

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, family violence research has not been a unidimensional affair. This study attempts to overcome some of the limitations of earlier approaches used by researchers in this field. For example, Dobash and Dobash (1980) focused mainly on victims, and the principal question they wanted to answer was “Why do they stay?” Other researchers (Gelles, 1974, 1987; Straus, 1978) focused on the family unit as a whole, using intact couples as respondents. This particular study is different in the sense that it focuses on the perceptions and experiences of victims, the perceptions of perpetrators (not necessarily related to the victims interviewed) and the views of service providers who work with both the victims and perpetrators of violence. This focus is therefore the strength of my methodological approach.

The study adopts a sociological perspective that places wife battering within a macro model of society. The concern is first with structural relationships such as the inequality in power relationships between men and women, and other external factors of socio-economic nature. Wife battering is a complex phenomenon that requires more than a single theory or methodology for a solution. The complicated nature of the problem is evident in the perceptions, attitudes and analysis of the research subjects, namely the victims, perpetrators and service providers. My perspective sounds feminist and it does reflect a feminist touch due to its focus on the victims of

wife battering. However, its concentration on the perpetrators of violence as well as some service providers distinguishes it from 'traditional' feminist research such as the work done by Dobash and Dobash (1980), Pagelow (1981), Walker (1979) and Yllo and Bograd (1988).

Like other feminist research on family violence, this study focuses on the victims' experience of violence, their subjective responses and coping strategies, the use of shelters and refuges, satisfaction with police and medical personnel, and the implication of such experiences for social change. However, this study deviates from the norm of perpetuating the invisibility of violent men. The almost exclusive focus on battered women contributes to the myth that the victim is in some way responsible for the violence (Knight and Hatty, 1987), and yet this is about violence perpetrated by men. To include the perpetrators in research serves to disclose a phenomenon that may otherwise remain unexplored. The researcher wants to understand violence perpetrated against women by men from the point of view of the men themselves. What is it about batterers that makes them tick? The most important point to make is that family violence is a social problem, and as such one needs to take into consideration not only the views of one party, namely the victims, but also those of the perpetrators and other people within society who are in a service provision role. While it has proved difficult (in this study in particular) to place perpetrators under the research microscope, it is nevertheless vital to investigate this group because they are the people who commit acts of battering. I believe that any research on wife battering done without considering this group fails to recognise the problem in its totality.

This study adopts a qualitative line of inquiry incorporating the three categories of respondents mentioned earlier. While this method does not attempt to

indicate the extent of wife battering, it does, however, try to clarify the nature of such violence by providing information that cannot be collected through the use of statistical methods. According to the Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce (1991: 66) such statistical inquiry often obscures the direction of the violence and contributes to the labelling of women's construction of reality as irrelevant to research. Knight and Hatty (1987) maintain that such a traditional quantitative approach does a disservice to the victims of wife battering. It perpetuates women's sufferings and allows them to remain invisible and private. Because the data have obscured the direction and dynamics of battering, neglect of social action has ensued. Quantitative techniques have contributed to the belief that victims are unreliable witnesses, and hence their construction of reality is seen as an inappropriate research tool. Nevertheless, despite its inadequacies, the need to clearly identify the extent of wife battering points to the necessity of quantitative approaches. However, that is not the aim of this thesis.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is divided into three main parts:

- An in-depth study of battered women's experiences of violence itself and their strategies for survival. Their experiences of both the statutory and voluntary institutions (the police, social services, women's refuge) were also assessed.
- An in-depth study of men who have been convicted of battering their partners.
- An investigation of the services provided by women's refuges and other social services to highlight how effective these are in meeting the needs of battered women. This involved gathering information from a range of voluntary sector

workers who often come into contact with battered women. These included refuge workers, social workers, probation officers, and counsellors.

3.2 RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

An interview schedule was designed for all respondents (see Appendix), and then tested out in the preliminary stages of the research amongst some victims of violence. For both the victims and perpetrators, there were open questions at the end of each interview on how service provision could be further improved, and what plans they had for the future. The interview schedule covered the following areas:

- Background and demographic details
- The nature and level of family violence
- Support from family and friends
- Attempts to secure alternative accommodation during violence
- History of violence within the family of origin
- Contact with the law (police, legal aid, courts etc)
- Contact with social services (counsellors, refuges)
- Medical attention
- Hopes and plans for the future

The reason why these particular areas were chosen for the study was that earlier research on wife battering, as mentioned in Chapter 1, concentrated on the individual pathologies of both victims and perpetrators. Research done in the 1970s and 1980s, however, found the pathological explanations of wife battering too narrow and inadequate. Instead, research of that time discovered that there were

demographic, social, economic, cultural, individual, relational and situational factors related to such violence. Those factors were interrelated and reinforced one another. As the data analysis will show, it is not the pathology of either the victim or perpetrator that can explain the violence, but rather factors such as alcohol, socialisation, relationship problems, stress and pressures.

The interview schedule for the service providers covered the general area of their organisation, how it operates within the needs of either the victim or perpetrator or both, their individual perceptions of wife-battering, factors associated with it, its remedies, and their relationships with other services working within a similar area.

3.3 SOURCES OF DATA

As mentioned earlier, the study targeted three categories of respondent for face-to-face personal interviews. In addition, library material, government documents and relevant brochures were incorporated into the overall thesis.

Family violence in general is a rather sensitive area and is thus likely to create major problems for researchers. Any researcher who attempts to study wife-battering in particular is immediately aware of problems unique to this field, difficulties that discourage even the most stout-hearted researchers. This study also experienced major problems, as this chapter will later reveal.

The primary data for this research is based on 21 interviews and field notes. In-depth interviews with the victims and perpetrators were tape-recorded, as they did not have any problems with that procedure. Tape-recording transcripts are invaluable. Their advantages include, among others, their corrective nature to the limitations of intuition and recollection. In enabling repeated and detailed examination of the events of interaction, the use of recordings extends the range and precision of any

observations that can be made. The use of such data could also allow other researchers to have direct access to the data about which claims are being made. This subjects any analysis to detailed public scrutiny and minimises the influence of personal preconceptions or analytical biases. Such raw data would be easily accessible in a variety of investigations and can be re-examined in the context of any new findings (Silverman, 1993: 19).

Finally, and most importantly in my view, is the nature of the rapport which develops between the interviewer and interviewee. Good rapport makes life easier for all parties to the interview, particularly where sensitive issues like wife battering are concerned. Often interviewees feel insignificant and unattended to if the interviewer is busy taking down notes and not necessarily paying special attention to them in terms of listening carefully and “pretending” to share their situation.

3.4 SAMPLING

Constructing an appropriate sample is the first problem. Due to the implicit assumption that male perpetrators are not going to present themselves for research and that wife-battering affects only women, some feminist researchers (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1981; Walker, 1979; Yllo and Bograd, 1988) study only women survivors as victims. Besharov (1990: 25) suggests that perpetrators seldom volunteer for treatment, let alone as helpful research subjects. As a result, using only one source of data to draw conclusions about both partners clearly leads to somewhat one-sided accounts. Apparently, most conclusions about the personalities of perpetrators and the quality of marital relationships were a result of interviews only with women – the victims. Finkelhor et al. (1988: 30) argue that even researchers who manage to identify subjects (survivors or perpetrators) independently miss out on a lot

of family violence. In this study, the problem is overcome by the inclusion of both perpetrator and service provider reports.

Besharov (1990: 14) further suggests that researchers who decide that battered women need to be the sole source of data because locating male perpetrators seems almost impossible encounter further difficulties in terms of choosing an appropriate sample. Battered women are not a captive population and typically must volunteer as subjects of study. Volunteers, in turn, are a unique sample, since any investigator must wonder why some battered women are willing to present themselves for scrutiny under a researcher's microscope while others are not. In this fashion, therefore, women who admit to having been abused and are willing to be assessed have originally defined family violence.

Battered women must be identified and their involvement in research solicited, particularly to study the impact of intervention programs (Gelles, 1987). Researchers have often sought out battered women staying in shelters that provide emergency accommodation and other services because they constitute a ready-made group for the study. In doing so, however, researchers have not always shown an awareness that this subsample may have characteristics dissimilar to those of the larger population of battered women and may be a unique group. The Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce (1991) has also supported this view that over-representation or under-representation of particular groups within the community could be another source of possible distortion regarding data collected through agencies. For example, some agencies are highly likely to collect data that show a class or ethnic bias because women from certain social groups are more likely to rely on such agencies for assistance than others. Women with scarce economic resources are more likely to seek assistance from a refuge; women from non-English speaking backgrounds are

least likely to call the police for intervention; and middle-class women are likely to approach a lawyer. It should also be noted that medical practitioners are under legal and professional obligations to maintain the confidentiality of their clients and as such may wish to withhold any information they deem confidential.

Again, locating volunteers through broader recruitment such as the media or agencies may often produce a preponderance of volunteers who have been in battering relationships but are no longer in them. Once again, such a sample presents unique aspects that reduce the extent to which the findings can be generalised. Finkelhor et al. (1988: 30) suggest that identifying subjects through agencies is very fallible as it often involves labels such as “battered women” or “women in crisis” which most individuals would resist. The problem with such labels is that the focus is only on the disadvantaged groups that present themselves to public agencies. This leads to false impressions about the nature of wife battering, such as the idea that it occurs only within certain socio-economic groups. Ethical concerns, the practical difficulties of identifying and approaching battered women, and possible risks to their well-being during assessment add to the problems of locating representative samples (Besharov, 1990: 15).

A survey which was conducted in Sydney by O'Donnell and Saville (1982) indicated that the data on the incidence of family violence relied mainly on sources and organisations which were situated within the lower socio-economic groups, where a great majority are unable to access regular practitioners and lawyers' fees. In that sense it becomes quite obvious that poorer groups would be over-represented in any sample. Also, it was not possible to survey all battered women who passed through the refuges during the period of their study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the nature of the organisations and the dynamics of the refuge made it

almost inevitable that potential respondents were overlooked for any one of a number of reasons. This was especially so in the case of short-term residents. If a woman arrived in an obviously distressed situation, to be handed a questionnaire on her experience of violence could not be viewed as a supportive action.

This study shares many of the same problems of earlier work in that obviously disadvantaged categories of victims and perpetrators were the only ones available for interview. The women in this study were obtained through the use of Women's Shelters or Counselling Services. The men were accessed through a department that deals with matters of probation for convicted offenders. The fact that the respondent populations which were most readily available were those in crisis or those convicted by the justice system coupled with the unavailability of control groups and the case study nature of the research all make it impossible for comparisons and generalisations. But, as we shall see by the end of the thesis, the findings of this study nevertheless prove to be significant in themselves and suggest a number of topics for further research.

3.4.1 CASE STUDIES: VICTIMS

Five interviews were conducted with victims of wife battering for a pilot study. These women were not currently in a relationship, and were not living in a women's refuge, although they had some experience of refuge life. These women were all residing in a country town. The interviews then lasted for more than an hour, which created a feeling among the interviewees that the schedule was too long. Apart from that the researcher realised that given the flexible nature of the interviews, women automatically captured a lot of other questions even before they could be asked,

which culminated in the shortening of the schedule. The final schedule was between forty five minutes and an hour.

The second phase of the research consisted of seven interviews with women living at a women's refuge located within a city. This was the only refuge that allowed me to interview, although the workers later criticised my work when it came to their turn to be interviewed. The characteristics of these women are dealt with in Chapter 4.

For some women, reliving their past experiences was too much and often I had to stop the interviews for some time. For some it was too difficult to even remember exactly what happened.

3.4.2 CASE STUDIES: PERPETRATORS

Four perpetrators (not related to any of the victims interviewed here) were interviewed for this study. The respondents were obtained through a government department. Initially 17 perpetrators had offered themselves for interview but the numbers declined gradually with some literally disappearing just when the interviews were about to start. These men were incarcerated for violence, and as their demographic features (Chapter 4) show, they are already a skewed category. It should also be acknowledged that they are the most dangerous and persistent type of offender, which to an extent explains the bureaucratic checks I was subjected to by the head office.

Interviewing the men was the most difficult and frustrating process. They were not as forthcoming as the women were nor did they initiate answers as the women did. Most of the time they kept forgetting issues, or just went silent or said they knew

nothing at all. However, some interview data was nevertheless successfully gathered for analysis.

3.4.3 CASE STUDIES: SERVICE PROVIDERS

Four service providers were interviewed individually and one refuge demanded to be interviewed as a group. Their argument was that they considered themselves equals and all performed the same duties and therefore saw no reason why they should be interviewed separately. But from experience with refuges, I maintain that refuges are the most difficult category to deal with. The major difficulty arises from the fact that they assume the position of expertise in the area of family violence, which undermines people from other organisations. Whilst I am not making general claims, the few other refuges I had contact with made me believe that with an attitude like theirs, they actually do the victims of violence a disservice by denying them access to researchers and monopolising most of the information.

3.5 METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE COURSE OF THIS STUDY

The major shortcomings of this research concern difficulties in accessing respondents and bureaucratic problems with some organisations to which I turned for assistance. The data gathering ran into problems of conflict of interest, personal confrontations and so on, which became real problems for me. These are discussed in detail below. Such circumstances led to interviewing a smaller number of respondents than originally intended. The researcher was also operating on very limited financial resources that would not allow frequent long distance travel, nor even permit following up on potential respondents.

Finkelhor et al. (1988: 29) suggest that for any area of study to exist and grow, researchers must have the tools to be able to identify and have access to their main object of study. However, family violence research is not exempted from problems, due mainly to the fact that wife-battering in particular occurs in private (O'Donnell and Saville, 1982: 54). Very little of it is witnessed by other than the participants, and almost never by researchers. Researchers must rely on accounts given by participants, and unfortunately the validity of these accounts are difficult to ascertain. Such violence is stigmatising and shameful. It occurs under circumstances of heated emotions and in relationships characterised by conflict, frustration, and bitterness.

Wife battering is unlike other crimes where often there is enough evidence. For example, after arson, there would be telltale ashes; after murder, a body. But the situation is not necessarily so with battering. Bruises and injuries are often hidden or explanations for them fabricated. Negative societal attitudes towards victims of violence and rape are reflected in widely believed, but inaccurate, myths about the victim's culpability or willingness (Blackman, 1989: 20).

As Geffner et al. put it:

“Difficulties in studying violent families have discouraged many potential investigators from pursuing research in these areas. In addition, discrepancies between the popular conceptions of the family and the realities of family violence, the shame and stigma often associated with such problems, and public policies protecting the sanctity of the home have tended to obscure the very serious magnitude of domestic violence. As a result of these and other issues, the development of family violence research has been impeded” (1988: 457).

Even though now the wall of silence has been broken regarding wife-battering among Australian men and women, it is still likely that those who admit to experiencing battering will give accounts that are affected and perhaps distorted by

their own powerful emotional needs. Finkelhor et al. (1988) argue that research on family violence causes other ethical dilemmas. Their argument is based on the effects such violence has on its victims. They maintain that:

“The subjects of family violence research are not just ordinary people in everyday situations. They are people at special risk, in dangerous circumstances, who have suffered serious traumas and may well have psychological impairments. Any research on family violence has a special responsibility to these individuals: a responsibility not to subject them to any additional trauma or contribute in any way to the perpetuation of their suffering. This places some limits on the types of research that can be done” (1988: 14).

This same story was echoed by a few of the refugees who denied me permission to interview their clients, maintaining that they were not in a mental state that would allow them to handle interviews. I was criticised for ‘ignoring the mental and emotional state of the women’ (Woman from Refuge B). This worker, like others such as those from the refuge which assisted in locating women who were no longer staying at the refuge, was concerned that I was not aware of what the women had been through, especially if I had not been in that situation personally. She emphasised that ‘women who are in such stressful situations do not want to be reminded no matter in what manner, of what they had been through’. Her decision was final and I did not get any interviews from her refuge. The argument was that women who were particularly at the refuge at the time were mentally fragile due to their experiences, and should not be subjected to further victimisation by researchers.

Therefore victims of family violence become difficult to count. The sensitive nature of the topic, the obvious cultural expectations of a harmonious marriage, the private nature and public perceptions of family violence and the subsequent fear of reprisals towards either the victim or researchers make research in this field very difficult.

3.5.1 DEFINITIONS

Definition is one of the many intrinsic problems in the field of family violence. According to Finkelhor et al. (1988: 28), there are profound disagreements and uncertainties concerning how to delimit the key objects of study in this field. For example, there is still the question of whether non-violent forms of maltreatment such as emotional abuse, physical neglect and so on, should be included in the field. These are some of the examples of unresolved definitional problems in the field of family violence.

Elliott (1989: 23) argues that many researchers in this field employ the concepts 'domestic violence', 'spouse abuse', 'wife-battering', and 'family violence' interchangeably and use widely divergent definitions for these terms. It is important to note (Gelles, 1987: 15) that these definitional problems make it difficult to compare studies or even to summarise findings.

This study was criticised for its usage of the concept 'spouse' throughout the interview schedule. Some refuge workers complained about the use of 'spouse' instead of 'partner'. The complaint was made through the telephone not only to myself but also to one of my supervisors. The response was by letter. I responded in the following manner:

"The phrasing of the questions is also fairly standard within the research tradition. While the term 'spouse' is perhaps not as inclusive as we might like, it is easily recognisable by most as meaning one of the two people in a significant sexual and economic relationship. It is also much easier to digest for the respondent than using various terms throughout the document or stringing together a litany of terms to make sure we cover all possible combinations. In short, it was not intended as a symbol to either include or exclude; simply to allow respondents to easily grasp the relationship category".

Generally, the point to drive home was that this research was not based simply on assumptions about wife battering. Rather, the questions have been taken from a careful and considered review of the academic research literature on the topic.

3.5.2 WOMEN'S REFUGES

The main objective of consulting the refuges was to solicit their assistance in terms of providing one of the main categories in this research, namely women who had been in a battering situation. It became clear that going through refuges is not the easiest way to obtain interview respondents. About ten refuges were contacted from different towns and cities; but after one to several meetings amongst refuge administration, depending upon different refuges, many would not allow me to conduct research on their clients. A lady from a Church-run refuge told me politely

“I am afraid we have made it our policy not to allow researchers to come and interview our clients anymore. We have had people from Australian National University and other organisations who come here and collect information and later use it against us. It has got nothing to do with you personally but it applies to everyone”.

She was sorry but there was nothing to offer in terms of assistance.

Half of the refuges contacted mentioned that it would not be a good idea to interview their residents as they were still stressed and in a state of shock, as I have already mentioned. One offered to mail letters of request to participate in this research to their clients who had already left the refuge, as they felt it was not appropriate to interview those women who were at the refuge at that time. One of the reasons why they had to do the mailing was to guarantee privacy and anonymity on the part of their former residents, and therefore the onus was on the individuals who got the letters to contact me.

The explanation for suggesting this particular group (former residents) other than the current residents was that the former were in a better position to talk to me since they had come to terms with their situation and had already coped with their problem. The latter were believed to be still disturbed both mentally and emotionally, according to the workers.

These were the same types of reasons that were given to me by some other refugees in one of the cities. Two of those openly explained their reluctance and caution to let researchers come into their refuges because they tend to use whatever information they gathered against the refugees in the end. This, according to the refuge director, was based on their past experiences. Very unfortunately, she would not elaborate on this issue. Refuge "A" was the only one that allowed interaction with their residents, although they were somehow monitoring my movements.

For example, originally they insisted that at least a worker be present during the interviews, which the researcher thought would affect the manner in which the interviewees would respond. The reason given for the presence of a worker was in case things went wrong during the interview. The emotional and mental states of the clients were again brought in. However, the willingness of the respondents about the whole issue was first sought, but it turned out that they did not want any worker to be present during the interviews. So from there, it was quite obvious that there were some issues which the women would rather not discuss in front of a refuge worker. This is already in contradiction to the position of expertise on the women that the refuge workers claim.

3.5.3 GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

These departments were contacted for their assistance in providing the second category, the perpetrators. Department "A" was unable to grant approval for this research for the following reasons:

"The research proposal, together with the associated papers you forwarded, have been carefully considered by Senior Officers of the Department. Major areas of concern which were raised included how individual inmates would be selected for inclusion in the study, the lack of precision with respect to staff involvement and the impact the study would have on the inmates themselves as well as the day to day operations of the Department's "A" Centres" (Director, Co-ordination Policy and Planning for Commissioner, 26.10.93).

Department "B"'s branch in the country town did not have any problems except that the Regional Office had to grant permission, because the Director of the Department liked to keep personal control of such matters and would reply to my requests personally. Therefore a research proposal was sent to the latter. This brought a few problems however.

The original proposal was considered and was not approved. Some of their concerns included:

- "The presence of a staff member during the interviews: Some members of staff are compellable witnesses and if admissions were made to behaviour constituting an offence or breach of an order, then they would be required to report the matter to the Police or relevant authority. (A similar problem may arise in tape recording responses). In addition, the presence of a staff member would have a significant effect on the subjects' responses. It is difficult to see why a confounding variable such as this should be included in the research design". (It should be noted that the presence of a staff member was suggested by the country town Office)

- “The nature of the questions in the interview schedule: Experience with offenders tends to suggest that they would be unlikely to respond truthfully to a lengthy series of intrusive questions. While access to this information is not the objection, it is thought that the method proposed is unlikely to achieve this purpose”.
- “The criteria for selection and the number of subjects: The method of selection of subjects is not self-evident. Is it proposed that subjects be selected on the basis of proximity to the country town, or on the basis of offence category, or marital status, or what? A sample group of 15 would only be representative of the selection criteria and could not be taken to represent the wider population of offenders”.
- “It is not clear whether this is a request to interview offenders only or both offenders and victims. If it is the latter, then there is a number of issues arising for the Service supervising offenders cohabiting with victims” (15.11.1993).

Apart from disapproval, it was stated that I might wish to lodge a further proposal that would satisfy these objections and concerns. This led to two more proposals before it was finally approved. It was approved in the end because some of their concerns were addressed. For example, one of their staff assisted in rephrasing the questions. There was more concern with the way the questions were structured than with the nature of the questions themselves. For example, questions 7, 8, and 9 for perpetrators are revisions so that they sound rather polite so as not to offend the respondent. Questions like ‘Why are you violent? Can you describe your behaviour please? Why do you abuse your partner? Why do you beat her?’ now read ‘When was the first time you felt angry? What did you do? What was the situation which could have led to that kind of a feeling? Could you please describe it? When was the first time you actually became aggressive? What happened?’ It was also felt that too many

sensitive questions asked one after the other could trigger some anger and/or violence.

Since the country town office was closer and had already agreed to assist in this matter, they were to provide respondents. Originally, seventeen offenders volunteered. But by the end of the interviews, there were only four respondents. The main reason for last minute withdrawal for some of them had to do with the nature of the topic itself. The officer in charge told me that at the beginning they were eager to talk about their violence to someone but later they decided the interviews were going to bring back some things they would not want to discuss with someone they did not know. Another important point that the officer brought to my attention was that some respondents wanted some assurance that the research was going to be beneficial to them. I want to believe that could be another reason why some decided not to grant me the opportunity to interview them, as I was not going to provide any immediate benefits.

3.5.4 CRITICISMS LEVELLED AGAINST THIS STUDY

There were a few criticisms particularly from women and some refuge workers. One woman who had been contacted by a refuge where she used to be a resident telephoned me anonymously to express her anger and disgust about my race. The lady actually told me that, being a black, I had no right to do research of this kind in Australia, particularly amongst white Australians (note that this had never been my specific intention). She actually asked me why I did not research Family Violence amongst Aboriginals or even go back to do it in Africa. She said I had no right to come here and turn their lives upside down. They wanted to be left alone especially because they had gone through a lot. Some (African) colleagues had also expressed

concern on the nature and sensitivity of the topic. They warned of serious problems (for example, being an African and trying to research such a sensitive and private topic in a foreign country which is almost exclusively white) concerning the data, which they could already anticipate. Nevertheless, it was pointed out to her that her decision not to participate was respected. It was also spelled out that the invitation to invite her participation was made by her former refuge, clearly indicating that she could only get back to the researcher if she was interested in the study. The letters of invitation did not contain any material that could have caused any anger or offence (see Appendix A).

Other problems raised by some service providers were handled separately. The criticism regarding terminology has been discussed under definitional problems. This research was also criticised on issues that had been raised in the published research on family violence. One of these questions concerned evidence for associations between family violence and social indicators such as class, race, marital status and pregnancy.

3.5.5 RESPONSES TO CRITICISMS/CONCERNS

Class and Race

Some of those (two refuge workers where I was originally based) I spoke to maintained that there was no association whatsoever between social class-related factors and family violence, unlike the situation 'especially as presented in the popular media'. Regarding evidence of any association between social indicators (such as class, age, marital status etc.), Gelles and Cornell (1990:75) argue that results of the National Family Violence Survey indicate a link between family violence and age, with violence occurring most frequently among those under 30 years of age. In Australia in particular, the results of a

survey done on Women's Safety (1996) clearly indicate that younger women (18–24) are more at risk of violence than older women are.

Straus et al. (Gelles and Cornell, 1990) also found that violence was more common in Black households than in White households in the USA. In Australia though, since 1987, there has been an increase in understanding of wife battering. At present, 66% of the community do not regard ethnicity as a 'cause' of wife-battering, although there is still some uncertainty about the incidence of wife-battering in ethnic communities (Office of the Status of Women, 1995: 8). It is worth noting that race might not be the only vital factor here. Perhaps income and occupational status would probably be associated with the increased rates of violence amongst blacks; and as Gelles and Cornell found out:

“Irrespective of the method, sample, or research design, studies of marital violence support the hypothesis that spousal violence is more likely to occur in low-income, low socio-economic-status families...One of the main factors associated with wife battery is the employment status of the husband. Being unemployed is devastating to men in our society. It is a clear demonstration that they are not fulfilling society's expectation that men should be the family providers. Unemployed men have rates of wife assault that are almost double the rates for employed men” (1990: 75).

Marital Status

Courtship violence has revealed that many of the patterns that are found in marital violence emerge long before a person gets married. Wallace (1996: 169) argues that significant relationships whether they involve dating, cohabitation or marriage, place women at risk. Cohabiting couples are actually at a higher risk than married couples. Gelles and Cornell (1990: 35) commented that the saddest and most revealing findings from the research on dating violence was where the individuals involved interpreted the violence as

a sign of love. Perhaps the biggest surprise is that rather than the violent episodes shattering the romantic images held by those involved, one gets the impression that violence serves to protect the romantic illusions of dating.

In fact, Geffner suggests that a review of the marital violence literature reveals that marital violence is probably a misnomer. As he puts it:

“In fact, few, if any, studies require a legal marital relationship. In reality, spouse, wife, and husband are typically used generically to refer to a man or woman involved in an intimate marriage-like relationship. Our informal survey, albeit incomplete, did not identify any studies that specifically excluded unmarried ‘spouses’” (Geffner et al., 1988: 461).

Violence during Pregnancy

The same applies to literature concerning the relationship between pregnancy and family violence. I refer to the details of the relationship between battering and pregnancy as discussed in the literature review.

3.6 STRENGTHS OF THIS METHODOLOGY

The type of methodology employed in this research has to a certain extent addressed some of the methodological shortcomings of others:

- Incorporating perpetrators as well as service providers into the category of respondents. This makes this research broader than that confined to battered women only (Pagelow, 1981:17). Studies that concentrated on victims only have tended to confuse the symptoms that result from abusive behaviour with a psychological image of the victim. Battered women, compared to their unbattered counterparts, do experience anxiety and depression and sometimes suffer from high levels of stress. But such qualities are not necessarily inherent in their psychological make-up but are rather a consequence of fear and violence. The legacy of such studies has been a belief in blaming the victim and support for the

popular stereotyping of victims. For example, victims are viewed as the nagging wife, the vindictive woman, or the female masochist (Family Violence Education Taskforce, 1991: 99–100).

- Women/survivors were not necessarily at the shelter/refuge at the time of interviews. Some had been out of refuge for quite some time, which is important in balancing their accounts of battering. Those who are in refuges are regarded as very fragile and not fit to conduct ‘healthy’ interviews. In other words it is easy to question or even challenge the accounts of people who are in crisis, as at the time they are highly influenced by emotions. But those who are already out and coping alone are in a better position to leave no stone unturned, as they are not scared of what the service providers may find out. They are not in a crisis situation charged with emotions. In my opinion, their accounts hold more credibility than those who are under a lot of stress.
- This is a sociological rather than psychological undertaking, and studies survivors as the best available sources of information leading to a better understanding of the sociocultural environment in which they live and why they remained in violent relationships. It investigates their constraints and perceived lack of alternatives rather than using them as subjects in psychological and personality tests (Pagelow, 1991: 27).
- Asking similar questions of all three categories of respondent was meant to combat the tendencies to bias of information collected from a single source.
- Direct contact and personal interaction with both victims and perpetrators helped the researcher gain more in terms of information that could not otherwise have been collected using other methods.

- The broad three-way focus on victims, perpetrators and service providers has been rare in previous research and yet it is very significant given the substantial differences in perception, attitude and analysis of the three perspectives uncovered in the research reported in this study.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In terms of data analysis, some attempt has been made to interpret the findings statistically, although this was not meant to produce any generalisations or sweeping statements. In most cases, verbatim quotations have been used to illustrate and reinforce the results: the interview responses themselves are the primary source of data.

The analytical framework in this study was based upon three different, but related, approaches in qualitative research. First of all, accurate description. When analysing and presenting the findings, the researcher cannot possibly present all the data in toto to the readers, and must therefore reduce these data. The major principle here is to present an accurate description of what is being studied, although not necessarily all of the data that has been studied.

The second approach that has been adopted here is grounded theory. It involves building a theory out of the data collected. In other words, the issue here is not to start with a theory and then test it; rather, a researcher begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. Building a theory by its very nature implies interpreting data, for the data must be conceptualised and the concepts related to form a theoretical rendition of reality. That is, a reality that cannot actually be known but is always interpreted.

The final approach is the generation of concepts, which involves immersing oneself in the data and then searching out patterns, identifying possible surprising phenomena, and becoming sensitive to inconsistencies, such as divergent views offered by different groups of individuals. This process involves generating new concepts as well as relating their observations to pre-existing notions, on some occasions.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the methodological issues that arose from the study. It has also addressed some research-related problems concerning family violence in general, and tried to show their applicability to some problems encountered while conducting this particular research. Despite the strengths of my methodology, it is clear that no one single type of research can adequately explain the nature, extent, and factors associated with family violence.

The next chapter analyses and discusses the data pertaining to the nature of family violence. It also shows how diverse family violence is, and that it should not necessarily be treated as a single-factor phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

NATURE OF VIOLENCE

The purpose of this chapter is to present and interpret the data on the nature of family violence as perceived by the three categories interviewed. The discussion begins with the women's experiences, then perpetrator accounts of events, and finally service provider accounts. The analysis also covers the demographic features of both victims and perpetrators.

TABLE 4.1: WOMEN'S DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Sophi	22	Australian	De facto	2	Single Parent
Stephanie	23	Australian	2 De factos	1+A	Housewife
Mpho	24	Australian	Single	2	P/T Student
Pinki	27	Aboriginal	Single	1	Single Parent
Maria	30	Peruvian	De facto	1	Home Duties
Neo	31	Australian	Single	2	Student
Renee	34	Australian	Married	3	Wife/Mother
Wendy	35	Australian	De facto	2	Mother
Brooke	36	Australian	Married	3	Clerical
Thato	37	Australian	Mx2	2	Home Duties
Tseli	38	Australian	Mx2	3	Sales Assist
Lerato	41	Australian	Mx3	4	H/Duties; P/T Student

Key:

Mx2 – Married twice Mx3 – Married Thrice 1+A.– 1 child and an abortion

The author would like to point out that while these demographic variables have been analysed and interpreted, they are not especially significant in terms of family violence. However, an attempt has been made to give the reader a broader picture concerning the backgrounds of all the women and men involved in this study.

AGE

The table above was ordered in terms of age beginning with the youngest. Ages ranged from 22 to 41. One third of the women were in their mid twenties, with more than half in their early to late thirties, and just one woman in her forties. An Australian survey on Women's Safety (1996) discovered a link between family violence and age, namely that violence occurs most frequently among those under 30 years of age, although this does not seem to be the case in this table. However, Frank claimed that often 18–24 is the age category which is prone to violence.

MARITAL STATUS

The literature (Wallace, 1996) on family violence has indicated that, like age, marital status is also an important factor which shapes or influences the type, frequency or intensity of violence. Such an indicator is important especially when one wants to make comparisons. For instance, there is an assumption that the highest number and greatest severity of assaults are found among cohabiting couples. The argument is that such couples are more isolated (by society) than married couples and as such there is greater opportunity for abuse due to the lack of a support network. The autonomy and independence enjoyed by cohabiting couples is also much greater than that of married couples. Therefore when the issues of power and control arise, violence occurs. Such couples may share some features that trigger violence, but they also lack others shared by married couples which stop the conflict from escalating into violence (Wallace, 1996: 169).

The results in Table 4.1 indicate that close to half of the women were legally married, with three who had been married at least twice; one third were in de facto relationships, with one woman who had been in more than one de facto, and the remaining were not in any relationship at the time of interviews. The common factor however, is that

all of them had been involved in violent relationships regardless of their marital status. The conclusion that one can reach from the table is that *any* woman who enters into any significant relationship is at risk of wife-battering, marital status notwithstanding.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN

The question of children was regarded as another potentially important factor in this study, as will become clear in later discussions concerning women's decisions to leave or stay in abusive relationships. Three quarters of the respondents had at least two children, three had one child each, and one of the latter group had also had an abortion.

OCCUPATION

Two women were employed in clerical and sales jobs, the remainder comprising parents, home cuties and students. There is not much information to draw from this table, due to a lack of variety. This information may also help in understanding some of the implications of acquiring respondents from particular agencies. It is evident that this particular sample was dominated by housewives who are likely to be dependent financially on their partners. That in turn is likely to result in violence over money matters as Chapter 5 will show, and/or some of these women would want to go back to their violent partners just to maintain that support.

4.1 WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF VIOLENCE

The table below shows a list of the various types of violence that the women in this study experienced. The categories have been ordered such that in some cases words synonymous to those used by the respondents have been used to make the table as simple and readable as possible.

TABLE 4.2. TYPES OF VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Physical Activities</i>	<i>Objects</i>	<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
Mpho	Smashing Hitting Throw Scratching	Knife Fists Glasses/Pots Legs	Arguments	None
Neo	Punching Smashing	Fists Glasses	None	Jealousy
Tseli	Smacking Punching	Hands Fists Knife	Degrading Names Sexually Inactive Threats	None
Thato	Punching Beating Kicking Stabbings Hitting Throw/Hit	Fists Belt Legs Knife Wood Bricks	None	None
Lerato	Hitting Rape Pushing	Fists Rifle Against Walls	Threats	None
Pinki	Slapping Punching Stabbings Throw	Hands Fists Fork Plates	None	None
Sophi	Beating Punching	Hands Fists Knife Baseball Bat	Threats	Leave Out Lock Out Pushy Jealousy
Maria Renee	Physical Choking Hitting Grabbing	Hands Hands Fists Gun	Arguments Threats	Screams None
Stephanie	Slapping Dragged Pushing Throw	Hands By Hair Against Walls Stereo/Glasses	Arrogance Verbal Abuse	Jealousy
Brooke	Smashing Slapping Choking	Furniture Hands Hands	None	None
Wendy	Pulling	Hair Out Machete	Cornered Threats	Psychological

Table 4.2 shows the responses pertaining to the types of violence as perceived by survivors. Unlike Table 4.1 which was ordered by age, this table and the subsequent ones

have been analysed according to the order of consecutive interviews. The reason was that the interviews were originally numbered from the first to the last. Following the order used in the first table would be confusing. It was felt that at some stage wrong interviews would be matched with wrong names.

In all cases, physical violence was mentioned as the most common form. The common types of physical violence included (in order of frequency) five cases of punching, four cases each of hitting and throwing, three cases each of slapping and smashing items, two cases each of beating, choking and stabbing, and one case each of causing scratches, smacking, pulling hair out, kicking, dragging, grabbing, and rape.

It is important, however, to note that in one of the cases the physical violence was perpetrated by the woman on her partner. Maria never experienced any physical violence at the hands of her partner; but she argued that his screaming at her was enough emotional torture. She described how after leaving him a few times she went back hoping for the best, but matters only got worse:

“He continued screaming at me and I thought I couldn’t handle it anymore. I started to physically abuse him. He called the police and the ambulance. He told them that he believed I was suffering from nervous breakdown. The police did not press charges, but insisted I go to the hospital. At the hospital they told me I was schizophrenic, which I think I am not. They kept putting me on drugs which I felt were only making my emotional state worse. That is why I escaped; I want to go home and be with my son”.

At the time of the interviews, Maria had taken refuge at a women’s shelter after escaping from the hospital. Maria’s story is marked by an institutionalised stereotype: when women fight back, they are labelled as mad and out of control. Her husband is not a professional in the area of mental illness, and yet he managed to convince the police and the ambulance that she was suffering from a nervous breakdown. Even before much intervention, both the police and ambulance officers agreed that she should be hospitalised. Because of the condition she was in, she felt as though she had not been a good partner.

She felt the need to go back and prove herself otherwise. It also shows the role which children play for women to decide to either stay or leave an abusive relationship. Another important aspect of the analysis is the distinction that the police and the ambulance made between what they regarded as violence and non-violence. Probably if either Maria or the partner had sustained injuries they could have paid more attention and done more in terms of intervention, instead of listening to one side of the story. While she was acting out of self-defence, Maria was constructed as a perpetrator of violence by her husband, the police, and the ambulance services.

In so far as physical violence was concerned, some women mentioned life threatening situations and dangerous weapons which were used against them. For example, Renee was choked until she lost consciousness: "He choked me while my little son was forced to watch. I couldn't believe it. I thought I was going to die. I actually saw stars". Thato and Pinki were both stabbed with a knife and a fork respectively. Lerato and Renee were both threatened with a gun/rifle in separate incidents. Wendy had a machete held at while her partner threatened to kill her. Sophi was beaten with a baseball bat. Other women had items such as bricks, glasses, plates, pots and stereo thrown at them in separate incidents.

Verbal abuse was mentioned as the second most common form of violence. Incidents of such violence included arguments, arrogance, degrading names and threats. For example, Tseli's partner referred to her as a 'log in sex' which implied that she was cold and unresponsive in bed. Her partner also made death threats and actually took an overdose once.

Verbal abuse, particularly insults and name calling and the making of hypercritical comments about the wife's housekeeping and mothering can do more damage in terms of confidence and self-esteem. Some women (Tseli, Lerato, Maria and Thato) experienced

remarks such as 'you are a log in bed', 'you are hopeless', 'you wouldn't survive without me' or 'you are a bitch'. According to Sarah (one of the service providers) most often the female partner looks to the male for affirmation, esteem, and acceptance, therefore they tend to believe whatever the men say. In that way, their confidence and self-esteem are likely to be critically diminished by such comments. One of the women in the sample actually confirmed this belief. Maria commented that:

"I have very low self-esteem. I feel incapable of doing things for myself, as a result of what he has been telling me. I also feel it is because he is more educated and I am not. Sometimes I feel it is unfair because he married me knowing very well that I did not have any education...I want to go back and prove to him that I can be independent. I want to gain self-esteem...if he does not change, I will leave him for good".

This statement seems to support Elliott and Shanahan's (1988: 35) view that even though people associate physical violence more with family violence, for some verbal and emotional abuse can be more damaging. In Maria's case as an example, she even goes further into believing that somehow she is to blame for her situation. To try and convince someone that she is a human being is just something out of the ordinary. To a certain extent Maria's story is an indication of how dependent she is on this relationship, but more important is her hope for change on his part, which seems to serve as an ultimatum.

Another factor is that the women's stories reveal how over time they began to experience their worth to be determined almost entirely by the behaviour of their abusers. Once this stage was reached, degradation was both a powerful and painful tool; women felt they had no opportunity to redefine a more positive self-worth because definition lay solely in the behaviour of their abusers.

The least mentioned form of violence was emotional. I should add that even though verbal and emotional abuse tend or appear to overlap, the victims emphasised a clear distinction between the two and these are their stories which the researcher should

not adjust to suit the latter's convenience. This included jealousy, screams, ill treatment and psychological abuse. Neo, Sophi and Stephanie all mentioned jealousy as the cause of their emotional trauma. Neo's partner got jealous when she talked to other men. Stephanie's partner accused her of sleeping around. But Sophi's account of jealousy was rather different from the others. She was actually punished for not being jealous. According to her story, her partner: "would more often sleep around, leave his girlfriends' numbers on the table or even have them call him at my home so that I could get angry. If I don't get angry, he also becomes suspicious as to why, and this causes more trouble".

She was also subjected to other unpleasant incidents like being locked out of her house, and at times her partner would invite her to some places so that he could disappear and leave her there alone.

Wendy too commented about some psychological scars that remained after some incidents of verbal and physical abuse. She had been *cornered* (forced into a corner where she could not run anywhere to escape) and had hair pulled out. She had also been subjected to death threats. Maria believed that her partner's screaming cost her a lot emotionally.

In general the women mentioned physical violence as the most common form, and more than half of the women had suffered both verbal and physical violence. Physical violence in most cases involved the use of dangerous weapons on the victims by the perpetrators. Some women mentioned having suffered physical violence only. What is not clear though is whether or not these women perceive verbal and emotional violence as not violence since it is not physical. The women who did not experience physical violence explained the damage which verbal abuse had done to them emotionally.

The analysis shows that the women themselves have a different perception of what family violence is. For example, even though I would consider verbal and emotional abuse

as one category since they seem to overlap, the women made a clear-cut distinction between the two. Moreover, it is interesting to note that some women (Neo, Thato, Pinki, and Brooke) did not mention any experience of verbal abuse at all, yet if one argues on a commonsense level, verbal abuse would always precede physical abuse. And these were the women who experienced some of the shocking cases of physical violence. Jealousy plays a vital role in emotional abuse. While some women were being accused of being unfaithful to their partners, others were being deliberately provoked into becoming jealous as in Sophi's case, and the lack of such expected jealousy triggers violence. For her partner to leave telephone numbers around in her own flat is something bad, let alone having the girlfriends ring him at her house. It is not only a sign of abuse but also to do with the many characteristics of wife battering. It shows the different patterns of behaviour which people involved in a violence situation are subjected to. In conclusion, the analysis indicates that no matter what form of violence involved, the victim is somehow left with a feeling of hurt, whether physical or not. Some are left with a feeling of guilt or some responsibility as a result of what they had been told over time, and some (Tseli and Maria) are left with a feeling of worthlessness as partners and as mothers. Stephanie mentioned that the hardest situation was to convince her partner that she was not sleeping around. As she put it:

“there was nothing I could do or say in order to prove him wrong. He would call me names like slut or a whore because that was what was in his mind. He had already decided that I was sleeping around and there was nothing I could say to change his thinking. That was one of the hardest things I had to live with apart from his beatings”

As a follow up on this question, women were asked to describe the worst incidents of violence that they had experienced, and the results are shown in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WORST INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Emotional</i>
Mpho	Nappy in Mouth	N/A	N/A
Neo	Punched on Face Smash Glasses	N/A	N/A
Tseli	None	Verbal Abuse	Death Threats Suicided
Thato	Jumped on Stomach Bladder/Bowel Burst Hospitalised	N/A	N/A
Lerato	None	N/A	Death Threats
Pinki	None	None	None
Sophi	Beating Punched at Ear Earring Stuck in Skin Bruises/Black Eye	None	None
Maria	None	None	Nervous Breakdown
Renee	Dragged from House	None	Threats with Rock
Stephanie	Dragged by Hair Head against Wall	None	N/A
Brooke	Slapping Choking Unconscious	None	N/A
Wendy	None	None	Death Threats

The data in the table above indicates that amongst the worst incidents of violence, half of the women mentioned physical violence as the most common. Incidents included punching, smashing, jumping on, beating, dragging, pushing, slapping and choking. Thato described one of the most life-threatening situations she had ever been in. It was after an argument that her partner became physically violent. As she told her story: "He jumped on my stomach until my bladder burst. I was hospitalised several times...Nobody knew if I was going to live. Even the doctors could not make any promises".

Sophi was beaten up during breastfeeding period. She described it as a "good beating". She asserted: "I was beaten when I was breastfeeding the first child. That was a good beating which left me with bruises and a black eye. In another incident he punched me at the ear and the earring stuck in my skin".

Stephanie was “dragged outside my house by hair, and once outside had my head continually pushed against a brick wall”. Brooke was subjected to constant slapping and was “choked until I lost consciousness”. Mpho had a dirty nappy stuffed in her mouth after an argument, while Neo was punched in the face and had glasses smashed in front of her. She thought her partner was going to stab her using those.

Emotional violence was mentioned as the second most common form of violence. About half of the women mentioned having suffered some incidents of emotional abuse. Tseli’s partner had made several death threats and even took an overdose once. But what hurt her most was when she:

“...discovered that he had been abusing our daughter since the age of six, as well as his niece who was staying with us. That was when I finally left him. But he tracked me down at a Women’s Refuge and asked to talk to us (me and the kids). When we came out he pulled out a gun and shot himself in front of everyone else. This is an emotional punishment that I will live with for the rest of my life. This has changed my whole life. Even the kids still have a lot of problems and are undergoing counselling”.

This excerpt brings out another significant link between wife-battering and child abuse. While none of the women mentioned any sexual abuse as children, this particular case study points to the possibility that male batterers can also become child molesters.

Renee recalled her worst experience after two years of marriage. As she put it: “I said something about one of his mates and he just didn’t like it. He grabbed me by the throat and dragged me a few metres from the house. He pushed me to the ground and threatened to smash my face with a rock”.

Lerato had been threatened with a rifle a couple of times. Wendy was threatened with a machete, and Maria had suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of constant verbal abuse.

The analysis shows that when it comes to what is labelled worst incidents of violence, women are highly likely to sustain serious injuries as a result of the beatings

inflicted upon them. It also brings home the point that physical violence is still the most common form, followed by threats of physical violence using dangerous weapons such as rifles or the use of broken bottles. Emotional abuse also plays a major role especially when the other partner uses threats as blackmail. For example, Tseli's case bears a testimony to that. While she had been subjected to constant verbal abuse and had her children sexually abused, her partner used death threats as a bargaining power to have her where he wanted. The threat to kill himself and the taking of an overdose so as to stop her from leaving the situation shows the abuse of power and trust in a marriage situation. The stories of these women are an indication that violence can range from mild to life threatening within the spur of a moment.

In a follow-up question, women were asked if they ever said anything to their partners at the time of violence, and what the latter's responses were. The results are shown in Table 4.4.

Apart from Thato and Brooke, the rest of the women had at least tried to address the situation by either trying to reason or trying to stop the partners from continuing with their violence. Mpho, Renee and Brooke got more or less similar responses from their partners. According to Mpho, "everytime I would try to calm him down, but he didn't bother. He just took no notice". Renee's partner would just ignore her, and Stephanie ended by retaliating because her partner did not care about her please to stop.

Neo, Lerato and Maria also shared similar experiences. Neo used to "scream at him to stop his violence, particularly when the children were there. But the more screams, the more punches". For Lerato, "everytime I cried, he would get even more excited. I had no choice but to try and fight back". This was also a similar experience for Maria, who very unfortunately was mistaken for a mad woman.

TABLE 4.4: PARTNER'S RESPONSE DURING VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Addressing the Violence</i>	<i>Partner's Response</i>
Mpho	Tried Calming Him Down	Took No Notice
Neo	Screamed at Him	More Punches
Tseli	Asked Why Violent	Her Fault Not Good in Bed All Blame Goes to her
Thato	Never Had Choice to Talk	Not Applicable
Lerato	Cry Try to Fight Back	Gets Even More Excited
Pinki	Asked What Wrong She Did Just Took the Blame	Always Blamed Her as Cause
Sophi	Many Times Asked Why	Thought He Was Justified Told Her She Deserved It
Maria	Tried to Reason	Gets Even Worse
Renee	Tried to Stop Him	Just Ignored Her
Stephanie	Asked Him to Stop Retaliated	Did Not Care
Brooke	No Way to Reason His Look Just Enough	Not Applicable
Wendy	It Was Unbelievable	Sometimes Talking Helped

Tseli, Pinki and Sophi too had similar experiences. They used to be blamed for all the violence. Tseli would ask her partner why he was so violent, and she used to be told “it was my fault because I was no good in bed. All the time the blame goes to the wife”. For Pinki, “I would always try to ask him as to what wrong I had done. I knew that I was not wrong, but I just took the blame. He always blamed me for causing everything.” Sophi would many times ask why her partner was violent. “He thought he was justified. He always told me that I deserved it.”

Thato and Brooke had no chance to say anything during the violence. Brooke mentioned that “there was no way to reason. The look on his face was just enough”. Wendy’s situation was a bit different from the rest. Even though at times she could not believe what was happening, she would still try and reason with her partner. She argued that sometimes the talking used to help stop him from being more violent.

Apart from Thato and Brooke, all the women tried to address their partners’ violence by either seeking an explanation or retaliating. Most of them were blamed for being the source of all the violence, they were told that they deserved it, or that it was their fault. There were some excuses used such as “you are not good in bed”. For some women (Neo, Lerato, and Maria) questioning the violence was a source of increased excitement for the partner, some (Mpho, Renee, and Stephanie) were just ignored and others (Tseli, Pinki, and Sophi) were blamed for their own victimisation. It is clear that some women are never even given the chance to negotiate or reason. But the patterns that emerged from the responses were that of escalating violence and blaming the victim. The blame the victim thesis actually indicates that violent men to a certain extent believe that they are justified for their actions – that it is somebody else’s fault.

The women were further asked to describe their partner’s attitude after each incident of violence, and the results are shown in Table 4.5.

Three quarters of the women mentioned that their partners at least apologised. Lerato, Renee, and Brooke’s partners attributed love to their violence. According to Renee: “He would apologise and say all sorts of things; that he didn’t mean to do it. It is because he loves me, and it will never happen again”. This story is similar to Stephanie’s. Her partner used to tell her “He is sorry, he shouldn’t have done it. It would never happen again”. For both Mpho and Brooke, their partners ultimately stopped feeling sorry for their actions. Mpho asserted: “He used to apologise, and always wanted sex afterwards. If

I refused he would just rape me. He ultimately even stopped apologising”. Brooke put it this way: “He used to be apologetic earlier. He always told me he did it because of love. But later he never even apologised”. Tseli’s partner used to apologise on grounds that he was drunk whenever he got violent. According to Sophi “he would apologise but things would be alright for a few days only. Maybe two to three days”.

TABLE 4.5: WOMEN’S AFTERMATHS OF VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Positive Response</i>	<i>Negative Response</i>
Mpho	Apologised	Always wants sex No More Apology
Neo	Nice Everytime Apologetic	
Tseli	Apologetic	Blames Alcohol
Thato	Sleep	Go out drinking
Lerato	Apologetic It is Love	
Pinki	Apologetic	
Sophi	Apologetic	2–3 Days peace
Maria		Never discussed
Rencee	Apologetic Didn’t Mean it It is Love	
Stephanie	He is Sorry Shouldn’t Have Done It Would Never Happen Again	
Brooke	Earlier, Apologetic It Was Love	No Apology
Wendy		Nothing happened

Looking at the pattern of these responses, they resemble Walker’s (1979) phase of remorse in her six stages of the cycle of violence. This is the phase which involves shame

and fear of the consequences, denial and playing down, such as “it was only a bit of a shove”, or promises of changed behaviour in future.

Thato’s partner seemed to have had a rather different attitude towards his violence. He would not apologise but would rather “sleep or go out drinking”. Neo’s partner was apologetic and would become nice all the time until he erupted again. Maria decided not to discuss anything regarding her partner’s violent outbursts afterwards, while for Wendy the partner would “just pretend as if nothing happened”. According to these women, this type of behaviour and attitude caused them a lot of emotional trauma.

What is important to note from the women’s stories is that for many of them it was not like they had been involved in a single incident of violence. Name-calling and threats were common, but it is interesting to note that, for some women, moving into a new relationship did not save them. Lerato, Stephanie, Thato, and Tseli had actually experienced more than one incident of physical abuse at the hands of one or more partners. I should point out that Lerato was actually in a women’s refuge more as a result of her eldest son’s violence. When her abusive partner left her for another woman, her son took over the stepfather’s behaviour. Lerato was married three times.

As the data suggests, most of the time there is an excuse for the violence. The partner would apologise on the basis of having been intoxicated, or the violence was an expression of his love for the female partner. For many of them, promises of not continuing with their behaviour are just too common. For some, even though they used to apologise for their violent behaviour earlier, with time they even stop apologising. They do not see the need to keep apologising.

What is intriguing is why women too often fall prey to empty promises. If someone makes a promise it is commonsense that such a promise should be kept. But the stories so far show that too many unkept promises were made to women. This also proves

that violence is a cycle that escalates over time. An explanation would probably relate to the way the promises act as a knot to tie these women in a violent relationship. It is either that such promises make a woman feel loved and worthwhile to her partner, or further confuses them about rational decisions concerning their situation. For being constantly told that they are loved, the violence would never occur again, or alcohol was to blame, all seem to influence the women's decision of what is right or wrong in an intimate relationship. The reason most men apologise after violence is tied to their knowledge of their partner's soft spot, that the violence was all a result of love, because women need passion. Such promises are some of the factors that keep women in a state of perpetual violence, as the next chapter will show.

The following section addresses the views of the male perpetrators on the nature of violence as a phenomenon. The purpose is to compare the views of the victims and perpetrators and to provide an insight into how different people involved in a violent situation view their lot.

4.2 PERPETRATORS' ACCOUNTS OF VIOLENCE

This section deals with the types of violence which the perpetrators in this study inflicted on their partners. The thinness of data in this section is acknowledged beforehand. This was a result of the perpetrators' reluctance to talk about some of the violence. There was also a 'deliberate' lack of expression which resulted in 'I don't know' or 'I don't remember' kind of responses and even silence when probed. They made it clear that there were some critical issues that could jeopardise their cases. The problem is also a result of the fact that no pilot study was possible with this particular group. But first of all an overview of their respective demographic backgrounds will be provided in the table below.

TABLE 4.6: PERPETRATORS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
Richard	19	Australian	Single	0	unemployed
Jack	24	Australian	Separation	1	unemployed
Tim	27	Aboriginal	4 De factos	3	unemployed
Steve	34	Aboriginal	Married	3	unemployed

Respondents are listed from the youngest to the oldest for purposes of this section only. The youngest respondent was 19 years of age, two were in their mid twenties and the oldest was 34 years. Half of the sample population was of Aboriginal descent and the other half was of white Australian descent. Their marital status shows quite a diversity, ranging from single, married, four de facto relationships and separation. Two men had three children each, one had one child, and the other one had none. In terms of occupation, all men were unemployed at the time of the incident.

It should be noted that the small sample size was a function of the relative lack of availability and willingness to be interviewed of respondents as discussed in chapter 3.

Table 4.7 shows responses from interviews with male perpetrators of family violence. All of the respondents mentioned both physical and verbal violence as the main types they have been involved in. Hitting with fists was the most common form of physical violence, followed by punching, and finally by smashing of items. Perhaps it could be assumed that all cases of physical violence had been preceded by verbal abuse, though the data reveal rather more diverse forms of physical violence for some respondents. For example, both Tim and Steve had been involved in more than one activity of physical violence.

TABLE 4.7: PERPETRATORS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Objects</i>	<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Afterwards</i>
Tim	Hitting Punching Hit Walls	Fists	Gets Wild	No Communication Black Eye Bruises
Steve	Smash Bottles Punching		Arguments	Feels Low, Guilty Talks to Uncle/Mum Sometimes Cry
Richard	Fights	Fists	Arguments	Feels Very Bad Counselling
Jack	Hitting	Fists	Arguments	Feels Bad Nose-Bleed

In terms of the aftermath, three quarters of the respondents mentioned some feelings of remorse. The pattern of this remorse included feeling bad, low, and guilty. As Steve put it: "I feel low-down afterwards, guilty. Normally I talk to my pastor uncle and my mother when I am feeling down. I find talking to them very helpful, it takes off the pressure. Sometimes I just want to cry".

In a similar fashion, Richard has also tried to address his problem. He asserted: "I used to feel very bad afterwards, but there was no one to talk to. I went to see a counsellor, but couldn't understand what she was saying. It just didn't help".

But not all men mentioned a feeling of remorse despite some of the injuries suffered by their victims. For instance, Tim's partner had a black eye and bruises after his violence. When asked as to how he felt afterwards, he simply replied that there was no communication whatsoever between him and his partner.

However, the data indicate that some perpetrators do feel sorry for their actions at some stage. Perhaps this could be due to the evident injuries they inflicted on their partners

during fights, or maybe this feeling is due largely to the fear of and/or threats of a partner's decision to leave the relationship. For example, Steve's wife was taken to hospital as a result of his kicks, and apparently left him for sometime afterwards. Jack hit his girlfriend until she had a bleeding nose that did not require medical attention. But she finally left him. At the time of interviews, he had not heard from her since she left, and he did not even know where she was.

The expression of remorse seems common to both victim and perpetrator accounts of perpetrator violence. Looking at the nature of responses from the women, most male perpetrators of violence have a tendency to be apologetic and become all nice after each incident of violence. At one extreme, they tend to blame the victim for their actions; at the other, they become nice, with all sorts of material and emotional promises. It is either they became violent because they were drunk, it would not happen again, things would be better in future, or explicitly that they did it because of their love for the victims. The bottom line is that the perpetrator does not want to lose (his) victim, which points to some form of emotional dependence.

This final part of the chapter analyses the service provider view and understanding of violence. It should be pointed out that the participants were drawn from different organisations, which should be borne in mind when attempting to come to terms with the nature of their responses.

4.3 SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERCEPTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Most of the information provided is based on the general understanding of and the accounts of the interaction of the various service providers in this study, and their respective clients. Cindy and Group are refuge workers in different locations, Frank is a probation officer, and Nancy and Sarah are counsellors for a Women's Center. The service providers involved were asked to comment on the relationship between violence and such factors as ethnicity, age, and marital status, of their clients. This question was based on the assumption that violence and its frequency has to do with these variables (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 75). The results are illustrated in Tables 4.8 and 4.9 respectively.

TABLE 4.8: VIOLENCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF CLIENTS

<i>Service Provider</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Cindy	No Link	No Link	No Link
Frank	18–24	Married De Facto	Aborigines
Nancy	No Link	No Link	No Link
Sarah	Mid 20's	All Forms	Some Cultures
Group	No Link	No Link	No Link

The data in Table 4.8 indicate that in so far as any relationship between family violence and some demographic variables were concerned, Cindy, Nancy and Group (these were five workers from one refuge who categorically refused to be interviewed individually, on the grounds that they were all equal and performed same duties when it comes to clients) have not observed any such link. It is also important to note that unlike the rest of the service providers in this study, Cindy and Group are all refuge workers. It is

interesting to note the similarities in terms of their responses to this question, despite being located in different States.

Cindy responded: "I do believe that violence does not have degrees. Violence is violence. Also, it has nothing to do with what nationality; it occurs in any culture at any age. Children as small as three months have been physically and sexually abused".

The Group, which also argued that there is no link between violence and these other variables, put it as follows:

"Domestic violence cuts across all socio-economic levels, cultures and age groups. To place violence in categories of low, medium, and high minimises the violence. I do not believe violence can be measured nor its effects. It is an individual's experience which can only determine...the only common denominator is that in 90% of cases the perpetrator is male".

Nancy could not comment much on this question except that most of the time where violence is involved, men are perpetrators; and "in some cultural and socio-economic groupings men have less skills in communication". She believes that this contributes to violence to some extent. It should be noted again that some respondents in this category were reluctant to discuss much regarding their clients. Privacy and confidentiality were mentioned as the main reasons.

Frank works with male perpetrators of violence, and all the male respondents in this study were with his department. The majority of his clients are of Aboriginal descent. However, he feels that this category is overrepresented. He argued that violence "seems to be more acceptable within Aboriginal culture. But this is changing". In terms of age, the majority of his clients are in the 18–24 age group. Another important observation he had made was the similarity in age category of perpetrators of family violence with other crimes. In so far as marital status was concerned, violence occurred in either legally married or de facto relationships: "but for most part it involves people living

together...personally I think the ability to communicate lessens the likelihood of violence”.

Nancy has already echoed the same point.

Another respondent argued that violence probably has to do more with culture. Sarah observed that: “In some cultures women are more put down. They are devalued and this results in more violence...where there is violence in the community, there is likelihood to be more violence against women”.

She gave examples of some African and Aboriginal cultures where in most cases men are the dominant figure in society. She also observed that the age group that is prone to violence is mid-20s. In terms of marital status she feels that violence, especially physical, verbal and emotional occur just the same, regardless of any other condition.

The views on the relationship between violence and marital status have also been supported by the Elliott and Shanahan (1988: 45) results. They argued that family violence occurs no more frequently in de facto relationships than in legally married couples. In making comparisons, the tables on victim and perpetrator demographic features indicate that family violence is likely to occur in any living together setting, particularly any type of sexual relationship.

Table 4.8 also reveals the different ways in which people who come into contact with victims and/or perpetrators of violence view the subject itself. Others, particularly non-refuge workers in this study, make a link between family violence and all sorts of other variables of demographic and even economic nature; but refugee workers in particular seem to deny that violence could be linked to other factors, because by doing so the extent of the problem is minimised.

One could infer that this belief in so far as refugee workers are concerned has to do with their ideology that in all cases men are perpetrators and women are victims without doing any sociological analysis to address the problem. This belief could also be to do with

what type of a refuge one is dealing with. For example, some feminist refuges have a very radical position in so far as family violence is concerned, advocating only 'feminist therapy' to battered women. Goals of such shelters include keeping women from returning to their husbands. Their rules prohibit reentry to any woman who uses the services and then returns to her former partner. Their rules prohibit contact between shelter clients and their partners. Their form of therapy is argued to increase the woman's feeling of being in control of her life (Loseke, 1992: 34). That is why often there are conflicting interests amongst refuges themselves. This conflict of interests does not end with the refuges, but also manifests into problems for researchers who need access to the various refuges. For example, this study caused some problems for some refuges. Some would not allow me access to their clients because I was operating from a rival refuge (feminist) that held a totally different ideology from theirs. Others I talked to also confirmed that this clash of interests becomes obvious especially when one has to access some information from all the refuges. It was also my personal observation that the refuge I was operating from was not necessarily in a harmonious working relationship with others. It was evident to me that there seemed to be some power struggle as well between refuges.

This observation could be supported by material from Hopkins and McGregor (1991: 12) regarding the confusion over which refuge was established first in Australia. In some accounts, Warrawee refuge in Fremantle was established in 1971 and could therefore be regarded as the first refuge. Elsie, a refuge in Glebe, was established in 1974. However, some people like Hopkins and McGregor (1991) believe that the latter refuge, which apparently is run by feminists, is Australia's first refuge. Their argument is that on one hand, the establishment of the former was not motivated by a concern about family violence but rather by a shortage of temporary accommodation for both women and children. On the other, the latter set the whole process in motion and was more visible in

the struggle for funding. It has also been most self-consciously and deliberately part of the movement against family violence.

TABLE 4.9: SERVICE PROVIDERS' VIEW OF TYPES OF VIOLENCE

<i>Service Provider</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Verbal</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Others</i>
Cindy	Physical Threats	Verbal Child Abuse	Emotional	Sexual Economic Incest
Frank	Physical	None	None	None
Nancy	Pushing Poking Hitting	Yelling Name Calling Shouting	Humiliate Rape	Restrict Income Isolation
Sarah Group	Physical Head But Kicking Hitting Bashing	Verbal Names	Emotional Emotional	Financial Sexual Isolation

The table above shows the different types of family violence as perceived by the service providers. All respondents mentioned physical violence, with hitting, bashing, kicking to face and body, poking, pushing, and head butting being singled out. Verbal abuse was the second most common form, and ranged from name calling, yelling, shouting and threats. Economic and sexual abuses were other common types that were mentioned by more than half of the respondents. It is very interesting to realise the differences in responses when it comes to the question of types of violence. Some excerpts from the victims in this study are used to highlight some of the forms of abuse the service providers are referring to.

While service providers mentioned economic and social abuse (isolation) as some not-to-be-taken-for-granted forms of violence, neither the women victims nor male perpetrators of violence mentioned any of these. That is a striking finding. This is because people who are involved in family violence situations have their own perception of what 'violence' is as compared to 'abuse'. There are certain situations that both parties (victims and perpetrators) would not consider as violence, yet service providers would.

In short, both women and men in this study did not view economic abuse as a form of family violence. It shows that service providers think of themselves as experts in their field. They know better what is good for their clients. While this is an important point that has implications for service provision, the reader is reminded that the 'sample' under observation is limited. Even more striking is to observe that women in particular mention both the economic factor and isolation as some of the reasons that kept them in abusive relationships. This will be discussed in the next chapters. Other forms of abuse which were mentioned included emotional abuse, child abuse, incest, and isolation or social abuse. These different types of abuse are outlined below.

Sarah perceives verbal abuse as the most common form of violence. She argued that even though the women had enough of the abuse:

"because of a lack of self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and need of male company, they tend to ignore what goes on within their situation. At one extreme they have reached a stage of being docile regardless of whatever happens. They keep finding excuses to hang in there in abusive relationships. At the other extreme they can no longer see the cycle of violence since they are in it"

Nancy and Group saw this form of abuse as a necessary precursor to physical violence. From the discussions with women victims in this study, two thirds mentioned some form of verbal abuse as having led to physical violence.

Isolation, also known as social abuse, was another form of violence which service providers mentioned. Nancy described it as:

“restricting who female partners can see, forbidding any contact with friends, family members, and neighbours, no social outings as a couple or even unpleasant outbursts so that consequently everybody feels threatened and would not want to visit any more”.

Often this leaves the wife alone so that the husband is able to twist her as he wishes, without any interference whatsoever. Economic abuse was mentioned as well. Nancy described this situation as one “whereby a husband would restrict income but make the wife responsible for payment of debts”. This could be tied to what one of the victims (Renee) described as her actual experience:

“The middle of the marriage was the worst time. He had a lot of job-related stress. You know, being a proud man, he wouldn’t allow me to work because in that way he wouldn’t be in a position to control me financially. He was very proud. Always wanted everything under his own control”.

Sexual abuse has been described too well by one of the victims. Lerato described how she had a good relationship until such time she decided to develop it further. It was not until that time when her partner started showing some signs of violence. As she put it:

“It was not until engagement that I realised some changes in his behaviour. One night he just came home drunk. We had an argument regarding his drinking and late nights, which was not what he wanted to hear. He raped me, and then tore off the engagement ring”.

From this story one could deduce that until engagement Lerato’s partner did not realise his right over her. The engagement ring seemed to have served as an indicator that he had every right to do whatever he wanted with her body.

The final form of abuse mentioned was emotional. According to Nancy, male partners “keep their spouses guessing as to what wrong they have done, humiliation, like telling them that they are stupid”.

Professionals who work in the field of family violence find all of these behaviour patterns present in physically assaultive relationships (Elliott and Shanahan, 1988: 26). But most often verbal and emotional abuse are perhaps the most pervasive forms. Verbal abuse

is a dominant feature of all violent relationships, particularly during the tension build up phase before a violent episode.

This chapter has attempted to show the various types of violence that can exist in the most intimate of relationships. From the information provided by the three categories of respondent, it is evident that physical abuse is the most common type. It is also important to note that verbal abuse plays a very important role as a catalyst to behaviour that leads to physical violence. Verbal abuse is the second most common type of violence. Another important finding or observation is that one way or the other, every woman suffers at least verbal and emotional abuse. This can be seen from the various tables in the text on the types of violence.

The study also suggests that violence is not necessarily one way. Richard argued that his partner was as equally verbally as physically violent. Three women mentioned that after a lengthy period of verbal and emotional abuse they turned physical themselves. Stephanie turned physical in self-defence, after her partner hit her with several objects. Maria turned physical out of frustration. Her partner had never laid his finger on her, but the verbal and emotional trauma she suffered was just too much for her. She could no longer tolerate it. In her own words, "I had to let the steam out somehow". Lerato would sometimes try and fight back because her partner would not stop being violent.

Other important observations made concerned the manners in which the partners reacted during the violence. While some women were blamed for the violence, some were not taken any notice of. Some could not even utter any word out of fear. For others, the more they tried to reason, the more the violence escalated. Worse still, many of the women mentioned that they were actually blamed for the violence.

Having discussed the different shapes which family violence can take, and the various responses to the violence by the perpetrators, the reader may wish to further

explore the reasons why such violence occurs in the first place. This is the main thrust of the next chapter, which addresses the issue from the victim, perpetrator and service provider view.

CHAPTER 5

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WIFE-BATTERING

Research on the various aspects of family violence has indicated a multitude of factors associated with violence in the home, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. The 1960s research on the same field advanced the model of psychopathology. That is, mental illness and character disorders supposedly caused people to abuse their wives (Family Violence Education Taskforce, 1991: 98). Other intraindividual models proposed alcohol and drugs as contributing to family violence (Geller, 1992: 66; Pahl, 1985: 39), although no causal relationship has been found, except that in many cases where wife battering is present, alcohol is also present. Still others have consistently found that factors such as the learned behaviour (Walker, 1979: 22), low self-esteem (Pagelow, 1984: 81), low socio-economic status, stress and social isolation are all related to family violence (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: 196). However, researchers like Dobash and Dobash (1980: 30) and Martin (1981: 7) argue that patriarchy and male domination are the primary factors associated with wife battering.

The purpose of this chapter therefore is to explore some of the possible factors that are associated with wife battering and the reasons why some women decide to remain in abusive relationships. Similar questions regarding the factors associated with violence and the women's decisions to stay in abusive relationships were asked of all three categories of respondent, that is, women survivors, male perpetrators and service providers. However, for both the women and men, there was an additional question regarding violence within their family of childhood. It should be pointed out that some service providers answered certain questions in a general way, as they considered that

more specific answers would amount to an invasion of their clients' privacy and confidentiality

5.1 WOMEN'S ACCOUNTS OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE.

The following section deals with the women's own perceptions of the factors they associated with violence in their relationships. A follow-up question asked whether or not they had left their partners after the violence, if they went back, and the reasons that prompted them to go back. They were requested to comment on the nature of their relationships after they returned. The women were also asked if they witnessed and/or experienced any violence in their families when they were growing up. The results pertaining to the first question are shown in Table 5.1.

Looking at the nature of the responses in the table below, alcohol was the most frequently mentioned factor, being associated with violence by more than half the women. A quarter mentioned jealousy, the second most common factor. The rest of the responses varied from job-related stress, lack of communication, lack of socialising, comments about friends, arguments over families, provocation and late nights. Mpho was not very sure of what she could attribute towards her partner's violence. For most of the time she was kept in isolation and there were no social gatherings allowed, so she could not figure out any reasons for the violence. Tseli blamed the alcohol for her partner's behaviour. According to her "the man would go to the pub while the wife stays at home with the kids". Neo's partner was a jealous person. She mentioned his jealousy: "when I was talking to other guys, I think he became jealous when the relationship was becoming more comfortable. Alcohol as well was affecting his behaviour".

Thato partially blamed alcohol. When the abuse first started:

Lerato explained the violence in terms of both jealousy and alcohol. She mentioned that it was not until their engagement that his behaviour started to change. She observed:

“Earlier in the marriage we would go out for family picnics, and club dancing. But later things changed. He was never there, always with ‘dad’ or drinking at the pub. Every time he was drunk there would always be abuse. One night he came home and just erupted. He chased me around the house while he was masturbating”.

Pinki complained about late nights and gambling; that her partner’s “behaviour changed 3–4 months after we had decided to live together. He would go out to a pub and starts gambling. He would come home late and always broke”.

Sophi had a similar story concerning alcohol consumption and violence:

“It was not until 6 months later that he showed some signs of violence. One time we had been drinking with friends and one of his friends said something which could have upset him. He was drunk and he started pushing me around. Afterwards, the violence actually happened all the time. I could never find out why he was violent although I realised he had problems with alcohol”.

She also mentioned that before they had children, they used to do things together, but after the children were born, things changed. “I was always stuck at home with the kids”.

Maria met her partner through his work trips to Sydney. But she decided to move with him to Canberra because she wanted to escape from Sydney. Their problems started: “after one year, we started arguing over families. He didn’t want my relatives, particularly my mother to stay with us. He just didn’t want her around. That’s when he started screaming at me”.

Renee experienced some violence after two years of marriage. She had made a comment regarding one of her partner’s friends, and he did not like it. That was enough to grab her by the throat and choke her.

Stephanie explained that even though she and her partner decided to move in together for economic reasons, it was more of his idea to start a proper relationship.

However, later things turned out to be different. As she told me:

“A month before I moved in with him, once we were at our friends’ place and he got drunk and started to verbally abuse me. When we got home he became physically violent and was throwing a stereo at me. His major problem was arrogance whenever he drank. He was also jealous because he thought I was sleeping around. But I really believe his drinking was a problem”

Brooke’s husband of 14 years showed some violence during her second pregnancy. As mentioned earlier, her partner was a very proud man, who would not allow her to even work. But the pressures of work, coupled with other problems were the source of their problems especially during this second pregnancy. His car had some problems, and she described it as having been:

“his pride. Everything else came second to this car and when he ran into problems with it, he was just devastated. He couldn’t eat, he couldn’t talk to anybody. Being a person who does not want to fail in anything whatever, pressure and stress affect him very much. You know, he is a real perfectionist, always aiming for excellence”.

She mentioned that because of his attitude, they never even had any time together to try and talk things out. “He is a workaholic”. Wendy mentioned alcohol and lack of communication on her partner’s part as the major problems regarding his violent behaviour. The first time she experienced his violence was two months after they decided to live together. He got drunk and physically threatened her. It should be noted that this was the man who, after each incident of violence, would pretend that nothing had happened at all. Since they never went out together, or shared anything in common, it made it difficult for her to explain his violent outbursts except for alcohol and his lack of communicative skills.

It seems from the above data that the women do not necessarily find anything wrong with the abusive partner except for factors of an external nature. For instance, if it were not for alcohol, the relationship would be fine. If my relatives did not come to stay with us we would not have fights. If he did not have work-related problems he would not have hit me. It seems at this stage that each and every one of the women is identifying factors other than the abuse as the problem. The women seem to be undergoing a denial process.

The women were further asked about the reasons why they remained, left and/or returned to their violent relationships. The responses are shown in Table 5.2.

TABLE 5.2: WOMEN'S DECISION TO EITHER LEAVE OR STAY

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Reason to Leave</i>	<i>Reason to Come Back</i>	<i>Afterwards</i>
Mpho	Physical Violence	Not Applicable	N/A
Neo	Generally Violence	Hope for Change	Things Worse
Tseli	Child Abuse	Not Applicable	Suicided/Remarried
Thato	Physical Violence Hospitalised	Hope for Change	Remarried
Lerato	Neglect/Illness Unhappy/Powerless	Not Applicable	Quit
Pinki	Violence	Affection/Promises	Didn't Work
Sophi	Violence	Go Off Alcohol	Things Fine More Fights/Adultery
Maria	Misunderstanding	Needs Partner Hope for Change	Not Applicable

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Reason to Leave</i>	<i>Reason to Come Back</i>	<i>Afterwards</i>
		Prove Herself	
Renee	Abuse/Threats	Children	Choked/Quit
Stephanie	Lack of Concern	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
	Alcohol/Sleazy		
Brooke	Alcohol	Promise of Change	Considerate
	Late Nights		Very Gentle
	Physical Violence		More Violence
Wendy	Violence	Stopped Drinking	Good Affair
	Alcohol		Moved States
			More violence

As we shall see, many of these women actually left their partners more than once, and, importantly, some decided to go back for various reasons.

Lerato, a woman who had been married three times had an interesting story to tell. Her first husband left her for another woman. She would “separate regularly with the second husband”. The reasons why she left her third husband after four and half years were:

“I was not allowed to have any friends. But he was never there, always with dad. He was never there for me. He only needed his parents. There was just too much of his parents’ involvement in our daily life. I became too ill, not only from his neglect but also from unhappiness. I felt helpless and powerless as his wife”.

What I found interesting about this story is why Lerato seemed so keen on being involved in intimate relationships despite the fact that they did not seem to work for her. I found it also fascinating that some questions regarding the male violence triggered her old memories regarding her former marriages, but when it came to actually discussing the violent episodes of her former marriages she simply told me that she did not remember

some events. I had a similar problem with the perpetrators. The difficulty is that most often people cannot be forced to talk about the things they do not want to talk about.

For Neo, it was yet another story:

“I first left my partner after one year of marriage. After that we had a couple of breaks and I would seek safety from my parents. But this did not help improve the situation because the assaults were regular. What hurt me most was that after every episode of violence he is every time nice and apologetic, which leaves me confused as to what exactly is going on. I finally left him after 4 years”.

She argued the main reason for going back all the time was hope that he might change, which very unfortunately did not happen.

Thato experienced some punching and belting from her first husband after the first 3–4 months of their then 18 months marriage. She stated earlier that every time the violence took place she always thought she had done something to anger him, and that she deserved it then. She mentioned:

“having been physically assaulted numerous times throughout the marriage. I left for the Women’s refuge a few times, but kept going back. I was hoping for change, but also because I got married to him in order to get away from my unstable home. The situation was better when he went to jail as a result of his violence. But when he came out he was a real monster. He came straight to my flat and in the process of fighting he jumped onto my stomach until my bladder/bowel burst”.

Several points may be made about the above extract. Firstly, the main reason for getting into this marriage was to escape an unhappy childhood family. But instead, Thato seems to have walked straight into a lion’s den. The person whom she believed would protect her was actually the one who was destroying her. Secondly, she was stuck with him no matter what happened because she believed that her family was no good for her – she seemed to have no alternative but to put up with him. The extract also shows us, thirdly, how violence can escalate over time. The partner was sent to jail as a result of his violent behaviour; but on release he goes out for even more vengeance. This indicates that

ending and/or trying to end the relationship and seeking intervention can actually lead to more violence and negative repercussions.

Pinki also left her partner a few times and kept going back. She was:

“sick of the violence and left to stay with friends and sometimes with my sister. He would beg me to go back. The relationship would be very different. He would be apologetic and nice some time, then the violence would start again”.

Maria

“left a couple of times for Sydney where she stayed with relatives. I left because he didn’t want to understand that I had a mother. Even when we got back together, he was still uncomfortable because my mother was staying with us. He was complaining about lack of privacy but not realising that I also needed my mother to stay with us. I could not leave my mother to stay with relatives in Sydney while she could come and live comfortably with us in Canberra”.

I should make it clear that at the time of interviews Maria had been away from her partner for two months, and maintained that she was going back to her partner “to prove herself”. The implication here is that Maria still believes, to a certain extent, that she is to blame for the situation, that she is probably not a good partner. All the more reason why she has to go back regardless of all what happened to her, to show the partner that she is worthwhile.

Only one woman, Renee, mentioned that the main reason to stay in an abusive relationship was because of her children. She asserted: “I left him heaps of times after several abuse and physical threats. I went to stay with my parents. But I felt trapped especially because of the kids. It was not until I got custody that I decided to leave it”.

Stephanie left her second partner because he “was not concerned about our son. He wouldn’t give up his drinking and his sleazy life”.

Brooke had actually left her partner three times before, to stay with her mother. Apart from the violence itself, Brooke’s decision to leave was also determined by her partner’s alcohol and late nights. She noted:

“he would come back home drunk in the middle of the night and expects me to prepare dinner for him. Sometimes he would just throw the food at me. You know, I would leave but then he would contact me to get back together. He would be very gentle, considerate. He would tell me how much he loved me, and that things would be better. But that would last like a honeymoon stage. He was back at it again”.

Wendy too attributed her partner’s violence to alcohol. She had actually left twice.

The first time she stayed with a stranger for a couple of days, and then ended up in a caravan park. The second time was when she moved to a Women’s refuge. She told me:

“He was always drunk whenever he became violent. After I left he stopped drinking. We got back together. It was a good relationship while he didn’t drink. We even moved to another State. But things just got worse. He was more violent. I think it was because we did not have any family or friends around us. I had not even had a chance to make new friends around our area. I was solely dependent on him socially, emotionally and financially. One day he came home and he started fighting over nothing. He kicked me around the kitchen floor, and punched me in the jaw”.

While the consequences of the violence are shocking, it is even more shocking to realise the length of period that some women spent in a violent relationship. One such woman is Tseli, who had been married twice. Neither of her marriages worked because of violence, but for the purposes of this study she decided to concentrate on her second marriage and her decision was respected. Despite having been physically abused, called degrading names and subjected to numerous death threats she still stayed. She told her story:

“when I first met him, the relationship was thrilling; I was on top of the world. After eight-nine months we both decided to get married due to pregnancy...he started physically abusing me, calling me degrading names, made several death threats, and even took overdose once. But I first thought of leaving him when discovering of what he did to the kids, even though I was already planning to leave before. I made this final decision after ten years”.

This view of women leaving or returning to violent relationships because of children has also been supported by various responses from service providers as will be shown later in the text. However, the common theme in this particular case is that five out

of the twelve women involved commented that they remained in abusive relationships because of promises and hope of change in the partner's behaviour.

Another important observation from this study is the manner in which women would leave due to the violence, and after some weeks go back to the situation. For some of them, they had been in multiple violent relationships before. The question would be if someone had been involved in more than one violent relationship, why go for more? It appears that battered women often do this. The point is that unless something is done to raise their self-esteem, they are likely to stumble from one violent situation to another. This is surely linked to the 'hope of change' women have and they try to achieve that.

In the section that follows, women were asked about their family of origin, if there was any violence, and if they experienced any at all when they were growing up. The results are shown in Table 5.3.

The table below shows the various responses from women concerning their family of origin and violence. Out of the total sample interviewed, three quarters of the women had at least witnessed and experienced some form of violence during their childhood. For the most part, the violence was between the parents, and sometimes would extend to children. As the data indicates, the most commonly mentioned types of violence between adults were verbal (six mentions) and physical (nine mentions), and all the women who grew up in violent homes had experienced at least one or the other. Alcohol was also mentioned as the source of violence particularly on the part of parents. In those cases where alcohol was mentioned as the source, either one or both parents were alcoholics.

Neo did not mention any link between her childhood violence and her abusive relationship as an adult. She experienced "too much violence from my father as a child". However, she did mention that apart from "having a good friendship and fun with my partner, we decided to live together because I wanted some security". The implication is

that she did not feel secure in her family of origin. Tseli witnessed a lot of “verbal and physical violence between mum and dad. But I experienced a lot of verbal abuse from mum”. She explained that the main reason for getting married was pregnancy. But the question here would be whether or not at the time her partner was ready to make that commitment.

TABLE 5.3: WOMEN’S FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Own experience</i>
Mpho	Verbal	Father	Some
	Physical	Father	Couple of Times
Neo	Verbal	Father	Too Much
	Physical	Father	Too Much
Tseli	Verbal	Mother	Too much
	Physical	Parents	None
Thato	Physical	Parents	Belting from Both
Lerato	Some Physical	Parents	Just smacking
Pinki	Verbal	Parents	Some
	Physical	Parents	Just a Bit
Sophi	Physical	Mother/Boyfriends	Some
	Emotional/Mental	Mother	A lot
Maria	None	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Renee	None	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Stephanie	Verbal/Physical	Adopted Mother	A Lot
	Psychological	Adopted Mother	A Lot
Brooke	Physical	Father	None
	Verbal	Mother	Some
	Neglect	Both Parents	A lot
Wendy	None	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Thato not only witnessed violence between her parents but also experienced belting from both. She mentioned that apart from the mixed feelings she had about her relationship, she decided to get married to her partner to escape from her “unstable family”. The implication here as well is that regardless of the nature of the relationship, the respondent just felt she had to give herself away in order to get out of her family. What further implications does this have for the man? Most probably that the woman is now his property since her own family cannot even give her enough protection and security. The man might try and use the woman’s unstable family situation to his own advantage and convenience, knowing that the woman is well tied down. She cannot possibly go back to her family even if anything happens to her.

Lerato’s family was “not really violent. I was smacked for childish behaviour, if I was naughty”. But for one reason or the other at 18 years of age she decided to move in with her partner “to escape from my family”. This was despite the possessive behaviour that her partner had already portrayed in their relationship. This is yet another interesting story. Lerato was very much aware of the uncomfortable nature of the relationship, but because of her family problems she decided to move in with him. What makes her think that once they are living together his behaviour will change? He could argue that she came into the situation knowingly, and therefore should not expect him to change his habits.

Pinki witnessed a lot of violence between her parents “for more than eight years. But I experienced just a bit”. Sophi witnessed a lot of “verbal and physical violence between mum and her various boyfriends”. However, she experienced emotional, mental and some physical abuse from her mother.

Stephanie was a victim of physical, verbal and psychological abuse from her adopted mother. Brooke’s father was an alcoholic. But there was “basically a lot of

neglect from both parents. I got a lot of verbal abuse from my mum as a result of stress from my father's behaviour”.

An important observation is that in five cases mentioned, verbal abuse would precede physical violence. In cases where parents were perpetrators of violence on the children, the majority of the women mentioned having experienced at least verbal or physical violence from one or both parents. However, some women mentioned that their mothers would turn against them out of sheer frustration as a result of the violence perpetrated against her by the father. In other words, things being normal, the mother would not abuse their children. The question here would be is it a matter of power? Men abuse their female partners because they believe they are more powerful, and the women would in turn abuse the people who are powerless with respect to them, their own children. Even though some do not necessarily become physically violent, the idea of taking out their anger on somebody else serves the purpose, since in most cases they cannot confront the man.

One of the women believed that she was abused physically, emotionally and mentally because she was adopted. Although none of the women directly admitted to their childhood experiences as having affected their adult lives, less than half (four women) had mentioned that they just decided to live with and/or get married to their partners in order to escape the violence in their homes.

Another important observation to make from the information provided is that the quality of the marital relationship to an extent influences the likelihood of child abuse. In other words, where there is violence between parents, the probability of child abuse is greater.

5.2 PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTS OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE

TABLE 5.4: PERPETRATORS' ACCOUNTS OF CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

	Tim	Steve	Richard	Jack
Alcohol	●	●	●	●
Fights other blokes			●	
Fights outside		●		
Her clothes	●			
Her family	●			
Her violence		●	●	
His mother			●	
Jealousy	●		● ¹	● ²
Lying	●			
Messy house	●			

This section presents the perpetrators' own accounts of the factors they associate with their violent behaviour. The discussion also covers their perceptions of violence in relation to their childhood families.

The results in Table 5.4 indicate that alcohol is perceived as the most common factor associated with violence. The most interesting part of the interviews I had with the men was that they all admitted to having abused their partners while they were intoxicated.

¹ Suspicion

² Refers to past affair

But while they admitted to intoxication they argued that they were driven to become violent by some circumstances. For example, Tim explained that:

“I came home from the pub and the house was a mess and yet she was in the whole day. I asked her as to why the house was like that, but she lied to me. Then I discovered that she had been drinking with some friends. I just got angry and I hit her a couple of times”.

What Tim is telling us is that, despite his intoxication, he would not have become violent if the house was clean, and if the partner did not lie to him. But then one could also ask had he not been intoxicated would he still have behaved in the same manner? Perhaps he became jealous when he realised the partner had been drinking with friends at his home while he was not there? Maybe if he had been there things would have been different. So are we talking about alcohol as an excuse here? Steve and Richard’s stories provide some testimony for this, as we shall see.

It was not only the dirty house that caused Tim’s tantrums. He mentioned his hatred for the way his partner used to dress. Asked how this contributed to his violence, he noted:

“Sometimes my friends would come to the house to see me. But because of the way she was dressed, they seemed attracted to her. I hated it as much I hated her clothing. I just didn’t like it. She knew that I hated it but she never took any notice or did anything to change her behaviour. It used to make me wild”.

This point indicates jealousy, which was mentioned as the second most common factor by three-quarters of the respondents. In this case, the partner’s clothing and the kind of attention that his friends seemed to pay her was reason enough to become violent. Here one can see a man who seems to want to dictate what type of clothes his partner should wear so that other men would not pay any particular attention to her. The question of dominance/power also comes into play. The man feels he has all the power to choose for his partner what to wear at what time and in which setting.

He also mentioned that:

“her family was another source of our problems. We always quarreled about her family coming to live with us. I thought that was invasion of my privacy, as I couldn’t even let my own family come and stay with us. I felt they had to find their own accommodation”.

We again see a man who wants to determine who should come to his house and at what time. If he can go out to a pub and drink with his friends, what gives him the right to prevent other people from going to his house unless they are his friends, and he is there? Is it maintenance of privacy or simply keeping the woman in line with what he wants by isolating her?

Steve also blamed alcohol for his violent behaviour. One incident involved both drinking with friends:

“We got into an argument and before long it had turned into a fight. In the process of struggling I smashed some bottles. Our friends tried to break the fight but that was when my partner decided to start fighting herself. I punched her in the eye, and she had already grabbed one of the broken bottles, which she used to stab me. Another time we had been drinking at home, but then later decided to go to a pub. After having had enough to drink, I asked her that we should go home and she refused and we started fighting. We were thrown out of the pub and once outside the fight continued, simply because she was too drunk to understand. I hit her and she fell to the ground. I kept asking her to get up but she couldn’t and I kept using a little bit of force. She started bleeding. One of our friends called the police and they took her to hospital after the fight. They took up her case and charged me with assault because she was bleeding”.

Tim’s story of alcohol and jealousy is not unique. Richard too had a few things to tell about his partner despite having admitted to alcohol as the trigger. It is important to note that he made me aware that violence is not all one-way traffic, as will be shown in his narrative. Like Tim, he maintained some kind of provocation. His story is as follows:

“My girlfriend used to have another bloke and I was still suspicious. One time we were both drinking and we started quarrelling about it and the fight started. The worst part of it was that she was as argumentative and as violent and this did not help. I tried to calm her down but that was when she started to fight back and then I had no choice but to protect myself. I used my fists to hit her. I could have stopped if my mother did not intervene. It just made me worse as she was always on her side. Every time we had problems my mother would blame me, telling me I am the bad boy. The violence was getting out of hand and she called the police”.

What this story tells us is that his suspicion, drinking, her violence, and his mother's interference all provoked his anger. In other words, Richard resents anyone meddling in his private affairs. From a description like this, it is rather difficult to determine which is the major contributing factor of the violence. One could argue it was jealousy that was exacerbated by alcohol consumption. Or alternatively, it was the alcohol that triggered some bad memories. Whichever it was, the two seem to complement each other, and it is not easy to determine which has more effect on the violent behaviour.

It is also important to note the blame that he places on the partner's violence. For him, her attitude of fighting back both verbally and physically, instead of reasoning, was another factor associated with his violence. He blamed his mother as well, for she used to back his partner even if she was at fault.

Jack's violence was triggered by his partner's former relationship. He argued that most of the time they had arguments:

"it involved her past relationship with a man she had a kid with. Often it was the source of our arguments because I was not very sure if she had made a clean break with this man. Sometimes she had to meet him regularly because of the child, and I was jealous that it was just an excuse to be together again. One time I decided that we should discuss this issue in detail, but the argument ended up in a fight. I hit her across the face until she started to bleed from the nose".

What one could deduce from Jack's story is that he expects just too much from the partner when he actually went into the situation knowing that there was a child by another man involved. Why should this particular child suffer because the mother decided to get involved with somebody else and not the real father? It also indicates that as long as this child is there and the father is still alive, Jack could never have any trust. When will he be sure that there is nothing more than caring for the child between his partner and the other man? The father of the child will always remain a thorn in his flesh. Maybe the

important thing would be to understand and accept the situation and trust the partner or simply leave the relationship.

The perpetrators were further asked why their partners remained in abusive relationships and the results are shown in Table 5.5:

TABLE 5.5: WOMEN'S DECISION TO EITHER LEAVE OR STAY

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Reason to Leave</i>	<i>Reason to Come Back</i>	<i>Afterwards</i>
Tim	Sick of Him	Don't Know	Things Lot Better
			Stayed Only Two Weeks
Steve	Arguments	Children	Still Together
	Fights		Still Argue
Richard	Arguments	Hasn't Come Back	Alone
	Fights		
Jack	Arguments	Hasn't Come back	Alone
	Unsure of Love		

The perpetrators were asked to comment on why their partners had left them (if they did), the reasons why they came back (if they did), and what happened afterwards. In all cases, the partners had at least left, and in half the cases, they did not go back. For Richard and Jack, it was the first incident of separation and at the time of interviews they had still not returned.

Tim's partner had left and then went back to him and finally left. As he narrated his story:

"One night we had a fight and one of our neighbours called the police. They took her to a local Women's Shelter for the night. The following day she was moved to Ngora Women's Refuge. I felt so lost after she left, and I just kept on drinking. I contacted her family, especially her sister. Nobody could answer my questions, and I was devastated. About two years ago we got back together. Things were a lot

better. But after two weeks she told me she was getting sick of me, and she left for good”.

When asked why his partner came back, Tim responded “I don’t know”.

Some conclusions from Tim’s story could be that he pretends not to know what is going on in his life. He knows better than anyone else does what happened the night the police took his partner away. Yet he expects other people to know what is going on and to help solve his problem. But he is denying that there is a problem by not accepting that he is also to blame.

Steve had a similar experience. He told me:

“My wife left twice after some arguments and fights. The first time she went to stay with her sister. She was there for six weeks. The second time she went to live with friends in Darwin. She was there for four-five weeks. She came back and I think it is probably because of our boys. They are very important to both of us. We are still together now even though we still have arguments”.

The implication from Steve’s story is that only physical fights are violence. As he argued, the partner left him when there were some fights involved, but she is still with him apart from some arguments. It shows how some of the people who are in the family violence situation perceive what they believe to be violence. It clearly shows that the woman herself does not regard arguments as violence, therefore there is no reason to leave until such time as she becomes Steve’s ‘punching bag’.

For both Richard and Jack, their partners left as a result of violence. Richard’s girlfriend decided to get a flat of her own. Jack’s partner was living with a friend. Both expressed a feeling of remorse for what had happened. Jack was not so sure that she still loved him because of all the arguments they had had.

The perpetrators were asked about their family of origin and if there was any violence when they were growing up. The results are shown in Table 5.6:

TABLE 5.6: PERPETRATORS' FAMILY OF ORIGIN AND VIOLENCE

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Violence</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Causes</i>	<i>Own Experience</i>
Tim	Verbal	Parents	Alcohol	Bashing and Threats
	Physical	Uncle	Alcohol	Bashing
Steve	Verbal	Parents	Alcohol	None
	Physical	Parents	Alcohol	None
Richard	Verbal	Parents	Alcohol	Some
	Physical	Parents	Drinking	Belting from Both
Jack	None	N/A	N/A	N/A

The table (5.6) shows the results concerning the perpetrators' family of childhood and any violence involved. In three-quarters of the cases, there was both verbal and physical violence involved. In all cases of violence mentioned, parents and/or relatives were the main actors. Tim grew up in a violent family. Both his

“parents were alcoholics which resulted in much violence between them. I also experienced a lot of violence myself from both of them. The worse part of it was when my mother once stuck a knife at my throat after they had been drinking, threatening to kill me. My uncle who was staying with us would also bash me whenever he gets drunk. It was a mad house and all the time I was a victim of their drunkenness and violence. Nobody would come to my rescue”.

Steve witnessed violence by both his parents but he did not experience any himself. He mentioned that alcohol was the major factor at play in so far as his parents' violent behaviour was concerned. However, his violence as an adult extended to other places as well. He commented: “I don't necessarily fight at home only. I also fight with other people at pubs. I always feel that other people want to pick up a fight, so I go for it. Sometimes this makes me to fight again when I get home”.

What is it about witnessing violence that makes Steve violent both inside and outside his family? Does it have to do with proving how strong and manly he is, since he

has an attitude that people always want to pick up a fight? Does he feel somehow inferior? This can only lead one to conclude that Steve is by origin a violent person. The mere fact that he believes that others are ready to pick a fight with him indicates someone who simply cannot control his hot temper.

Richard witnessed much violence between his parents. He attributed much of the violence particularly to alcohol:

“When I was around six-seven years old, my father had a serious drinking problem. Every time he gets drunk he would come home and starts to fight. It used to happen all the time and often over nothing really. He would throw dinner all over the place and just mess up the place and ask my mother to clean it up. He would complain about almost everything. He used to beat her up as well and gradually it was becoming too much for my mother. At some stage my mother could not handle it anymore, and out of frustration, she turned violent on me. Sometimes they both used to belt me. I think this has contributed towards my adult behaviour”.

He also mentioned that his violence is not necessarily confined within his family home. As he put it

“once in a while when I go out I might have a fight with some blokes. Even if I feel it is nothing to make an issue of, I just fight. It is like something inside me pushes me to doing it. It probably has to do with the frustration of not being able to protect my mother when I was young. I was so helpless at the time and I could not confront my father”.

At least Richard confessed that his childhood experiences of violence have affected his adult life. Probably he is taking out the anger that has been brewing inside him ever since he was subjected to violence. Maybe this is the best way for him to let go of the past, since he could not fight back when he was young. Jack neither witnessed nor experienced any violence at home as a child, yet he has become a violent adult.

Looking at the pattern of responses, one respondent had neither witnessed nor experienced violence in his childhood family, another witnessed violence between both parents, but actually never experienced any; but both have grown to be violent adults. Only one respondent mentioned that his adult behaviour has been influenced by the

violence he both witnessed and experienced as a child. There appears to be, then, some relationship between *witnessing* violence as a child and becoming a violent adult, but there is less evidence about any link between *experiencing* violence as a child and becoming a violent adult

The section that follows concentrates on accounts of family violence as constructed by the service providers.

5.3 SERVICE PROVIDER ACCOUNTS OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE

Service providers were asked to give their views on the factors they associated with family violence. Some made me aware that they were not going to discuss their clients in particular, as this could be a breach of confidentiality previously guaranteed. However, they agreed to comment in general terms. Their refusal to disclose some relevant information made this study a bit difficult. Therefore the verbatim quotes of only those service providers who were willing to address this question are outlined

Jodie, a service provider from Ringo Centre attributed violence to intergenerational transmission. In her own words:

“There is a direct link between witnessing/experiencing violence and becoming a violent adult. Growing up in an abusive home leads to seeking an abusive behaviour. The children learn that violence is normal and acceptable. They see their fathers as role models and they grow up to emulate those role models. They also associate violence with masculinity. They therefore will seek to show some power through violence either at home or in public places”.

The view that family violence is self-perpetuating across generations has been shared by others (Finkelhor et al., 1988; Lackey and Williams, 1995). In other words, many people who witness or are victims of violence in their family of origin subsequently use violence themselves as adults in their intimate relationships. They are at a higher risk of becoming either victims or perpetrators in their later life. It is my understanding therefore

given Jodie's comment and the literature that men in particular, are likely to become violent partners and fathers, as a result of either witnessing or experiencing family violence.

Looking at the demographic data for both women and men (Chapter 4), more than three quarters of the women were unemployed. They were either students or mothers. All the men were unemployed. Sometimes this would result in a lot of pressure and stress, especially when there are children involved. In Lerato's case, for instance, her partner's salary (if employed) had to support four children and two adults. If there are other commitments like mortgages and so on, the situation becomes even more stressful. This is just one example of a situation that could be enough to cause chaos in the family. However, given the skewed nature of the respondents, one was not able to determine the role which unemployed played, particularly regarding the perpetrators.

The second attribute according to Jodie is the validation of violence by the judicial system in particular. She argued:

"The type of harassment which victims of both physical and sexual violence are subjected to in courts is astonishing. Women and children in particular are now scared to testify in courts because of the way they are treated by the system. They are not only scared of further victimisation through questioning, but are also aware of the repercussions in case the perpetrator is acquitted. The situation is even worse for children who are too young to testify. We are having similar problems ourselves trying to get their stories apart from what their mothers or doctors tell us".

This points to the injustices and further victimisation of the victims of violence by the legal system. Jodie argues that even if there is a clear case to be handled, it sometimes becomes difficult for victims to assist in terms of proceedings. For example, fears of further victimisation through the courts and of the perpetrators (in cases of acquittal) are mentioned as significant. Furthermore, the implication is that the victims are blamed for

their demise. In other words, the court as an institution of justice seems to be operating in the reverse direction when it comes to helping the victims of family violence.

Nancy mentioned in general terms that men of certain cultures and socio-economic classes are less skilled in communication. Where partners are not in a position to communicate effectively and understand one another, there is a likelihood of violence. The men are likely to express their frustrations through anger as they cannot easily express themselves to their partners.

Sarah also maintained that some cultures condone the use of violence, particularly against women, because women are regarded as worthless:

“The inferior status some societies relegate to women makes it difficult for men to respect women. Men always feel that the women are their property, that they own them. You will treat whatever item you own depending upon how much you value that. Women are already a devalued class by men and society”

Frank, like Sarah, also observed that violence was more acceptable in some cultures, particularly within Aboriginal culture. But he pointed out that alcohol played a major role, especially where levels of violence were very high. He mentioned that in the case of his work he had more contacts with Aboriginal people who seemed to have a drinking problem.

The Group like Cindy denied any relationship between wife-battering and socio-economic factors or alcohol. They argued that:

“If people start to make excuses for violence, then there is no way we can solve the problem. The problem is men’s violence on women, and not alcohol, not education or who the victim is. The problem is about power relations between men and women. Alcohol in particular is used as an excuse, just like women’s provocation. A lot of men drink but do not abuse their partners. In the same manner there are a lot of educated people who abuse their partners. That is why we do not want to address issues like those because we don’t believe in them. It is time men started to take responsibility for their actions and stop making excuses or blaming the victims”.

TABLE 5.7: WHY DO WOMEN REMAIN IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Social</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Other</i>
Cindy	Support	Company	Needs a man	Self-esteem
Frank	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Mutual Agreement
Jodie	Not Applicable	Children	Children	Esteem/ Confidence
Nancy	Economic	Survival	Love	Change
Sarah	Money	Pressures	Children	Change
Group	Money	Togetherness	Children	Promises

Table 5.7 shows the various responses to the question of why some women remain in abusive relationships, bearing in mind that some of them do leave their partners at least once. It is quite interesting to see the overlap in terms of responses related to social and emotional reasons. The reasons mentioned most frequently were that women go back or remain in such relationships due to social pressures, the belief in the sanctity of the family, children need their father, financial support and belief or promises that the partner would change his violent behaviour.

Nancy's account of this question was of particular interest. She pointed out that women often leave abusive relationships, and after some time go back again, and so on. In her detailed account, she argued:

“Many of our clients develop self-esteem, living skills and learn they have options in choosing how they live their lives. We provide them with support networks and belief in themselves. 30% return to their partners with varying degrees of success. It is more successful if the male has had the opportunity of working with a counsellor. They believe the children need their father; they still love him; they can't survive without him for social and monetary reasons. They forget how scared they were and they minimise the situation. They believe he has changed. I don't get puzzled but rather frustrated. This is generally temporary however because the decision must always lie with the clients. I feel frustrated when I feel

there has been no change made and the client and the family are returning to a violent situation”.

Given the above direct quote, one realises that for this particular service provider, the expectation is that once the woman has been violated, there is only one solution – to get out once and for all. But contrary to her expectations, once the women have managed to pull themselves through and gain self-concept, some of them return to the old situation with high hopes. Sometimes they are successful, and others are not. What surprises her after all is why any woman who had been abused to the extent of leaving her home should return to that kind of a situation again. Of course what Nancy is not aware of here is that what she believes is good for her client is not necessarily so for clients. By providing the necessary support to women who have been violated she feels she has their interests at heart; but the question is, do the women feel the same? Are they really prepared to leave their partners, or are they just after temporary separation so that each one of the partners could think of what is best for the relationship? Nancy’s story is just one indication that there is a wide gap between what people who are in service provision think, and what their clients in turn feel about their situation.

She believes: “clients come to us because they have had enough and are dissatisfied with their lives. Quite often it is through referrals from friends, doctors and other services”.

There is a discrepancy here between what Nancy said and how the clients behave. If they had enough of the situation, why would they go back after a certain time? Looking at the women’s stories earlier in the chapter, two thirds of them had left their partners before, and then went back for various reasons, which point to their hope for change in the partner’s behaviour. Brooke, Maria, Pinki and Renee had left more than once each, but still felt they wanted to go back to the relationship. This clearly indicates that the women

do not want to end the relationship or leave the abuser, but they want the abuser's behaviour to change. In other words, if the violence stops, then they have no problems to continue with their lives with their partners. It is also worth noting that clients often do not seek assistance of their own free will. Other parties had to come in to persuade women to seek help.

Another account from one of the Group stated:

“It is my opinion that women at some time eventually leave their abusive partners. This can vary from one to many attempts of separating. It is difficult to place the numbers. Some women return in the hope that the partner has changed. Later they find the patterns re-emerging in the relationship and again leave. Belief in the family staying together and need of children to have a father, money issues and promises it will never happen again. It is a woman's decision to determine her life. Options are given to women to assist in making informed decisions and strategies are determined if the women feel unsafe on returning to abusive relationships”.

They argued that women finally leave to seek help from them “due to desperation, fear, advice from the police and other service providers, family, and friends. It is also their decision that they no longer wish to subject themselves and their children to family violence”.

Frank, who works with male perpetrators of violence also commented that often the victims leave their violent partners but then return again. He put it:

“In this case it is the victims decision for a separation. 70% would go back under mutual agreement with their partners. The indication is that once it (violence) happens it will happen again. So I am concerned as a service provider” (The underlined words are mine so as to maintain anonymity of the respondent).

The refuge worker Cindy also maintained that women often come and go and then come back. She believes that at times it is because the women have some expectations and hope, and in that sense are not ready to leave the relationship as yet. She put it as follows:

“The moment they leave home and seek safety at the refuge they are determined not to go back but some (2%) do return home mainly for economic pressure, hope of change in partner's behaviour, for children and social pressures. It is a woman's decision; she knows what she wants and she may not be ready to leave yet, and there is really nothing we can do as refuge workers”.

She made it particularly clear that: “women finally leave abusive relationships because no-one likes to be bashed for ever, or when the violence involves the children”. This further strengthens the earlier argument that women will finally leave once the violence starts to impact on their children.

What is striking is the percentage of their clients who go back to their partners. This estimate is extremely low compared with estimates of other service providers. This probably has to do with location. She works within a big city, while the rest of the service providers come from a country town. As Coorey (1988: 55) has indicated, women in country areas are more disadvantaged financially, have nowhere to go, and lack anonymity and privacy, while community attitudes and the gossip network which is part of small town life are equally constraining. Therefore, many women are bound to try and make their marriages work, but the story in big cities can be different. There, women probably have many more alternatives and strategies for survival. This analysis attempts to explain the wide gap in the number of clients who go back to their partners given by Cindy as compared to the others.

Others have echoed all the different reasons given for women’s coming and going back. For example, Matka (1991: 15) has mentioned that women leave a relationship and return to it a number of times because they are conditioned by societal expectations of keeping a marriage together. The indication is that while many victims do leave some violent relationships, a considerable number stay, often for a long time. For some of them, even though the relationship might be violent, this may not be the only factor involved. Some victims maintain strong feelings of love and concern for their partner despite the abuse. Some stay in the hope that the violence will end, and some stay because they feel that it is not acceptable to walk out on a marriage, especially if children are involved; and

still others feel that they are somehow to blame for their situation and are too ashamed to seek help.

The nature of the responses from different social providers is quite significant. While the trend is that women return or remain for economic reasons, social pressure, hope and promises of change, Jodie and Sarah mentioned that the state of 'hopelessness' in which the women find themselves is what prevents them from leaving abusive relationships. Jodie argued that women remain and/or return to such relationships because:

"they place the children first. They remain in abusive relationships because of societal expectations that children should be living with parents, which in this case includes the father. Some women take that very seriously, depending upon their locations. Some societal pressures also include the ostracising of women who have left their partners. This forces a lot of women to remain or return to their abusive partners. Not what they want as battered women but rather what other people expect and want out of any marriage situation. Another problem comes in terms of the relationship between the children and their father. Some children would never accept anyone apart from their own father and that as well places a lot of pressure on women. The emotional ties between the children and their biological father become a determining factor in the women's decisions. Some women also lack self-esteem and confidence. They feel they cannot do without the man despite the violence. However, in most cases, it is only when the violence extends to the children that they decide to leave for good"

Her statement to a certain extent tied very well with Tseli's (one of the victims) experience. She stayed in a violent relationship for a long time, and it was only when she discovered that her partner had been sexually abusing the children that she finally decided to leave. In a similar manner, Sarah believed that:

"women leave partly because of the violence and partly due to a lack of role models. About 50% go back because of children, need of company, and because they can't leave without a man; but most important is due to low self-esteem. Due to a lack of self-esteem and lack of confidence, they always need somebody around them".

Both Jodie and Sarah mentioned these as the most damaging consequences of family violence. There are also practical issues that may tie a woman to a violent relationship despite their attempts to free themselves of violent partners. These include

living in geographical or social isolation, having children to care for, or having nowhere safe to go and no financial support. Perhaps the most compelling reason why women stay in violent relationships is fear of the consequences if they leave. These fears are often well grounded, as many cases where women have left a relationship testify. According to Coorey (1988: 101), violence and harassment often continue after the couple has split up. After women leave the relationship, the men often conduct harassment and threats with even more vengeance than previously. For example, Tseli's partner followed her to the women's refuge where she was staying and shot himself in front of the family and refuge workers. Another woman, Stephanie had to be moved from one refuge to the other as a result of her partner's constant verbal abuse and death threats. Even though she was upset, she agreed to talk about it. She told me:

“(This Refuge) is kicking me out because my de facto contacted them. At the moment I feel the refuge is not of much help. Some of the workers are good. But they should be more careful about their contact numbers appearing in phone books and also the type of information they leave on answering machines”.

This issue was quite complicated because the workers accused this woman of having rung her de facto when they were not around and as such being the one who provided him with the refuge telephone number. But she maintained her innocence to me that she believed her de facto obtained their number from a telephone book. At the time of these interviews she was removed from this refuge. But it should also be pointed out that generalisations regarding the delicate issue of security and secrecy of refuge addresses is difficult. For example, O'Donnell and Craney (1982: 65) have observed that there are some refuges that are happy to be widely known, and appear not to be troubled by the resulting harassment; others prefer to give out phone numbers but keep addresses secret.

SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to analyse and discuss the factors associated with wife battering as seen by the people who are directly involved in violence situations (victims and perpetrators) and those who provide assistance (service providers). To some extent the findings indicate an emergence of some strong patterns on the factors that are associated with battering. Women attribute battering to alcohol, perpetrator's personality and socialisation more than the men. However, there seems to be nothing like one single major factor, although some are more common than others, for example, jealousy and alcohol. The results also reveal a combination of various factors that seem to reinforce one another at some stage. These include blaming the victim for the violence, fights over late nights and habitual gambling, arguments over friends and families and job-related stress and family pressures. Therefore while we cannot associate one particular factor with violence, there is a combination of factors such as the ideology of men's desire to dominate women, and/or environmental pressures which become necessary prerequisites, which in turn become explosive because of the emotional and psychological make-up of the violent party.

Perpetrators also mentioned alcohol and jealousy/suspicion over past relationships. Other factors included the female partner's violent behaviour, cleanliness, arguments over families and fights even outside the family home.

One should also note the discrepancies in the way different types of people explain violent behaviour. In some cases, what service providers regard as factors associated with family violence do not necessarily apply to both the victims and perpetrators of violence. For example, with the exception of Frank, who happens to be the only male service provider, other service providers did not perceive alcohol in particular as a contributing

factor. Their main argument revolves around issues of power and male domination, and societal acceptance of violence. Some of the factors which keep and/or bring back women into the violent relationships according to service providers are not necessarily so for both men and women. For women in particular, hope for change in the partner's behaviour influences their decision to either leave or stay in a violent relationship. This learned hopefulness becomes a significant part of the findings in this study.

The so-called 'gate-keepers', in most cases, seem to have a different perception of the whole issue of family violence as compared to their clients. Refuge workers in particular seem to view and understand family violence quite differently from how the men and women involved see their situation. This seems to fit very well with what O'Donnell and Craney (1982: 97) refer to as 'a clear distinction between the users and providers of the service, and a hierarchical set of relations among workers, based on the notion of the expert who knows best how to deal with the disadvantaged'.

Are service providers relying on the real accounts of what their clients tell them, or do they make general judgements regarding the whole situation? Does mere interaction with perpetrators and victims of family violence give them an upper hand as compared to other people? Why is it that both perpetrators and victims sometimes have a tendency to play down their violence? Maybe once in a situation it is difficult to assess what is good and bad. One can only see another person's worst situation. We can talk of the nature and extent of violence more in a rather upfront manner only because we are not in the situation ourselves.

But from the data, there are issues of cycle of violence, structural factors (unequal power relationships between men and women) and interactional factors (poor or lack of communicative skills). However, no single one of these factors could satisfactorily explain the factors associated with wife battering. They need to be related to one another in order

to get a better picture. It is also important to see that a curtain lies between us (outside viewers) and them (perpetrators and victims). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the service providers believe they know their clients' situation better than even the clients themselves do. To even prevent researchers from talking to clients not only indicates gate-keeping but also reflects a situation of power and control.