikka, M.B. (1983). (eds.). *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, metaphysics, methodology and philosophy of Science*. London: D. Riedel Publishing Company.
- Harway, M. & O'Neil, J.M. (1999). *What causes men's violence against women?* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Hoffman, L. (1990). *Battered women as survivors*. London: Routledge.
- Jasinski, J.L. & Williams, L.M. (1996). *Partner violence: A comprehensive review of 20 years of research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Jewkes, R., Kekana, L.P, Levin, J., Ratsaka, M., Schrieber, M. (1999). "*He must give me money, he mustn't beat me*": Violence against women in three South African Provinces, Pretoria: Medical Research Council.
- Johnson, M. (1988). "Courtship Violence: Survey vs. Empathetic Understandings of Abusive Conduct." *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 9: 175-186.
- Kantor, G.K. & Jasinski, J.L. (1998). Dynamics and risk factors in partner violence. In J.L. Jasinski & L.M. Williams (eds.). *Partner violence: A comprehensive review of 20 years of research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Keeney, B.P. (1983). *Aesthetic of change*. New York: Guilford.
- Kelly, K. (1999). From encounter to text: collecting qualitative data for

- interpretive research. In M. Terre Blanche, & K. Durrheim (Eds.). *Research in practice. Applied methods for the social sciences* (pp.421-437). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Kirkwood, C. (1993). *Leaving abusive partners from scars of survival to the wisdom of Change*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
 - Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
 - Lebaka-ketshabile, L.S. (1997). *Liberating Action: A Perspective on Contextual Spirituality*. Pretoria: CB Powell Bible Centre.
 - Lebaka-ketshabile, L.S. (1999). African Women As Moral Agents: *The moral implications of the status and role of women in their communities*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation: University Of South Africa.
 - Lewin, K. (1986). “‘Everything within me rebels’: A letter from Kurt Lewin to Wolfgang Kohler, 1933.” *Journal of Social Issues* 42: 39-48.
 - Loseke, D.R. (1992). The battered woman and shelters. *The social construction of wife abuse*. State University: New York Press.
 - Mabena, L. (2002). Exploration of factors contributing to abuse in black South African women. Unpublished master’s dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
 - Macdonald, G. (2002). *Domestic violence-Battering women, physical abuse*. London. Sage Publications.
 - Mahowald, M.B. (1978). *Philosophy of Women: Classical Current Concepts*.

Indiapolis: The Crossing Press.

- Malan, L., Parenzee, P. (1994). *A group programme for women who have been abused*. *A social work Practice*, 94(2): 2-9
- Marshall, J., & Rossman, J. (1994). *Investigating statistical concepts, applications and methods / Preliminary*. Belmont, Calif. : Duxbury ; London : Brooks/Cole
- Martin, D. (1976). *Battered wives*. San Francisco. Glide Publications.
- Maturana, H.R. (1978). Biology of language: The epistemology of reality. In G.A. Miller & E. Lennenberg (eds.), *Psychology and biology of language and thought*. New York: Academic Press.
- McNamee, S., & K.J Gergen (eds.). *Therapy as social construction*, pp 25-39. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Meyer, W.F., Moore, C. & Viljoen, H. G. (1997) *Personology: From individual to ecosystem*. South Africa: Durban University.
- Mill, .M. (2005). Portfolio Management as a tool for peer helpers to monitor their development. Unpublished master's dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Mills, L.G. (1998). Mandatory arrest and prosecution policies for domestic violence: A critical literature review and the case for more research to test victim empowerment approaches. *Criminal justice and behaviour*, 25, 306-318.
- Moon, S.M., Dillon, D.R., Sprenkle, D.H. (1990). Family therapy and qualitative research. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 16 (4), 357-373.

- Moore, D.M. (1979). *Editor's introduction*. An overview of the problem. In Moore, D.M (Ed.) *Battered women*.
- Moore, D. M. (1979). *Battered Women*, Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Netshishive, T.M. (2006). *Group work with adolescent girls staying in a shelter*. Unpublished Master's dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- NICRO (2009). Statistics on violence against women in South Africa and internationally Available from, <http://www.nicro.org.za/home/>. Accessed on 01/01/2008.
- O'Leary, K.D., Malone, J. & Tyree, A. (1994). Physical aggression in early marriage: Prerelationship and relationship effects. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 62, 594-602.
- Olsen, T. (1980). *Silences*. Virago Press. Washington.
- Pato, L.L. (1996). Being Fully Human: *A Traditional African Culture and Spiritual Perspective*, In Spirituality in Religions Profiles & Perspectives. C.W du Toit (Ed.). Pretoria: University Of South Africa.
- Ramose, M.B. (2002). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, Harare: Mond Book.
- Rapmund, V.J. (1996). *Social support and depression in women; A constructivist approach*. Unpublished Master's dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Rapmund, V.J. (2000). *Enhancing student's personal resources through*

narrative. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- Rappaport, J. (1993). Narrative studies, personal stories, and identity transformation in the mutual help context. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Sciences*, 29(2), 239-256.
- Russell, D.E.H. (1990). *Lives of courage*. Women for a new South Africa. New York: Basic Books.
- Sarbin, T.R. (1986). *Narrative Psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Shotter, J. (1993). *Conversational realities. Constructing life through language*. London: Sage.
- Sigler, R.T (1989). Domestic violence in context: An assessment of community attitudes. Lexington, M.A: Lexington Books.
- Simkins, C. (1981). *The distribution of African population of South Africa by age, sex, and region-type*. SALDRU Working Paper No. 32. South African Labour Development Research Unit, Cape Town.
- Sprenkle, D. (1994). Editorial: The role of qualitative research and a few suggestions for aspiring authors. *Journal of marital and family therapy*, 20 (3), 227-229.
- Steier, F. (1991). *Research and Reflexivity*. London: Sage.
- Stiles, W.B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical psychology review*, 13,593-618.

- Terre Blanche, M. & Durrheim, K. (1999). Histories of the present: Social science research in context. In M. Terre Blanche & K. Durrheim, (Eds.). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (pp.1-16). Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Terre Blanche, M. & Kelly, K. (1999). Interpretive Methods. In M. Terre Blanche & K. Durrheim, (Eds.). *Research in practice. Applied methods for the social sciences*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. New York: The Falmer Press.
- The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004). London.Oxford University Press.
- Tiftt, L. (1993). *Battering of Women: The Failure of Intervention and the Case for Prevention*. Westview Press, Inc.
- Walker, L.E.A, (1979). *Battered women syndrome*. New York: Springer.
- Walker, L.E.A. (1984). *Battered women, psychology and public policy*. *American Psychologist*, 29, 1179-1182.
- Walker, L.E. (1993). *The battered women syndrome is a psychological consequence of Abuse*. In Gelles, R.J. & Loseke, D.R. (Eds.). *Current controversies on family Violence*. London. Sage Publications.
- Walker, L.E.A. (1994). *Abused women and survivor therapy: A practical guide for the Psychologist*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J.B. and Jackson, D.D. (1965). *Pragmatics of human*

communication: a study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes.
W.W Norton & Company, Inc. New York- London.

- White, M. & Epston, D. (1992). *Experience, contradiction, narrative and imagination*, Adelaide Dulwich Center Publications.
- White, M. (1992). Deconstruction and therapy. In M. White & D. Epston (eds.). *Experience, contradiction, narrative and imagination*, pp. 75-96. Adelaide Dulwich Center Publications.
- White, M. (1995). *Re-authoring lives: Interviews and essays*. Adelaide: Dulwich.
- Wilkinson, S. and Kitzinger, C. (1996). *Representing the Order*. London: Sage.
- Wilson, H.S. & Hutchinson, S.A. (1991). Triangulation of qualitative methods: Heideggerian hermeneutics and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 1(2), 263-276.
- Wilson, K.J. (1997). *When violence begins at home*. A comprehensive guide to understanding and ending domestic abuse. Alameda, CA: Hunter House Publishers.
- Zastrow, C. & kirst-Ashman, K. (1990). *Understanding human behaviour and the social Environment*. 2nd Ed. Hall Publishers: Chicago.