

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A common assumption about family violence is that even though it is widespread, it is relatively minor in terms of frequency in comparison to street violence. Yet research (Dallos and MacLaughlin, 1993; Mugford, 1990) indicates that there is considerable community awareness of the extent to which violence occurs in private, that is, in the home, and that it accounts for about a third of all reported cases of violence. The earlier professionals such as social workers and psychiatrists and popular writers often conceptualized family violence as aberrations confined to relatively few homes. They further relegated wife battering, in particular, to individual psycho-pathologies, defining the victim, her abuser, and/or both as neurotic (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1990; Pagelow, 1981; Straus and Hotaling, 1980). Today, however, it is well known that such violence is extensive rather than being a product of mental illness. Some men who batter their partners do indeed suffer from mental illness. But not everyone with mental illness is violent, and not all batterers are mentally ill (Schornstein, 1997: 30).

Research on family violence has typically focused on four questions (Gelles, 1979: 12, 1987: 14). First, the extent of the problem: this came as a reaction to the then conventional wisdom that family violence is rare, recent, and confined to a few mentally disturbed people. Second, the patterns of family violence. Some researchers (Steinmetz, 1974) believed in the ‘class myth’ that violence is confined to one particular class such as the working class, poor, and Blacks. The third question was: what causes people to be violent? Early investigations employed a psychodynamic model of violence, which aimed at identifying personality traits and character disorders associated with physical attacks on

family members (Schultz, 1960; Snell, Rosenwald and Robey, 1964). Others (Gelles, 1974, 1979; Straus, Gelles, and Steimetz, 1980;) developed sociological, social psychological, ecological and various multidimensional theories of violence. The fourth question concerns the consequences of victimization. Researchers (Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1979) focusing on this issue raise questions about whether battered children are likely to grow up to be abusive adults, why women who are battered remain with their assaultive spouses, and what constitutes the emotional and psychological consequences of being either the victim or an observer of prolonged violence in an intimate setting.

The study of family violence cannot be done without taking the family as a basic unit of society into consideration. Sociological views of the family may be presented as a dichotomy. At one extreme is its importance as a 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch, 1977) both as a biological and social fact and as the most appropriate place for the physical and emotional nourishment of its members. At the other extreme, the family is seen as oppressive, repressive and confining (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1981; Walker, 1979; Yllo and Bograd, 1988). Buzawa and Buzawa (1990: 25) observed that researchers have often commented upon the irony of a family model which tends to generate conflict and violence while being at least theoretically designed to maximize love and support. This latter extreme remains one area of concern in this thesis: what is it about the family that results in the generation of conflict rather than the generation of affection? This issue is dealt with later in the chapter when examining the role that the family as an institution plays in encouraging or preventing wife battering. The thesis will also argue that wife battering should not necessarily be explained in terms of family dynamics only, but also in terms of the larger social constructs which supported the problem.

In the following section the author briefly assesses the past and present research concerning family violence before discussing why the family has, in some circumstances, turned into a battleground.

### **1.1 A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Family violence is a problem that has existed for centuries. It was only with its relatively recent 'discovery' that there has been an explosion of interest, consciousness, and literature. Numerous studies (Coorey, 1989; Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Freeman, 1979; Gelles, 1979; Horsfall, 1991; Hyden, 1994; Levinson, 1989; Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1981; Pahl, 1985; Renvoize, 1978; Scutt, 1983; Stark and Flitcraft, 1996; Walker, 1979) have been done in an attempt to find solutions to this problem. Its multifaceted nature has provoked significant research controversies, such as definitional problems, access to cases, sampling, and measurement. Several measuring techniques are used to determine the extent of family violence. Surveys, official reports and clinical studies all offer professional insight and invaluable information into the nature and extent of this problem. Researchers have interviewed, tested, observed and evaluated millions of people in an effort to establish the factors that contribute to family violence. Despite countless efforts by governments and given the level of public awareness regarding wife battering, the problem still continues to exist. Further research is necessary in relation to the perceptions of all those involved in family violence. This includes the victims, perpetrators and service providers, which has been very rare in wife battering research. For instance, does wife battering mean one and the same thing for the victims, perpetrators and service providers? Do these categories share the same views on the nature of, and the factors associated with, wife battering? These questions are important because they may shed a light as to how the different perceptions influence policy-making.

We begin our review of past research with the literature of the 1960s.

### 1.1.1 RESEARCH IN THE 1960S

In the 1960s scholarly and even popular literature on wife battering was virtually nonexistent. The rare reports on wife battering reflected a psychopathological model which dominated early research and writing on family violence at the time. Such a view portrayed both the battering husband and the victim as suffering from neurosis or personality disorders (Gelles, 1987: 35; Stith, Williams and Rosen, 1990: 45).

The early descriptions of wife battering were presented by researchers and clinicians from the fields of psychology and psychiatry, rather than coming from battered women or refuge workers. Their view of marriage and the family was one of harmony: any dark side reflected the personalities of the individual family members, and was nothing that the family and marriage as institutions could be held responsible for. Schultz's (1960) study concentrated on the causes of wife battering through an analysis of the personality characteristics of the perpetrator. After analysing data from four men convicted of the attempted murder of their wives, he concluded that the men's upbringing was characterised by dominating, rejecting mothers who were largely aggressive towards them. Initially, the men reacted with submission, at the same time identifying with the mother and her aggressive behaviour. The men were never able to channel their own aggression in a normal way, since throughout their lives they had remained passive and yielding, rigidly checking their aggressive impulses. It was only through their relationships with their wives that the men began to reproduce their relationships to their mothers. They related to their wives more as mothers than as wives, adopting a submissive position as a result. Their aggression increased when they failed to meet their needs for intimacy and dependency. They were constantly torn between their hostility towards their wives and their

dependence on them. The aggressive outburst occurred at the point the man interpreted something as the ultimate rejection, such as the discovery of his wife's infidelity or her request for a divorce (Schutz, 1960: 103–12). Schutz's work was unique at the time because it was one of the first to be presented about wife battering, and also because it concentrated on the perpetrator, who over the ensuing 20 years, became virtually non-existent in wife battering research.

Four years after Schutz's work, the three forensic psychiatrists Snell, Rosenwald and Robey focused on the battered woman. Their study was based on data gathered from twelve couples in which the woman had reported her husband for assault. Initially, the authors had intended to get both the women and the men to psychiatric examinations, but it turned out to be much easier to get the women to comply with their requests. The women were willing to present their version of the events, whereas the men appeared more restrained with the psychiatrists. They concluded that the women were aggressive, efficient, masculine and sexually frigid. On the one hand, the women were more controlling towards the men, yet at the same time dependent on them. On the other, the men were described as passive, indecisive, impotent, and alcoholized (Snell et al., 1964: 108–11). The findings of these three psychiatrists located the origin of wife battering in the combination passive man versus aggressive woman. Following from their analysis, women are indirectly made responsible for men's brutality against them. Women as mothers are viewed as the causes behind the disturbed psyche of the violent men, and women as wives are held responsible for situations that arise where a man uses violence against his female partner. They asserted that the dual dependency and deviance exhibited by the battering couple exposed wife battering as a method employed by the couple to maintain equilibrium. This equilibrium allowed couples to continue to express their maladjusted personality traits, and produced a situation in which behavioural change was unlikely. Thus

the masochistic woman was as much to blame for the violence enacted upon her as her equally deviant husband.

As they put it:

“The periods of violent behaviour by the husband served to release him momentarily from his anxiety about his ineffectiveness as a man, while, at the same time, giving his wife apparent masochistic gratification and helping probably to deal with the guilt arising from the intense hostility expressed in her controlling, castrating behaviour” (Snell et al., 1964: 111).

### 1.1.2 RESEARCH IN THE 1970S

The decade of the seventies witnessed a massive increase in attention to and published reports on various aspects of family violence particularly in the United States of America. This shift from selective inattention to high priority social issue has been explained in terms of three cultural and social forces (Gelles, 1987: 28). First, the war in Vietnam (Blackman, 1989: 7), assassinations, civil disturbances, and increasing homicide rates in the sixties created sensitivity to violence in both social scientists and the public alike. Secondly, the emergence of the women’s movement uncovered and highlighted the plight of battered women. For example, Del Martin, who organised and chaired the National Organisation for Women task force on wife battering, produced *Battered Wives* (1976) one of the first major books on the topic. The third factor pointed to the decline of the consensus model of society employed by social scientists and the ensuing challenge by those advancing a conflict or social action model. The former explained that family tensions were prerequisites for a higher equilibrium, and the latter observed that conflict between individual assertiveness and family order were unlikely to make a breakthrough (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: 60).

Perhaps a fourth factor should be added. Someone had to demonstrate that research on family violence could be conducted. According to Gelles (1987) researchers commencing projects in the early seventies were constantly told that reliable and valid

research on family violence could not be carried out. Investigators were reminded that they would literally have to ask, ‘Have you stopped beating your wife?’ (1987: 29) in order to obtain valid and reliable information.

Studies in that period included those of O’Brien (1974), Gelles (1974) and Gayford (1975). O’Brien’s (1974) study concentrated on violence within divorce-prone families. His analysis of wife battering was based on the existence of a cultural norm of male dominance. He found that male violence was a result of the condition in a family where the achievement ability of the husband was less than his proscribed status, that of the *household head* and *breadwinner* (my emphasis). Therefore, in any cases of failure, the male attempted to establish his social status by exerting his dominance over his wife. His analysis depicted the man and *not the woman* as the victim of this cultural norm. This led him to suggest that there was a need for social intervention of a type intended to strengthen the earning and achievement potential of husbands (O’Brien, 1974: 71–3).

Gelles’s (1974) research concentrated on the incidence of, reactions to and dynamics of wife battering. The study consisted of a violent sample and a comparative sample of neighbouring families with no known history of violence. The sample of violent families was collected from police and social service records. He found that violence in the family was more common than previously suspected, as his control group revealed that one-third had experienced violence in some form within the family, and that for one-tenth violence was a regular experience. He also found that violence was more prevalent in low-income families, although this correlation had more to do with an increased amount of stress accompanying low-income status, rather than a lack of resources or a subculture of violence (1974: 50–61).

Gayford’s (1975) study was based on a survey of 100 battered women living in a refuge in Britain. His main focus was on personal background factors such as whether

women had had sex before marriage, had affairs, or had been pregnant by men other than their husbands. Without a comparison to the responses of women in non-violent relationships, he concluded that battering is correlated with characteristics such as sexual promiscuity. He thus constructed a profile of battered women which included a multitude of behaviours that were considered culturally deviant for women, and in so doing suggested that these were causal factors in abuse. This he did despite the fact that women cited many practical and economic reasons for staying in their relationships. He illustrated the severity of the emotional trauma experienced by women through data on suicide attempts. He also reported that one-half of the batterers also batter their children. This shows that wife battering also appears to be associated with other violent behaviours, and is not likely to be isolated to assaulting one's partner or assaulting only the current partner (Gayford, 1975: 75–83).

Other work includes that by Straus and Gelles, who conducted National Family Violence Surveys first in 1975 and then later in 1985 in the United States of America. The 1975 survey involved 2143 families, where respondents were asked to recall occasions when they had been angry or had experienced a conflict with their partner or child. They were asked to nominate the tactic used during the conflict, which ranged from calm discussion to attacks with a knife or gun. The tactics fall into three general modes: rational discussion, termed Reasoning; verbal or nonverbal acts that symbolically hurt the other, termed Verbal Aggression; and the use of physical aggression, termed Violence. This hierarchy of tactics is known as the Conflict Tactics Scale. The CTS classifies acts by degree of seriousness. They found that 16% of their sample had experienced some kind of violent incident in the preceding year, and that 28% of couples had experienced a violent domestic dispute during their relationship. Some of the results aroused particular

indignation. For instance, the 1975 survey revealed that the rates of violence by wives were remarkably similar to the rates of violence by husbands (465–79).

The two surveys resulted in improved research in the field of family violence mainly in three ways. First, the 1975 survey represented an attempt to measure the incidence of violence in a large and representative sample. Second, the availability of data on a representative sample enabled researchers to move beyond the individual psychological perspective of wife battering that was a dominant feature of the 1960s. Third, the survey(s) broke the tradition of basing research on interviews with battered women only, as half of the respondents were husbands and half were wives.

Straus and Gelles (1975 and 1985) provide a large body of evidence that suggests major causes of physical violence in the family are to be found in certain features of the family, and within (USA) society as a whole. These features include, among others, male dominance in the family and society, the presence of legal violent acts such as capital punishment, and illegal violence seen in the high rate of violence in the streets and millions of people living in poverty in one of the wealthiest societies in human history.

The above mentioned studies demonstrated that research could be done (using non-clinical samples) and even provided some appropriate methods and sampling techniques for conducting research on family violence. In summary, research efforts during that period were focused on:

- Establishing reliable empirical estimates of the incidence of various forms of family violence
- Identifying the factors associated with violence in the home
- Developing theoretical models which explained the causes of family violence. Even though investigations by those concerned with family violence focused more on

effective prevention and treatment theories respectively, empirically research on such measures was rare (Gelles, 1987: 29)

### 1.1.3 RESEARCH IN THE 1980S

The eighties saw a decline in concern for research on the incidence of family violence particularly in the USA. With the exception of Straus and Gelles' US Second National Family Violence Survey (Gelles, 1987), there were no new major studies aimed at estimating incidence. To a certain extent, experts felt that since the importance of the social problem of family violence had been established, new and improved incidence data would be of little additional value. There was concern, however, for data relating to changes in rates of family violence, which of course requires incidence data, and that was the objective of the Second National Family Violence Survey of 1985. Apart from that, there were other studies done by feminist researchers concentrating on male dominance and female subordination (Dobash and Dobash, 1980) and the consequences of wife battering on its victims (Pagelow, 1981).

Dobash and Dobash were the first to base an analysis on the idea of male domination, focusing on what traditional ideas are all about and how such ideas supported an institution of patriarchy in which wife battering is a major form of control over women by men. Their argument was that the family and women's positions as wives are parts of this institution. After interviewing 137 battered women, they found that battering was a way in which men controlled women, and was part of a larger system of control. Increased social isolation was a characteristic of a battering relationship applied only to the women. Men were more likely to increase the frequency with which they socialized with their own friends, whereas women decreased contact with friends over the period of the relationship. Furthermore, the findings revealed that battered women were not passive, or helpless, in

the relationship. They sought many forms of aid in reducing the danger of their situation, although the type of aid they requested or received was restricted. Women reported that they were less likely to contact agencies such as social workers and police because of the stigma attached to the use of such agencies in domestic matters. They also reported that many of the agencies contacted responded with the concern about keeping the family together, held stereotypes about the masochistic psychology of battered women, and treated the effects of abuse rather than attempting to secure a safer environment for the women. They concluded that wife battering was a product of a system which was reflected in historical laws about male ownership and marriage, as well as current social gender roles and structures which secured the dominance of men over women (1980: 40–5).

The historical legacy of men's legal ownership of their wives, along with the laws which specifically gave men the right to abuse or punish them, underlay the social circumstances in which wives were the appropriate victims of battering. Evidence for this analysis included the finding that abuse began, in many cases, only after the couple had been married. Since this finding, others have found that police and court records showed that some abusers believed they had a legal and moral right to be brutal towards the women to whom they were married (1980: 75).

Pagelow (1981) used quantitative methods similar to those of Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, but went beyond their model by asking women about the patterns of violence, what they did about it and why they stayed in violent relationships. Her research focus clearly distinguished battering from noninjurious acts such as pushing and shoving where the act is clearly not intended to inflict pain. Some of her findings include battering as a mutual combat process, violence tending to escalate over time in intensity and frequency, this escalation sometimes continuing after the relationship has been severed. By focusing on the institutional responses to battered women who ask for help, she concluded that

battered women's responses depend more on the social and cultural environment with which they live. Women in a battering situation cannot totally and by themselves either create or alter their situation in a vacuum. If alternatives are to be addressed, the forces that tend to prevent, block, or obscure alternatives should also be examined (1981: 47–50).

In Australia, it was during this period that the States and Territories passed legislation addressing the problem of wife battering (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 26). This legislation will be outlined in chapter 2.

#### 1.1.4 RESEARCH IN THE 1990S

This period has probably experienced a different type of research on family violence from that done in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The type of research in the 1990s has moved beyond the study of incidence and correlations and the proposing of causal models. Researchers have begun to test theories, to study the consequences of family violence, and to examine the impact of intervention programs on violence in the family (Geller, 1992; Hearn, 1996; Hyden, 1994; McFarlane, 1992; Schornstein, 1997; Stark and Flitcraft, 1996).

Stark and Flitcraft's (1996) work, for example, originally focused on documenting the extent of wife battering and its significance for women's health. At a later stage of data analysis, a third goal emerged, that of evaluating the appropriateness of the clinical response and to suggest ways of improving it. They concluded that more women sought medical treatment for injuries resulting from wife battering than any other cause. Another finding involved the links between wife battering and a whole range of family and women's health problems, such as child abuse, homicide, alcohol and drug abuse, rape, poor pregnancy outcomes, and female suicide attempts. The third major conclusion of

their work is that the medical response to abuse directly contributes to the isolation and entrapment that are hallmarks of the battering syndrome, which if not curtailed through early intervention, evolves through predictable stages into a pattern of entrapment that is as devastating as the trauma of physical assault. They acknowledge recent support for community-wide violence prevention by federal health and justice agencies and professional medical associations, which are important steps in remedying the *dual trauma* of wife battering, constituted from parallel strains of male coercion and clinical mistreatment (1996: xvii–xviii).

The Australian Federal Government also initiated a National Committee on Violence Against Women (1992) which consists of 19 members from the community, all states and territories, the police force and the Commonwealth. The committee has been working on developing a national strategy on violence against women which provide the basis for the coordinated application of the resources of all levels of government and the community, to adequately address the widespread and complex issue of wife battering (Fatin, 1992: 10).

In Australia, there are three major trends (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 96) in the way family violence has been approached:

- First, despite an early recognition of the criminal nature of such violence, especially physical assault, criminal prosecution or state intervention was rare.
- Secondly, with the increasing prominence of medical and psychiatric explanations of violence came a perception that such violence was a sickness to be treated.
- Thirdly, and most recently, attempts have been made to perceive the problem in terms of gender inequality and there has been a restored recognition of the criminal nature of violence in the home, as reflected in the passing of legislation by the States and Territories.

In the late nineteenth century family violence was understood as criminal behaviour by New South Wales legislators but attempts to specify remedies available to battered women were unsuccessful. For example, a *Wife Beaters Punishment Bill* was tabled and suspended in 1889. Despite this recognition of its criminal status, family violence was only dealt with by criminal prosecution when the attack amounted to attempted murder or malicious wounding (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 96).

This history of failed concern is significant as it reflects attitudes that are still prevalent in some members of the Australian society today, for example, the belief that violence in the home is ‘private’, and hence not the domain of the state or any of its agencies. However, research in the 1990s has moved beyond that stage. Reflecting on their experiences of the health, welfare, and legal systems, and responding to the lack of services, women created shelters for women leaving violent situations; women subsequently negotiated funds from the state for specific services and lobbied for reforms to legal practice and statutes. For example, after the 1991 spate of family killings the National Committee on Violence Against Women, through the Commonwealth/state Ministers for the Status of Women, called for urgent reforms to be considered by the Police Ministers and Attorneys-General. At the end of the same year, violence and firearms legislation was on the top agenda for the special Premier’s meeting in Adelaide (Fatin, 1992: 10).

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH AND ITS IMPORTANCE**

The continued prevalence of family violence has prompted this study. It is a problem that occurs in most, perhaps all social and ethnic groups (Levinson, 1989: 30). It occurs on all social and economic levels, with long lasting toll on its victims in particular (Wallace, 1996: 170). The assumption is that most people in the world have at some time been either the perpetrator of, victim of, or witness to violence between members of their family. It is within the framework of this assumption that this study aims to examine the concept of ‘family violence’ as perceived by those immediately involved as victims, perpetrators and service providers. What do these perceptions mean for wife battering and any strategies intended to eliminate the problem?

In the last 15–25 years, Australia started to reassess wife battering as a social problem. The women’s movement worked hard to place the issue on the public agenda, to the point that all State and Territory Governments have reviewed and modified their legislative, policing and welfare responses, the Federal Government has funded a public education campaign, and state governments have mounted their own education campaigns. Despite all these activities, it is a disappointing fact to know that wife battering is still a fact of life for many Australians. Worse still, there remains tacit acceptance by some proportion of both men and women that it is the right of men to use violence against their wives under some circumstances and the role of women to accept such violence (Mugford, 1990: 46).

The study also attempts to examine the impact of family violence on both the victim and perpetrator, as well as the effectiveness of some social agencies in assisting the victims of violence in particular. These issues are examined with the following hypotheses (which arise out of the literature) in mind:

- Family violence is a result of male superiority
- Family violence as a cycle which is perpetuated intergenerationally
- Pregnancy as a period of high risk for battered women
- Violence as a response to environmental pressures such as unemployment and low education.

The study focuses on family violence in the form of ‘wife battering’ rather than on other forms of family violence, for reasons to be discussed later. The section that follows defines the concepts, some of which are controversial in the area of family violence.

### **1.3 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

The use of certain terms in the area of family violence may be confusing unless otherwise defined within the context of a particular study. The following concepts derive from the literature pertaining to the definitions and usage of concepts within the family violence field, as well as from this study, and therefore, as defined here, should be understood and interpreted within the context of this particular study.

***Family Violence:***

This includes any acts of abuse and aggression between two people who are in an intimate relationship.

***Wife Battering:***

This includes acts of abuse by a male partner toward a significant other (female partner) within a family environment. These acts may be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, or even a denial of rights of the other person (economic and isolation abuse). It is also used interchangeably with terms like wife beating, wife bashing and wife abuse throughout the text.

***Mutual Combat:***

This concept implies that battering is not necessarily one way; that female partners are potentially also violent.

***Battered Women:***

This refers to all women who are involved in a battering relationship, regardless of their marital status. Often, the discussion on battered women makes reference to wives. Unless otherwise stated, this must be taken to refer to cohabitantes and girlfriends as well. The law may distinguish among wives and other women, but the problem is basically the same. As one researcher put it:

“man’s proverbial inhumanity to man is matched only by his inhumanity to wife. Nor is the problem confined to wives; the absence of a wedding ring is no safeguard against brutal assault, and women are battered by men with whom they cohabit as well as by their former husbands...If anything the plight of cohabitantes is worse than wives” (Freeman, 1979: 127).

They are also referred to as spouses and partners in this study.

***Physical Abuse:***

This is the most visible form of abuse, which includes those acts that result in injury. Such acts include hitting, beating, and pushing as an example.

***Verbal Abuse:***

This is one form of abuse which is not immediately identified by some members of the community as violence, rarely identified by perpetrators, but frequently described by the victims as part of the taken-for-granted pattern of maintaining control in any form of marital situation (Elliott and Shanahan, 1988: 35). It is not distinct from emotional abuse. It is the kind of behaviour that amounts to denigrating, humiliating or destroying the female partner’s belief in themselves. It includes making of threats to the partner’s life, threats of suicide, insults, harassment or even nagging, damage to property or treasured objects, or

sometimes even causing harm to family pets. This type of behaviour is a dominant feature of all violent relationships, particularly during the tension build up phase before violent episodes.

***Sexual Abuse:***

This is rape in any marital or living together situation, in which the male partner makes demands for sexual intercourse, forced intercourse, threats of violence, sometimes with a weapon, accompanying forced sex and compliance in sexual acts in which the female partner does not wish to participate.

***Economic Abuse:***

This is also referred to as financial abuse. It implies a total control of the family's economic resources, often involving the withholding of income. Women who come across such situations are probably not even expected, let alone allowed, to buy themselves personal items such as underwear, a dress, or a pair of shoes for quite some time. They are entirely dependent on the male partner for almost everything, including their own income.

***Isolation Abuse:***

Also known as social abuse, isolation abuse is another common feature. This could be in terms of geographical location, whereby the couple is living on a farm in a country area, far removed from family and friends. It could also come in the form of a male partner dictating who the female partner should see, who should visit the house and so on.

#### **1.4 WHY WIFE BATTERING?**

The literature on family violence reveals the multifaceted nature of the problem, that there are all sorts of abuse and aggression among family members, ranging from infanticide, to

sibling rivalry, to elder abuse (Pleck, 1987; Wallace, 1996). It is now becoming clear from some research (Freeman, 1979; Steinmetz, 1977), that husbands may be violated as well, allowing the adoption of concepts such as mutual combatants. Furthermore, research (Tierney, 1982) suggests that assaults upon men by their wives constitute a social problem comparable in nature and magnitude to that of wife beating, although such a claim has been highly criticised by feminist researchers (Kurtz, 1993: 257). Again, enormous publicity has been given to the fact that there are women who kill their partners, less to the fact that they do so in smaller numbers than men kill women. Women tend to kill in self-defence or after enduring years of abuse (Mullender, 1996: 12). Although these other forms of family violence cannot be underestimated, the most significant problem is the violence perpetrated against women in the domestic environment, which is the focus of this study as already mentioned.

The author acknowledges that wives do commit violent acts as well. However, it should be highlighted that wives assault less repeatedly, cause less damage due to their physical stature, and cause less dangerous and injurious behaviour than do the husbands. It should also be pointed out that considerably more husbands than wives justify violence as a necessary or good feature of a relationship (Mullender, 1996: 13)

Therefore, wife battering becomes a central issue for the following reasons:

- There is a great deal of empirical research in this area (Wallace, 1996: 21). People are gaining an appreciation of its magnitude and its causes and yet no one has come up with sufficient explanations for this tragedy. Each year millions of wives are abused by their husbands globally, and in Australia specifically perhaps a hundred women are killed and thousands injured every year as a result of criminal assaults by their male partners (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 15). However, despite this knowledge and some measures adopted to address the problem, it is unfortunate that wife battering is

still a serious problem and there is no sufficiently good data to say whether or not the incidence is growing. Again, there is still a problem of shared views which subscribe to blaming the victim instead of the perpetrator or failure to understand the debilitating effect of exposure to prolonged violence (Seddon, 1993: 1) as well as its impact on the victims in particular, by some members of society. Moreover, people's ability to prevent or treat such behaviour is rudimentary, at best (Besharov, 1990: 10)

- Most of the perpetrators of family violence do not present themselves for scrutiny and it is invariably the most powerless (particularly women and children) who are put under the researcher's microscope. Women are victimized by violence in the family to a much greater extent than are men, and should therefore be the focus of the most immediate remedial steps (O'Donnell and Craney, 1982: 12). Violence perpetrated by men on their partners within the family accounts for nearly a quarter of all reported violence and over 70% of violence in the home (Dallos and MacLaughlin, 1993: 11).
- Wives are locked into marriage to a much greater extent than husbands. Due to a variety of economic and social constraints, such as stigma and humiliation at a failed marriage, they often have no alternative to putting up with beatings from their husbands. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980: 44) compare this situation to that of a person married to an alcoholic. Their argument is that 9 out of 10 men would leave an alcoholic wife, yet only 1 out of 10 women would leave an alcoholic husband.
- Given one-way violence as opposed to mutual combat (Straus et al., 1980: 23) husbands demonstrate higher rates of the most dangerous and injurious forms of violence. The greater physical strength of men makes it more likely that a woman will be seriously injured when beaten up by her husband than the reverse, and that about 20% of all women who go to emergency rooms for treatment have been battered and

that women are almost five times as likely to be murdered by a male partner or ex-partner as the other way round (Mullender, 1996: 12)

- Wife battering is not only an unpleasant and unnerving subject, but it also has devastating effects. Stark and Flitcraft (1996: 197) argue that some victims of physical and sexual abuse develop self-destructive behaviours. Some may also suffer depression, social isolation, and are prone to suicide.
- Wife battering requires further professional and public attention because of its continued prevalence and its consequences on the victims. Isolation of the victim is one of the most damaging effects of wife battering, and is a consequence which the perpetrator often seeks to maintain. The Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce (1991: 130–31) suggests this alienation often creates a rift between professionals and clients, particularly in relation to the use of support groups.
- For many battered women, battering continues even in pregnancy. According to Stark and Flitcraft (1996: 203) pregnancy is a high risk period during which battering may begin or escalate, thus harming the foetus as well as the mother. McFarlane (1992: 11) points out that one in twelve pregnant women experience battering during pregnancy. Battered women are also four times more likely to deliver a low birthweight infant.

It has also been asserted that:

“...the beating of a pregnant woman endangers her life as well as that of her unborn child. In my own experience in talking to with victims, a woman’s announcement of pregnancy to her partner often resulted in her being beaten by him. The reasons a man would batter his pregnant partner are complex and varied. They may include jealousy of the unborn child for receiving the love and attention he feels the woman would otherwise show him; anger regarding the additional responsibilities the child will present; anger that the woman is not as energetic or able to care for him as she may have been before the pregnancy; jealousy regarding attention given to the woman and to the unborn child from friends and relatives; denial that the child she is carrying is actually his own; and anger regarding the woman’s inherent creative power to bring life into the world” (Schornstein, 1997: 11).

The above-mentioned are therefore, a justification for the author's focus on wife battering.

### **1.5 THEORIES OF THE FAMILY**

As has been mentioned earlier, the study of violence among intimates begins with the institution of the family and marriage. The family has been, and still is, viewed as the basic institution of organised social living, with a private world of its own, separate from the public world of the state and society at large. In other words, the 'family' and the 'state' naturally inhabit separate spheres of the 'private' and the 'public'. As a result, there arise issues of concern when other societal institutions unnecessarily trespass in the private world of the family. The fundamental functions of reproduction, nurturing, and socialization allocated to the family equate the well being of 'the family' with the well being of 'society'. Public anxieties about aspects of family life tend to reveal the normally implicit and taken for granted assumptions about the relationship between this institution and the society at large. Inevitably accompanying the discussions about family violence are calls for the state to intervene in order to regulate, reconstitute and if necessary punish (Dallos and MacLaughlin, 1993: 1).

While the family home is traditionally viewed as a harmonious haven from the pressures and strains of contemporary life, society is being increasingly forced to recognise publicly that it is also a location of routine violence against women. It is in the light of these two extremes of the family that wife battering is examined.

#### **1.5.1 FAMILY AS A HAVEN THESIS**

The assertion that the family is 'a haven in a heartless world' appears in its strongest form in functionalist sociology (Goode, 1959: 188–90; Parsons, 1951). The structural-

functional paradigm suggests that the family is vital to performing several of society's basic tasks. This view therefore, explains Dallos and MacLaughlin's (1996: 1) assertion that 'the well being of society is equated with the well being of the family'. The family is seen as the backbone of society. This invaluable contribution by the family towards the well being of society is in relation to the following classical functions (Goode, 1959: 188). These functions are reproduction, status placement, biological maintenance, socialization, emotional maintenance and sexual control. When all these functions are explored and translated, they are all oriented towards producing an individual and keeping him or her in action. Consequently, they may be viewed as societal functions as well. It is through these functions that the work of society gets done. Replacement of members of society is the societal function that corresponds to reproduction or fertility. Status placement of the individual relates to the wider social integration of the parts of the society. Socialization, sexual control and emotional maintenance have their societal counterpart in the responsibility of the family to the society for the behaviour of its members. Biological maintenance and status placement relate to the provision of access to resources and have their societal counterparts in the control and transmission of power and property, and thus the maintenance of the existing power and property structure of the society.

The structural-functional paradigm identifies a number of the family's major functions in biological and social reproduction, which makes it easy to realise that society as we know it could not exist without families. It views the family as serving fundamental social needs, as well as reproducing members of society and values which are generally shared. Its emphasis on co-operation and consensus rather than conflict and oppression as embedded within the system highlights the positive aspects of family life. Its positive evaluation of the family as important and valuable, its stigmatisation of alternatives and its

emphasis on stability and the maintenance of the social order, provides support for traditional family values (Elliot, 1986:10).

Whilst this approach gives great insight into the analysis of the family and society, it is a narrow view of the family and overlooks the great diversity of the Australian family life as an example. The family is dynamic, with marked changes across the life course. Since the 1970s many things have changed. The marriage rate has fallen and the average age at first marriage has risen from 21.0 to 25.3 years for brides and from 23.4 to 27.3 years for grooms between 1975 and 1995. Both men and women were not only more reluctant to enter into marriage, but were also more ready to leave it. Since 1979 the crude divorce rate has fluctuated between 2.4 and 2.9 divorces per 1,000 population, and about 40% of first marriages end in divorce (statistics from *Year Book Australia 1997*: 83–4). At the same time many divorcees re-partner, and the incidence of remarriage has risen which results in formation of de facto stepfamilies. For example, in 1981, about one-third of all marriages involved at least one previously married partner. Changes have also occurred in the extent to which various family members have access to or control over resources. There has been feminization of poverty (85% since 1985) as well as the striking feature of life without children within some Australian families (Goodnow, Burns, and Russell, 1989: 23–5).

Furthermore, the approach pays very little attention to how other social institutions like the state could meet at least the same human needs. Finally, it overlooks the problems of family life. It mistakenly assumes that family life can be insulated from the tensions and pressures which permeate the wider society, ignores the fact that some people have the power to order family life in terms of their own interests but others do not. It also pays insufficient attention to the ‘dark side’ of the family – the fact that established family forms support patriarchy and incorporate a surprising amount of violence, with the

dysfunctional effect of undermining individual self-confidence, health, and well-being, especially of women and children (Elliot, 1986: 132).

Functionalists emphasize the emotional supportiveness of the family; but Browne maintains that:

“the cereal packet image of the typical family has already been questioned...but the view of the warm and supportive happy family which is often presented in the mass media has been questioned on a more fundamental level...While the family is often a warm and supportive unit for its members, it can also be a hostile and dangerous place...Tempers become easily frayed, emotional temperatures and stress levels rise, and as in a pressure cooker without a safety valve, explosions occur and family conflict is the result. This may lead to violence, divorce, psychological damage to children, perhaps even mental illness and crime” (1992: 241).

Lasch (1977: xiv) has also expressed concern about the nature of the family. The family is not in itself destructive, but rather that the modern family has been invaded and distorted by the destructive forces of capitalism. This implies that family relationships reflect the menace and the self-interested individualism of the market place, brought about by big corporations and the need for mass production. But the most important issue he was concerned with was the emotional pain and fragile nature of marriage, and the hostility and recrimination amongst members within a family.

It is this darker side of the family that is the focus of the section below. Due to the very private nature of the family, any accurate evidence on the extent of violence and abuse inside the family becomes difficult to obtain, as a result of fear or shame. This means that there is a high probability that most such nasty incidents are covered up.

In short therefore two aspects come out of the structural-functional paradigm:

- Family tensions are inevitable. They actually serve as prerequisites for a greater equilibrium (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: 59)
- The institution of the family and marriage is both a harmonious and functional setting and therefore any disharmony is a result of personal failures due to personality

imperfection. This view has been severely criticised by feminist researchers (Hyden, 1994: 15) and is a subject of the section that follows.

### 1.5.2 THE FAMILY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF OPPRESSION

This view has its roots within both the Marxist and Feminist paradigms. For purposes of this research the feminist perspective of the family will be discussed. Feminist researchers (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Martin, 1976) argued that the institution of marriage and the family has historically perpetuated the oppression and subordination of women. Such a perspective suggests wife battering in particular was not necessarily an expression of a psychological problem within the perpetrator, the victim or the family; but rather an explicit brutal example of patriarchy in society and of male dominance. Marriage consists of a hierarchical power structure, with the man as the dominant and the woman as a subordinate. The feminist analysis of the family is that of the man as the batterer and oppressor, and the woman as a subordinated female sex and a victim (Hyden, 1994: 8).

Dobash and Dobash (1980) conducted research in two Scottish cities amongst shelter women; they found that wife battering represented 26% of all serious assaults and 76% of all family violence. Their research findings go beyond the individual pathology or mental illness of the perpetrators. Instead, wife battering was widespread and had cultural blessing. Wife battering was seen by many men as the natural extension of the husband's authority. The belief in the privacy and sanctity of the family meant that nobody, including the police, was willing to intervene. They argued that:

...men who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in Western Society – aggressiveness, male dominance, and female subordination – and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 24)

The above mentioned research findings point to the irony that the family, where nurture and affection are supposed to be located, is also the place where violence against

women is most tolerated (Elliot, 1986: 128). The power which men have over women therefore has turned the family into a violent battleground.

One thing that becomes clear from my study though is that despite the differing views on family life, the family is still continuing and for many it is still 'a haven in a heartless world'.

This chapter has attempted to discuss the shift from selective inattention of family violence to high priority social issue since the 1970s. It also draws attention to the shift theoretically from a functionalist to a power/conflict theoretical base. The theoretical framework adopted draws from the power/conflict theory of the family. In general, the chapter has attempted to provide an overview of the study, its justification, as well as laying the groundwork for the subsequent chapters. The rest of the thesis is divided into seven parts, with each concentrating on a specific area.

Chapter Two examines and reviews the available literature as well as the different theoretical explanations of family violence. The literature review is in line with the objectives of the study, in the areas of the extent of the problem, the factors associated with family violence, myths which support wife battering, factors which keep women in battering relationships, the various responses to family violence, and to what extent pregnancy is involved in battering.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology adopted for this particular study. The study adopted a qualitative type of research involving three parties, namely, victims of violence, perpetrators and service providers, in a case study form. This three-way focus is the strength of this thesis but has been rare in previous research, yet it is very important especially in terms of service and policy recommendations. The use of grounded theory as an analytical framework contributed to a discovery of new hypotheses that did not form part and parcel of the original objectives of the study. These include: wife-batterers may

also abuse children, learned hopefulness as a determining factor in women's decision to leave a violent relationship, and wife battering as a response to the victim's aggression. The limitations result from the case study nature of this research, which is not representative enough to make overgeneralisations. These are, however, a result of wider problems of bureaucratic and ideological nature that the author experienced and which obviously impacted on accessing a more representative sample.

Chapter Four discusses the results of the data pertaining to the nature of violence. Family violence is commonly taken to mean physical violence between spouses, usually perpetrated by the husband on the wife. The result is that the wife experiences fear of her husband during an argument and at other times and that the husband is able to control the outcome of any escalating argument by the use of violence (Elliott and Shanahan, 1988: 23). Initial discussion among the categories involved focussed on physical violence: bashing, kicking, hitting, grabbing, punching, and belting. Some victims and perpetrators made a clearcut distinction between violence and abuse, with the latter reflecting a subtler, less physical form of behaviour. An important finding in this chapter points to the differences in the manner in which both the victims and perpetrators perceive family violence. While family violence for perpetrators is more usually considered to be related to the more physical forms of behaviour, victims argue that, in the absence of physical violence, verbal/emotional abuse is more damaging.

Chapter Five discusses the results of the data on the factors associated with family violence. The thesis explores the relationship between violence and social factors such as age, marital status, occupation, number of children, and nationality as a starting point. But as is revealed later in the chapter, alcohol, jealousy, and individual psychology are mentioned as other factors that contribute to violence. With individual psychology in particular, acts of violence are explained in terms of deviant behaviour attributable to

individual psychopathology; that the perpetrator is mentally ill, that his behaviour is learned from his own childhood experiences or that he has low self-esteem. Similar arguments have been used to explain why women are victims in their own homes (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 35)

Chapter Six deals with the role of pregnancy in battering. Research has indicated the relationship between battering and pregnancy. For many battered women pregnancy does not provide a respite from abuse, as could be expected (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 209; Gelles, 1979,1987; McFarlane, 1992; Renvoize, 1978; Schornstein, 1997; Scutt, 1983; Stark and Flitcraft, 1996; Wallace, 1996). Many women continue to be abused or threatened during pregnancy, while for some the abuse actually starts with the first pregnancy or escalates during pregnancy. During pregnancy, the breasts, abdomen, or even genital area may become special targets for assault. Both the perpetrators and victims in this study acknowledge the relationship between pregnancy and violence.

Chapter Seven discusses the various responses to family violence. It focuses on how individuals, friends, family, police, medical practitioners and other institutions which are involved in service provision and work directly with the victims and/or perpetrators respond to family violence. The study reveals that many of the victims had broken the wall of silence. Various agencies were contacted and the nature of assistance depended more on the needs of individual women, though there was some displeasure registered against the hostility of some social services, by the victims in particular.

Chapter Eight summarises and concludes the thesis. It also summarises the conclusions of each chapter of the thesis. First, the study draws attention to pregnancy as a dangerous period for many battered women. Secondly, contrary to Lenore Walker's (1979) notion of 'learned helplessness' emerges the notion of 'learned hopefulness' as a

significant factor influencing battered women's decision to leave a violent relationship. Thirdly, and most important, this study has identified the power of service providers in dominating the nature of public discussion of family violence, in ways which are at odds to a significant extent with the views and needs of service users. The findings reveal the differences in perception in terms of explanations for violence. Of particular importance are the differences found in relation to verbal, social and economic abuse (as opposed to physical abuse), and differences in the perceived significance of alcohol, jealousy and pregnancy.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM**

A review of the marital violence literature reveals that there was virtually no public discussion of wife battering from the turn of the century until the mid-1970s (Loseke, 1992: 2; Loseke and Cahill, 1988: 171; Pleck, 1987: 30). The discovery of wife battering was due in large part to the work of feminist organizations and scholars who documented and publicised it in the mid-1970s (Besharov, 1990: 10). By 1978, wife battering had become a separate topic, distinct from reports on assaults and murders (Barnett and LaViolette, 1993: xiv). Tierney (1982: 207) too attributed the relative public awareness of wife battering to the development and strength of the women's movement in the 1970s. Wife beating, then, became the object of media attention and government policy not because of an increase in its frequency or because the public had become more concerned but because of the existence of that social movement to help battered women. The growth of the battered women's movement illustrated both successful resource mobilization and the creation of a social problem. In Australia, the concern with wife battering was promoted by the refuge movement and the *Femocrats*, that is, feminist bureaucrats in the government (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 30).

Before its recent popular attention, wife beating used to be called 'domestic disturbance' by members of the police and 'family maladjustment' by marriage counsellors and social workers. Accordingly, even at the time when the problem was 'discovered', the average person, even the average professional, believed it only happened to poor, passive

women with lots of children and little education (Barnett and LaViolette, 1993: 39). Unlike battered children, battered women were regarded as masochists (by psychiatrists) who deserved the abuse by provoking their husbands into beating them (Pleck, 1987: 12). Statements like ‘they must like it, or otherwise they would leave, they asked for it or deserved it’ supported such beliefs. Worse still, many women were blamed for their own victimization. Even those who turned to the criminal justice system were often maltreated or ignored by police, lawyers and judges (Barnett and LaViolette, 1993: 51).

During a time when wife battering began receiving widespread attention, sociologists and psychologists, with a few exceptions, entirely ignored or overlooked the possibility that relationships that begin with vows to love, honour and cherish sometimes include physical violence that occasionally results in death for one of the spouses (Gelles, 1987). This ignorance could be attributed to the following:

- The family was socially defined as nonviolent, therefore causing a perceptual blackout of family violence going on daily all round us in normal families.
- The functionalist emphasis on consensus and integration had desensitized or diverted attention away from family conflict in general, and conflict that used physical force in particular.
- The socially shared definitions of the family as nonviolent seem to lead husbands and wives to define and construct instances in which physical force is used as something other than violence (Gelles, 1987: 10).

The emergence of the women’s movement though brought about some changes. Feminist researchers (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Horsfall, 1991; Martin, 1976; Scutt, 1983) to mention a few, drew attention to the power which men have over women through the use of physical force, and have identified the family as a major site of male physical abuse of women. They argued that wife battering is not a rare phenomenon, the

action of disturbed or drunken men, but is widespread and has cultural support. It is seen by many men as the natural extension of a husband's authority.

Wife beating has traditionally been considered a private matter, and not the business of the police, courts, or even the state. This is because societies safeguard the sanctity of the home, and it was not until the 1970s that wife battering received public attention. It was as recently as the 1980s that Australia in particular began to challenge the long-standing tradition that gives a man both the moral and legal right to batter his wife. But the seriousness and savagery of battering relationships cannot be underestimated. Murder, suicide, permanent injury, kidnapping, incest, and child abuse are all inherent aspects of the battering syndrome (Walker, 1984: 45).

Again, women who are denied full economic participation and opportunities find it difficult, if not impossible, to survive financially without a husband. Religions that view women's subordinate position as divinely ordained make social change and progress difficult. Some denominations view divorce as unacceptable and as such attitudes make it even more difficult for a woman to end a violent relationship. Even further, some priests preach to many battered women that they should be good Christians and forgive their husbands (Hofeller, 1983: 69).

Furthermore, social institutions have systematically regulated relations between the sexes to maintain a double standard that has effectively kept wives legally, socially, emotionally, and economically dependent upon their husbands. Although there are no longer laws that give a man the right to beat his wife, it is still very difficult for a battered woman to take legal action against her husband. This is because at each stage in the process of criminal or civil prosecution, a woman may encounter problems substantial enough to discourage her from proceeding further. In short, even though a woman is

theoretically protected by law from violence by her husband, in practice her alternatives are limited (Hofeller, 1983: 70).

Battered wives presented themselves to feminist grass-roots organisations through rape hotlines started by these groups, as well as victim assistance agencies and rape crisis centres (Hyden, 1994: 6; Loseke, 1992: 5). These grass-roots organisations quickly defined the range of services needed by victims of battering, such as shelter, transportation, counselling, legal assistance, and child care. They also made political demands for change in the power relations between the sexes (Hyden, 1994: 6).

This clearly indicates that the assumptions that violence in the family affects just about everyone, or that the marriage is a hitting licence are not specific enough. Such assumptions ignore a fact and what research reports indicate, that physical violence, particularly between adults in the family, is overwhelmingly directed at women. The home is a potentially dangerous place for women and children and markedly less so for men. Two American national household surveys of 1975 and 1985 suggest that between 1.1 and 1.8 million wives are severely abused by husbands each year (kicked, bitten, hit with a fist or some object) and that another 3 million are pushed, grabbed, shoved, or slapped (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: 162).

Gelles (1987: 40) suggests that for years crimes of sexual and physical assault against wives by their husbands were the most underreported in the criminal justice system. In Australia as well, prevalence and incidence estimates exhibit under-reporting to a greater or lesser extent. A major reason for this is the embarrassment, guilt, fear, anger and denial of the problem. These in turn, have a bearing on the willingness to reveal past experiences and behaviours, answering questions truthfully in the presence of the perpetrator, question comprehension, recall accuracy, non-response and level of interview expertise. Furthermore, there are definitional problems. Most studies of wife battering

have limited their investigation to physical violence because it is easier to identify and document than verbal, emotional or any other forms of abuse (Mugford, 1991: 54–5).

Wife battering is an emotive topic not just because the injuries which women receive provoke feelings of shock and pity (Pahl, 1985: 3), but also because the pervasive acts of violence and abuse are committed with shame and secrecy in the social institution society holds sacred, the family (Knudsen and Miller, 1991:65). Equally shocking is the disproportionate level of violence that is perpetrated on women by acquaintances or significant others. It is more likely that a woman will be raped by someone she knows than by a stranger, and wife battering, by definition, is carried out by one with whom the woman has had an intimate relationship (Sampselle et al., 1992: 13).

Violence between intimates arises from a sector that societal norms define as safe. The expectation is that family and friends will protect and nurture, and not do harm. To be the target of abuse at the hands of someone who is known imposes a burden that compounds the physical trauma. When the abuse arises from someone familiar, a sense of betrayal and exploitation is added. This can shake a woman's confidence in her ability to judge another individual and can rob her of critically needed sanctuary. That the crime was perpetrated by one who knows her can seriously compromise her sense of self-worth. This might provide a partial explanation for the long-lasting physiological and psychological dysfunctionality that many abused women experience (Sampselle et al., 1992: 6).

It is not only shocking to look at the injuries, but it is shocking as well that such things could occur in a domestic setting between two people who have promised to love and cherish each other. The discrepancy between the violence and the setting within which it takes place both makes it harder to understand the problem and also makes it harder to help those who are the victims (Pahl, 1985: 3). But domestic violence is much more common than generally realised and recognised (Gelles, 1987: 12). However, in Australia,

no population survey has been conducted to assess the incidence of family violence but overseas data, especially from United States and Canada can be used to indicate the significance of the problem, although they are not totally reliable or complete in themselves. The fragmented bits and pieces available in Australia only tell about cases which are reported to the police and other agencies, and provide no information at all about prevalence of the problem (Mugford, 1990: 48).

This is because violence within marriage is seen as essentially private matter, both by the man and woman concerned and by those who are outside the marriage (Pahl, 1985: 13). The victim-wife may protect her battering husband from societal intervention in much the same way as alcoholism and mental illness and other phenomena of deviance are screened off. Furthermore, the family is a veritable cradle of violence (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980: 255) which can be seen as a private affair as acts of violence witnessed and experienced at childhood are socialised and internalised.

Given the difficulties in data gathering, one can only conclude that the statistical information currently available (that wife-battering occurs in one in three homes, using Straus and Gelles's 1975 and 1985 survey results as a base) significantly underestimates the incidence of family violence in Australia. But to argue that the available data is not wholly reliable is in most cases to declare that it is useful only as an indicator of the minimum likely levels of violence occurring in Australian homes (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 69; Mugford, 1990: 48). It is as if family violence does not exist, and when forced to acknowledge its existence, people attempt to deny its commonness or severity, or that it happens between normal people. People wish to believe that a beating from one member of a family is something different, and even less harmful than one from a stranger. Such is the strength of myth of family and of the desire to preserve it (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 125).

But if this privacy is maintained and respected, what are the implications of this for the people concerned, which include not just the husband and wife, but also their children? Who is being protected when this privacy is respected? At what point, and at whose request, is it appropriate for public agencies to intervene in the private world of marriage? (Pahl. 1985: 27). Non-action is not surprising given known police attitudes favouring non-intervention and given the serious potential consequences, such as reprisal or even more violence, should intervention take place. So cases reported to the police represent only the tip of the iceberg and the great majority of assaults on wives do not appear in any official records. In actual fact, the whole issue boils down to the belief that to marry or cohabit is to court the risk of physical abuse (Freeman, 1979: 29), not forgetting that power relationships also contribute to this situation.

The prevalence of battering among women's experiences of intimate relationships with men, the growing awareness amongst adult women of potential and actual sexual danger from male intimates, acquaintances and friends, and the memories of adults of physical and sexual abuse during childhood shatter the illusion of the safe home (Stanko, 1990: 58). Everyone's sense of well-being is to some extent affected by the fear of such crimes, and this fear often dictates many of people's daily movements such as which route to take home late at night. There can be no doubt that being assaulted or raped by a stranger in some dark alleyway is frightening, humiliating, painful, and perhaps fatal, but are such things any less horrific if they happen within the home and at the hands of a relative?

Accordingly Dobash and Dobash (1980: 25) argue the fact is that once again, for women and children, the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong. Gelles' (1987: 45) research on marital rape indicates that intimacy and sexual assault are frequently related. The women who are raped by boyfriends, dates, lovers, ex-

lovers, husbands, relatives and other men that they know might represent the tip of an iceberg which reveals more extensive pattern relating intimacy with forced sexual relations.

For example, the Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce asserts that:

“Violence, or the threat of violence, against women, whether it is in the form of wife-beating, rape, sexual harassment, assault or murder is associated with social ideas about male domination and may well be a major means with which the subordination of women is maintained. This is not to say that violence or the threat of violence is inevitable in male-dominated societies. However, where male domination is supported and accepted and women are devalued and subordinate, violence may be seen as a relatively easy means of controlling women” (1991: 21).

Where women are still viewed as the property of men and lack economic and political power, violence against women, both symbolic and actual, will continue, and women will remain in a precarious world. Walker (1979: 75) suggests that male partners beat their wives because nobody stops them. Whilst there are a few consequences for perpetrators, women and children are more likely to lose their lives, their sanity, and their developmental integrity. Living with fear takes an enormous emotional toll on its victims, the condition which the battered women she interviewed describe as ‘walking on eggshells’. Battering seems to be more about the abuse of power and control. The more frightened and humiliated a woman becomes, the easier it is for her to be controlled. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence let men get their way with women.

The view that family life is private operates as an ideology of social control, which would prevent people from talking about their experiences and feelings and thus discovering common elements in apparently individual lives. 20% of the Australian community still believe wife battering is a private matter (Office of the Status of Women, 1995: 8). The ideology of private life serves to alienate people from each other and to lead them to assume the hypocritical and passive guise that enables the dominant cultural mythologies to flourish. The need to keep domestic aspects as private leads to a sense of personal guilt and failure while preventing people from working towards a social

understanding of their situation. This privacy is about women being owned, controlled, and being possessions of their violent partners. Women are not free, live in fear, in social isolation, in emotional and often in economic deprivation. They often accept blame for what is wrong, blame for the violence, and blame for the fact that their family scenario does not live up to the patriarchal promise (McGregor, 1990: 41). This attitude, however, seems to be changing gradually. State intervention and women/men's willingness to discuss their situation with researchers is a testimony to all this (Hearn, 1996; Hyden, 1994). This has also been helped by the rise of feminism. The result has been the slow dismantling of the wall of silence that separates the private from the public spheres of life. By sharing experience women realise the existing continuum of violence which stems from unequal power relations within the family (O'Donnell and Craney, 1982: 12).

In addition to this, major changes have taken place in the status of the problem of wife battering itself. There is an enormous body of specialised literature and the response to battered women has burgeoned into an international network of services from Boston to Cape Town and includes an extensive state-run regulatory apparatus in addition to thousands of community-based programmes (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: xix). One would also like to add that emergence of programs like the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action in Australia in particular, are a signal that the state is maintaining its stance towards eradicating the problem. Australian studies include Coorey (1989), Easteal (1992, 1993, 1994), Elliott and Shanahan (1988), Hatty (1988, 1989), Horsfall (1991), O'Donnell and Saville (1982), Scutt (1983) and Seddon (1993). The Australian Federal Government, through the Office of the Status of Women, established the National Committee on Violence Against Women (1992), which focused on the experience and needs of women subject to violence in all forms and aimed for the elimination of violence

against women from Australian society. Surveys include Community Attitudes to Violence against Women (1995) and Women's Safety Australia (1996).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, estimates from the two American national surveys (1975 and 1986) are used as a measure of the extent of wife battering. Despite the haphazard data on wife battering, when refuges become available, they are always filled to capacity and have waiting lists before they actually open their doors. The argument here is that what is important is to develop better tools to define the extent of the problem. In the meantime, however, the voices of battered women and those working with them are loud and clear: battering is a human problem and not only a statistical one. It is time everyone in society sat up and took notice of the violence occurring against women within the home (Sampselle et al., 1992: 8).

## **2.2 THEORIES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE**

The purpose of this section is to discuss some of the major theoretical models that were adopted by different researchers in an attempt to explain the occurrence of family violence. However, it should be noted that none of these theories have satisfactorily explained the causes of family violence. For example, none of them explains why family violence occurs in one family but not in another. These models are described as follows:

### **2.2.1 RESOURCE THEORY**

This theory is based on the principle of power, whereby the family, as with other social systems, is viewed as a power system. The model assumes hold that the use of violence within a relationship depends upon the resources a family member controls (Wallace, 1996: 13). It attempted to explain all types of violence by suggesting that it was used as a resource when all other sources of power and control were unavailable. Goode (1971) developed this model. He argues that men convert the superior economic resources they

command outside the home into the privilege of beating their wives to resolve domestic disputes. O'Brien (1974) found that male violence was a result of a condition in the family where the achievement ability of the husband was less than his proscribed superior status. Gelles (1974) adopted the same model in his study of the incidence of, reactions to and dynamics of family violence. He found that violence was more prevalent in low-income families, a correlation he ascribed to an increased amount of stress accompanying low-income status, rather than a lack of resources. There exist laws such as parental rights and obligations, laws governing custody, and property rights, and these are backed by the police and the courts. All these are an expression of family patterns, which need some form of force to maintain stability. The argument is that the absence of force would undermine the structural strength of the family (Gelles, 1987: 42).

In an attempt to apply the resource theory to family relations, it has been observed that the more external resources a person controls, the less the likelihood that they will use violence or force to maintain control. In other words, resources such as success, prestige, age, gifts, job, authority, friendship, love, intelligence and so on, impact on a family member's power (Bersani and Chen, 1988: 60–61; Gelles, 1987: 43). Consequently, because various socio-economic classes have different levels of access to such resources as would help them to redress their balance of exchange with family members, and also different sources of pleasure and contentment, different levels of family violence could be expected. One reason why lower class people experience greater frustration and bitterness is because they have fewer resources than the rest of the society. As a result they may be inclined to resort to more violence than the rest of the society (Kirkwood, 1993: 15).

However, this theory has suffered some inconsistencies particularly with respect to wife battering. The underlying principle is that violence is more likely to occur when a person's power or status ranks high in one setting (for example, education), and ranks low

in another (for example, income), or when the norms governing the status in the family are ambiguous or changing. For example, in the family now, traditional normative expectations are undergoing rapid changes, and men in particular may use violence to maintain their superiority over women who have traditionally inferior roles. Therefore husbands who fail to perform adequately in their traditional role as breadwinners, or who feel that their traditional power in the family has been eroded while women's power has increased, are more likely to use violence (Levinson, 1989: 16).

The theory does not explain why sex and not ability is a key to economic power, what men win when they beat their wives, or why women appear to be more entrapped after they are hit. In addition, wife battering has become a public issue when men's relative economic advantage over women is declining, not growing, a fact that highlights the defensive nature of male violence as other sources of male power erode (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996: 28).

### **2.2.2 EXCHANGE THEORY**

This theory argues that wife battering is based on a determination of costs and rewards (Wallace, 1996: 9). The model was developed in an attempt to come up with an integrated model that could best incorporate the key elements of diverse theories used to explain family violence. Again, this model could provide a suitable perspective to explain and answer a variety of questions and issues such as "why do women remain in abusive relationships?" (Gelles, 1983: 156–7). Exchange theory applies cost-benefit analysis in attempting to explain family violence (Levinson, 1989: 17). According to Gelles (1987: 17), the fundamental principle of exchange theory is that people engage in particular behaviour either to earn a reward or escape punishment; and that in any exchange relationship, the rule is that the greater the rewards, the greater the costs, and the greater

the investments, the greater the profits, and that some hit others because they can. In applying this to family relations, family violence is governed by the principles of costs and rewards. People will use violence to achieve their means provided the costs of such violence do not outweigh the rewards gained by doing so. The privacy of the family unit and the subsequent low risk of intervention decreases the cost of violence, thereby allowing it to occur (Gelles, 1983: 20; Levinson, 1989: 18).

Gelles (1987: 18) also believes that in some societies the costs are often low because adequate social controls are not available to prevent violence between family members. Inequality, privacy, and images of 'a real man' have been identified as some major factors in social and family structure which reduce external social control of the home and increase the rewards for being violent. For example, the normative power structure in society in general promotes sexual and generational inequality. This in turn weakens social controls and reduces the costs of being violent, particularly for men. The private nature of the family makes relatives and neighbours reluctant to intervene in family disputes. In a similar manner, laws prohibiting wife battering, even if in existence, are not enforced to avoid breaking up a family. Finally, in some social arrangements there exist some norms that consider male aggressiveness and sexual inequality as proof that someone is a real man. Rather than risk loss of status, the violent member may actually gain status. Moreover, the popular assumption that 'a man's home is his castle' further reduces external social control over family life. Even in situations where violence could cost a person their status, the violent individual could actually employ some accepted vocabularies or motives to explain their behaviour. For example, the violence could be justified in terms of drunkenness, or lost control (Bersani and Chen, 1988: 64; Gelles, 1983: 159; Levinson, 1989: 15–16).

This model has been a useful tool in explaining other findings in the study of family violence. For example, the explanation for violence during pregnancy is that pregnant women are at risk of physical violence due to their apparent helplessness and vulnerability because they are unable to hit back. However, some criticisms have been leveled against the model. Bersani and Chen (1988: 65) argue that this theory is one of the few that has attempted to create some cooperation between theory and research.

### 2.2.3 SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE THEORY

The basic assumption of this theory is that there exists differential orientation to family violence reflected in the cultural differences in values and norms. Some subcultures develop norms that emphasize the use of physical violence to a greater extent (Levinson, 1989: 17) because it is appropriate within that subculture, it is normative (Gelles, 1987; Straus and Hotaling, 1980: 58). What that subculture values may be learned definitions of toughness, the worth of human life, the character of masculinity, the meaning of honour and deference. Some normative rules may dictate violent responses for even trivial remarks, and such norms have a life of their own (Bersani and Chen, 1988: 65).

The model has been developed as an explanation for differences in the frequency or severity of violence among different cultures. Research has shown (Levinson, 1989: 16) that cultures around the world may be distinguished from one another on the basis of the number of different types of violence which occur. For example Carroll (in Bersani and Chen, 1988: 68–9) compared two ethnic groups in order to differentiate the level of violence within each. Mexican-American families on the one hand are thought to have higher levels of violence as a result of greater importance placed on such values as male dominance, strict discipline and the general recognition that the rest of the members of the family are under the submission of the father. Jewish American families on the other have

been known for having lower rates of violence. This is a result of such norms as intellectuality and rationality, articulateness, argumentativeness and parent-child bargaining, which are primarily used as a legitimate means to solve family problems and as such do not encourage physical responses.

The subculture of violence theory was intended to call attention to a normative system that shapes the conditions under which violence is a normal outcome. According to Straus et al. (1980: 155), those cultures that accept family violence as the norm are seen to have the highest rates (Gelles, 1987: 67). However, this theory ignores the question of how such norms, as cultural patterns, originated in the first place.

#### 2.2.4 SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

This theory is more a product of social psychology than sociological analysis. It rejects the assumption that aggression is an inner drive, and suggests instead that aggression is both learned and occurs in a social context (Levinson, 1989: 75). The main assumption is that children model adult aggressive behaviour, and will increase or decrease the modeled behaviour in response to witnessing whether it is rewarded or punished. Children will report wanting to be like an aggressive adult when that adult is rewarded. This view is supported by a number of studies that have found that men who are violent have a higher incidence of witnessing and/or experiencing violence as children (Straus et al., 1980: 100; Roy, 1977: 78).

It also suggests both the contextual and situational factors as the cause of family violence. For example, contextual factors such as personality traits, couple characteristics and societal characteristics create an environment which is conducive to family violence. In other words, in addition to violence learned in the family of origin, the theory also focuses on violence as learned and reinforced in the culture. The situational factors precipitate

family violence especially when they occur in the presence of contextual factors that also encourage violence. Contextual factors that are of particular importance for intimate violence include violence in family of origin, stress, and an aggressive personality style. The main situational factors are marital strife and alcohol, and whenever these five come together, there is a likelihood of violence. Violence therefore can be seen as learned response to stress from observing others. Individual stressors can be either internal or external. Examples of internal stressors may be feelings of insecurity, feelings of inadequacy, or personality difficulties, while external stressors may include unemployment, illness, or interpersonal difficulties. As a result, violence is not caused by individual psychopathology or societal stress, but rather by the way in which some men have learned to respond to these difficulties (Stordeur and Stille, 1989: 29).

Once the men have learned violence they use it, and the reinforcement for such violence increases the likelihood that it will be used again. The use of violence becomes a cycle, which was developed by Walker (1979) and is now known as the *Cycle of Violence*, which assumes that violent behaviour is learned within the family and bequeathed from one generation to the next. It consists of three phases: tension building, the acute battering incident, and kindness and contrite, loving behaviour (this cycle is discussed in detail later in the chapter). The intergenerational transmission of violence thesis has drawn a lot of attention within the social learning perspective, that people who witness and/or experience violence as children are likely to grow up as violent adults in their intimate relationships (Finkelhor et al., 1988; Herrenkohl et al., 1983; Lackey and Williams, 1995; Pagelow, 1981; Straus et al., 1980: 112–3). However, there are some limitations within the theory. Herrenkohl et al., (1983: 307) argue that the case-studies usually cited to support this theory lack a control group, which makes conclusions about the history of violence difficult. The suggestion is that emotional deprivation rather than physical violence may be

a salient feature in a high-risk childhood. It is also argued that while many abusive parents may be a product of violence in their family of childhood, there are still many who are not. Some victims of abusive parenting do not necessarily become violent towards their own children, which indicates that there are other factors within the individual's childhood history which affect the emotional development. Also as Seddon (1993: 25) has observed, the cycle of violence theory does not sufficiently explain why some individuals are violent and others are not.

The extent to which factors other than just witnessing/experiencing violence as a child are related to the severity of discipline used in parenting is important. Research has shown (Levinson, 1989: 17) that the effects of witnessing and/or experiencing violence as a child may be different for men and women, with a more direct effect on men.

#### **2.2.5 GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

This theory assumes that all parts of the system contribute to the maintenance of the overall equilibrium. The family therefore works continually as a system to maintain this equilibrium, even when it is achieved through dysfunction. All members therefore participate in a system and carry out the responsibility of family dysfunction. Violence within the family therefore, is a result of a system rather than individual pathology of the family member (Giles-Sims, 1983: 70). Battering in this context is no longer simply the responsibility of the batterer, but rather a behaviour that is maintained by the actions of all family members. The theory also suggests that battering is a result of repetitive interactions between family members characterized by certain relationship structures or dynamics, and that it serves a functional role in maintaining this relationship. Whenever violence occurs, family members who engage in such acts fulfill their own self-concept of being violent. In this case then the victim is blamed. It becomes her responsibility to change her behaviour

to stop the violence perpetrated against her (Stordeur and Stille, 1989: 25–6). But Bograd (1984) has criticised this theory for its bias, in that it blames the victim for violence while excusing the perpetrator. The seriousness of violence is underemphasized by viewing it as simply one of the many system problems. It implies that women are responsible for controlling their husbands' feelings and actions, while ignoring the power differentials between men and women, not only in marriage, but in society in general.

## 2.2.6 PATRIARCHAL THEORY

This theory forms an underlying foundation that provides support for anyone claiming the existence of structural inequality among family members. This approach is associated with feminist view of the institutions of marriage and the family, which endorse the hierarchical power structure, where the man is the dominant figure and the woman is a subordinate (Hyden, 1994: 8; Wallace, 1996: 21). Levinson (1989: 35) views the model as a political agenda associated particularly with a feminist perspective on family violence. The basic assumption is that wife battering is a result of the arrangement within the traditional family, which is male dominated. The social structure supports gender inequality, and that inequality is rooted in the history and in the traditions of most societies. Marriage within such an arrangement is an element whereby women are classified and treated as men's property. With the existence of laws and norms which support this arrangement, men will control women and will use violence to maintain that control if necessary (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Horsfall, 1991; Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1981; Scutt, 1983; Walker, 1979).

The feminist perspective suggests that men are not only trained and reinforced to be violent against women, but the patriarchal structure and men in general are rewarded by women being restricted and limited by their fear of men's violence. According to the advocates of this view, unless the sexist society which maintains wife battering is

challenged and change comes about, wife battering will continue even if individual men cease their violence towards their partners (Stordeur and Stille, 1989: 32).

Historically, society has placed women in inferior and subordinate positions within both public and private institutions. Religion is one such institution that perpetuated the subordination and oppression of women. Some religions, just like other patriarchal institutions, played a major role in endorsing wife beating. Christianity, Islam and the church affirmed the male-dominating family structure. Christianity blamed the woman for having caused a man to sin by offering him the forbidden fruit, and as such she is the cause of all human ills and troubles. The underlying assumption is that she deserves shame, detestation and punishment for whatever she has brought to man (Al-Ash'Ari, 1988: 4). The Book of Genesis probably as well provides the most powerful symbolic message in the Bible regarding women's place. God created a companion (Eve) for Adam, out of his own (Adam's) rib. On waking Adam exclaimed 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of a Man' (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 3). The husband was held responsible for his wife's behaviour and was admonished to beat her when she committed a serious wrong or mortal sin, 'not in rage but out of charity and concern for her soul' (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 124). The beatings then were for the 'protection' of the woman's soul (Martin, 1976: 5).

The law is another tool of the patriarchal system. Throughout history, the legal and cultural precedents, to some extent, sanctioned the right of a husband to use violence (sexual or physical) against his wife. Under the law husband and wife, by virtue of their marriage, were considered as one, thus suspending the very being or legal existence of the woman. A woman could not separate from her husband without his consent, divorce was extremely difficult and any goods were forfeited if she left without his permission. Legally,

the law obliged married women, as having no other refuge, to conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and the husbands to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions. Under the husband's wing, protection and cover, the wife performed everything (Martin, 1976: 6). As she was considered to be his property it was difficult for her to dissolve the marriage.

Dobash and Dobash (1980: 35) have argued that the type of status which women inherit on marriage disadvantages them in terms of their legal rights and other associated legal processes. Instead the legal process allows their husbands to assume all sorts of positions such as the lawmaker, judge, jury and executioner in so far as the marriage is concerned.

McGregor (1990: 37) points out that in Australia, the law in the past was thoroughly gendered, and it is only recently that gender inequality has been progressively removed from statute law. It was only in 1902 when the *Commonwealth Franchise Act*, which is now the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was passed, and it gave women the right to vote and to stand for federal elections (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 24). Even worse, women were paid less than men for doing the same work, until 1969 when Equal Pay case was granted by the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. Not only did the law institutionalize gender inequality, but it also encouraged wife battering. Adopting British Common Law, wives were considered to be the property of their fathers before marriage, and that of their husbands after marriage. Before the laws changed, therefore, men were able to claim compensation for the damage to their reputation if their wife was raped.

However, as the results of the data from this research will indicate, none of the above theories on their own adequately explain family violence. The findings will show that there are a lot of factors involved in wife battering that are incorporated by more than

one theory. Therefore, in order to fully understand the phenomenon of family violence, at least all the theories should be considered.

My theory is a combination of patriarchy and male resentment to the conspicuous attention given to women's issues and women's rights. My point of departure is that men beat up their female partners due to male domination, which is a legacy of patriarchy. Often, when there are cases of wife battering, nobody should intervene because that is entirely a private matter between two people in a private setting. In such a way, society condoned wife battering by protecting the sanctity of the family. But now things have changed. There is considerable public awareness regarding wife battering and the advocacy to enhance the status of women in societies. My feeling is that this attention leaves some men with mixed feelings of anger, inferiority and resentment of the way in which the private sphere of the family has been invaded. Women and children alike know about their rights and points of reference when faced with crisis. Men feel powerless because they can no longer do whatever they like with women and children without being put under scrutiny by outside agencies such as the courts. Men are aware that women can always escape their bully behaviour to refuges and women's centres, and as such their power to dominate is gradually reduced. Therefore, the male resentment of advocacy for women's liberation and independence, together with the patriarchal ideology that perpetuated the inferior status of women, contribute to wife battering. The only way men can maintain their power position is through violence within the family setting.

### **2.3 THE PROFILE OF BATTERED WOMEN**

Most cases of wife beating which have come to the attention of professionals were long-standing relationships involving repeated assaults and physical abuse. In almost all cases, the violence had increased in frequency and intensity over time. This is how the question of

why these destructive relationships endured and, in particular, why the victims remained in such relationships emerged (Pagelow, 1981: 19).

The question of why a woman who has been physically abused by her husband remains with him has been one of the most frequently asked by both professionals and the lay public in the course of discussions of family violence. Despite the fact that the question is one of the more difficult to answer adequately, it also derives from the elementary assumption that any reasonable individual, having been beaten and battered by another person, would avoid being victimized again, or at least avoid the attacker. Very unfortunately, the answer to why women remain with their abusive husbands is not nearly as simple as the assumption that underlies the question (Gelles, 1987: 108).

The responses of battered women to the violence perpetrated against them are by no means uniform. Some put up with their lot; quite how many, no one knows. There is no doubt however that they constitute the majority of women who have been subjected to violent abuse in the domestic setting. Many people believe that battered women are somehow responsible for what has happened to them. Observers of battered wives have been known to comment that the wife's behaviour must have been such that she provoked her abuse and therefore deserved it (Gelles, 1987: 110).

The women's decision to remain in abusive relationships has been supported by Barnett and LaViolette (1993) who attribute this to the role which cultural mores and sex-role socialisation play. The family is a setting where a woman learns about gender identity. Women learn that affiliation with a man gives them status and worth. Battered women form attachments and become emotionally dependent upon their male partners in the same way other women do, following the same path as their non-battered sisters.

Women also learn about hope and commitment in their family, qualities continually nourished by cultural messages. Their primary reason for remaining in or returning to an

abusive relationship is their hope and need to believe that their abuser will stop the violence, a need called learned hopefulness (Barnette and LaViolette, 1993: 22). It is some of these traits which are most valued in women, such as commitment and tolerance, which may sometimes be used to pathologize their behaviour and to blame them for staying.

Straus (1977: 215) attributes this feeling to the internalisation of the ‘women as children’ social definition in the form of negative self-image. The whole concepts of compulsive masculinity and its associated violence, and compulsive femininity and its associated negative self-image seem to be fully established sexually structured patterns of behaviour. Husbands are the agents of women’s repressed position in society, where humiliation and degradation of the victim is often the major motivating force. Under such a structure, women tend to develop negative self-images, especially in relation to the crucial trait of achievement. As a consequence, they may also develop feelings of guilt and masochism, which encourage toleration of male aggression and violence, and in some extreme cases, to seek it.

This view is expressed in such statements as “the woman must have done something to deserve it” or “women must enjoy it really, otherwise surely they would leave” (Gelles, 1987: 55; Pahl, 1985: 5). Other statements like “women should be struck regularly, like gongs”, or “those women libbers irritate the hell out of their husbands” (Straus and Hotaling, 1980: 24) also support the view that women always ask for it. Otherwise, battering is treated as normal violence or laughed off with remarks that it has been caused by the rise of feminism, or helping battered women would be an invasion of privacy.

It is perhaps easier to envisage a violent act of bashing than it is to understand why the victim does not run away the first time it happens. The tragedy is that battered women are blamed for what is happening, they continue to blame themselves and feel guilty about

the violence and this is one reason why they do not leave but continue to endure the violence. At other times, these women stay because they no longer have self-confidence. Blackman (1989: 75) argues they are characterised by low self-esteem, traditional attitudes about family life, feelings of responsibility and guilt with respect to the batterer's actions, and severe stress reactions. Martin (1981: 81), on the other hand, suggests that cultural norms encourage a belief in the significance of a harmonious marriage, that the failure of a marriage represents the failure as a woman. Some women are made to believe that marriage gives their lives a meaning, that they have no value as individuals apart from their male partners.

Loseke and Cahill (1988: 255) have identified both the external and internal constraints as the main causes for women to stay in violent relationships. The external constraints constitute the economic dependence of women upon their spouses. If a woman has children but no money and no place to go to, she cannot be held responsible for the unreasonable act of staying. She has absolutely no choice. This has been supported by Gelles' (1987) research, that women who are poorly educated and unemployed find it very difficult to leave their violent husbands.

One question that might be asked in relation to this reasoning would be "what about friends, family, welfare systems and social service agencies?" Can't they do anything to help? But again, Loseke and Cahill (1988: 257) argue that more often than not, family and friends tend to blame battered women for their problems instead of helping them. Furthermore, social service agencies provide very little, if any, assistance. In fact Seddon (1993: 1) expressed concern about the manner in which social services have pre-conceived notions about family violence. He believed that a holistic approach is necessary, especially when dealing with the problems associated with family violence is difficult and requires a rather sensitive and empathetic handling.

Part of the internal constraints emanates from the battered women's perception of violence. They define violence as normal and natural. It is only defined as a problem if it becomes severe and/or frequent enough. If it is not subjectively defined as a problem, then women have no reason to consider leaving. But then women remain in violent relationships even when violence is subjectively defined as a problem. Experts on battered women suggest two major sources of such internal constraints. The first one is the femininity of battered women. Women stay with their violent spouses because they are emotionally dependent upon them (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 155; Freeman, 1979: 73; Langley and Levy, 1977: 57; Loseke and Cahill, 1988: 168; Moore, 1979: 10; Roy, 1977: 55). They are also characterised by poor self-image and low self-concept (Freeman, 1979: 74; Langley and Levy, 1977: 65; Loseke and Cahill, 1988: 168) They also have traditional views about women's proper place (Loseke and Cahill, 1988: 169).

Secondly, the process of victimization itself plays a very vital role. Once a woman is bashed she will fear physical reprisal if she leaves. Battered women are sometimes said to develop complex psychological problems from their victimization. These include the 'stress-response syndrome', and 'enforced restriction of choice'. A symptom common to all such diagnostic categories is that sufferers find it subjectively difficult to leave their spouses (Loseke and Cahill, 1988: 169; Martin, 1979: 35; Moore, 1979: 11; Roy, 1977: 56). Freeman (1979) indicates that victimization as a child increases the wife's tolerance for violence as an adult. Both the external and internal constraint accounts portray battered women who 'stay' as more acted upon than acting.

In addition, a theory of *Learned Helplessness* (Walker, 1979) has been offered to explain why women put up with abusive relationships. The theory holds that battered women learned to be helpless. The repeated beatings and lower self-concepts leave women with the feeling that they cannot control what will happen to them. Like laboratory

animals after experiencing repeated shocks from which there is no escape, battered women eventually learn that they are helpless to prevent or control their husbands' violent attacks. In spite of this belief, these women still maintained a sense of responsibility for provoking the assaults against them. Thus they would appear to be trapped in a situation of inherent consistency. They may believe that they cause the abuse, but cannot cause it to stop. They are simultaneously in control and out of control (Blackman, 1989: 49).

Walker (1979) refers to this theory as the *Cycle of Violence*, which describes interpersonal aggression that intensifies in degree and frequency over time and holds the people involved in an established pattern of behaviour. This cycle consists of six phases, namely:

- Build up phase: characterised by increasing tension
- Stand over phase: consisting of verbal attacks to weaken the female partner, increasing her control and fear and making children feel like they are walking on eggshells
- Violent explosion: which refers to unpredictable triggering incident; assault which is carried out in fit of self-righteous rage; foul language and long, ranting tirades
- Remorse phase: involving shame and fear of the consequences; denial and playing down, such as 'it was only a bit of a shove'; and promises of changed behaviour in the future
- Pursuit phase: such as attempts to buy back the partner with expensive gifts and promises; reverting to threats and more violence if the woman does not cooperate
- Honeymoon phase: having come closer to destruction and separation, partners cling together to each other for comfort; a time of intense intimacy, denial of earlier difficulties, inevitably followed by the increasing tension of the build up phase (Walker, 1979:45).

Often the periods between repetitions of this cycle tend to shorten over time. Honeymoon periods become shorter and the tension build-up mood may dominate the home. With the increase in severity and frequency of the battering process, the battered woman loses motivation and believes that her situation is hopeless. The perception then becomes the reality, that of 'learned helplessness', the condition whereby the victim believes the perpetrator is invincible and that neither she nor anyone else can change that.

Walker (1984) also presented the concept of *Battered Woman Syndrome*. She asserts that victims of wife battering gradually become paralyzed by fear and believe that they have no other options. As a result, these women stay in the abusive relationships, coping the best they can. The Battered Woman Syndrome involves a woman who has been, on at least two occasions, the victim of physical, sexual, or serious psychological abuse by a man with whom she has an intimate relationship. It is a pattern of psychological symptoms that develop after a woman has lived in a battering relationship abuse. The victim gradually feels and hopeless and helpless, and as a result, remain in abusive relationships.

However, Walker's (1979) theory of learned helplessness implies a rather passive nature of battered women. Most battered women are far from passive. Dobash and Dobash (1980: 270) point out that women do not choose just to stay or leave. Rather, many women stay, leave, and then return. Even for those who stay, there are concrete reasons. The fights over who is the boss, money, sex and childcare are all at the heart of the violence. Women remain in such relationships, and so are battered, not because of pathology, self-blame or even helplessness, but rather because the helping system implicitly collaborates with violent men by supporting traditional family roles and treating victims as if they were the problem. As a result of the combination of sex discrimination, an inappropriate helping response, and male violence, women's options are cut off, they

become entrapped in violent homes, and may develop many of the behavioural and personality problems said to cause abuse.

Stark and Flitcraft (1988: 306) argue that contrary to battered women being viewed as helpless, self-blaming and avoiding helping services altogether, they are actually stronger, more independent, and more sensitive than other women. They actually seek medical help even more promptly. Feelings of helplessness may as often result from a history of institutional victimization as from violence, and the view of battered women as helpless victims, rather than survivors, may actually prompt interventions that reduce a woman's ability to cope. In all probability, hospitalisation is a source of low self-esteem among abused mental patients, whereas the more positive self-perceptions of women in shelters reflect their emphasis on support and advocacy.

Women who experience less severe and less frequent violence are more likely to remain with their husbands and not seek outside intervention. Even if a woman needs help and protection from her husband, she all too frequently finds out that the institutions/agencies she contacts are ineffective or unable to provide real assistance. Again, women assaulted most frequently tended to call the police whilst those beaten less often were inclined to seek a divorce or legal separation. Amongst explanations given for this is the difference in the socio-economic class of the women affected; working class women rely upon police intervention, whilst middle class women seek the advice of the legal profession to solve their marital problems. However, Seddon (1993: 4) maintains that the fact that some groups do seek help from the police or community services does not mean family violence is confined to low-income groups or that it is more prevalent amongst certain ethnic groups.

Finally, some wives put up with violent situations because they highly cherish the privacy of their families. They fear that the myth of their peaceful family life will explode,

as there is strong pressure on individuals to keep their marital 'altercations' private. Some of Gelles' (1987) respondents suggested they would never even think of calling the police, going to a social worker, or file for a divorce because those actions would rupture the carefully nurtured myth of their fine family life. For example, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours will Hear* (Pizzey, 1974) encapsulates this philosophy. The last thing many people want is for details of their personal lives to be exposed in the newspapers (Freeman, 1979: 40).

Moreover, a woman who has been dominated, controlled and frightened for years has lost a great deal of self-confidence and self-esteem. The prospect of living on her own may be frightening. Before a woman could leave a violent husband for good, she must overcome not only her personal fears, but also the deeply ingrained ideas that marriages should be held together at almost any cost, that the break up of marriage is mostly the fault of the woman, and that broken homes are worse for children than whole, though violent, ones. These cultural notions are often urged upon battered wives by their friends, relatives, and even representatives of social agencies (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 140).

In conclusion, it appears that before the public awareness of wife battering, the women's actions would be explained in terms of the police, social agencies, and court lack of understanding about family violence; that women who seek help and protection from their husbands all too frequently find out that the agents and agencies they call are ineffective or incapable of providing real assistance. But the deficiencies of the external agencies and the social pressures on individuals to cover up family altercations are no longer powerful forces which keep women with their abusive husbands.

## **2.4 THE PROFILE OF PERPETRATORS**

Men's violence against women has often been explained in terms of psychological essentialism. Perpetrators have been labelled passive-dependent, infantile, or as lacking impulse control, while battered women have been defined as masochistic, paranoid, or depressed (Yllo and Bograd, 1988: 16–17). For Straus (1977: 194–5), such men are viewed as “aggressive”, “uncontrolled”, or mentally ill. They are also psychotic, or suffer from brain damage that interferes with their ability to control aggression. A qualitative study of perpetrators suggests their behaviour is an overcompensation for a distorted male ideal that they feel obliged to fulfill. Their distortions are in part the result of the role models of their fathers or of media heroes. They are not so much super ‘macho’ men as much as they feel they fall short of what they are ‘supposed’ to be as a ‘man’. Their low self-concept may be related to the abuse they witnessed or received while growing up (Gondolf and Fisher, 1991: 284).

The feminist perspective on wife battering is that men's violence is a general means of maintaining and reinforcing power that is available to men. In this context, men's violence is in large part a development of dominant-submissive power relations that exist in normal family life. Men may resort to violence when their power and privilege are challenged, and other strategies have failed. Such violent actions may be available as part of men's repertoire at all times, but are most used at times of particular threat, such as women's response and resistance to the situation. Furthermore, men's violence to women may develop in association with feelings of threat when women do not do what men expect, in terms of child care, housework, paid work, and sexuality, to mention just a few. Frustration and anger at possible or potential loss of power in one sphere, such as at work

place, may also be acted upon in another sphere or relationship (at home), where there may be little, if any, resistance (Fawcett et al., 1996: 31).

Perpetrators come from all socio-economic backgrounds, race, religion, and walks of life (Straus et al., 1980: 330; Walker, 1979: 75). Batterers have a tendency to minimize and deny their violent behaviour. This is partly due to embarrassment, guilt and shame about their behaviour. Another reason men will minimize or deny their behaviour is because it is often in their best interests to do so, particularly when they are facing criminal charges. They also forget or blank out, and adopt processes of exclusion and inclusion of particular behaviours. For example, in talking about violence, men overwhelmingly refer to physical violence (Hearn, 1996: 104). The end result is that such men will often see the woman as the cause of their violence. Certainly women can and do provoke arguments just as men do. But the response to such conflict or anger is each person's own responsibility, and it is chosen by that person at that particular time as a way of responding to that situation (Sonkin et al., 1985: 42).

The history of social intervention as well is not very impressive because by the end of the day, the perpetrator's behaviour is excused on psychological grounds and the victim is invariably to blame. Statements like 'men are violent because they drink too much', 'men are violent because they do not have a job', 'men are violent because they have stressful jobs' are all too common. Whether an intervention was done by a lawyer, magistrate, police officer, marriage counsellor, next-door neighbour, or psychologist, the welfare of the victims was not paramount. McGregor (1990: 38) suggests that one thing which is very clear is that when a plethora of expert opinions, theories and contradictions emerge, and change does not occur, the experts are not looking at the wider picture. Instead, they have become distracted.

The danger with this distraction is that perpetrators often grasp at any excuse for their behaviour, and there are many half-baked theories of causation which give them ample scope. The wider society and the welfare agencies that serve it, tend to treat men as if they are less than fully to blame and women as if they share the blame for wife battering. The tendency to blame the victim has become a wider social trend, which in turn has its own consequences. As has been asserted:

“...choosing to ignore the complacency and domination of men as a gender, there is a tendency for criminal justice and welfare agencies to regard the few men against whom action is unavoidably taken – those who take abuse to its logical conclusion and kill, for example, or who happen to come before the courts – as the few bad apples in the barrel. Action must be taken against them, runs the thinking, or they might turn the whole barrelful bad. In fact, the barrel – the patriarchy – is already bad and what we really need is a new barrel” (Mullender, 1996: 37).

## **2.5 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WIFE BATTERING**

As discussed in chapter 1, early traditional theories of wife battering concentrated on the individual personalities of either the perpetrator or the victim. The works of Schultz (1960) and Snell et al. (1964), amongst others, relate wife battering to psychological problems, including immature personalities, personality disorders, poor impulse control, low frustration tolerance, dependency, depression, developmental trauma leading to misogyny or ego functioning problems, fear of intimacy and/or abandonment, jealousy, addiction, and other psychiatric illnesses.

The search for psychological causal factors or distinct personality configurations associated with wife battering has, however, not proven very useful. Not all abusive men evidence psychopathology and those who do reveal no consistent psychological patterns, while women of all sorts may become victims of their husbands’ abuse (Yllo and Bograd, 1988: 53). To some extent even some psychiatrists have dispelled this belief about the

relationship between violence and personality disorders. For example, the chairperson of a committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists concluded that:

“as in crime and delinquency, the majority of wife battering will almost certainly prove to have no clear correlation with mental illness...yet all the varieties of mental illness may occasionally play a part. In other words, once in a while a man may attack his family as a direct result of some severe mental disturbance or sickness, but in most cases of marital violence there is no evidence of what would be clinically defined by a psychiatrist as mental illness” (Renvoize, 1978: 43).

In other words, the argument is that when it comes to mental illness, such a person could attack all members of his family, or even close friends. But with intimate violence, however, there does not seem to be enough evidence so far to point in that direction.

Such psychiatric-oriented approaches regarded abusive men as passive-dependent, infantile, or as lacking impulse control, while victims of repeated acts of family violence are seen as masochists, paranoid, or depressed and later conceptualised of as being trapped by perceptions of their role (Bograd, 1988: 16). Such theories tended to ignore historical traditions which condone family violence, the superior economic and physical power enjoyed by most men in society, and the subsequent impact of fear of retaliation if a victim tries to leave or terminate their relationship with the perpetrator (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1990: 16). By focusing on mental illness, most psychological theories ignore the question of power. For example, why is it that mentally ill men beat their partners and not their bosses at work, or why impulse-ridden, out-of-control men contain their rage and anger until they are in the privacy of their family home, at which time they bruise and injure their partners but less frequently kill them (Bograd, 1988: 17). All these questions remain unanswered in so far as some psychological explanations are concerned.

The psychological explanations of family violence have also been criticised for perpetuating a false ideology. For example, their focus on the individual psychological characteristics of either the victim or perpetrator assumes that family violence is far from

being a social problem. Instead, it is viewed as the domain of a deviant few in the society. In other words, the consequential effects of individualising family violence is the exclusion of the significant structural factors. Such an explanation also portrays a rather different and deficient image and understanding of the position of men and women in violent situations. In general, such explanations suffer from inadequacy. Their emphasis on individual psychology ignores the structural relationships within a society and how heavily those weigh upon the lives of the victims of violence. The approach concentrates on deviance and inadequacy, and as such results in an image of family violence which blames the victim and may be used to excuse and even justify the perpetrator actions through diminished responsibility (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 102).

These approaches focus mainly upon the individual perpetrator, examining characteristics of such a person and, to a lesser extent, the victim (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1990: 12). Psychologists, in particular, have sought to understand wife battering through the examination of characteristics of individuals. They focus on personality traits and internal defence systems. They locate the problem within the individuals concerned and explain it in terms of deviant or pathological personalities such as mental illness and excessive alcohol consumption (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 98; Pahl, 1985: 9). They also typically focus upon the individual stressors created by poverty and/or unemployment; deep-seated links between intimacy and violence due to physical punishment from childhood; patterns of poor self-control and low self-concept; immaturity, depression, schizophrenia, and severe personality disorders; the ability of perpetrators to externalise blame by justifying their actions and blaming their victims; substance abuse, particularly the use of illegal drugs and excessive alcohol consumption (Buzawa and Buzawa, 1990: 15–16; Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 267).

Other features include the occupational environment of the perpetrator. For example, the tasks and ideology of some specific occupations have been theorized to predict rates of family violence with more accuracy than social class or parental violence. Wife battering is spread throughout classes but where conditions are particularly stressful, violence is likely to be greater. Money worries, homelessness, frustration at work are just examples of such conditions. Dobash and Dobash (1980: 98) found that in their study of 109 battered women the majority of disputes that preceded the violence focused on the husband's jealousy of his wife, differing expectations regarding the wife's domestic duties, and the allocation of money.

There are a number of myths about wife battering which have developed over time. These myths, which are a form of societal defence mechanism, have grown up as shields to protect the family, which is regarded as an important social institution (Schornstein, 1997: 24).

First of all, violence in the family is seen as a working class phenomenon, which occurs only in lower socio-economic groups. Straus et al. (1980: 455) have corrected this, suggesting instead that wife battering occurs in all socio-economic groups, at all levels of society, although they maintain that there is more intra-familial violence the lower one goes down the socio-economic status continuum.

Other research (Finkelhor et al., 1988; Hancock, 1979: 13; Lackey and Williams, 1995) on family interaction and the development and occurrence of violence between family members tends to indicate that violent individuals grew up in violent families and were frequent victims of familiar violence as children. Straus (1977: 202) refers to the family as a "training ground for violence". The significance of this is that the level of violence in all aspects of a society, including the family itself, reflects what is learned and generalised from what goes on inside the family, starting at infancy.

Domestic violence is probably a major problem in any society. According to Sampselle (1992: 4), The Proceedings of International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women reveal the shocking truth about violence as a global problem affecting women in many different cultures. For example, some cultures sanction dowry murders (India), clitoridectomy (Africa); and violation of the right of due process, where a mere accusation of adultery is grounds for immediate imprisonment.

Continuing concern at the global level about violence against women was an important theme at the Third and Fourth International Congresses on Women's Health Issues, which were held in 1988 and 1990 respectively (Sampselle, 1992: 6). Crimes reported included the execution of Egyptian women carrying an illegitimate pregnancy; the high incidence of female infanticide in countries where government policy is to limit fertility to one child; and the statutory limitations in many societies that equate women's legal status to that of a minor, with power residing in the woman's father, husband, or eldest son.

The second myth is reflected in the assumption that women caused the violence, that they asked for it. Schornstein (1997: 24) maintains that the batterer caused the violence and as such is responsible for his own actions. This myth further suggests that women enjoy their victimization. Such statements are found in romance novels where women are routinely overpowered by men and, as a result, transported to greater sexual fulfillment. This misguided belief is woven into the fabric of some societies. For example, one Texas gubernatorial candidate (Clayton Williams) compared Texas weather to rape, saying, "If it's inevitable, just relax and enjoy it" (Sampselle, 1992: 7). Turner (1988: 28) maintains that often many battered women take on board all the blame, the guilt and the shame associated with the violence. It is because they are conditioned to believe that they are in the wrong, thus losing their confidence and self-respect along the way.

A variation of this myth is that women seduce rapists and incite the batterers. This myth of seduction effectively excuses the perpetrator and blames the victim. Scutt (1983: 142) has argued that common law does not recognise marital rape. Under this law, the wife and any property of the marriage belongs to the husband. Therefore there is no way any husband could be guilty of stealing from his wife. Hence no husband could be found guilty of raping his wife. Also, from a slightly different perspective, the notion that women issue an invitation for assault allows society to look the other way in cases of wife battering. Statements like “she must have done something to make him so angry”; or “why would she stay if she didn’t think it was partly her fault?” are examples of this attitude. Such attitudes also explain the guilt and shame that research tells us is the overwhelming initial response of abused women (Sampselle, 199: 225).

The third myth is that alcohol and drug abuses cause wife battering, and Schornstein (1997: 26) argue that is not necessarily the case. Hancock (1979: 64) suggests that alcohol gives men Dutch courage. It leads to violence in many cases because it sets off primary conflict over drinking that can extend to arguments over spending money, cooking and sex, and so on. In these cases drinking may serve as a catalyst or trigger for long standing marital disputes and disagreements.

A theory of *Deviance Disavowal* has been suggested regarding the association of alcohol and wife beating. Most families wish to define their family as normal, thus in order to disavow the deviance of the family violence individuals often invoke the explanation that they were drunk and did not know what they were doing. Alcohol is therefore associated with accounts of family violence because it allows the aggressor, the victim and other family members to ‘orchestrate’ an account that admits the occurrence of deviant behaviour but maintains the definition of the family as normal by focusing the blame on the alcohol that caused the deviant act (Hancock, 1979: 12).

Thus there is a close relationship between alcohol and wife beating, and other family violence. Gelles's (1974: 117) study of wife battering in New Hampshire found that drinking accompanied violence in 48% of the families where assaults had occurred. Many of the wives in his sample said their husbands only hit them when drunk. The association was a peculiarly male one, since only one wife in his sample became violent to her husband or children when inebriated. Gayford (1975) found that 52% of the women said their husband was drunk at least once a week, and another 22% said that he was drunk at least once a month; 44% said that the violence only occurred when the man was under the influence of alcohol. Roy's (1977: 40) study of 150 American women found that four factors which were most often cited were, in order of importance, arguments over money, jealousy, sexual problems and alcohol. However, others (Geller, 1992: 11; Roy, 1977; Schornstein, 1997: 27; Wallace, 1996: 168) suggest that the alcohol does not cause violence – it is simply an excuse and a catalyst for other causes and reasons. There are men who drink and do not abuse their spouses and so it appears that alcohol in itself cannot be described as the cause of wife battering. Apart from that, Gelles (1974: 117) suggests that some men who wish to carry out a violent act become intoxicated in order to accomplish their mission.

McGregor (1990: 33) points out that a majority of Australians believe in the alcohol mythology (a myth which both the victims and perpetrators in this study support). For example, police officers are often heard saying, "If only we could dry these blokes out, we'd stop domestics". The victims would describe their perpetrators as follows: "He only does it when he's drunk". The next door neighbour would assert "He's as gentle as a lamb when he's sober". And the perpetrators themselves often tell "It's the grog that does it". Her argument is that the popular social construction of wife battering associated with

alcohol, is a dangerous construction, which distorts far more than it clarifies and hides far more than it reveals.

Martin (1979: 40) and McGregor (1990: 38) have also expressed concern regarding research into the cause of marital violence, which seem to concentrate on the external influences of the husband's behaviour and the victim. Justifications such as "he was under stress", "he lost his job", "he drank too much", or "his mother had an extramarital affair" are often put forth. Whatever the rationalization, it serves only to excuse the husband's behaviour and remove his responsibility for his own actions. The wife's condition is not seen in its totality, but only in terms of what she may have said or done to provoke her husband's anger, such as "she wore her hair in a pony tail", "she prepared a casserole instead of fresh meat for dinner", "she said she did not like the pattern of the wallpaper" or "she drinks too much". The two authors argue that in no way do any of these events warrant a violent response by the male partner. Even if the woman did provoke her husband's anger, there can be no justification for these severe beatings. Furthermore, any approach that attempts to change the wife's behaviour in order to change that of the husband only further victimizes her.

The fourth myth is that wife battering is a family or private matter. Schornstein (1997: 26) argue that wife battering instead is a crime against the victim and against society. The repercussions and costs of wife battering affects just about everybody. In America, the dollar costs include services of the police, the prosecutors, the courts, and social services as well as medical expenses, lost workdays, and decreased productivity. Wife battering also has serious long-term effects on the children. Children who witness wife battering experience both immediate and prolonged negative outcomes. They are more likely than children from nonviolent families to repeat the cycle of such violence as

adults. McGregor (1990: 33) too believes that wife battering is a crime which must be responded to accordingly if social change is to occur in Australia.

The fifth myth is that women are just as violent as men are. Steinmetz (1977) asserted that men were abused at a far greater rate than was believed; arguing that wives abused husbands more often and more severely than the other way round. Straus et al. (1980: 36) found from two national self-reports surveys that wives committed almost as many assaults as husbands did. This hidden problem of *Battered Husbands* was hailed and given a great deal of air-time by the American media (Mullender, 1996: 13). The fact is that men make up the overwhelming majority of wife battering perpetrators (Schornstein, 1997: 28). The extent of wife battering is staggering, although whatever statistics available indicate that women are being brutalized in alarming numbers (Wallace, 1996: 186), estimated at between 2 and 4 million women in the US who are severely physically abused each year by their partners (Schornstein, 1997: 4).

## **2.6 FAMILY VIOLENCE AND PREGNANCY**

Gelles (1979) conducted his first study on family violence in the 1970s. The findings suggested that many of the wives were physically struck during the term of their pregnancy. Other sources (McFarlane, 1992) support the notion that physical violence and pregnancy are more highly associated than is commonly realised. Clearly, the extent of violence during pregnancy is still an empirical question that is common enough to be considered by researchers and practitioners in the area of family relationships.

Until recently, there have been no Australian studies published that have focused on the prevalence of family violence during pregnancy. The first of its kind was conducted by the Royal Women's Hospital in Brisbane in 1992. The study was based on 1014 women who attended the public prenatal clinic at the hospital over a three-week period.

Of those, 29.7% reported a history of abuse, and 8.9% were abused during their pregnancy (*The Australian* 17.10.1994), and medical treatment was sought for injuries related to family violence by 31% of those who reported abuse during the current pregnancy.

Helton et al. (1987) interviewed 290 pregnant women randomly selected from public and private prenatal clinics, 80% of whom were at least five months pregnant. Of those, 8% reported battering during the current pregnancy and 15% reported battering prior to the current pregnancy (1987: 105). This, according to Campbell (1992: 35) makes them highly at risk for further abuse as well as subject to the atmosphere of threat and coercive control that accompanies physical violence. More importantly, additional findings were that demographic variables such as nationality did not predict abuse during pregnancy, but physical violence before pregnancy did. The overall indication was that 23% of the women had been physically battered before or during their pregnancy. Eleven other women said they had been threatened with abuse, and 29% reported the abuse had escalated following knowledge of the present pregnancy (McFarlane, 1992: 206).

For most stories researchers hear from women, their first experience of battering comes when they inform the male partner of their pregnancy. For some, battering is the order of the day, which only gets worse with the news of pregnancy. Even worse, some will tell of how the kicks and fists used to be concentrated on the face, but with pregnancy, the tummy becomes a focal part (Gelles, 1987: 130). McFarlane (1992: 205) argues that one in 12 women are battered while pregnant, and battered women are four times more likely to deliver a low birthweight infant.

McFarlane's (1992: 206) studies of battered women report that 40–60% of battered women are abused during pregnancy. Reports of abuse during this period include blows to the pregnant abdomen, injuries to the breasts and genitals, and sexual assault. The

abused women report miscarriages, stillbirths, and preterm deliveries following a battering incident. Despite all this, few researchers of family relations have been aware of the crisis of pregnancy, and that it often leads to physical violence.

A study by Bullock and McFarlane (cited in McFarlane, 1992: 208) assessed more than 200 pregnant adolescents in two metropolitan areas, in order to establish the prevalence of battering during teen pregnancy. 26% of the respondents admitted to being in a physically violent relationship. Among those battered, 40–60% stated that the battering had either begun or increased with pregnancy. Most of the battered teens had neither told anyone about the abuse nor had reported it to law enforcement authorities.

Another study was undertaken by Amaro et al. (cited in McFarlane, 1992: 208), which assessed violent incidents among a cohort of 1,243 pregnant women. Participants were predominantly poor, urban, and minority group women. 7% of women reported physical or sexual abuse during pregnancy. An additional analysis was made, which employed a control group. When incidents of violence were analyzed, 60% of the victims were subjected to one incident of violence during pregnancy, 25% were victimised twice, and 15% experienced three or more incidents. Under these circumstances, it is important to realise that pregnancy does not provide any protection against violence. Instead, it serves as a stimulus for the first episode of violence or prompts an escalation in an already abusive relationship.

Provocation has been identified as one factor that forms an important part of beatings during pregnancy. In trying to explain why many pregnant women do not necessarily receive the type of emotional support they expect from their partners while pregnant, Hoff (1990: 56) suggests jealousy and Scutt (1983: 126) womb envy. Battering a pregnant woman would reflect an extreme response of jealousy towards the unborn baby and anger at the threatened displacement from the centre of the woman's attention.

Another factor not to be under-estimated is the man's deep-seated fear and envy of the woman's reproductive power. A man would deal with such emotions by asserting physical power over the woman. Therefore jealousy and demands for attention are often the underlying factors behind violence during pregnancy because the woman seems to be indirectly asked to make a choice between the husband and the foetus (Hoff, 1990: 115; Scutt. 1983: 255).

Much provocation is obviously unintentional on the part of the wife. Pregnancy itself provokes many men; most researchers agree this is the most dangerous time for women. Far from deliberately inviting attack, the mother's greatest anxiety will be to protect their unborn children, but this concern for someone other than their husbands can be enough to inflame the jealousy of these insecure men, especially if sexual intercourse is restricted or denied them altogether.

In addition, if the pregnancy was the reason for the marriage, the man is likely to have mixed feelings about the forthcoming child or, if there are already other children, he may well be reluctant to have the responsibility of yet another mouth to feed. The attacks may reflect this ambivalence without there being any direct intention on his part to induce a miscarriage, though this is the not infrequent result. Pregnant women are kicked in their bellies, thrust downstairs or beaten up time after time, and one can only wonder what effect these traumas must have on the children who survive these attacks when they are eventually born (Renvoize, 1978: 35).

Gelles (1987) put forth some five major factors that are believed to be the causes of violence against pregnant wives. First of all, violence during pregnancy might be due to some sexual frustration on the part of the male partner. This is because in many families, pregnancy is associated with abstinence from sexual intercourse.

Secondly, pregnancy seems to change family routines. For instance, for a husband who is used to his routine of work and leisure, the idea of change often leads to conflict, arguments and, in some cases, violence. If the family is already experiencing some economic stress, the occurrence of pregnancy, the role changes and potential new mouth to feed add to the stress level (Gelles, 1987: 44; Renvoize, 1978: 36; Stith et al., 1990: 105).

Thirdly, the biochemical changes that occur during a woman's pregnancy may be another source of stress. Besides being critical of their husbands' behaviour, pregnant women tend to pick on their husbands, are easily irritated, and are easily depressed by having to stay at home all the time and because they perceive a growing lack of sexual attractiveness.

Fourthly, done consciously or unconsciously, violence against a pregnant wife may be interpreted as prenatal child abuse or filicide. Some women who were battered while pregnant reported that the beatings were followed by miscarriages, and others reported kids who were born handicapped (Scutt, 1983: 257; Renvoize, 1978: 36) One of Gelles' respondents commented that her partner used to hit her in the face. But during her pregnancy that was when he started hitting her in the belly. Weird as it may have been to her, but it may have been one way of terminating her pregnancy and relieving himself of the impending stress of yet another child (Gelles, 1979: 35).

Finally, violence is more likely if the victim is perceived as unwilling or unable to retaliate. Therefore pregnant wives may be vulnerable to violence because their husbands view them as unable or unwilling to retaliate because of their changed physical condition. However, given the limitations of the data, it is difficult to assess if this is the case, but it is possible that just being vulnerable to attack makes the violence a more likely outcome to family conflict than other possible outcomes. The implication is that violence during

pregnancy is much more common than anyone has suspected. Gelles' (1987) findings suggest that violence towards pregnant wives is not just an individual aberration of aggressive husbands, but rather grows out of the stress of the situation, and is compounded when the family has other preexisting stresses.

Clearly, the examples cited support the tentative hypothesis that women are at greater risk of battering during pregnancy, such that an important aspect of research and examination of intrafamily violence ought to focus on violence which occurs during a wife's term of pregnancy. And this is one particular area that was significant in this study.

## **2.7 VARIOUS RESPONSES TO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Battered women have often been viewed as showing low self-esteem and as being passive, shy, reserved, helpless, or self-blaming, as avoiding helping services altogether, or as delaying the use of medical care (Stark and Flitcraft, 1988: 306). But this claim has been refuted. Some have suggested that:

"battered women suffer from severe and persistent violence, that they are hemmed in by social, moral and material forces, that help seeking is a complex and multi-layered process not necessarily related directly to the severity of a particular violent assault, and that the nature of agency responses plays a direct role in this overall process" (Dobash et al., 1985: 163).

Evidence such as this challenges speculation that battered women suffer from learned helplessness, are violence-seeking or violence-prone. On the contrary, abused women engage in an active struggle to find solutions to the violence and to seek help of outsiders in these efforts. The battered woman's need for assistance from others, like the violence she experiences, begins early in the marital or cohabiting relationship and continues to change over time as the man's violence grows more frequent and severe and the woman actively seeks a cessation to it (Dobash et al., 1985: 147). Seddon (1993: 7) suggests that family violence ranges from a single-instance tiff where violence is used for

the first time and never repeated, to the case where the victim is exposed to regular and serious violence over many years. This regular violence may even reduce the victims to a state of helplessness. Hence many such victims may find it difficult to seek outside help. Even for those who finally do so, the decision to take this step may have required great resolve and courage. Despite their efforts to seek help battered women often receive negative responses. According to Dobash and Dobash, the entire society condones violence against women. They argue that:

“the entire community belongs to such a club and is responsible for the continued assaults on women and in some cases their deaths: the friends and neighbours who ignore or excuse the violence, the physician who does not go beyond the mending of bones and the stitching of wounds, the social worker who defines wife-beating as a failure of communication, and the police and court officials who refuse to intervene. The violence is meted out by one man but the responsibility for that violence goes far beyond him” (1980: 222).

At this juncture the significant issue is to explain why women do or do not seek assistance. This analysis involves factors associated with the women, the men, and the formal agencies.

### **2.7.1 THE POLICE AND LEGAL RESPONSES TO WIFE BATTERING**

Increasing discontent with the legal response to wife battering was heard during the 1970s and 1980s both throughout Australia and overseas. This was as a result of the re-emergence of the women’s movement and the development of a sophisticated and credible feminist theory, which became the driving force towards the criminalisation of wife battering which society and the law for so long had failed to acknowledge (McGregor, 1990: 41). In 1982, the following legislations were passed in some Australian states: South Australia, *Justices Amendment Act (No. 2)*, New South Wales, *Crimes (Domestic Violence) Amendment Act*, Western Australia, *Justices Amendment Act (No. 2)*. In 1985, the *Justices Amendment Act* was passed in Tasmania. In 1986 was the passing of

*Domestic Violence Ordinance* in Australian Capital Territory. In 1987, was the Victorian *Crimes (Family Violence) Act*, and in 1989 was the passing of *Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Act* in Queensland, and the *Justices Amendment Act* in the Northern Territory (Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991: 181).

These legislations, in theory, are meant to address the issue of wife battering, under which victims would have a far greater legal protection than they previously had. (Marcus, 1990: 65). The mention of the term “wife battering” evokes a response from society that is incongruous with a criminal offence. If the discussion shifts to assault, criminal violence, sexual assault, torture, and murder, it is clear that these are behaviours which society accept as crimes. But whenever wife battering is uttered, society reacts with scepticism and suspicion (McGregor, 1990: 37). In so far as the law is concerned, expectations are contradicted by the facts (Faragher, 1985: 111). Martin (1981: 87) supports this view, arguing that the police, district attorneys, and judges are hesitant to interfere with what goes on behind those tightly closed doors. The notion that *A Man's Home Is His Castle* and as such cannot be intruded upon pervades the world of law enforcement.

The *Rule of Thumb* that was introduced in the 17th century (Paterson, 1979: 80) said that a man could beat his wife as long as the stick he used was no thicker than his thumb. The idea was that women should not be beaten too severely and there should be some way of protecting them from the violence of men. In this way, the law gave credence to the idea that women are allowed to be beaten; that women are property; that women belong to their husbands. Since women are like children, they should be disciplined like children; a slap on the face or a thrashing with a good sturdy stick was an acceptable and legal way to keep them in line.

Scutt (1982: 112) has pointed out that even in Australia the police force is reluctant to intrude in the private lives of individuals. It has also been said that there is not much the police force can do to reduce the incidence of violence in marriage, because that is a matter of personal relationships between the parties concerned. Although most frequently contacted, studies (Coorey, 1989: 4; Hatty, 1989: 77; McGregor, 1990: 38) have revealed that the police are rated lowest of all agencies in terms of being helpful. The response of the police, based on the notion of mediation and restoration of the peace, falls far short of women's initial and unschooled expectations of protection and legal redress.

Prosecutors, like police officers, often view the problem of wife battering as primarily a civil and personal matter requiring neither arrest nor judicial response. Accordingly, the court official tries to assess whether the victim is worthy and whether she is sincere about following up the arrest complaint. A woman must demonstrate that she did not deserve to be attacked and that in the face of all her difficulties she will pursue the complaint against her husband. Very often the sincerity and resolve of a woman is judged by her willingness to institute divorce proceedings against her husband. The woman may also be required to secure various forms of evidence in order to reinforce her case in the eyes of the investigating officer and/or prosecutor. She may be required in police districts that do not have a police doctor to go to a private physician and obtain her own evidence of injury (Dobash and Dobash, 1980: 219).

The role of the police and the wider legal system is to deal with the fundamental issues of the violation of women's rights, and to prevent future infractions. In essence, men too, should realise that Australian society would no longer tolerate or condone their violence against women (Palmer and Etter, 1994: 9). The National Committee on Violence Against Women (1992: 18) categorically states that one of the most significant roles of the law is to make a clear statement to society that particular conduct on the part

of citizens is unlawful and unacceptable and that it will be socially condemned and punished. But in reality, this is far from being true, as the whole issue revolves around gender.

Gender equity is a slow and difficult task. Workers in the legal area aim to break down the barriers and explode the myths that surround wife battering. However, gender inequality is so embedded in Australian history, culture, value system, and political and economic systems, that the task is virtually impossible. Law reform generally precedes practice in the process of social change. But there is so much at stake that one wonders if the law reform towards gender equality will ever be reflected in practice (McGregor, 1990: 41).

In conclusion, I wish to argue that even though there has been law reform in Australia, there still exists a wide gap between ideology and practice. For example, this study will show that some battered women are not entirely satisfied with the police and courts handling of wife battering issues. The argument that what the law says and what actually happens in practice are two different things, has been suggested by Hatty (1989: 88). A juxtaposition of police attitudes and women's experiences reveals an enormous disparity between male belief, *in their superiority and the right to use violence* (my emphasis), and female reality, *of subordination and deserving of violence* (my emphasis), and signals the futility of promoting the law as a primary solution to wife battering. It highlights the failure of the law at a very fundamental level: the nexus between ideology and practice.

## 2.7.2 THE RESPONSE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The battered women's (BW) movement began in Britain in 1972 with the opening of the first refuge by Chiswick Women's Aid. With Erin Pizzey (*Scream Quietly or the*

*Neighbours Will Hear*, 1974) behind the whole idea, a group of feminists who wanted to do something about the position of women in society began with a march by 200 women and children and a cow in protest against the elimination of free school milk, soon obtained a community women's meeting place and soon discovered that women were being battered and were in need of a place of refuge (Hanmer and Maynard, 1987: 45). Again, Pizzey soon realised that police, social workers, and medical practitioners did not want to help those women, and that local social services had refused to house them (Pleck, 1987: 130).

In Australia, the women's movement arose at the end of the 1960s. It is quite striking, however, that domestic violence was not one of the initial concerns of the movement. Instead, it was primarily an outcome of the initial focus of the women's movement on discrimination in public life, where male violence was not an issue. Demands concerning reproduction and childcare, and demands for an end to discrimination against women in the public sphere, particularly the workplace, were on the agenda. The other set of demands concerned the provision of equal opportunity in the workplace and the removal of all forms of discrimination. What these demands share in common is that they do not focus on male behaviour, but rather on the activities of the state. They are demands that the state provide free childcare, that the state legislate to end its own discrimination and that of other employers in the workplace, and so on. They are not addressed to men and do not, in the first place, seek change in the behaviour of individual men. They are notably silent about the relationships that exist between men and women in the domestic sphere. Also conspicuously absent is the question of rape (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 7).

One reason why the women's movement focussed on the public sphere was that in principle, it is much easier to bring about changes in the public arena than in the private.

Another reason why the feminists looked to the state from the outset to solve their problems was the question of the *Australian Tradition*. The state was, and is, regarded as inescapable presence. The state remains an all-pervasive fact of life, taking on a variety of welfare functions, and it seemed only natural for the individuals to rely on the state to protect their interests. To an Australian, the State means collective power at the service of individualistic rights (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 6).

Another reason why the women's movement ignored domestic violence at the beginning is that the problem was essentially hidden from view. There is a conspiracy of silence concerning male violence in the home, which involves both the victims of violence and the authorities who might be in a position to do something about it. The police, medical practitioners, social workers and others who come into contact with this type of violence have traditionally ignored it. The main reason is largely because it is a private matter between a husband and his wife, based on the belief that a man's home is his castle and should be inviolable; and the fact that it may also be a woman's home is overlooked (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 8).

Family violence could only move onto the agenda when its victims began to speak up; but women also participate in this conspiracy out of guilt, shame and fear. Victims are usually brainwashed by perpetrators into believing that they are in some way responsible for the violence, that it is their fault (blame-the-victim theory). As a result they become ashamed to acknowledge what is happening, believing that others do not share their experience, and they are often fearful that if they complain, the violence might escalate. That is one reason why they remain in their own private hell, unable to see the broad pattern of injustice of which they are victims (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 8).

For a considerable amount of time there had existed a very few church and charity run organisations, which provided shelter to a trickle of battered women and their children

in Australia. It was precisely because of the women's collective struggle and the promise it holds for growing strength and understanding of women's position in society and in the family, that women's refuges are one of the most positive practical outcomes of the 1970s of the women's movement (Saville, 1982: 95).

The first feminist-run refuge, Elsie, was opened in 1974, and that brought about some attempt to place domestic violence in a wider social context. It was no coincidence, however, that this refuge was established immediately following the appearance of Pizzey's *Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear* (1974). Before then, individual women had been given shelter, and sent on their way, with little or no attempt to examine the broader reasons for their plight, nor their choices, if any, for the future. In fact (Saville, 1982: 95), by their very origins the church-run organisations often saw success in terms of the numbers of reunited families to which they could point, regardless of whether the conditions which had driven the women to seek shelter in the first place had been eradicated or not.

This first refuge was created by a group of women who squatted in an empty house in Glebe, in the state of New South Wales. These women were victims of batterings and bashing by their husbands who believed that, because they had married them, wives were there for the beating. These women were prepared to live in overcrowded and sub-standard conditions, in order to get away from violence (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 57; Saville, 1982: 95). That incident demonstrated just the beginning of a massive problem. Soon after, Warrina Women's Refuge in Freemantle, Western Australia opened its doors to women victims of domestic violence, through government funding (Scutt, 1983: 270).

In 1975 the Federal Labour Government recognised the fundamental importance of women's refuges and began funding at the rate of 75% of operating costs and 50% of

capital costs. State governments were expected to make up the shortfall. In February 1980 the number of refuges in operation in Australia had soared to somewhere around a 100, about 30 of which operate in New South Wales, as a result of the plight of women wishing to leave home being continually thrust into the public eye, and women's groups organising to do something about the problem (Saville, 1982: 96; Scutt, 1983: 261). By 1987 the federal government was funding 163 women's refuges and a further 20 non-accommodation support services. Clearly, the establishment of Elsie started a chain reaction which, fuelled by the previously unacknowledged plight of large numbers of battered women in the community, resulted in the explosive growth of refuges throughout Australia (McGregor and Hopkins, 1991: 11–12).

According to McGregor and Hopkins (1991: 40) feminist-run refuges have tended to decline. In 1984 only one of the 22 refuges in Queensland was explicitly feminist, while in Victoria the majority of the currently funded refuges are feminist. In Australian Capital Territory, four out of five women's refuges are feminist. Despite all this, feminist refuges are significant because they set the whole process in motion, and were most visible in the fight for funding. It is also feminist refuges that have been most self-consciously and deliberately part of the movement against domestic violence. For these reason they continue to be important.

### **2.7.3 THE MEDICAL RESPONSE TO BATTERING**

It is interesting that while the overall impact of battering on medical care is enormous, the medical response to abuse has been slow and sporadic. Battering has been equated with severe injury and consigned to emergency medicine. The vast majority of health visits by abused women involve complaints or problems that may have little organic basis, and reveal relatively minor injuries, which greatly complicates the encounter between the

emergency clinician and the abused woman. For the woman, the assaultive relationship presents both a situational crisis and an ongoing social emergency, punctuated by physical attack. But to emergency clinicians trained to respond to life-threatening heart attacks, gun-shot wounds, or auto accidents, the abused woman's sense of impending 'emergency' seems inappropriate, and the complex psychosocial picture she presents seems more suited to psychiatric management than to medical care or social service (Kurz and Stark, 1988: 45).

Warshaw's (1993: 135) research shows that the structural constraints of an emergency room in a training institution led not only to non-detection and non-intervention, but more importantly to a lack of receptiveness and response by health care providers to the issues that a battered woman struggles with, issues that are vital to her life and well being. Clinicians fail to acknowledge abuse as a source of injury or other problems. Instead, they reinterpret women's experience in ways that are consistent with strictly medical views of behaviour and disease. Although abuse is rarely recorded, abused women are treated differently as a group. There is speculation that clinicians make an implicit diagnosis of abuse in which psychosocial sequelae such as alcoholism or depression are viewed as its cause, and where the woman and not her assailant or his violence is seen as sick (Kurz and Stark, 1988: 60).

The same view has been expressed in Warshaw (1993: 129), Campbell (1988: 72) and Turner (1988: 28) that in many instances there is an increase in prescription of tranquilizers and painkillers for battered women than for other women in emergency rooms. Valium, ativan and anti-depressants are meant to calm women's shattered nerves. The physicians would medicate but not face the implications of what or why they were medicating. This is evidence enough to prove the health care system's perpetuation of

violence, especially when such medication might prevent the woman's good intention to terminate the violent relationship.

Warshaw (1993: 139) argued that more significantly, physicians did not open up the possibility for the battered woman to discuss what may have prompted her to seek medical attention. They failed to respond to the distress that the woman's physical symptoms reflected or to clues offered about her situation. They chose instead, to provide medication for the chief complaint and address only the physical symptoms, thus reinforcing whatever feelings of helplessness, isolation and futility at not being seen or responded to the woman may have already felt. The same view has been expressed by Stark and Flitcraft (1996: xviii) that medical neglect, minimization, labeling and victim blaming contribute to the isolation and entrapment that are the hallmarks of the battering syndrome.

The Australian situation too suffers some deficiencies within the area of service provision. Marcus (1990: 69–70) highlights the need to work on this area to enhance a more appropriate quality assistance for the victims in particular. Wife battering is a complicated issue, which is extremely difficult to deal with. It requires service providers to go against the conventional beliefs about the family and instead probe into the intimate details of family life. Many service providers feel ambivalent about their role in these situations and are not adequately informed about the issue or about the sources of assistance for their clients. Some cannot understand or empathise with victims of wife battering. They find it difficult to comprehend women who do not leave their abusive partners or constantly return to them. In many cases women may not disclose the true cause of their injuries or health problems such as insomnia and anxiety. They end up being treated for their manifest symptoms while the actual cause remains undiagnosed. Women may approach lawyers for advice about divorce proceedings and yet not disclose violence

as a determining factor. They may approach a priest and instead are advised to obey the will of their husbands and respect the sanctity of marriage. These attitudes have serious ramifications because they affect the quality of care that victims receive and may result in women's disclosure of violence being disrupted or disregarded. As a result women may suffer further injury and damage to their self-esteem. They may possibly not attempt to seek help again for many years.

In conclusion, it appears there is considerable amount of public awareness regarding wife battering and its consequences on its victims. However, there is still a hangover regarding the role of society in wife battering. Despite intense research on the area, it is still one of the most commonly misunderstood issues within the study of family violence in general. Society has placed women in inferior and subordinate positions throughout history, and even today the glass ceiling exists both in public and private institutions. These factors contribute to the interpersonal dynamics that result in violence against women (Wallace, 1996: 186).

We should not however, overlook the initiatives and efforts of governments in addressing the issue of wife battering. In Australia in particular, the Federal Government policy regarding violence against women has broadened over the years. For example, since 1987 there have been a number of important developments which include:

- Community debate about judicial attitudes and the treatment of women by the legal system.
- Several high-profile sexual harassment cases.
- Television violence inquiries, censorship debates and discussion about the media's portrayal of women.
- A number of significant Australian government machinery and legislative reforms to raise the status of women and eliminate violence.

- The development of policies to deal with gender issues and sexual harassment in schools and universities, such as the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Strategy (Office of the Status of Women, 1995: 1).

However, not only the Federal Government has done something about wife battering; most of the Australian States as well have now introduced legislation that has moved wife battering more firmly onto the political agenda. While this is in many ways a long overdue move, because it finally acknowledges wife battering as a crime, it has been met with rather mixed feelings. Politicians are constantly arguing that wife battering is a problem which should concern the community at large. But it has become increasingly difficult for the community to have a real and ongoing role in dealing with this issue. Many of the feminists feel that the issue they fought so hard to bring to public attention is being wrested away from them and co-opted into the sphere of 'government'. This has led to feelings of frustration, anger and powerlessness as 'solutions' are imposed from above with scant regard for consultation and appropriateness (Marcus, 1990: 63–4). This situation, to me, could have some serious implications for both the victims and perpetrators of violence.

This chapter therefore has attempted to give the reader a wider picture concerning family violence. The material has been gathered from various disciplines, which is appropriate for giving us some insights into the extent of, factors associated with, beliefs and responses concerning this phenomenon. It also allows us to assess the different views as presented by different researchers from various disciplines. However, it should be noted that there have been differences in purposes of study, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, and these should be taken into consideration before one could reach a conclusion on the nature and extent of family violence. Finally, it should be pointed out

that this thesis is not meant to prove the literature otherwise. Instead, it is a continuation of some research already done, with the hope that where others did not effectively explain the occurrence of such violence, there might be a new outcome from this research. The review illustrates the particular problems under investigation and the gap in the existing literature which this thesis aims to fill.

The areas to be investigated in particular are pregnancy and wife battering, violence as a result of male superiority, and intergenerational transmission of violence. The thesis fills the gap in the sense that not much research had been done in Australia, in particular, to investigate violence during pregnancy. The time frame within which earlier studies were done also prompted my study. The issue of male superiority as a component of the patriarchal system again becomes an important issue to investigate, given the rise of feminism and the popular attention given to changing women's status in society. The same question of validity also applies with the intergenerational transmission of violence. Before 1970 when wife battering was *a secret in the closet* up to the 1990s when the *secret has come out of the closet*, (my emphasis), how far does the intergenerational transmission theory holds? It should also be borne in mind that the above-cited studies were done some years before my study.

Some striking issues come out of this review. Wife battering is no longer a private issue due to state intervention and, of course, the help of the feminist movement. Studies reveal (Geller, 1992; Hearn, 1996; Hyden, 1994; the present study) that now even the perpetrators are letting themselves be researched. Intervention programs are not only designed for women 'victims' but also for men 'perpetrators' as a result of their willingness to participate in such. Attitudes and responses have changed and one goal remains to strive towards achieving violence-free families. Given this public awareness of the problem, one question still remains regarding the continued prevalence of wife

battering. This could be explained in terms of men's defensive response to women's progressive liberation from domestic servitude, a liberation that is as inevitable in an expanding capitalist economy as it is inconceivable apart from women's self-activity across a broad terrain.

The next chapter addresses the methodological issues concerning fieldwork in relation to the above mentioned areas under investigation. As the next chapter indicates, my methodology also fills a gap that existed in wife-battering research. It deals with the difficulties involved in researching on wife battering in general, and the specific problems encountered in this particular research.