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3

**CULTURAL AND OTHER CONSTRAINTS IN HELP SEEKING
WITH ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS: The Narratives of Xhosa-
Speaking Women.**

By

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A minor dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Clinical Psychology.

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DECLARATION.

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

Signature

11.12.2001

Date.

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I must start by thanking God the Almighty for sustaining me until the completion of this work.

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ABSTRACT.

Little is documented about Xhosa-speaking women's experiences and the social and cultural barriers they are faced with when seeking help for the abuse in their marriages. This study explores the experiences of Xhosa married women who are in abusive relationships and have sought help in a counselling organisation. It traces their path of seeking help before they reached the women's counselling centre.

The study was conducted by holding in-depth interviews with eight women who live in a township and its surrounding informal settlements in Cape Town. Their narratives are presented in case studies and the discussion of significant themes is presented in a separate chapter. The study suggests that a number of factors influenced their decision to seek help. The women wanted the abuse to stop rather than to leave their marriages. It revealed how traditional African values influenced the women's help seeking pathways. The study suggests that these women began by seeking help from their in-laws before they went to their own families. It revealed that family is regarded as their primary source of support while at the same time it prolongs their search for help 'within', therefore, restricting them from reaching out for professional help. The study suggests that these women began by seeking help from their in-laws before they went to their own families. They actively and persistently sought help for the abuse in the informal systems for a number of years and experienced being failed repeatedly by these systems.

In view of this study, it is recommended that these informal sources of help be targets for greater collaboration with the formal helping agencies in order to provide the needed service and support in a coordinated manner. Their usefulness could be enhanced through education and they could be an important potential resource for mental health workers and professionals if they work differently. More research on cultural influences in help seeking is also recommended to better inform and equip the counsellors through training.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Aims of the study.....	2
1.3 Justification for the study.....	2
1.4 Brief description of the project.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
2.1 Introduction.....	5
2.2 Violence against women.....	5
2.3 The magnitude of the problem.....	5
2.4 Help seeking.....	8
2.5 The dynamics of wife abuse and it's effect on help seeking.....	11
2.5.1 Orientation to the framework.....	11
2.5.2 Microsystems level.....	12
2.5.2.1 Personality factors.....	12
2.5.2.2 Demographic factors.....	14
2.5.2.3 Alcohol.....	14
2.5.3 Mesosystems level.....	15
2.5.3.1 Power and control factors.....	15
2.5.3.2 Social isolation.....	16
2.5.4 Macrosystems level.....	17
2.5.4.1 Poverty.....	17
2.5.4.2 Community violence.....	18
2.5.4.3 Patriarchy.....	18
2.6 Culture.....	19

2.6.1 Culture and violence against women.....	21
2.6.2 Lobola and abuse.....	22
2.6.3 Marriage and abuse.....	23
2.7 Summary.....	25
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	26
3.1 Introduction to qualitative research.....	26
3.2 The Research process.....	27
3.2.1 Gaining access.....	27
3.2.2 Participants.....	29
3.2.3 The interviews.....	30
3.2.4 Transcribing.....	32
3.2.5 Translating.....	33
3.3 Method of analysis.....	33
3.4 Ethical considerations.....	34
3.6 Reflexivity.....	35
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDIES.....	36
4.1 Introduction.....	36
4.2 Case studies.....	36 - 74
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	75
5.1 Introduction.....	75
5.2 Recognising the abuse.....	76
5.3 Seeking help in the family.....	79
5.3.1 The family-in-law.....	79
5.3.2 The women's family of origin.....	82
5.3.3 Leaving the husband as a help seeking strategy.....	83
5.3.4 The significance of marriage.....	84
5.4 Seeking help outside the family.....	86
5.4.1 Community members as sources of help.....	86
5.4.2 Seeking medical attention.....	87
5.4.3 Alternative help.....	88
5.5 Economic constraints to seeking help.....	88

5.6 The turning point.....89

5.7 Summary..... 90

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....91 - 94

LIST OF REFERENCES.....95 - 100

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CHAPTER ONE.

INTRODUCTION.

1.1 Introduction.

The family has been revealed to be the most violent social unit. Gelles & Strauss (1979, p.15) claim, "A person is more likely to be hit and killed in his or her home by another family member than anywhere else". Though this statement was made decades ago and despite increased clinical interest and attention, it is still valid as the phenomenon is growing. It was reiterated by Gilbert (1997, p.878), that "the home can be a dangerous place and individuals have more to fear from close members of their own families than from total strangers".

The concept of domestic violence is very broad and includes several types of violence, such as child abuse, incest, family murder, spouse abuse or battering, marital rape and abuse of the elderly. In this study I will concentrate on one type of domestic violence, the abuse of women by their husbands, which is sometimes referred to as spouse abuse, wife abuse or battering. These terms will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

Women abuse is a growing social, medical, legal and mental health problem across class, race and culture, despite the awareness raised and policies made to deal with it (Jacobs & Suleman, 1999; Penn-Kekana, 1997). It includes physical, emotional, verbal, sexual and financial abuse and in the worst situations death may result (Schornstein, 1997). Though women are aware that abuse is no longer regarded as a private matter and that there is even a law against it in South Africa, it is still under-reported (Human Rights Watch, 1995). There is a growing number of young women who are killed by their partners, which usually happens after months or years of abuse. The question that is often asked is, why do women stay in abusive relationships instead of seeking help? Motsei (1993) argues that to ask such a question illustrates a failure to take into account cultural values regarding women and marriage and the social and economic realities that the women are faced with when they leave a relationship. Where there are values which emphasise 'privacy' as the moral cement of personal relationships, wife abuse is often not recognised or tends to be overlooked

by both the abused women and their communities. Women will be reluctant to get help and ashamed of having failed relationships, as it is common for battered women to view themselves as personally and socially lacking (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). They may be further bound by the belief that it is culturally inappropriate to disclose problems within the marriage to outsiders, whether to police, work-mates, medical doctors or counsellors (Armstrong, 1998).

The South African government expressed its commitment to addressing spouse abuse at policy level by the passing of the New Domestic Violence Act 1998. Despite recognition that violence against women is regarded as a violation of human rights, in our newly democratic society, it is necessary to look at the underlying power relations within the family. At this level there are powerful ideologies in the form of traditional cultural values and beliefs that may play a role in the rationalisation of the abuse of power among members. Aspects of cultural beliefs can oppress women and these may be used to perpetuate violence against women, also influencing the women's decision to seek help.

1.2 Aims of the study.

Rather than look at why women stay in abusive relationships, I want to explore Xhosa-speaking women's experiences of abuse in their marriages and their responses to it. In this study, I look at:

- i) how these women recognised that they are abused,
- ii) what they did in response to the abuse,
- iii) their experiences of seeking help prior to accessing the women's counselling organisation and
- iv) what made them to decide to reach out for help outside the family.

In particular, I was interested in exploring the way in which cultural beliefs entrenched in African family life seemed to affect the abused Xhosa women in their decision to seek help.

1.3 Justification for the study.

Most of the international literature on wife abuse is from a white middle class cultural perspective. Additionally, a number of research studies done in South Africa concentrated on experiences of the white middle class population and recently the so-

called 'Coloured' population. While research studies done in South Africa on wife abuse are useful in understanding the phenomena (Arendse, 1998; George, 1999; Maconachie, Angless & Van Zyl, 1993), they rarely give insight into the subjective experiences of particularly the abused African women. In addition, many studies have relied on those women who had access and made use of the women's shelters. The focus on shelter population is probably due to the difficulty of accessing the abused women in the community. Language differences is possibly another reason for limited studies on African women, as most of the researchers who cannot speak the women's mother tongue have to rely on translators. Making use of language translators in sensitive issues like this becomes necessary, but may be uncomfortable for both the researcher and the person interviewed. Swartz and Maw (1996) acknowledge the difficulty of working across language, cultural and social class divides in an unfamiliar context. As an African Xhosa speaking woman researcher, I hoped that I would be able to address some of these challenges and make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of African women's experiences of the processes involved in making that first step towards seeking help while they are still in their abusive marriages. The researcher acknowledges the fact that it is not only married women who are abused. However, the study focuses on married women as they may have more cultural influences on their decision to seek help. These factors include the woman's in-laws and her status as a married woman.

It would seem that African women have not been seeking formal help especially for sensitive issues like wife abuse and mental health problems. This was reflected in a study by Normand (2000). From her random sample of 86 cases registered and receiving counselling at NICRO in 1995, only 14% of the women were Xhosa-speaking. This raises questions about the African women's presentation for help in organisations dealing with abused women. More research done in Western Cape institutions had similar findings of under representation of black women in treatment institutions (Leon & Thomas, 1998; Strebel et al, 1999 cited in Normand). From such reports it may be assumed that African women make minimum use of the services provided for them. It is necessary, therefore, to explore the factors which constrain them from seeking help and what influenced those who came for help, to come forward.

1.4 Brief description of the project.

The current study was prompted by the above indicators. There have been few studies around the area of help seeking by Xhosa-speaking women. The current study therefore looks at the way these women respond to the abuse and seek help. It is particularly concerned with questions of whether the socio-economic and cultural factors that the township women are exposed to influence them.

Prior to outlining the structure of the thesis, a few preliminary comments on this study may provide the reader with an indication of the context in which the study took place. The study was undertaken in a township and its surrounding informal settlement area (shack area) outside Cape Town in the Western Cape province. For this project I interviewed eight women who experienced abuse in their marriages and accessed a well-known women counselling centre in the township for help. Each of the women described how she experienced the abuse and the attempts she made to deal with it. These experiences were given in a narrative form and each is presented in separate case studies.

Chapter one introduces the topic and the thesis. Chapter two is a review of the relevant literature on violence against women and help seeking. Several factors that may influence the women's ability to seek help are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology. The process of how the research was done and the method of analysing the interview material is discussed. Chapter four presents the interview material in individual case studies. A multiple case study format is used to present a narrative account of each woman's experiences of abuse and her response to it.

Chapter five is a discussion of the themes that emerge from the eight case studies. This chapter brings together some of the findings of the study. Chapter six gives the conclusions and makes tentative suggestions for practice and further studies.

CHAPTER TWO.

LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1 Introduction.

This chapter provides a review of selected literature on woman abuse both internationally and locally. I will begin by defining violence against women and then exploring the extent of the problem as documented. This is followed by the exploration of literature on help seeking and the dynamics of wife abuse as they relate to choices available to women in dealing with the abuse. I will then explore the interaction of Xhosa cultural values and practices as they have the potential of influencing the course of wife abuse and help seeking.

2.2 Violence against women.

Violence against women is defined in the United National Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as:

any form of gender based violence, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (cited in Watts, Osam & Win, 1995, p.6).

Although this is only one of many alternative definitions, I found this definition appropriate for this study because it includes physical and psychological harm to women. The psychological harm is often neglected and hard to recognise as abuse, preventing women from seeking help to address it. The definition also encompasses both the public and private sphere of abuse. Included in this definition is wife battering that often occurs within private homes, which are often perceived as safe havens in a cruel world. In this context, the violence may occur between two people who are bound together by marriage vows to love and cherish each other. The simultaneity of love and abuse that is in such relationships also influences the decision to seek help for the abuse and where to go for help.

2.3 The magnitude of the problem.

As in other types of domestic violence, the number of reported cases of wife abuse is only a proportion of the actual number. The documented incidence rate of violence against women is a problem because it reflects only those who seek assistance, either

with the police or the organisations dealing with this problem. Other problems with official statistics are that they do not specifically target wife abuse, they are recorded as general assault cases (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

International research suggests that many women experience abuse at some point in their lives and that there is a growing incidence of the problem. International large-scale studies reported by the World Health Organisation (cited in Jacobs & Suleman, 1999), indicated that between 16 and 52 percent of women have been assaulted by their husbands or partners. Fischbach and Herbert (1997) reviewed data from the studies documenting the problem in the United States and found the following: population-based surveys suggested that between 21 and 30 percent of American women will be beaten by partners at least once in their lives. In the worst case scenario women are killed by their partners (Fischbach & Herbert, 1997; Schornstein, 1997). These statistics indicate that the growing numbers are approaching 'epidemic' proportion as they are rapidly spreading or increasing in occurrence (Schornstein, 1997).

Similarly, high statistics are found in the developing world. Bradley (1988), cited in Fischbach and Herbert (1997) revealed that 95% of requests for protection in Papua New Guinea were against intimate partners. Fischbach and Herbert (1997) argue that while the developed nations have collected information on gender-based violence for a few decades, the attempts in systematically recording data in low-income countries only started within the last few years. They further warn about the inaccuracy of documented prevalence resulting in artificially deflated rates in some countries and also at the possibility of inflated statistics relying on women's self-reports.

In South Africa, the exact level of gender violence is not known, because there is no reliable national database on this issue (Human Rights Watch, 1995; Jacobs & Suleman, 1999; Vogelmann & Eagles, 1991). According to the Human Rights Watch report (1995) no official statistics exist in cases of domestic violence, as the police officials do not distinguish them from other assaults. The existing estimations, which are from South African women's organisations are that 25% of women are victims of gender-based violence and that one in six women are in abusive domestic relationships (Human Rights Watch, 1995; Motsei, 1993).

The difficulty of assessing the prevalence of the problem is also related to the fact that no systematic nationwide surveys have been carried out (Human Rights Watch, 1995). However, small surveys have been reported and they suggested very high levels of gender violence, as high as in other parts of the world, and often far higher (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). For example, a survey conducted by Human Sciences Research Council found that 43% of 159 married women surveyed in the Cape Town metropolitan area had been subjected to marital rape or assault (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Further, the results of two surveys, in 1990 and 1992, in the Cape metropolitan area and adjacent rural areas, found that violence in the home - not necessarily between spouses or partners - represented one third of all interpersonal violence (Human Rights Watch, 1995). A community survey in three provinces in South Africa, in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Northern Province, identified 30% of women as victims of abuse by intimate partners (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka & Schreiber, 1999).

What was found to contribute to lack of reliable statistics of the extent of the problem was that it is probably under-reported (Jacobs & Suleman, 1999; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). Jacobs and Suleman (1999) found that women continue to suffer abuse over long periods, yet they seldom speak about it. Social stigma and fear of retaliation further deter women affected by abuse from coming forward (Human Rights Watch, 1995). In addition, a failure to identify battered women by health care providers also contributes to the problems of unreliable statistics. They are often labeled and treated according to their secondary symptomatic disorders and the underlying problem of battery is ignored (Motsei, 1993). A study that was conducted at Alexandra Clinic suggests that health care workers were treating the symptoms of the problem and not referring women to appropriate support structures (Motsei, 1993).

In addition, the difficulty in determining the exact extent of the problem of wife abuse is exacerbated by the fact that most women who are abused by their partners do not seek help outside informal network of the family and friends (Human Rights Watch, 1995). In the state response to domestic violence in South Africa, Human Rights Watch (1995) highlighted the fact that a 1993 survey of 111 women revealed that 50% sought assistance from extended family; 22% went to friends and neighbors;

12% went to the church; 8% went to street committees or councils; 2% to the social workers and only 6% went to the police. This clearly indicates that the victims of abuse found the abuse unacceptable and were unable to cope with it, yet the low numbers of victims who seek help from formal sources also suggest how difficult it can be to reach out to sources outside the informal networks.

According to the same study, the traditional values that prevail in different sections of South Africa reinforce the attitude that 'wife-beating' is a private affair and therefore to complain to the police is to exhibit disloyalty to family thus inviting rejection by the family (Human Rights Watch, 1995). It solely depends on the abused woman to come out and disclose the abuse. In contrast to the issue of child abuse, which has mandatory reporting laws in many countries, including South Africa, there is no such uniform reporting requirement for suspected wife battering. Kemp (1998) maintained that the absence of a national mandate makes it more difficult to assess the extent of the problem.

The lack of official statistics relating to wife abuse makes it difficult to identify the group of women that may be at risk. According to Harris and Dewdney (1994) it also allows the issue to be trivialised in the minds of some service providers. With such difficulties in determining the exact extent of the problem, it is important to look at factors that are related to wife battering and help seeking for abuse.

2.4 Help seeking.

The statistics presented in the previous section relied heavily on women who could be identified through formal helping agencies. The difficulty in getting accurate statistics on women abuse seems to suggest a difficulty in accessing help for abuse. This is clearly an area which requires further exploration. This section will serve to explore general literature on help seeking for personal difficulties, and it will be followed by literature on help seeking specifically for abusive relationships.

Literature suggests that individuals experiencing problems first consult their inner resources as they attempt to recognise an experience as a problem of a particular kind, and to problem solve. If their personal resources fail, their contact with the help resources progresses outward, as they first consult with members of their informal

social networks, like families, friends and neighbors before they seek help in more formal sectors (Dobash, Dobash & Cavanagh, 1984; Goldberg & Huxley, 1980; Good, 1986; Green, 1999; Harris & Dewdney, 1994; Helman, 2000; Lempert, 1996; Swartz, 1998). In any society, people who are not helped by self-treatment make choices about who to consult in the popular, folk or professional sector for help (Helman, 2000; Swartz, 1998). Swartz (1998) acknowledges that all sectors of society make extensive use of folk and popular resources when people are distressed. He maintains that they often turn to people around them who are often not formally trained in health care and who often do not consider themselves as having special skills or abilities in the issues but they are influential and important. They may give advice about the problem or may suggest where to go for further help (Swartz, 1998). Kleinman (1988) and Good (1986), however, acknowledge that help seeking processes varies across ethnic boundaries and that some cultures do not easily fit the patterns outlined by the models. Remarking on the differences between cultures, Good (1986) cites the Chinese tendency of early and prolonged efforts by the family to manage the problems in each episode without encouraging the sufferer to seek professional care. Clients of different ethnicities may, therefore, arrive at the mental health centres at different points in the course of their suffering and experience different types of family involvement (Kleinman, 1988).

The choices to seek help are influenced by the contexts in which they are made, the resources of help actually available, whether the services will be paid for and whether the person can afford these services. These arguments suggest that the documented incidents of a phenomenon might vary from culture to culture, as it seems that the decision to seek help is influenced by culture as well as by the socio-economic conditions of the people in need of help. It is this general literature that provides a useful background in understanding help seeking among abused wives.

Wife abuse is a pattern of recurrent behavior and often happens over a considerable period of time. Since women are not helpless children, some people may assume that the solution would be to leave or divorce the husband, but this is often not the case. Several factors have been considered in the attempt to explain why women stay in abusive relationships, ranging from economic reasons such as unemployment and exposing children to further hardships; emotional reasons, like no inner strength, fear,

hope and love; and societal reasons like inefficient policing, few resources, no community or family support and being told by family to stay (de Sousa, 1991; Gelles, 1986; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kemp, 1998; Motsei, 1993; Pretorious, 1987). There is probably no single explanation as to why women remain in abusive relationships and none seems completely able to account for the complexity of the phenomena. However, Gelles (1986) maintains that the assumption that the woman would automatically leave her husband overlooks the complex subjective meaning of intrafamilial violence, the nature of commitment to the family as a social group and the external constraints which limit the woman's ability to seek help. Schornstein (1997) also argues that obstacles to its intervention are complex and multi-dimensional, and may operate on more than one level at the same time (personal, institutional and societal levels). In analyzing the multidimensional violence, Marano (1993) views it 'as a product of many forces' operating and interacting at many levels between an individual and his environment.

Although there is literature on the help seeking behavior of abused women (Arendse, 1998; Artz, 1998; George, 1999; Maconachie et al., 1993), there is limited research on the patterns and experiences of help seeking among African women who have experienced persistent violence. In addition, the literature often focuses on the individual psychological experiences of the women and does not deal with the interaction of the women and the cultural contribution in their help seeking. Armstrong (1998) in her study on Zimbabwe women, however, reveals how culture limits the women's choices of whether to seek help or not. Additionally, Harris and Dewdney (1994) studied the perceptions of ordinary people's help seeking particularly concerning wife abuse, which suggested that the expectations by the larger community had a considerable impact on the abused woman. These findings suggest that a decision to seek help for abuse does not rest solely on the woman's ability to make decisions. Multiple factors are considered as having an influence on the decision to seek help and the type of help sought.

Harris and Dewdney (1994) also argue that the nature of help that the women are looking for shifts as they undergo more abuse. They claim that the women tend to begin by seeking sympathy and personal support, but later, after some severe assaults, they are likely to request direct intervention and specific means of escape. However,

Dobash, Dobash & Cavanagh (1985), in their study of help seeking patterns, found that the act of help seeking is not solely related to the severity of a specific violent attack. Gelles (1986), on the other hand, suggested that the frequency of violent attacks influenced the type of help sought by the women. Unlike the patterns of help seeking for other kinds of distress mentioned earlier in this section, seeking help for abuse seems to be complex, influenced by a variety of factors. In the next section the issue of wife abuse and help seeking will be explored in more detail.

2.5 The dynamics of wife battering and its effects on help seeking.

2.5.1 Orientation to the framework.

To understand help seeking, it is important to locate it within a broader understanding of the dynamics of abuse, which help to define the possibilities. Various theories are used to understand wife abuse and in these, several factors are known to play a role in the dynamics of the abusive relationships. The same factors may be seen to restrict women from seeking help. Gelles and Cornell (1990) maintain that perfect associations do not exist in social sciences, the understanding of the phenomena “grows out of a complex set of interrelated factors” (1990, p.17). A multifactorial explanation that emphasises the interaction of various factors and reciprocal relationship between the individual and the social environment is most suitable for this phenomenon. For the purpose of this report, the model was adopted from several ecological models used in explaining the complex phenomenon of violence in the home (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kemp, 1998; Sanchez-Hucles & Dutton, 1999). These models were then adapted for the understanding of wife abuse and help seeking behaviors. The ecological approach was chosen because it acknowledges the social context in which help seeking happens. It places the individual in a larger social context, and proposes that the social and cultural environment have an influence on the woman’s functioning. What is significant about this approach is that it is comprehensive and considers political, economic and social factors that shape the quality of family life.

In this section I will explore factors that contribute to the dynamics of spouse abuse and I will explore these factors at three levels, microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem levels. Although the factors are presented in different levels, they contribute towards a sense of fluidity between the different levels, suggesting a

constant interaction and influence on one another. They are also seen to have potential influence on how women and the larger society deal with the abuse. This model is not intended to replace the theoretical explanations but is rather to illustrate the complex nature of wife abuse. The different theoretical views may be integrated and used within this model in explaining the interaction of different factors.

These factors should not be viewed as ending with the causation of wife abuse but as extending to the maintenance of continued control over the women's attempts to deal with the abuse. For example, Harris and Dewdney state:

one cannot predict a woman's help seeking and other problem-solving actions by looking only at demographic variables. Instead, it is essential to take into account situational determinants of a battered woman's behavior in order to understand the ways in which she manages her problems (1994, p 51).

Armstrong (1998) also considered the dual character of these factors, where in some ways they constrain and in others they act as triggers that influence a woman to seek help.

2.5.2 Microsystems level

2.5.2.1 Personality Factors.

At this level, the focus is on factors which pertain to individual and personality factors. In reviewing literature on abusive men, they are described as feeling powerless, helpless and inadequate, they have low esteem, vulnerable self-concepts and are also depressed (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Stith & Rosen, 1990). Gelles and Cornell (1990) sum up the explanation by arguing that the picture is consistent with diagnoses of borderline and antisocial personality disorders. While explosiveness and exploitativeness characterise borderline personality, and violence and lawlessness characterise antisocial personality disorder, such individualistic views, however, imply that men are not responsible for the violence they commit thus in a sense blaming the victim (Andersen, Boulette & Schwartz, 1991). Gelles and Cornell (1990) and Dutton (1994) criticise these individualised psychiatric explanations as merely linking assaultive behavior to existing diagnostic categories without etiological explanation, overlooking the contextual factors which have a contribution, 'an ideal smokescreen to blind us from considering social organisational factors'. The feminists also reject the psychological explanations of male violence claiming that wife assault

is violence committed not by madmen who are unlike other men, but by men who believe that patriarchy is their right (Dutton, 1994). However, there may be individual factors in each man's history which cause him to abuse his wife. Marano (1993) links the men's vulnerable side relating to violence, to jealousy, their fear of rejection and security of attachment, as they constantly want their wives' attention.

On the other hand, abused women are described as being dependent, with low esteem, feelings of inadequacy and helpless, shy and unassertive, although direct opposite profiles have also been reported (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). There are questions about whether such personality factors were present before or are a result of abusive experiences. These personality factors are likely to be consequences of abuse rather than character traits (Gelles & Harrop, 1989 cited in Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Gondolf & Fisher, 1991). It is therefore necessary not to see them in isolation from other interrelated factors like the lack of family support and accessible resources. For example, a woman can be assertive and take control of her life but she would need a supportive environment to be able to stand up against abuse in her home. Dutton (1994), in emphasising the argument against single factor explanations, maintains that contextual features of battering form paradoxical attachments that make leaving the battering relationship difficult and may lead to erroneous interpretation of battered women as masochistic. Additionally, Lempert (1996) highlights the contradictory duality in abused women's definitions (that is, the paradox of love and violence), which must be considered to understand how abused women strategise and develop agency to change or cope with violence. Thus these individual factors are not enough by themselves to explain violence or whether women would seek help for it.

The combination of the individual personality factors with family and societal factors can easily lead to a sense of disempowerment and to a state of 'learned helplessness' a term coined by Seligman in 1975, then used by Walker to explain the passivity of abused women. In this state they become passive, pessimistic and even blame themselves for the violence. They are characterised by the reluctance to seek help. In some cases, following repeated failure in obtaining help, the women fall into this state of 'learned helplessness' and they stop looking for help (Maconachie et al., 1993; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996). This argument suggests that this could be a reactive symptom to violence. Gondolf and Fisher (1991), however, argue that research on such profiles

has not been able to establish that battered women as groups are anymore depressed or passive than non-battered women. In their study in Texas, they found women who are active help seekers despite the severity and the duration of the abuse.

2.5.2.2 Demographic Factors.

In addition to personality factors, demographic factors like age and race are considered to play a role in abuse. “In most cultures, simply being female puts women in jeopardy of physical violence” (Fischbach & Herbert, 1997, p. 1161). This is clearly suggested by the high incidence of gender violence where females are the victims in society as well as their homes. Moreover, the history of racism in South Africa has impoverished African women and men, placing African women under double oppression. Ramphela and Boonzaier (1998) reflect on the social and political impact on black men by stating, “the oppression they suffer in the wider society acts as a paradigm for their domination of women, which is reinforced by an appeal to ‘tradition’ to justify practices that are said to be central to ‘African culture’” (p. 166).

Callagan, Hamber and Takura (2000) argue that there is evidence that African women, who are the poorest sector of our society, are more likely to experience violence compared to their white counterparts. Their argument is in support of the interaction of poverty and race, in explaining violence. It is not surprising that when black men see their deteriorating social and economic circumstances, which is usually accompanied by unemployment, they experience it as a personal failure. This experience often causes a reactionary backlash within the family, to the detriment of wives rather than opening up space for resistance to race and class oppression (Campbell, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). The combination of these factors influences them to use violence as a means of increasing their self esteem. Being poor on its own means lack of resources necessary for help seeking, like telephones to summon help in times of crises. It can also mean simply not having taxi fare to go out and reach help.

2.5.2.3 Alcohol

Literature suggest that alcohol abuse by abusive husbands is strongly related to wife battering, although there is no conclusive evidence of causal links between them (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Harris & Dewdney, 1994). Pahl (1985) and Motsei (1993)

instead argue that drunkenness should not be seen as a 'cause' of violence but as a condition that co-exists with it. As a result of this complicated relationship between alcohol consumption and violence, both the man and his wife may excuse his violent behavior on the grounds that he was drunk, therefore failing to acknowledge that he is responsible for the beatings. This hinders the abused woman's ability to define his actions as abusive and to make a decision to seek help for the problem.

2.5.3 Mesosystems level.

At this level, the immediate relational and family factors in which abuse occurs are considered. These are in interaction with the individual factors, mentioned in the previous section, which increase the risk of spouse abuse and influence the women's choice of whether or not to seek help. Gelles (1999) claims that, although there is empirical evidence supporting the commonly held belief that violence cuts across social groups and categories, it does not do so evenly. Certain social factors are risk factors for higher rates of violence and abuse.

2.5.3.1 Power and control factors.

The family is a power unit like other systems and power imbalance is associated with wife abuse, especially when the imbalance threatens the male power (Andersen et al., 1991). If an individual does not have other resources which place him or her in a position of power, he or she is likely to use violence in order to gain power. Factors like status incompatibility and status inconsistency are suggested as couple factors which are predictive of aggression (Campbell, 1992; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kemp, 1998; Rosenbaum, Cohen & Forsstrom-Cohen, 1991). Literature suggests that in a male dominated society there is a higher risk of violence when a woman is better educated and employed in a higher status occupation than her husband. However, women who are uneducated and nonprofessional but achieve more in a professional position than her education would predict are also abused (Andersen et al., 1991; Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Status inconsistency, as a risk factor, is also associated with unemployed men, those with low income status as well as those who reside in low-income households. Such factors appear to threaten the husband's sense of self-esteem, possibly contributing to a shame induced rage. Again, this is influenced by the man's belief in male dominance (Gelles & Cornell, 1990). Such feelings of

The structural constraints of the massive urbanward movement strains people's traditional networks of support of a township couple (Campbell, 1990; Spiegel & Mehlwana, 1997). This social isolation or lack of meaningful connection to people becomes especially important in the continuation of abuse in a relationship, particularly for an African township woman who is often physically and geographically separated from the extended family. This eliminates the family as an important potential resource that they can use in times of crisis. However, Spiegel and Mehlwana (1997) suggested that kinship ties established in the township environment may take the extended family's role but this may have a totally different quality. The woman may take refuge with the family for a couple of times but her own guilt and shame for inconveniencing them may prevent her from seeking safety with them again (Maconachie et al., 1993).

2.5.4 Macrosystems level.

This level focuses on societal factors that interact to create an environment that is conducive to violence between the partners therefore influencing the process of help seeking. These include broader factors such as cultural values and beliefs, the lack or availability and accessibility of the resources in the community in which the women live. Central to this level is the cultural attitude that accepts violence as a means of self-expression or problem solving. As the concept of community is a broad one, cutting across different aspects of society, for the purpose of this report it refers to residents in the same neighborhood, directly or indirectly involved in the issue but who are not related to the women concerned.

2.5.4.1 Poverty.

Poverty, the stress of unemployment, low income, no job satisfaction and poor housing are linked with violence (Artz, 1998; Pahl, 1985; Stith & Rosen, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). While it is acknowledged that violence occurs in all socio-economic strata and is not simply caused by poverty, poverty does increase the risk of violence in the families. Poverty lowers one's self esteem, leading to despair and this may become a breeding ground for violence in the family. A study described in Pahl (1985) suggested that violence of husbands often resulted from the husband's assumption that marriage should be an unequal relationship in which he should be

dominant. With the realisation that he is unemployed and therefore unable to play the dominant role to which he aspires, he becomes violent.

In addition, families which fall under the poverty line may not have the resources necessary to deal with stressors of family life or seek therapy before violence escalates (Artz, 1998; Stith & Rosen 1990). Financial dependence of married women on their abusive husbands keeps the women trapped in the violent marriages because they have limited resources (Andersen et al., 1991; Pahl, 1985). According to Pahl, the central feature in this is that financial arrangements are seen as a very private part of the couple's life together, thus serving as a barrier from seeking help. Poverty plays a role in maintaining abuse. As Helman (2000) puts it, a client may not seek help simply because she is poor and has limited means of accessing the services. In poor communities, there is often a history of inaccessibility of resources and little infrastructural provision, for example, telephones, which are necessary in times of crises. Such structural factors limit the women's chances of changing their situations when confronted with violence, because they have few options.

2.5.4.2 Community violence.

Domestic violence is closely linked to the levels of violence generally, in the society 'because the family is the microcosm of society' (Gilbert, 1997; Penn-Kekana, 1997; Stith & Rosen, 1990; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). The escalating levels of violence in the streets and in the community renders violence in the home an expected and sometimes acceptable act and therefore prevents abused women from seeking help. The less women experience and are exposed to violence in the community, the more likely they would view marital violence as a crime and the quicker they would seek intervention when their husbands physically abuse them.

2.5.4.3 Patriarchy.

Patriarchal structure and male socialisation are often implicated as a cause of wife abuse, based on the notion that women are male property as an expression of a cultural norm (Campbell, 1992; Gelles, 1999; Gelles & Cornell, 1990; Kemp, 1998). Feminist ideologies emphasise patriarchal organisation of societies as encouraging violence towards women. However, as the single factor explanation of violence is criticised by the ecological models, explanations based on patriarchy alone are also

insufficient. Despite the accomplishments by the feminist focus, Dutton (1994) however, criticises its focus on patriarchy and failure to emphasise individual factors that differentiate one male from another. He argues that the predominant and almost exclusive focus of feminist research on cultural determinants has left the psychopathology not systematically connected to cultural markers. It is necessary, therefore, to view patriarchy as one of the contributing conditions in wife abuse, recognising the moderating factors from different levels, like the microsystem and mesosystem, in order to give a complete predictive picture of the process of seeking help and how that request is received by a patriarchal society. The patriarchal system commonly found in almost the whole of Africa is also encountered among African groups in South Africa (Chikanda, 1982; Jewkes et al., 1999). According to Jewkes et al. (1999) the Xhosa culture has a history of patriarchy, which is very much adhered to in the modern Xhosa family. More details on cultural issues relating to abuse will be discussed in the following section on culture.

Both men and women are influenced by the confining stereotypes that prescribe the roles and behaviors that should be performed by the 'good wife or husband', although these may be changing. The conservative sex-role stereotypes dictating that women should be passive, dependent, submissive and home-bound while men should be independent, in charge and aggressive, serve to maintain the state of abuse of wives in the family, making them incapable of identifying abuse and seeking alternatives.

These societal factors, together with the cultural approval of violence, may influence husbands to resort to violence as a means of coping with structural stress. With a brief review of a model on family violence, it can be argued that family violence is a multifactorial rather than a singular causative phenomenon. Considering cultural factors among other factors is likely to enhance our understanding and contribute to more effective intervention and prevention strategies.

2.6 Culture.

Helman (2000) identifies culture as one of the influences on people's lives, including, for example, individual factors, educational and socio-economic factors. He warns against isolating 'pure' cultural beliefs and behaviors from the social and economic context in which they occur. Supporting the multifactorial approach, Helman asserts,

“It is therefore important, when studying how individuals in a particular society perceive and react to ill health, and the types of health care that they turn to, to know something about both cultural and the social attributes of the society in which they live” (2000, p.5).

Current theories have arisen from a predominantly Euro-American perspective and therefore tend to be limited and restricted, particularly in their lack of attention to cultural African issues. However, Campbell (1992) argues that theorists seeking to explain causes of violence in a particular society have often examined the cultural norms surrounding violent practices. It is important to note how the victim experiences the abuse and how it is linked to particular cultural or traditional practices. In order to understand more of this phenomenon we need to define the concept of culture and discuss it as it pertains to help seeking for abuse in the marriage.

Helman (2000) defines culture as a set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) that the individuals inherit as members of a particular society that tell them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods and to the natural environment. Kemp (1998) also maintains that culture represents an unwritten set of rules about behavior and these vary from culture to culture. Both these definitions stress the intergenerational transmission of guidelines. Because ‘culture’ is a slippery term with many referents which convey similar ideas, Thornton (1988) provides a list of words that have meanings and uses similar to culture. These are tradition, customs, way of life, or even race or folk-ways. Thornton (1988) acknowledges the difficulty of defining the concept ‘culture’ by stressing the importance of saying what the culture does and how it does it rather than defining what culture is. It provides a sense of identity with a group, thus a great deal of emotion is invested in the idea of belonging. Armstrong (1998) asserts that the word ‘tradition’ is often used to refer to the ways things were done in the idealised past, ‘the way our grandmothers and grandfathers did things’. In this report, the terms culture and tradition will be used interchangeably to refer to the way groups of people view their world and the kinds of values they hold.

Importantly, however, Helman (2000) maintains that culture is never static, it is in the process of change and adapts to the changes of each group, at the same time what culture dictates has a great influence on our lives. As socio-economic, political and geographical conditions of societies have been changing, the cultures between and within societies have changed over time. With the political changes in South Africa, there are expectations of shift from the traditional systems of patriarchy in the African family. Sometimes culture may therefore be seen as a way of seeking identity in a confusing changing world (Armstrong, 1998). In spite of the fluidity of its meaning, it is clear that 'culture' has some considerable impact on the way people live their lives. It is for this reason that I felt it important to explore the role that Xhosa tradition or culture may play in wife battering, specifically in seeking help outside the family circles.

2.6.1 Culture and violence against women.

International literature on gender violence shows a considerable interest in the influence of culture and a number of studies have been conducted in this area (Kim & Sung, 2000 on Korean Americans; Perilla, Bakeman & Norris, 1994 on Latinas; Armstrong, 1998 on Zimbabweans; Campbell, 1992; Levinson, 1989). These initiatives suggest the importance of acknowledging cultural or traditional influences on violence against women and on its management. Literature suggests that gender- and culture-sensitive mental health research is a neglected area, and it is only by understanding these issues that it will be possible to develop effective strategies to deal with domestic violence (Desjaris, Eisenberg, Good & Kleinman, 1995; Fischbach & Herbert, 1997; Kazarian & Kazarian, 1998).

The South African population is comprised of a diversity of people from different cultural groups, yet there has been relatively little research that moves beyond an exploration of white women's experiences of abuse. There are some studies, however, that have begun to explore women's experience of abuse in the context of African cultural beliefs. Chikanda (1992) traced the victimisation of South African black women as beginning in puberty and sanctioned by tradition and customs. Motsei (1993) has also considered the cultural influence on black women in abused relationships, maintaining that "women internalize the cultural norm that they are responsible for the success and failure of human relationships"(1993, p.6). In addition

to the cultural explanations of wife abuse in African populations, there is a great variety of expected behaviors, rituals and influences by family and community which impact on women's possible help seeking options and behavior. For this study it is important to look at the position of African women, particularly Xhosa women in the family and in the broader cultural context.

2.6.2 Lobola¹ and abuse.

The traditional custom of lobola may be seen as contributing to the abuse of women and restricting them from getting help. African women often marry according to customary union as well as civil rites. There are formalities required by tradition, including the payment of lobola or bride price by the man to the woman's family. This used to be a gesture aimed at establishing a relationship between the two families and a token of appreciation from the husband's family. With changes in economy however, its original meaning changed. Desjaris et al. (1995) claim that in recent years lobola has developed into a form of exploitation in which large sums are demanded and as a result it is now seen as a means of financial gain. Men often feel bitter about this and become more possessive of their wives, treating them as commodities. Additionally, the lobola exchange process is negotiated by men around women's value as assets to the family, therefore having proprietary implications for how the husband sees his wife (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). This adds to the complexity of the woman's help seeking as well as the community's response to wife beating. Chikanda (1992) maintains that lobola may again play a role in the decision concerning whether or not a woman will remain in an abusive relationship, as the husband may demand his money back, should the wife leave. Although this customary practice opens the possibility for gender inequalities in the marriage, it seems that some men may also have abused this custom and used it as an excuse to justify their violent behavior. As in many cases, it is not the custom itself but people's interpretation of it that contributes to the abuse of women.

¹ Lobola is also referred to as 'dowry' or brideprice. This tradition involves a payment by the bridegroom to the bride's family to ensure his rights in any issue of the marriage and appease his in-laws in times of dispute.

2.6.3 Marriage and abuse.

Loubser (1999) argues that the Domestic Violence Act of 1998 has given recognition to cultural differences in the social and psychological context of abuse by proposing the recognition of customary law and marriage traditions of black South African tribes. However, although the customary ritual of marriages is still followed, the inferior status that apartheid accorded to it often influences the women's feelings about the stability of their marriages and their rights within it. As Loubser further argues, this recognition of customary marriage by the Act says little about the treatment of women in marriages.

When an African woman gets married, she has a burden placed on her to keep the two families or clans together or to appease the ancestors (Chikanda, 1992). It is stressed that it is shameful for a bride to return to her family when marital problems and hardships occur as it reflects badly on her inability to keep the family together as well as on her family (Chikanda, 1992). In this way this expectation may influence the decision to seek help for abuse or even to leave an abusive relationship. Loubser (1999) writes extensively about the abuse of the African newly married woman (makoti²) in the Xhosa community and the pressure on her to remain in an abusive relationship. On the other hand, Van der Vliet (1991) remarked on the 'feminist consciousness' of the Xhosa township women translating into the deliberate decision not to marry or not to remarry if widowed or divorced. Although this may be a growing possibility for Xhosa women, it would seem, however, that this is not yet the norm.

Staples (1985), in his writing about the family ideology of black Americans, made a claim that being married is important to the majority of blacks, especially women. He referred to other literature (Hill, 1972; Gary 1983 cited in Staples 1985), which noted black people to believe strongly in the institution of the family and finding family life as their greatest source of life satisfaction. Staples' ideas may also apply to black people in South Africa. Artz's (1998) study suggested that the integrity of being of African women can only be established through a relationship with a man as his daughter or wife. This makes women particularly vulnerable to abuse. Part of the

² Makoti is a newly married Xhosa woman, (is also referred to as newly wed or the bride) she is referred to as makoti for, sometimes, a number of years into the marriage.

importance of marriage in South Africa is the value given to this institution not just as an arrangement between two people but between two families. In many African cultures there has been a shift from arranged marriages between two families without involving the partners, though it is possible that this is still practiced in some customs. The decision is left to the partners but the families remain an important part of the process as they undertake the negotiations for marriage and lobola. This continued involvement of the families in the couples' marriage can be a positive influence if there are problems in the marriage. On the other hand, such a link can be interpreted as the right of the husband's family to control the woman's actions (Armstrong, 1998) thus controlling her behavior in the marriage, including her access to help.

When problems arise in a marital relationship the woman is expected to settle them within the home by consulting the parents-in-law (Artz, 1998; Hermans, 1999). This is perceived as demonstrating her loyalty to her husband despite his treatment of her (Chikanda, 1992). Emphasising the dynamic nature of culture, however, Helman (2000) says that culture must always be seen in its particular context, with historical, social, political and geographical elements. Many African men and women moved from their original homes and settled in the cities. There is reasonable speculation that these changes and the increasing assimilation of Western values among these families may have relaxed traditional practices.

When a woman seeks help outside her husband's family, she is traditionally expected to go to her own family and let the matter be settled between the two families. Van der Vliet (1991) describes the Xhosa custom of *ukutheleka* (to return or keep back) where every prolonged visit of the wife to her parent's home raises the suspicion for the husband that her father intends to keep her back. This custom serves as a help seeking strategy for abused women and means more cattle³ for her father. According to Van der Vliet (1991, p.223) the dual purpose is "the woman tries to use *ukutheleka* to press for better treatment, the men to press for more cattle or prompt payment". The father will refuse to return her to the husband's house until at least one cow is paid.

³ The traditional transaction between the husband and wife's family, like in lobola, used to be in the form of live stock. The term 'cattle' is still used in such processes even though now payment is often made in cash equivalent to the market value of the cattle.

In urban areas there are no close links with extended families as they often live in rural areas. In these communities, bonds with extended families have weakened, therefore even when respecting and adhering to tradition or customs, there should be some flexibility. Chikanda (1992) argues that the position of a black urban abused woman is found to be similar to many Western women in that she may seek outside help, even though her family may disapprove of such an action. What is not known is what these women's experiences are in deciding to get help outside the family boundaries.

2.7 Summary.

Wife abuse has been discussed as a serious problem internationally and in South Africa, despite the difficulties in ascertaining the exact extent of the problem. I reviewed literature on help seeking for abusive relationships, especially the documented strategies that women take when seeking help. The factors involved in the dynamics of wife abuse, which may also have a significant influence on the victim's decision to seek help, were also explored. Violence against women should be understood in the broad ideological, social and political context in which it occurs. It is this context that determines the response to it, and where the women will seek help. Aspects of African culture were discussed separately as a factor which may contribute significantly in the explanation of abuse, as well as in the decision to seek help and how other members of the social group perceive that request for help.

CHAPTER THREE.

METHODOLOGY.

In this chapter, an introduction to the methodology will be provided and reasons for choosing the methods that I use will be discussed. Participants will also be introduced to the reader and the procedure for the collection of research material and its analysis will be described.

3.1 Introduction to qualitative research.

This study focuses on understanding what meaning violent relationships and help seeking have for the women being studied. As there was very little literature found on experiences of Xhosa women in abusive relationships, qualitative research was chosen as the most suitable method to provide an in-depth examination of these subjective experiences, as well as the meaning these experiences have for African abused women. Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasise the use of qualitative methods to uncover and understand what lies behind a phenomena about which little is known, as is the case here. Although retrospectively remembered events are liable to be interpreted in terms of current issues, the value of entering the women's internal world in this way outweighs the potential problem.

My interest in the study was how African women make sense of their abusive relationships and how their understanding influenced their decision to seek help and their experiences of help seeking. I chose interviews as my research tool for collection of material for a number of reasons:

- They enable the interviewer to elicit the women's experiences, as they are used to find out about things that cannot be seen or heard, like the participants' reasoning behind their actions and their feelings.
- They aim to discover the meaning the participants accord to the topic being studied.
- They explore the themes broadly, enabling the interviewer to deal immediately with misunderstandings which can influence his or her interpretations (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindal, 1994).

- The semi-structured interview, as a more open and flexible tool is able to bring out perspectives that are not easy to access because it allows the researcher to follow up issues by asking her questions based on the participant's comments or probe for details. Banister et al. (1994) claim that this approach can empower disadvantaged groups by validating and publicizing their views.

3.2 The Research Process.

3.2.1 Gaining access.

In the planning stages of the study, I approached a well-known women's counselling centre to discuss the intended study and to seek permission to conduct the study from the centre. Following this, arrangements were made between the researcher and the staff member to gain access to the participants who had been seen there. Gaining access to the participants was not a simple process of only obtaining permission to do the research. It became a continuous process of negotiations and renegotiations of my relationship with participants and thinking and rethinking access strategies (Maxwell, 1996). Because of the sensitive nature of the topic under study, a staff member was to contact the potential participants, inform them about the research and request their voluntary participation. The agreement was for the staff member to also make an appointment for the research interview, if the women agreed to participate. Banister et al. (1994) emphasise the importance of considering the impact of the route by which the researcher contacts the participants, in terms of how it structures the way they perceive her. Though I was keen to have contacts independent from the organisation, this was not possible because of ethical issues of confidentiality and the participants' circumstances which made contact difficult. My concern about the initial contact being made by the organisation, and the image of being associated with the evaluation of the program was not easy to avoid, given the circumstances. This became important to keep in mind as it meant that how the potential participants see the purpose of the interview would affect their decision to participate and even what they might say in the interview (Banister et al. 1994).

Accessing the potential participants was a very slow process and a source of frustration for both the staff member and me because most of the women in the agency records had no telephone numbers. This, in itself, was an important finding for me rather than just a technical problem in need of a solution (Ely, Anzul, Friedman,

Garner & Steinmetz, 1991), as it already indicated some of the difficulties they might experience in summoning help in times of crises, as they have no access to telephones. The thought of writing to them using the addresses on their intake forms or even visiting them was dismissed, as it had happened in the past that women no longer lived in the addresses they had supplied. Another important reason for not contacting them at their homes was the possibility of triggering further violence from the husbands of those women who still lived with their partners. The selection of participants was then limited to those who had telephone numbers on their records, where they could be contacted, introduced to the study and be requested to participate.

The decision to include women who came to the trauma office in a police station (the office is also run by the same organisation) was reached due to the limited numbers of women who were contactable in one office, and failed initial attempts to contact them. This trauma office was considered as another option of getting access to participants. Also considered was the fact that most of those who come to the trauma office are referred by police for counselling when they have come to lay charges. In those cases the aspect of having come voluntarily for 'a counselling service' fell away but even here, the women had still reached out for help in some way, even if it had only been when they were injured or in danger.

The participants' economic situation also needed to be considered, in terms of its effects on their potential participation in the study. A tentative offer was made to refund their taxi fare to and from the venue of the interview, if and when they showed interest in participation but indicated taxi fare to be a problem.

As the staff member was unable to sit through the slow process of selecting and phoning potential participants as was agreed in the beginning, I was then given permission to access the agency records (files from their satellite office as well as those from the trauma room in the police station). The process of selection was as follows: I took files of clients seen in each month and selected those categorised for domestic violence and abuse. From those files I selected women who were married and had telephone numbers where they could be contacted. This meant that out of the numbers of women who sought help for domestic violence, only a few could be selected for the study, in the manner of convenience sampling (Maxwell, 1996).

I compiled a list of names and their telephone numbers and began contacting the potential participants. Frustration was experienced when many telephone numbers were out of order or no longer in use, which again seemed to reflect the conditions under which many of these abused women were living. This was further reducing the already low number of contactable women. As I was making these initial calls to the women, I had my own concerns. I had to consider the fact that my contact could lead to further violence in the home. I had to be prepared to carefully handle situations where their husbands might pick up the phone. For example, in one contact, a husband was home and was interested in why I was calling his wife. I had to explain that his wife does not know me, and that I was only phoning to ask her a few research questions. I promised to phone again after hours when his wife returned from work. When I managed to get the potential participants on the phone however, most of them were willing to participate in my research. In fact, many appeared to be keen to talk about their experiences. Finch (1993) claims that the structural position of women, particularly, their privatised and domestic sphere makes it highly likely that they will welcome the opportunity to speak to a sympathetic listener. I then set up appointments for interviews in venues that were convenient for them, either in the offices or in their homes. Some women preferred to be interviewed in their homes during times when there would be no interruptions. For others the offices were the most convenient venues.

3.2.2 Participants.

In this research project, I initially proposed to choose 10 participants from a population of Xhosa women who attended a counselling service in the township, but due to difficulties accessing the women my final sample consisted of eight women. They were all married to the partners that had abused them, whether by customary union or civil rites. The participants were all Xhosa women, living in Khayelitsha and the surrounding informal settlement areas.

The ages of the participants ranged between 32 and 43 years of age. Their ages are consistent with those revealed by the World Bank to carry a heavy health burden (Watts et al., 1995). They were all still living with their husbands except one, whose husband abandoned her after she came for help. Three were unemployed; one was

self-employed, running a small shop from home. The rest were employed as domestic workers or factory workers. The literature reveals that when women do have jobs they are concentrated in the lower paying service sector which may further restrict their choices (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Their level of education ranged from Standard 2 to Standard 10. All had received some counselling ranging from a once off intake interview to several sessions of either face-to-face or telephonic counselling. All except one of the women had children. Children often are the reason why women endure the violence for many years. On the other hand, it is often when the eldest child starts being aware of what is happening that women decide that it is time to seek help or leave (Pahl, 1975). To protect their identity, the women are each given pseudonym in the report. Their demographic details are presented in the table below.

Table of Demographic Details

Participants:	Age:	Education:	Employment status:	No. of children
1. Noxhanti	32	Std 9	Employed – full-time.	2
2. Nokhaya	42	Std 3	Employed – casual	1
3. Nothembile	35	Std 10	Unemployed	2
4. Nomonde	35	Std 10	Employed – full-time	0
5. Nokuphumla	32	Std 9	Self-employed	3
6. Nosidima	32	Std 5	Unemployed	2
7. Nobantu	43	Std 3	Unemployed	2
8. Nomilile	33	Std 10	Employed – full-time	3

3.2.3 The interviews.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, individual interviews were thought to be the most suitable way of exploring the research issue. An interview guide was developed to serve as a flexible tool, with in-depth interviews lasting for one hour to two hours, the aim being to elicit the women's retrospective accounts of their experiences. The interview guide included open-ended questions to elicit information on their personal background. The women's demographics provide a helpful background to understanding each woman's experiences of abuse. The women's

beliefs about family life were also thought to be another important area to explore insofar as these reflected not only on their potential sources of support, but also cultural beliefs about the women's role in the family. The social support systems of the women were also explored to see which if any avenues of help they were able to make use of. I also used the interview to sensitively explore cultural aspects of gender relations. Consultation with the health sectors was explored in order to establish their use of the services and whether they expected intervention on the abuse when they visited hospitals or clinics.

Four of the women preferred to be interviewed in their homes and chose times that were suitable for them, when their children and husbands would be away. Initially I was concerned about their safety and mine, should the husbands arrive, but they all reassured me that it was safe.

The interviews were not conducted in the question-answer format but were a conversation between the participant and me, the interviewer. The interviews, which were conducted in Xhosa, were tape-recorded with the participants' permission. This was to ensure good communication and rapport with the participants while capturing accurate interview material.

The interview process consisted of two parts. The first part was a research contract where I thanked them again for agreeing to talk to me, introduced myself, the purpose of the interview and why I chose them for the interview. I assured them of confidentiality and then requested their permission to take notes and tape record the interview. Some women needed further clarification about tape recording, stating clearly that they did not want it broadcast on radio or TV. These were the questions I was expecting and they were a further confirmation of the construction of abuse as a private event which may threaten to bring shame upon the family name (Blumberg, Swartz, Roper, 1996). When they were satisfied with my reassurance concerning the publicising of the interview material, they all agreed to have the interviews tape-recorded.

The second part was the interview process, where each interview lasted for more than an hour. It covered the areas in the interview guide, already mentioned in the previous

section. The interview guide was used flexibly as a reminder of themes to be covered but it was not strictly adhered to, as is recommended in the practice of qualitative research (Banister et al., 1994). This project is deeply informed by the belief that people are a valuable source of information and that they are capable of reporting on and about themselves. My interview approach was to ask open-ended questions, listen with minimum interruptions and then track what they say. During the interviews I became aware that my questions seemed to encourage the participants to recount their past experiences of abuse and their strategies of seeking help in the form of narratives. The interviews seemed to provide a space for them to articulate their experiences in their own terms and from their own frames of reference. This was consistent with Mishler's (1986) suggestion that the answer to a question may evolve into a narrative format. I ended up with narrative material of their experiences which were also the products of the relationships I developed with the women.

My identity as an African woman may have influenced how the women evaluated the interview situation and why they told their stories the way they did. During the interviews, as soon as a rapport was established, the women seemed to relate to me as a friendly guest and not an official inquisitor (Finch, 1993). The women seemed quickly to forget that they were being recorded as they related stories to me. This shared identity seemed to promote a genuine rapport which led to greater self-disclosure, thus yielding richer data (Lee, 1995). Judging from the interactions that were taking place between us, I was becoming a companion to the women. The repetition of phrases like "you know; you understand mos" had a sense of appeal, suggesting that I should understand the truths and the implications of their realities. On the other hand, I kept in mind that this shared identity with the women could influence what I could get from them. I did not rule out the possibility that they could be telling me what they thought I wanted to hear as a woman. In order to address this possibility I attempted, in my interviews with them, to encourage their own unique account of their experiences.

3.2.4 Transcribing.

The interviews which were conducted in Xhosa were transcribed verbatim and then later translated to English. I was faced with the huge task of transcribing long conversations that took hours for one interview, as well as that of deciding what to

include and how to arrange the text. Reissman (1993) argues that the task of what to include and how to arrange and display the text has serious implications for how a reader will understand the narrative. Transcribing involved having to listen repeatedly to the tapes. As the interview material brought out the richness of their experiences, I decided to transcribe the conversations as accurately as possible except that some of my gestures and other nonverbal aspects of communication that may have been part of the interview were not included. My transcription included repetitions, incomplete utterances, laughs and sighs which had all been part of the interview.

3.2.5 Translating.

In the attempt to keep the conversation as authentic as the original, I translated the material as closely as possible to the style of conversation or the mode of expression. Translating from Xhosa to English was not an easy task as there were concepts or phrases that I could not translate directly to English. As I was interested in conceptual equivalence rather than linguistic equivalence in this study, in such instances I used the closest phrase that had the same meaning. The focus of the study was on the meaning of their experiences, therefore translation here was a hermeneutical approach, which implied construction of their realities rather than finding appropriate labels (Swartz, 1998). In the process I was aware of the language diversity which occurs within the same language and how this could possibly influence the meaning of the translated interview material (Drennan, 1992; Swartz, 1998).

3.3 Method of Analysis.

In analysing the material I wanted to find an approach of analysing the text in such a way that the women's narratives are given prominence, and that they continue to have control over their words, as Reissman (1993) puts it. My data analysis began with listening to the tapes in the long process of transcribing and translating the material. The uninterrupted narratives of their stories produced a rich sense of their experiences in their own words. I wanted to find a method that would allow these realities to be described and for me to reflect the participants' constructions of their position and of the events they may have experienced. I decided on the case study approach because it would give me the opportunity of effectively presenting the material in rich narratives for each woman (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) rather than have the material pooled. I decided to present each woman's narrative as a separate case study

to provide the closest sense of their experiences prior to extracting common themes. As I went through the texts of each woman's story, I identified and sorted every narrative that related to the actions taken in response to the abuse. As these were told in a narrative form, I began by sorting the data systematically into common headings which gave an account of the help seeking process. Some attempt was made to provide a chronological sequence in their stories, but in many cases the use of thematic headings hampered this.

In each of the individual case studies, I gave a description of the woman's experiences of seeking or receiving help, whether from the family, community or formal sources. I sought to make sense of particular experiences by looking as closely as I could and drawing on theoretical knowledge to interpret what was emerging from the material (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In an attempt to give the reader a sense of the identities of the women, I used direct quotes from the transcripts. The material will be presented in multiple-case format (Yin, 1994), with the narratives in separate sections, one after the other.

3.4 Ethical considerations.

Ethical approval of the study was obtained from the counselling agency to ensure that the participants would not be harmed by the study. The researcher was aware that this study might invade the participants' privacy as it seeks information of a private nature. This was taken into consideration and an informed consent was obtained from the participants. Another major consideration was that of voluntary participation. This was ensured by informing the participants of their right to voluntary participation when I introduced the study. They were informed about the aim of the study and what the information would be used for. When they agreed to be interviewed, they were assured that they would remain anonymous, as pseudonyms would be used. They were also assured of confidentiality, in that the data will be used strictly for the purpose of the study and no other person would have direct access to the interview data except in cases of supervision. Permission to audiotape the interviews was sought from them and the interviews were held in private. I was also aware that the interviews might distress the participants. Drawing from my clinical interviewing skills I conducted the interviews with as much sensitivity as I could.

3.5 Reflexivity.

It is important to acknowledge the centrality of the researcher in qualitative studies like this one. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, my subjectivity in the research process, values, beliefs and assumptions influenced and possibly contaminated the production of this work. Literature on qualitative research emphasises the importance of reflexivity in the research process (Banister et al., 1994; Ely et al., 1991, Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993). The issues of reflexivity in relation to this study are: Firstly, my personal reflexivity begins with reflections on what made this study of immediate interest to me. My personal identity and values as an African woman, which have influenced my choice of the study topic and its population, is accommodated by qualitative research. This is confirmed by Banister et al. (1994, p.13) when they say: “In qualitative research, we arrive at the closest we can get to an objective account of the phenomenon through an exploration of the ways in which the subjectivity of the researcher has structured the way it is defined in the first place”. In some ways my subjectivity was a resource in my research rather than a problem. I was able to ask questions that another white researcher would not have asked. However my identity as an African Xhosa-speaking woman, who knows and shares the women’s culture and language does not necessarily mean I always know and understand their subjective experiences and can sometimes get in the way of better understanding of the women. I found myself struggling with personal questions about their decisions to remain in their abusive marriages, when from my perspective it would have seemed much better to leave, which I had to monitor during the process of interviewing and analysing the material.

Secondly, my professional orientation as a counsellor also directed and shaped the course of the study. My assumptions shaped how the participants and I actively constructed the interview process, the arrangement of the material and the interpretation of the findings. I may inadvertently have encouraged their perception of me as a potential source of help. From my side I had to remain open to the variety of help available outside of my own range of expertise. In light of this, I acknowledge that in the process of describing and translating the women’s accounts, I may have distorted their reality. In addition, the conclusions and implications to be drawn from this study may be partly influenced by my beliefs.

CHAPTER FOUR.

CASE STUDIES.

4.1 Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the material from the interviews conducted with the eight women and to set the scene for the discussion in the following chapter. In my presentation of the cases I have tried to highlight each woman's attempts to get help for their situation from a wide range of sources, both formal and informal. Through the case narratives I describe their experiences of this help-seeking.

In Chapter One I noted the lack of studies done locally on African women experiencing wife abuse. This suggests that researchers may be having difficulty in accessing this group of women. The under representation of these women may suggest that they are not making use of professional help. If African women are not accessing formal sources of help it would be important to know, what they are doing to survive in their situations and whether there are any obstacles hindering them from coming forward. In order to explore this, it would be important to hear how the women describe their journey towards sources of help and their experiences concerning their attempts to get help.

CASE STUDY ONE.

Noxhanti is a 32-year-old Xhosa woman, married with two children, a nine-year-old girl and a six-months-old baby. She is a domestic worker and lives with her husband and children in a shack in a township. She was in an abusive marriage for 12 years in which her husband regularly abused her emotionally and physically, especially when he was drunk.

Recognition of abuse.

Noxhanti described how the abuse began immediately after she and her husband got married and lived with her parents-in-law in a rural village. Her husband began by being verbally abusive and threatening to throw her out of the house whenever he was under the influence of alcohol. He gradually became physically abusive. However, in the early days of abuse she did not report it to anyone. Noxhanti felt that she was a

stranger in her husband's family and in the village where she lived. She felt lonely with no support from the family. She recalled this time saying:

You can imagine that I was a makoti here and did not know this village. I was not familiar with his home for him to talk to me like that. I was still new. She claimed however that her mother-in-law was aware of the situation. Noxhanti initially hoped that her mother-in-law would help, but she did not. Throughout this first year of marriage she felt too 'new' in her husband's family to ask her parents-in-law for help. However, she did expect them to see what was happening and to intervene.

Noxhanti also believed that her husband only beat her when he was drunk and she hoped that if he stopped drinking the problem would go away. "Shame I tolerated this, thinking that he is going to change, in fact the reason why he behaves like this is alcohol. When he is drunk he becomes too violent, you see", she said. It seems that part of her initial reluctance to seek help was that it was hard for her to recognise his behavior as intentional abuse. It seems that she also had difficulty in giving up on the relationship with him as was reflected in this comment:

I could not just stop being his wife, it happens when your heart hasn't told you, you see. Yes, you can say when you are angry that you have had enough, its better to leave him, but when you sit down and think, no something tells you to go back. You have that hope that he is going to change.

As the abuse escalated Noxhanti thought about leaving. She was however unwilling to leave the relationship because she was afraid of the social stigma that might result. As she said, "when you know that you were married and you come back. You think that maybe your peers will laugh at you, you see." The shame of being called names and stigmatised for having returned from marriage was a thought she clearly could not bear, so she stayed.

Seeking help in the family.

After waiting in vain for her husband's family to intervene, Noxhanti decided to ask for their help directly, even though she and her husband no longer lived in the parents' house at that stage. When she started seeking help from her in-laws, she expected them to be able to intervene effectively, possibly because of their position of authority

in the family, but was disappointed. She was angry that her in-laws had no power to stop their son and described their typical response in this narrative:

I used to report this to his parents... I would ask what must I do about him and my mother-in-law does not come up with any advice, you see, so I have to tolerate his behavior.

Throughout her attempts to seek help from her mother-in-law, Noxhanti felt that she was reluctant to see her son in the wrong, resulting in her feeling powerless to change the situation. This, however, did not stop Noxhanti from maintaining contact and continuing to hope that she would come to her rescue. Her mother-in-law however continued to give her none or unhelpful advice about how to deal with the situation. For example, Noxhanti stated that on one occasion when she asked her about the continued abuse, her mother-in-law advised her to find work in order to be able to support her baby:

But I did not quite understand what she meant, - find work and bring up my child. Can you see that now she can't discipline her son and wants me to find work? Why can't she talk to her son to change his behavior? I did not quite agree but I did it. So, we stayed in those conditions, and the baby grew up.

As Noxhanti was disappointed by her mother-in-law's reaction, she turned to her brother-in-law for assistance. According to Noxhanti her brother-in-law was often involved and called in whenever there were problems between she and her husband. He became 'their guardian', within reach when he was needed. This response made Noxhanti feel a sense of being valued by the family. Ironically, her feeling of being valued also made her put up with the abuse for longer than she might otherwise have done. For as long as her extended family were not tired of her complaints, she felt able to stay. However, when her brother-in-law failed to respond on one particular occasion, this was a strong message for her and from her perspective, this was what finally helped her to go 'out' for help. "I told his brother to come and see the house ... it seems that his brothers had enough, because nobody came to see the mess".

When Noxhanti and her husband were living apart from his parents, she had hoped that other members of her husband's extended family would take over some aspects of her parents-in-law's role in relation to the couple. Regarding this, she was also

disappointed. She described how the abuse continued even when she and her husband moved to live in a relative's backyard, "and we moved to live with his aunt and uncle in another area, I hoped that since we were living with older people he was going to change. No, there was no change even there". This kind of pattern seemed to be a part of Noxhanti's married life. Throughout it seemed that she chose to stay at places where a relative lived close by, whether they lived in a relative's house or in the same yard. The relatives offered the help they could, by intervening in times of crisis and trying to calm her husband down. However, none of them were able to stop the violence and they never advised her to take further steps in getting help.

Later on in the marriage, Noxhanti decided she could not take it anymore and she left her husband in desperation for a short while to stay at her parents' home. After this she had direct help from his family but, ironically, not about the abuse. Instead, they responded to her husband's plan in her absence to get another wife. Noxhanti described in detail the intervention made by her husband's extended family in the rural areas concerning this issue, which they believed, would disgrace the family name. Noxhanti was summoned by his relatives to their rural home 'to solve the problem'. The fact that Noxhanti had left her husband and the reasons for leaving were not discussed, their interest was very focused, as this recounting of the process of the meeting shows:

So, Noxhanti, what do you say about this woman that he wants to make his wife?" I said I couldn't respond to that, you old people could have an answer. And they said that they do not agree with it and this will never be done in this house of *Mzangwa* (clan name)... They asked my husband what he had to say. He said 'I am tired of Noxhanti, she must go'.

Following this family decision Noxhanti's husband agreed not to take another wife. Noxhanti, however, was still reluctant to return and went back to her own family. Strangely though the effectiveness of this family meeting further cemented the idea of 'keeping it within the family' and reinforced the fantasy that they have power over her husband. Noxhanti stayed because the relatives wanted her to stay even when her husband no longer wanted her. Meanwhile, this intervention was clearly to save the family from embarrassment rather than for the benefit of Noxhanti.

Seeking help outside the family.

Noxhanti was however quickly drawn back into her husband's life, not only by her extended families' ongoing expectations of her but also by those of the community. Even while the couple was still estranged, Noxhanti described how a stranger, who claimed to be her husband's kin, traced her and asked her to come to the rescue of her husband. Her husband was involved in a relationship that the community members did not approve of and were concerned about his wellbeing. She described her mixed reaction to this:

I had to decide whether I want to go back to this man or not. But I did not like the way he and his mother treated me. At the same time I felt sorry for him even if he did put himself in this mess.

Noxhanti decided to go back and the abuse continued. When she felt that she was in danger, Noxhanti sought help from the community members, and apparently now felt no shame in letting the public know about the abuse. People in the community showed their support but when her husband told them that he paid lobola, they backed off because 'she was his wife'. She described her experience of one incident saying:

At that time he got in the shop shouting saying, 'this is my wife, you don't enter anywhere, I paid lobola,' all that stuff. Those people said, 'you can hear sisi, if he talks like that, we can't intervene, its better for you to leave'. I said that I am afraid of him, how can he chase me with a weapon and you again let me go with him. They said that they do not intervene in matters between married people.

Noxhanti was again disappointed when she realised that the community members would not protect her from her husband or even attempt to talk to him. However, Noxhanti reported episodes when community leaders, like street committees, became involved in the issue and tried to talk to him. This, however, did not stop him from abusing his wife.

Reaching current help seeking decision.

It is not clear what it was that pushed Noxhanti over the edge after 12 years of staying in the abusive marriage. She described a violent incident during which her husband broke down the shack in which they lived. She gave this destruction of property as one of the reason why she decided to seek outside help. It seems, however that it was

not only the destruction of property, but that there was an accumulation of feelings and she could not take the abuse any longer. She had made several unsuccessful attempts to deal with her husband's abuse, but she did not lose hope and stop looking further. She began to look beyond her family, extended family and neighbors for help. Noxhanti described how her husband broke five windows in the shack. This incident did not seem different from previous incidents. It seemed that the difference may have been internal and Noxhanti had lost hope for any changes in her husband's behavior.

Till now there is no difference and these children are growing up in this situation. I gave up this time ... it's also because I realised that my daughter grew up in these conditions and even the baby is going to grow up in the same conditions.

Her children's wellbeing was clearly an important reason for coming out for help and it appeared that she gave priority to their feelings above her own.

When Noxhanti finally took steps in seeking help from the formal sources, it was interesting to note how she went about doing it. She first let her child approach the offices of the women's organisation on her behalf, possibly thinking that only children's well being is important in formal sources of help.

Summary.

Noxhanti's first response to the early episodes of abuse was fuelled by fantasies about being rescued by her in-laws. This was partly because she was an outsider among her in-laws and she felt lonely. Also, she was unable to identify her husband's behavior as abusive and believed that alcohol was to blame. As the abuse escalated, she sought help from her in-laws in an attempt to keep the matter within the family. She was disappointed that her parents-in-law could not stop the abuse. She also hoped that involving the elder family or kin members, who are regarded as more powerful in man's life, could stop it. She was disappointed again in this regard. She then left her husband to live with her own family as a way of escaping the abuse. Her husband's extended family in the villages did not intervene in the abuse, but when he planned to get another wife, they intervened. The fact that they were able to intervene successfully in his attempt to take another wife must have raised hopes that the family valued her and could therefore stop the abuse. When she sought help from the community members, they seemed to be willing to help her but the fact that he had

paid lobola for her prevented them from intervening. As she might have felt that she did not deserve help, when she took that first step of seeking help from formal sources, she sent her child on her behalf.

CASE STUDY TWO

Nokhaya, 42, is a Xhosa woman, married into customary law for 13 years. She lives in a township with her husband and children. She was in an abusive marriage for 11 years where her husband was beating her. She came to seek help in the women's organisation for the first time after a long history of physical abuse. She also said that he was also failing to provide for the children's financial needs.

Recognition of abuse.

Nokhaya reported that the abuse started in 1989, two years after they were married. As she was narrating her story, she was unable to identify what caused the episodes of violence. She recalled how her husband hit her for the first time for 'no reason' and the shock she experienced from this. The incidents of violent attacks increased in frequency and intensity over the years. During these episodes she sustained injuries like cuts and bruises. She showed me her face, which was full of scars, as evidence of injuries sustained during these episodes. However, it took years before she could get help for the situation.

Seeking help in the family.

Nokhaya initially sought help from her mother-in-law. She told however of the disappointment she experienced whenever she went to her mother-in-law to report her husband's abusive behavior:

I went to her, while I'm with her she is by my side, but when I leave she is dancing with her son, she speaks the same language as her son.

After a while she began to realise that she could not rely on her mother-in-law and lost trust in her as a potential helper. She looked elsewhere in his family for help:

he has no father I can go to, his elder brother tried to show him the right way, but my husband did not want to listen.

She found her husband's elder brother very supportive. He tried to talk to her husband about the abuse. When she complained, her brother-in-law intervened and she felt valued by the family and did not want to betray them by going outside to get help.

However, this did not help Nokhaya for long, as the brother-in-law was unable to prevent the abuse. Her sisters-in-law, who also lived in the township, also did not help her. Although she never approached them directly for help, she nonetheless seems to have expected them to intervene and was disappointed that they did not.

For Nokhaya, when attempts to seek help from her husband's family failed, she turned to her own family for emotional support. She reported that in some incidents she would return home to her brother and would stay for a day or for a while, but would always go back again. She reported that when she told her brother about the abuse, he became angry and she had to be the one to calm him down. She would say, "maybe he will realise that he was wrong and ask for forgiveness". It seems that this experience concerning her brother's reaction made her reluctant to involve him in settling the disputes. She could see the potential of perpetuating violence between the two men. However, this did not stop her from going to her family for support when in distress. She, however, no longer talked about the abuse to her family members. Her family was aware that she preferred not to talk about it, they respected that and did not ask her. It seems that from them she expected sympathy and personal support instead of direct intervention with her husband.

Seeking help outside the family.

For Nokhaya, the community residents were, in some sense, another source of support. She, however, did not directly ask for help from her neighbors but they voluntarily intervened in times of crises. She, however, found it embarrassing when the neighbors heard their quarrels and sometimes they would intervene by talking to the couple:

It bothers me, I don't like it. Such that I once suggested that we move from this area, but I thought again that it's gonna be the same anywhere we go, it's better I endure the situation.

This statement suggests that although she needed help she was not ready to involve her neighbors in her marital issues. She reported that the residents became tired of her husband regularly hitting his wife and threatened to beat him up. Even this did not bring about an end to his beatings, instead they continued and were getting more dangerous.

Nokhaya reported that she was injured several times and would go to the clinic for medical attention. She would get stitches for her wounds, but would never report that her husband had beaten her. She clearly did not perceive the clinic as a potential source of help to stop abuse. She again told of the shame and embarrassment of being asked about the abuse. She did not want to be asked and did not feel ready to reveal it. She expressed her beliefs clearly when she said:

It's just that I told myself that there is this saying that 'a wife and her husband should stick together and keep their problems between them' ... Sit on your problems, I was trying to keep that, hiding my husband's problems and not take them out.

Nokhaya approached the medical institutions only to fix the physical wounds and, on going back home, sustained more injuries.

As she continued to stay in the abusive marriage, she still looked for solutions to their problems. When things are difficult to explain, people tend to look for explanations outside the relationship. Consulting a traditional healer for help is another route that, in this case, this couple took together. Nokhaya reported that she and her husband visited a traditional healer, who cited the problem as 'man-made', meaning it was through bewitchment that her husband was violent, and she gave him medicine to take. This affirmed his belief that his violence was beyond his control, thus giving him more reason and power to continue with it. On the other hand, this may have raised Nokhaya's hopes that the behavior would change. However, the medicine he received made no difference. It is possible that the healer's explanation also made her tolerate his abusive behavior and she did not look for professional help for a number of years.

Reaching the decision to seek professional help.

Nokhaya eventually sought professional help. She described in detail the last incident when her husband beat her before she approached the agency for help. He beat her for no reason and hit her head with a brick, resulting in her losing consciousness. She was admitted to hospital overnight and she still did not tell the hospital that her husband caused the injuries. However, it seems that this incident made her realise that her life was in danger. She was finally able to bring herself to lay a charge against her

husband. It also seems that her decision was influenced by an increasing feeling of being pushed out of her husband's family.

Going to the police station to lay a charge resulted in her being referred for counselling. Nokhaya stated that she was not aware that such services existed for abused women and now that she had come, she experienced relief, as her husband had stopped beating her, at least for the moment. At the centre she and her husband received joint counselling and she felt that this had been effective.

Summary.

Abuse began in 1989 as intermittent episodes. She was unable to identify what precipitated them, but noticed that these gradually became more intense and frequent. She first tried to seek help from her mother-in-law but did not find this helpful. She believed that this was because her mother-in-law took her son's side. However, she still had expected that the in-laws would help. She used to go to her own family for relief but did not expect them to intervene. After the failure of the extended family to intervene, she and her husband consulted a traditional healer for an explanation of their problems. The explanation they got may have kept her in the marriage as she wanted to believe that her husband wanted to change but was influenced by forces beyond his control. During the years she sustained several injuries and sought medical attention for them but did not report that she was abused by her husband. It was only when she had a head injury that she reported the crime. She was then referred to the counselling centre.

CASE STUDY THREE.

Nothembile, 34, is a married Xhosa-speaking woman with two children. Her daughter is 12 years old and her son is seven years old. She has been married for 14 years and lives with her husband in a township. Ever since she got married she has never been employed. Instead she stayed at home and looked after their children.

Recognition of abuse.

Nothembile recalled having problems with her husband early on in their marriage because he was having extramarital affairs. She did not see these affairs as a form of abuse until he beat her for the first time in 1989, three years into the marriage. She

said that since this incident, things had gradually gotten worse. She was beaten whenever she confronted him about his extramarital affairs. "I used to say I can tolerate all the others, but if he is the one who is abusing me, threatening to kill me, no, no...." In spite of his affairs, she expressed strong feelings of love towards her husband, and this may have influenced her inability to leave the relationship.

Seeking help in the family.

Although Nothembile and her husband lived independently as a couple, they lived in the same yard as her parents-in-law. When her husband beat her for the first time, her immediate reaction was to report him to her parents-in-law. She wanted them to resolve the issue. She first turned to her father-in-law, who tried to talk to his son but he was not able to influence his behavior and the abuse continued. She then expected her mother-in-law to intervene whenever there was a violent incident but she felt that her mother-in-law was not making any attempts to resolve the problem either:

my mother-in-law was at home but ignored me when he was beating me, I had to run to neighbors.

It seems that living in the same yard as her husband's family raised her hopes that they would intervene, even without her asking them to. This was not the case and she was disappointed. Her parents-in-law later left the township to live in the rural areas and Nothembile and her husband moved into in their house.

With repeated abuse and no help from her parents-in-law, she sought out other members of her husband's family for support. She did manage to establish a strong support system within her husband's relations, the aunts and uncles in Cape Town to whom she often reported the violent incidents. According to her, they would call her husband to a meeting where his relatives would confront him about his behavior, warning him that it was destroying his family. They were supportive of her and would comfort her whenever she went to report him. However they made comments like 'what would that home be without you', thus implying that as a wife, Nothembile had the sole responsibility of keeping the family together. Nothembile also believed that she had invested so much in this marriage, and such comments seemed to make it harder to consider leaving the abusive marriage permanently.

When the meetings failed to effect change in his behavior, she tried another strategy in a bid to solve the problem. She decided to move out of the house. She fetched her belongings and children and went to her husband's aunt and uncle in the township. Nothembile, however, was aware that her husband could trace her there, as indeed he did. Her husband's relatives spoke to her and persuaded her to return to her husband, that same evening. She recalled that it was after they confronted her husband that her aunt called her aside and asked what her response was to these discussions about the abuse. "I said there is nothing I am going to say, I'm only saying I am a dead person". In spite of this strong statement about her fear of returning, it appears that her aunt still encouraged her to return. It also seems that it was partly her loyalty to these helpful family members that made her listen to their advice against her better judgement. From these negotiations Nothembile agreed to return to him but insisted that this time she would seek further help:

I said that even if I'm staying, I am going straight to the offices, cause if you are abused by the head; if you are abused by the head, I don't see any marriage there.

Although Nothembile first sought help from her husband's relatives, she was determined to seek formal help if the abuse continued.

Nothembile did not mention going to her own family for help, instead she persistently looked for help from her in-laws. However she stated that her brothers visited them in her house after an incident where he had beaten her, then she had to tell them. Initially her husband denied that he had beaten her but Nothembile had bruises, swollen lips and a blue eye to show them. On hearing the reasons for the beatings, her brothers talked to her husband, advising that he be discreet about his affairs so that they would not cause problems in their marriage. At this point, Nothembile had made a decision to go ahead with her plans to seek help despite her brothers' pleas to endure it. As she said:

I said to my brother, 'hold it big brothers, *Dlamini* (clan name), you say I must stay? I want to be in contact with the law. You'll never be misled if you go according to the law.

Her brothers also failed to address the abuse directly and were concerned about what they saw as the cause of violence and her reaction to it. They also wanted her to stay in the marriage.

Seeking help outside the family.

Nothembile had previously sought medical help for several injuries over the years. She had broken teeth and she had miscarriages, which she attributed to his abuse during her pregnancies. “Yes, I am a crock because of his beatings ... I was lucky not to have permanent scars on my face”. When seeking medical help, she was seldom asked about the abuse. She recalled that a doctor asked her about it only once. She was open about it and did not hide it. The doctor called her husband and spoke to him, however this did not stop the abuse.

She also reported that when he beat her during pregnancy, they received joint counselling from a hospital social worker. Her aunt, who seemingly approved of her action, supported her and accompanied her. She reported that her husband was not cooperative. He was rude to the social worker and stormed out of the session. After this session she stayed with her abusive husband and endured the abuse as it continued.

Reaching current help seeking decision.

Nothembile took a long time before reaching out to formal channels of help again. It may be that she initially hoped that her husband would change. Moreover, her husband’s extended family continued to be involved and encouraged her to endure and stay in her marriage. She recalled one aunt saying: “Let me go there Nothembile and I’ll talk to him myself, cause this idea of going to the police ...” This was one of their attempts to stop her from going out for help.

According to her there were a number of factors that made her finally venture beyond the family to seek help. The turning point was when the beatings happened at a time when she was ill and in need of love and care. The threats that went with the beatings as well as the intensity of the beatings scared her into action. “He even tripped me making me to fall, hitting and strangling me, I thought I was going to die”. In this incident their children also became subjects of his violence, and this was the last straw for her. She described her reaction to this by saying:

Then I said, you have finished me, now finish me. If you hit my children because of something you know very well that I don't want ... it destroys the family.

In spite of the finality in this statement she still did not leave the relationship at this point. She had, however, had enough of the abuse and decided to go further than she normally did when looking for help.

However, before going to seek formal sources of help she still consulted with her husband's extended family. She told of how she resisted his aunt's attempts to stop her from going but she had already made her decision and went ahead. Even when she had made this decision, she went from one relative to the next to inform them that she was taking this step. It seems that she may have been seeking their approval and blessings or was perhaps giving them yet another chance to stop the abuse:

I said I'm going to the police right now, I'll start by going to aunt and uncle. They are also not going to stop me from going to the police. I am going to them just because it is according to the Xhosa tradition to let them know that I have been enduring your son's behavior.

By the time she was interviewed she had reported her husband to the police and was waiting for the court date for the interdict. The abuse had not stopped even when she was recuperating from an operation. This time it was emotional abuse and threats to beat her. She said: "just when I think I'm at the highest point of my marriage, the problem does not get solved". She believed that she had invested a lot in the marriage and therefore expected that at this point she would be living peacefully. All she wanted was for the abuse to stop.

She, however, had her own concerns about going to the courts because of the impact the whole process would have on his employment. She was unwell and unemployed and would not be able to provide for her children should this affect his employment. She ended the interview by saying: "At the same time, by sitting and not getting help, he may end up murdering me". She wished that the case had been dealt with immediately while she still had bruises to show that he was really abusing her. She said that she understood why other women ended up withdrawing the charges. In her

experience, her own husband tended to be nice to her as the court date was approaching and “because you love this person, love gives hope”.

Summary.

Nothembile experienced physical abuse for the first time 11 years ago and it gradually got worse. She stated that she initially reported the abuse to her parents-in-law. Though her father-in-law seemed to have tried to speak to his son, the abuse did not stop. She expected her mother-in-law to help when her father-in-law was not available but her mother-in-law ignored her. She then found strong support from her husband’s relatives. It seems that their ongoing support and care about her constrained her from moving further for help, even when their interventions did not stop the abuse. She reported that previously she had miscarriages and other physical injuries for which she received medical attention. She was also counselled by a hospital social worker. It seems that her husband’s failure to cooperate in the counselling session made her lose hope of its effectiveness, but she continued to stay in the marriage and dealt with the abuse by reporting it to his relatives. What triggered her to seek help outside was seeing her husband beating her children in one of his violent episodes. It was also the intensity of the beatings and his threats that made her fear for her life and which led her to seek help from the police.

CASE STUDY FOUR.

Nokuphumla, 31, had been married since 1990. She has three children, a 12-year old, nine-year-old and a two-year-old and she lives with her husband in a township. She reached out for help because her husband was emotionally and physically abusive.

Recognition of abuse.

Nokuphumla told me that she and her husband had experienced marital difficulties for years. She attributed these to alcohol abuse, saying that her husband had been drinking increasingly more and had been emotionally abusing her. He was also having extra-marital affairs. For years she had not thought of this behavior as abusive, as he was not physically abusing her. She had several fights with him because of his infidelity. This had got worse until she felt she could not take it any longer.

She reported that she was under constant stress and was suffering from headaches. She then decided to move away from him. She took her children and left him in the township for four months to live in the rural areas. By doing this, she thought she was giving him space to pull himself together and was also giving herself a break from his behavior. It was during this time that he stopped providing for the children's financial needs, forcing Nokuphumla to return to Cape Town to be with him. For Nokuphumla, what started as emotional and financial abuse escalated to physical violence, when her husband started beating her in 1997. She recounted her first experience of physical abuse, which occurred when her husband was drunk and returned home late at night. They had an argument about an incident which involved women, during which he locked the doors and started beating her: "He slapped and slapped me, he took out an iron bar, threatened me with it. I was crying and he said I must fight back."

Seeking help in the family.

Unlike most African women who start seeking help by reporting the abuse to the husband's mother, Nokuphumla did not have much contact with her mother-in-law, who lived in the rural villages. She explained that from the beginning she never felt welcome in her husband's family. Her brother-in-law was her only source of support in this family. In all the fights they had, she went to her husband's brother to report him. His brother consistently responded to her complaints and mediated by bringing them together, speaking to them and confronting her husband. Several attempts by his brother to stop his behavior however failed to end the violence. It seems that Nokuphumla had left her husband to stay with her own family several times, and during these times that her brother-in-law would also mediate and often persuaded her to return to her husband.

When the abuse became physical, she began to involve her own family in resolving the conflict. She said that she ran to her uncle and she reported that her husband was beating her. Her uncle and her mother called her husband to a meeting to discuss this:

He came and the discussions were held at my home. They discussed it and he said he did not just hit me. The discussion continued and OK, it was said that I must forgive him and I must go back to him. I said 'how can I go back to him when he beats me like this?

As it often happens with these discussions, the resolution was that she should go back to her husband. Nokuphumla was unhappy with the outcome and returned to her brother-in-law, who was not present at the meeting. She decided to go to him, while she still had bruises to show him, "I wanted to show his brother how I was, even if we did not discuss it". As a follow-up to this visit, her brother-in-law came to hold another meeting with her and her husband. The incident was discussed all over again, but her brother-in-law finally refused to intervene further. According to Nokuphumla, he said:

I can't discuss this, it should be discussed by elder people in the rural areas, it should not be discussed here.

He was involved in several attempts at resolving their disputes and thought that referring it to people with higher authority and power would bring a solution to the problem. In the same breath, he also told Nokuphumla to return to her husband. When she initially resisted returning to her husband, he saw her to be in the wrong as he said that 'she is adding to the problems'. She returned, and the abuse continued.

Nokuphumla recalled continued violence and destruction of property while they visited their village in the rural areas for Christmas. Her husband was again drunk and returned home to break the windows of their house. For her, this was an opportunity for the matter to be handled by the elders who lived in the village. She left him to stay in her brother's home, where she believed she had protection, which she could not get in the township. The matter was handled in the traditional way of calling a meeting between both families. At this point, she felt 'heard' as people with more power were finally meeting to put a stop to this. To her disappointment however, rather than addressing the abuse, what seemed to be important was the fact that he had not finished paying lobola and was thus fined to bring more money to her family. This was seen to be equivalent to an apology for his treatment of Nokuphumla. As a woman, Nokuphumla was excluded from the discussions, as it happens in this patriarchal cultural system, and she recalled:

I was not there when they finished talking, as I was told to leave the meeting. I was called later by my family, the others [her husband's family] had already left and I was told that I had to go back.

She had hoped for a better outcome from this big meeting, as she felt that her cries were listened to, although whether they understood them was another matter. She was however disappointed and felt dismissed in the end:

it seems that they [her own family] were happy that he asked for an apology [to her family], so I must go back the same day.

She had hoped that despite not attending the meeting, she would be approached at an individual level and involved in the issues pertaining to her. This however never happened. When she went back, she again felt ignored by both her husband and his brother. What was difficult to bear was that her husband never even bothered to apologise to her for what happened, but she stayed with him nonetheless.

Seeking help outside the family.

In Nokuphumla's story she described little involvement by the neighbors in her difficulties. She did however recall that when her husband beat her in their house one night in the township, her loud cries summoned help from neighbors. She could hear that the neighbors came running to their house but her husband had locked the gates and the doors. The neighbors understood the message, that this was a 'domestic affair', stopped outside the gates and returned to their houses.

Although Nokuphumla had never been to clinics for physical injuries, she reported that she had frequently visited a General Practitioner for tension headaches. She was aware that these were related to the abuse and when she was diagnosed with hypertension, she decided to take a break and go to live in the rural areas before starting the medication. The change in her pressured lifestyle seemed to provide relief for some time, but financial pressures forced her to return. She reported having to cope with the abuse by consistently using tranquilisers. She told me how the doctor would notice and comment on her repeated visits for the same complaint, asking about her personal life. However, like many abusers, her husband often accompanied her to the doctor and he was the one who responded to the doctor's questions. When her husband claimed that she was happy, "then the doctor won't say anything, he just gives me medication. Maybe I'll drink the pills and sleep and wake up feeling better, then I'll see that I'm well". It seems that her husband took her to the doctor under the pretense of taking care of her while he may have been preventing any chances of being reported to the professionals.

After her brother-in-law's attempts to intervene failed and he withdrew, he then recommended that the couple seek help from a traditional healer. It is interesting that her husband went there alone, leaving his wife behind, implying that the problem rested with him.

Reaching current help seeking decision.

In Nokuphumla's situation there was no incident she could identify as a turning point except that she had had enough of the continuous abuse. She reported having heard from a community radio about counselling services for abused women. Hearing the details of other women's stories helped her to identify herself as one of the abused women. It took her some time to make contact with the agency, even when she was aware of the services. She made a familiar statement:

I took years thinking that he is going to change, no he does not change. I thought maybe, it's just something small, he'll change, no he is carrying on.

Perhaps there had to be the accumulation of events and unsuccessful attempts to resolve the problems before Nokuphumla could come forward.

By the time Nokuphumla reached the counselor it seems she had made an internal decision to end the marriage but wanted the counselor to tell her that it was a good decision to get a divorce. She gave her experience of the session as follows, "I felt better after talking to her, it felt like I have taken out what was inside me and I stayed". However, when she received counselling and was not advised about what to do, she dismissed the idea of ending the marriage, deciding to give him another chance.

Summary.

Nokuphumla was not beaten frequently, but was emotionally abused consistently. In addition, her husband was an alcohol abuser. This made it hard for her to define this as abuse until the abuse was physical. She did not seek help from her mother-in-law as she claimed that she did not feel welcome by her in-laws from the beginning. However, she did rely on her brother-in-law to intervene in their frequent disputes, and felt listened to and respected by him, therefore feeling the need to be loyal to his family. Her brother-in-law's mediation did not end the abuse, instead it escalated to

physical violence. He then referred them to higher authorities in rural areas. Intervention by the 'elders' of her family in the rural areas did not focus on addressing and stopping the abuse. Instead they demanded that her husband should finish paying lobola, as a way of asking him for apology to the family for ill treating their daughter. He paid this and Nokuphumla was expected to return to him even though she was unhappy about the decision. The media helped her recognise that she was in an abusive relationship and that she could get help at formal sources of help.

CASE STUDY FIVE.

Nomonde, 35, is married and stays with her husband in their house in a township. She entered into a customary marriage in 1989 and later had a civil marriage in 1995. She and her husband do not have children and live on their own.

Recognition of abuse.

Nomonde reported that her husband assaulted her for the first time in 1990, a year after they got married. Her husband had stabbed her head and cheeks several times, and then he took her for medical attention, where she received sutures. In this incident it seems she remained passive and he was the one who took the initiative in caring for her. At the hospital, however, he gave a false report about the cause of her injuries. For Nomonde, it felt that her husband was showing remorse for what he did by taking her for medical attention and, she seemed to think it wouldn't happen again. However, the abuse continued over the years involving stabbings, beatings and verbal abuse.

Seeking help in the family.

Nomonde did not have parents-in-law alive. When she finally sought help, she began asking for help from her husband's relatives who also lived in the township. She reported that her husband's relatives, who are of the same clan and were the negotiators for lobola, were the first people she approached. Their response to her complaints never satisfied her. She described how they handled it:

He promised to come to my house and talk to him when my sister-in-law returns from the rural areas, he never came, they never came... And I went to the second one who just took my husband to the shebeen so he can buy him alcohol, he did not solve anything.

After this, Nomonde felt it was obvious that they were not interested in settling any problems between her and her husband. She expressed clearly what her expectations were when she sought their help:

For me to be satisfied and see that I am valued in this family, he was supposed to confront him immediately in my presence, find out what happened, how, in my presence, not in hiding.

It is for this reason that Nomonde vowed never to go to his family for help again. Without being able to access his family for support, Nomonde was forced to explore other ways of protecting herself.

As the abuse continued, Nomonde was subjected to constant eviction from the house by her husband. She believed that some of her difficulties were due to the fact that she had a customary marriage. In trying to make sense of it, she thought that getting a marriage certificate would be a solution to her problems. She pushed for a civil marriage and they signed their marriage in 1995. For her, this became a source of security but this did not stop her from being evicted or the abuse from continuing.

Her biological family was there for her merely as a place to run to, but she found it difficult to tell them about the abuse. It seems that the shame of being in an abusive marriage made Nomonde reluctant to share her experiences with her family:

You see I used to be unable to talk about it, even to my mother. I was covering the situation. So, even when I arrived home I used to say nothing, not complain or say that I have left him. I used to say I've just come to visit.

Nomonde suffered in silence for years and went back to her husband whenever he came to beg her to come back. Nomonde reported that on one occasion she left her husband for three months and stayed with her family. However, as she reported, "After that he continued coming and coming, my family was feeling sorry for him. Even my mother said 'please my child, go back to your house'". Her family provided only a temporary refuge and eventually they too encouraged her to return to the abusive relationship.

Seeking help outside the family.

The injuries Nomonde sustained were so severe that she had to receive medical attention for them. Even though her husband initially gave false reports about the

causes of the injuries at the hospital, Nomonde was unable to keep lying for long. During the follow up appointment for treatment of the wounds in the hospital, the doctor asked her again about her injuries. This time she was alone and she revealed that her husband stabbed her and then gave the hospital a misleading account of the circumstances. Taking the hospital doctor's advice, she laid a charge, but her husband begged her to withdraw the charges and she did. Soon after that he stabbed her again, and she had to visit the General Practitioner several times for medical attention:

My husband used to take me to the doctor but would refuse to go inside with me. When the doctor asks I would say he is in the waiting room. When he goes out to call him, he would not find him there, he has left.

The doctor's attempts to meet her husband during her visits suggested that he was a potential resource for help. Nomonde continued visiting this particular General Practitioner whenever she sustained injuries from her husband and needed help. During her fourth visit to the General Practitioner for the injuries that he also asked about laying a charge against her husband. She told me that her response was, "I'm still observing him". Nomonde apparently continued to hope that he would change his behavior.

The neighbors appear to have been drawn in to help in times of crisis. For example, she told of an incident when her husband was chasing her in the streets at night. She ran to a house asking for their help. She told them what was going on, and the couple got Nomonde and her husband together and talked to them. She threatened to lay a charge against him if he beat her. The neighbors begged her not to do that. They asked her husband to calm down and to go back home and make peace. This intervention by neighbors was not effective as Nomonde was treated badly that night again, with her husband even locking her out of the house.

Nomonde went to the police but when her husband complained about her seeking help from the police without asking the neighbors to intervene first, she would listen to him and continued to ask for help from the neighbors. She told me that it was after another one of his episodes of rage and destruction of property that she called her neighbor to talk to him again:

He was like a mad person, he destroyed furniture, ... and axed his wardrobe. I was afraid and I thought of phoning the police, but it was going to be a habit

running to the police whenever we had a fight. Additionally he always complained that I don't even ask help from the neighbors, I sleep with the police. I called my neighbor, she came.

In spite of the fact that Nomonde was in danger, it seems she still wanted to please her husband and make things right between them. She also worried that she might be blamed for calling the police and she wanted to avoid his accusations. She hoped that by doing what he wanted, he would stop his abusive behavior. She found however that the neighbors' intervention did not make any difference.

In her experiences, she often did not feel certain of support by people in the community, even when they attempted to intervene.

I called the same neighbor and she said she talked to him for over an hour. I said that I wanted her to see, so that they don't blame me. Many people blame me, especially his friends.

It was interesting that Nomonde decided to get help from the police for the first time when her husband broke her microwave. It seemed that it felt easier for her to lay a charge against him for the destruction of property than for her own injuries. This action however helped her, as it resulted in getting information about the possibility of getting a court interdict to protect her against his beatings. She applied for the interdict and he stopped beating and stabbing her for some time but continued to be verbally and emotionally abusive, destroying property and evicting her from the house. She renewed the interdict several times to include protection against these violent actions.

Nomonde had several encounters with the police but either would not lay a charge or would withdraw the charges at her husband's request. At the beginning, it seems she did this with the hope of changing his behavior, but later as the abuse escalated she did it out of fear of further abuse. Her husband also accused her of having affairs with the police, which further made her reluctant to go to them.

Additionally, even when she went to the police, she implied that she did not always get a good reception. She felt she was seen as a nuisance, always running to them. She could remember a few incidents, which made her feel that the serious nature of the abuse was being dismissed. For example, she stated that the attitude of one

investigating officer undermined her complaints and he persuaded her to drop the charges while the officer talked to her husband. She dropped the charges but the intervention of the officer did not bring about any changes in her husband's abusive behavior.

Reaching the current help seeking decision.

Nomonde told me of how she became aware of the services for abused women. She listened to a community radio program and this helped her to recognise that she also deserved help. Her husband however controlled her access to this informative program and she could only listen to it in his absence. When she had the information about the centre, she threatened to go to a counselling service the next time he kicked her out of the house. He again prevented her from going for help, but at this point Nomonde wanted all the help she could get and she went ahead anyway. She explained that it took a lot of patience for her to finally find a place where she could get help. She summed it up by saying, "Yes it's like that when you are looking for help"

Summary.

Nomonde reported that the abuse began during the first year of their marriage. She would visit the doctor for her injuries several times and was advised to lay charges, which she then withdrew whenever her husband pleaded with her. Since her husband had no living parents, she went to the negotiators for lobola, for help. They failed to help her and she decided never to go to her husband's family for help again. She then dealt with the abuse on her own, apparently ashamed to share it with her own family. It seems however that when he destroyed the microwave, it was the turning point, and she laid a charge of destruction of property. She finally applied for a court interdict. Even when she had an interdict, her husband remained emotionally abusive, although he had stopped beating and stabbing her. She eventually got information about the counselling service from the community radio and she finally came for counselling.

CASE STUDY SIX.

Nosidima, 32 years, entered into a customary union in 1987 and then a civil marriage seven years later in 1994. She has two children. Her husband abused her, emotionally and physically during the course of their marriage. She finally went to the police and

her husband was arrested in September 2000, after which he left her. He has since continued to threaten her.

Recognition of abuse.

Nosidima knew her husband for two months before she became his wife. She did not know that he was abusive before she married him, but reported that immediately after she became his wife he started beating her. She recalled the shock and disbelief after the first beating, initially thinking that he was 'playful'. When he woke up at night and beat her again, she realised that it was serious. She was a newly married woman. She thought of going back to her home: "but I was worried about the German print, they were still new and smelling of new fabric". For a Xhosa makoti there is a meaning attached to the dress code that symbolised the newly married state. Having a dress that was still new restricted her from leaving her abusive marriage. When the abuse started, her ideas about how a makoti should behave kept her captive in the marriage and made her submit to the abuse that was increasing in intensity. She described the details of the abuse she experienced:

When he beats me he did not use a stick, he used weapons like spades, he chased me with a spade and once hit me with the back of the spade. He threatened me with sharp objects but nothing made me to leave because I swore that I'll die in this family.

It appears that she was determined to stay married despite the constant danger she was facing. It seemed that her commitment to marriage meant staying even when conditions were bad. Leaving the marriage would mean that she had failed, so she stayed. She also told me how she pressed for her husband to marry her according to civil rites. It appeared that she hoped this would change his attitude to her. This, however, did not improve her circumstances even after he did marry her.

Seeking help in the family.

At the beginning, as she could not believe that her husband was beating her. She reported that it was hard for her to reveal the abuse to her mother. She could only say that she was 'unhappy', giving her mother the impression that she was having difficulty adjusting to the new life and family. Her mother encouraged her to stay and tolerate it, as it is said in Xhosa that 'marriage is not easy'. For her mother who had probably experienced the same problems adjusting to her marriage as a makoti, it

would be important for her daughter to pass this 'rite of passage'. She remembered her mother's advice:

My child, if your husband is really evicting you, he must carry your belongings outside. If they are still inside the house, he does not really mean that you must leave.

Nosidima was faced with comments like these that convinced her to stay, particularly as they were said by people who loved her. She believed the statements thinking her mother could never be wrong. The difficulty of opening up to her own mother completely seemed to be related to the belief that she should keep her marital issues within her married family. In this situation her mother was an outsider. She also told me that she was hiding it because "there was this hope that maybe he will come right", and she must have feared her mother's condemnation of her husband. Nosidima only revealed the beatings when her mother asked her directly. Even then though, her mother encouraged her to stay in the relationship.

Nosidima's parents-in-law were in the rural villages, so it took some time before she was taken down to be introduced to them. Instead, Nosidima was introduced to her husband's relatives who lived in the townships, and who were referred to as 'the family'. She often approached them for their help with the abuse and she found that they took responsibility, responding to her complaints. They would come to hold various meetings in her house but she reported that her husband did not cooperate. She said: "They do care and would come to our house but my husband would leave them there with me, saying they are my visitors, not his". Even these relatives who she believed might have power over him, failed to stop the abuse. However, Nosidima persistently called on this 'family' whenever her husband was violent.

When she finally met her parents-in-law in the rural village, she was already entrenched in the abusive relationship. She did not initially inform her parents-in-law about the abuse, feeling she still had to get to know these new members of the family. She explained her reasons by saying:

It was hard to report that there was something like this because it was going to be said 'she is coming to *'kuhota*⁴' and she is already complaining.

Initially she had fears about joining this family but later discovered that they welcomed her as their daughter-in-law. She experienced them as being very kind to her which she found hard to believe, "... even in my own family, I never got to be loved that much". Ironically however, it seems that this warm reception by her parents-in-law was one of the reasons that contributed to her determination to endure the abuse. She was 'to stay for their sake'. This warm reception by her in-laws however also gave her the courage to report to them whenever there was an incident of violence. Even when Nosidima was in the township, her parents-in-law would do what was in their power to address the problem, but could never stop the abuse. She recalled an incident when her father-in-law came all the way to Cape Town to address the problem. In this meeting her husband said in front of his father, how he wished to kill her, thereafter sending his father back home. It was clear that her husband was not going to stop abusing her even when his father intervened. Regardless of this she stayed.

Seeking help outside the family.

Nosidima described herself as being secretive about her family problems. This was clearly part of how she viewed the role of a woman in a marriage:

As I see it, the role of a woman in marriage is to put out the fire when it is burning. When you have put it out, you take your apron and cover all those things so that they are not seen by the whole world.

However, her attempts to hide their marital problems were defeated by her husband's tendency to beat her in the streets or shout insults outside the house:

Can you see that I was covering that and he has exposed himself. Now the covering I am talking about, he is taking it out and the people heard.

Though she did not initially ask for their help, the neighbors knew about the abuse and often intervened by calling the couple together and talking to them. This however had no effect on her husband's behavior.

⁴ Ukuhota is an introductory process of a bride to her in-laws' household, where she is expected to stay for a while with this family. She gets to know the family members and the family customs in the process.

She reported being embarrassed when her husband beat her in the streets with the community residents watching and passing by:

Everyone was passing by, and in the township people can say 'shame' but stand far away...

It seems that she also expected the community to do something to help her, but they did not, possibly afraid of interfering in matters between married people.

Several times she was beaten severely and needed medical attention. Though she would go to the clinic, she would not reveal the cause of the injuries and would lie about it:

When I go to the clinic for this blue body, I would not say it's him. I was hiding it because I loved him and I have that hope that he is going to come right.

She did not appear to see the medical services as a potential source for helping to stop the abuse. It appears that part of her reason for not telling the truth was that she did not want to lose the love of her husband, and hoped that he would change. In retrospect, however, she said that if she would be asked directly and she had knowledge about her rights, she would have reported it. It seems that her lack of knowledge about how she should be treated as a wife also influenced her to keep silent about the abusive marriage and not seek help.

As the abuse escalated, with her husband kicking her out of the house, she approached community structures, like the street committee, who tried to reason with him but were not successful. Then she explored the possibility of getting help from the taxi association. It seems that taxi organisations are seen as powerful structures in the township and are used as sources of support during various disputes in this community. It appears she was looking for a structure that could be more powerful than her husband and would be able to make him stop abusing her. Though the meeting with the taxi association was in her favor, her husband however did not stop his threats.

Nosidima was advised by women in the community to ask for help in the justice system. She did and she got a court protection order in 1999, after 11 years of

enduring physical abuse from her husband. However, it seems that even this did not stop him from beating her. She said, "It did not get better, but I did not want to reveal this because there is this position of 'being a wife'". It seems that even after getting a protection order for Nosidima, the social and cultural demands of being a wife were more powerful than the law. She did not report incidents of abuse that happened following the receipt of interdict until her life was finally threatened. At this point she went back to the police and laid a charge:

I was blue, no he did not beat me on the face. When they asked where did he beat me, I thought it's better to pull up my dresses so they can see I'm like this.

Nosidima thought that she had to have proof of her injuries in order to be taken seriously. Her husband was then arrested. He was apparently bitter about this, he left her and continued to threaten to evict her from his house or burn the shack with her in it. She told of the fear she lived in when she first heard these threats:

I tried to tell the community members that I have a problem, he was going to burn the house with me that night ... I tell you, I slept alone in the house that night, my children did not even want to listen, they slept at the neighbor's house ... I stayed for days with the sense that I might be dead by the end of the week, so he can have the house'.

Despite these deadly threats, Nosidima was still determined to stay in the house.

Summary.

Nosidima was beaten from the first year of her marriage, but could not leave because she felt pressured by the demands of being a 'new' wife. For her it would be a disgrace to fail in her role at the beginning. Initially she did not want to reveal the abuse to her mother until her mother noticed and commented on the signs of distress. Her mother encouraged her to endure and not to leave her marriage. The abuse continued but 'being called a wife', prevented her from reporting it. She initially reported it to her husband's relatives in the township, but they failed to stop him from abusing her. When she was introduced to his parents in the villages she received a very warm welcome, and found it easy to report the abuse to them. This seems to have influenced her decision to stay in this abusive marriage, 'for her parents-in-law's sake'. The abuse increased in intensity, attracting the attention of her neighbors despite her attempts to hide it. She experienced embarrassment when he hit her on the

streets with community members passing by, who did not offer any help. This led her to ultimately seek legal help through an interdict. The interdict however did not stop him from abusing her emotionally, insulting her, threatening to burn her with the house and trying to kick her out of 'his shack'. She also approached community leaders, the street committee and the taxi organisation for help but they were also unable to stop the abuse.

CASE STUDY SEVEN.

Nobantu is a 42 year-old Xhosa-speaking woman. She is married and has two children. Her son is 13 years old and her daughter is four years old. She has been married for 18 years, the first six years was according to customary law, and then they entered into a civil marriage. Her husband abused her emotionally and physically for most of their married life.

Recognition of abuse.

Nobantu reported that as a makoti, she experienced economic abuse, while she lived with her mother-in-law in her household in the rural areas. Her husband lived and worked in the township. He deprived her of financial support and also did not allow her to earn money. At the time she could not bring herself to complain to his mother. However, she hoped that her mother-in-law would notice that she was struggling and talk to her son. She was disappointed. It seems that the uncertainties of what to expect as a makoti made her unassertive and she did not directly seek help for this abuse, instead she joined her husband in the township. She expected that things would be better when she lived with her husband but instead the abuse escalated. The economic abuse went further to include constant criticisms and insults, verbal abuse and physical abuse. Her husband often kicked her out of the house and she would sleep either at neighbors' houses or sneak into the children's bedroom. In her opinion, the abuse became worse during her pregnancy with her first baby, as her husband denied paternity and kicked her out of the house. She hoped that it was a passing difficulty, however this did not stop.

Seeking help in the family.

Nobantu reported that she was initially reluctant to seek help from her husband's family because of the disappointment she had experienced with her mother-in-law

earlier in her marriage. Instead when her husband kicked her out of the house, she went to stay with her own family. This became a pattern where she often went to her family for emotional and financial help. She recalled how she was eventually forced to report the continuous physical abuse to her mother-in-law only when her husband chased her with a knife, while they were visiting her. She remembered how she told her mother-in-law about the ongoing abuse:

You see mother, it is not only here, even in Cape Town he does the same. But I thought he was going to have respect, at least while we are here.

She said that her mother-in-law was horrified by this incident and suggested that she lay a charge. Nobantu hoped that his mother would call them to a meeting and talk to them. She, however, did not agree when her mother-in-law advised her to lay a charge. Despite the mother-in-law's permission to reach out for police help, Nobantu still wanted to believe the best of her husband as she said, "I am the one who was postponing it, I thought he was going to change". She still insisted that her mother-in-law and his relatives should talk to them as couple so that he could tell them where she had gone wrong:

What I want is that he must say what his problem is. Does he still want me as his wife or has he found someone better than me. It would be better if he says so.

Nobantu found it hard to accept that there was a criminal element in her husband's behavior. Instead she felt that her in-laws had failed her by not intervening themselves. She did not follow her mother-in-law's advice to seek further help, instead she turned to her own family.

Nobantu said that she would go to her family when she fell pregnant, as these were the periods during which the abuse became worse and intolerable. She said that she hoped that her family would ask her husband what it was that she 'was not doing right' and lost self-confidence in being a 'good wife' to her husband. Her husband often did not bother to try to find her, as a husband is traditionally expected to do when a wife runs away. Though not fetching her suggested that her husband did not value her, Nobantu would still return to her husband. According to her, the peace in her marriage would last for less than three months after her return before he started abusing her again. She endured until she could not take it any longer. She recalled how she asked for help from her family:

I went to my father, he's my uncle but we call him father. I arrived and told him that I can't take it anymore. I came to stay home for two years and when my husband came to fetch me, you said I must go with him, if I have forgiven him and he has forgiven me. I listened to you, now what do I do because this man does not stop his behavior.

Although in this instance she had left her husband for two years, it seemed that she had not made a decision to leave the marriage. Rather she wanted the abuse to stop. When it did not stop she again turned to her 'father' for advice asking:

I asked my father 'what must I do, must I leave?...but I can't leave my things, I can't. My father said that the only thing he could think of was for me to lay a charge against him, as he does not stop what he is doing.

Once again, Nobantu was advised by her family of origin to seek police help, as her mother-in-law had advised, but she did not take the advice. It seemed that she believed that involving the police would mean the end of her marriage. She stayed and the abuse continued.

Nobantu reported their finances were always a problematic issue in her marriage as her husband had total control of the money. Part of her reasons for staying in her marriage seemed to be her financial dependence on her husband. She reported that she and the children would totally depend on her family for financial support while they lived with them. Although on one occasion she found work to support her newborn, she earned so little and decided to return because she "was not going to raise this baby alone as if she does not have a father".

Seeking help outside the family.

Although initially reluctant to seek help outside the family, Nobantu reported that she consulted a number of counselling agencies over the years, beginning in 1989. She looked for an outsider who could tell her what she could do to make things right between her and her husband. None of these attempts to get help were able to stop the abuse completely. She reported even taking the children with her to a social work agency, 'so they would tell how life was like at home'. Her husband's reaction to such strategies would often be more anger, making his behavior worse. Because of his reaction she stopped going to formal agencies for help.

Nobantu described how she began to make use of neighbors as her sources of support for several years. They gave her emotional support when she was in distress, as well as food and a place to sleep whenever her husband kicked her out of the house at night. She most often got support from the women in the area. Nobantu recalled and described an incident when the community members, including men, showed their disapproval of her husband beating her and chasing her in the streets. This time she had not asked for help but they reacted when they witnessed the incident:

The neighbors were watching this, as he was chasing me ... Two men who were passing by shouted saying 'No man, that ended a long time ago – chasing your wife in the streets. If you want to fight come and fight with us, leave the woman alone. He turned back mumbling...

This reaction by community members was effective in stopping the abuse only temporarily.

Because the people she turned to seemed unable to stop the abuse, she eventually went to her husband's work colleague for help during one of his episodes of violence. She hoped that another man – in particular, his work colleague - would be able to talk sense into him. She recalled the day she approached this man:

It was at night, I went to this man's house, they work together. I said, 'tata, please go to that man [her husband], I don't know what is going on. Please ask him what his problem is, what have I done to him.

His colleague talked to her husband but this did not stop the abuse. When he beat her again, the colleague's wife offered to accompany her to the police.

Reaching current help seeking decision.

As Nobantu narrated her experience, there were many events that could have been turning points for her. She moved between her family, the community and counselling agencies at times searching for help which she could not really find. In all these sources she was looking for an answer to the question 'what wrong have I done to my husband?' She wanted to make the marriage work and was economically dependent on her husband. Therefore, she was unable to consider leaving the marriage permanently. In her case, a neighbor, whom she ran to for help several times had to assist her to apply for an interdict. Even when she made a decision to apply for an interdict, she again contacted her husband's family and informed them of her

decision. It seems that this time she was ready to lay a charge. However, at the time of the interview she reported that she still had financial constraints. She did not have the required amount of money to finish the process.

Summary.

The abuse began with economic abuse during the first year of Nobantu's marriage when she lived with her mother-in-law. Although she did not ask for her mother-in-law's help, she expected her to intervene. When she did not intervene, Nobantu went to live with her husband in the township and hoped that this was going to solve their problems. She was however disappointed when the abuse escalated and involved constant criticisms, physical violence and eviction from the house. When she finally told her mother-in-law, she hoped that she would talk to them but was disappointed when mother-in-law advised her to lay a charge. She left her husband and stayed with her own family for two years but eventually agreed to return. Again, his abusive behavior did not change and her father also advised her to lay a charge. Though she was initially reluctant to seek help outside the family, she ultimately made several attempts to get advice from counselling agencies, starting from 1989. Her husband reacted with increased abuse. She then stopped using formal sources and coped with the continuing abuse by seeking help from her family and neighbors in times of crises. Neighbors were always there to offer help in times of crisis, like offering her food and a place to sleep at night. Her current attempt to seek help had been on the suggestion of a neighbor.

CASE STUDY EIGHT.

Nomilile is a 33-year-old Xhosa-speaking woman, married with three children. She is a domestic worker and lives with her husband and children in the township. They have been married for 12 years. Nomilile reported that her husband started by emotionally abusing her for many years. It was later on in the marriage that she was in physical danger and sought help from the women's counselling service.

Recognition of abuse.

Nomilile reported that her husband's abusive behavior began even before they were married, but then she did not recognise it as abuse. His behavior ranged from verbal insults and constant criticisms. He also belittled her, which seemed to erode her sense

of self-worth. He often arrived home to shout and push the children around, sometimes switching off the electricity and making them stay in darkness. In spite of these experiences, Nomilile excused her husband's behavior because there was initially no overt physical violence involved, though he would occasionally threaten her with weapons. However she said, "it is like he is beating us because our hearts are sore". In addition, he abused her only when under the influence of alcohol, which made her think that the alcohol and not her husband was to blame. She also cited love and being married to him as reasons for her inability to recognise the abuse. In Nomilile's opinion he was bringing money home and "home was home when he is not drunk".

She knew him as being rude whenever he was drunk and "that was his nature". She watched the abuse gradually increasing. Even though she was unhappy about his treatment of her, her husband did not think of his behavior as problematic, "because she had no bruises to show as physical evidence of abuse". Her husband's denial of the abuse caused her to be unsure of the definition of abuse. Additionally, her husband was only emotionally abusive during weekends, but was a good husband and father during the week.

Seeking help in the family.

Nomilile described her experiences of seeking help whenever she was distressed by her husband's abusive behavior. She and her husband lived in a township far from her parents-in-law, who would usually have been the first to be consulted for help.

Nomilile, instead, made use of her husband's relatives who became her support system in the township. She said that she dealt with the abuse by calling elder people and they would talk to her husband. She described them as supportive as they would respond to her calls:

I would call his brother and his wife and other relatives that live here. They all know how he is when drunk ... sometimes they would involve other relatives, so all the relatives know about him.

A series of meetings between him and his relatives were held and he would apologise to them, stating that he was drunk when the incident happened. These meetings, however, did not come up with a long-term solution to the abuse. She described how he reacted to these meetings. "He waits for them to leave and when drunk he says that they are not his fathers, he won't listen to them. You see it's like playing games".

Nomilile recalled that her mother-in-law had visited Cape Town from the rural areas when one of the incidents happened. It was after she had heard about the help offered by the women's organisation. She then consulted her mother-in-law, to get her approval for seeking help outside the family. According to Nomilile, this is what her mother-in-law said:

No, don't lay a charge against my child, if you have a problem you can wait until you return to the rural areas where this can be discussed. Don't take him to the officials, cause the officials won't do anything for you.

This statement seemed for Nomilile, to communicate that this was not a serious issue, it could wait until they returned to the villages, which usually happened once a year, during the December holidays. This discouraged Nomilile from getting help outside the family. Although she was aware that talking to the family was not successful in bringing about change, she continued to limit her help seeking within the family.

Nomilile reported that she did not get help even when she consulted the elders in rural areas. She remembered that one year she left her husband and went to the rural areas.

He however, followed and the issue of abuse was taken to the elders:

he followed us as he usually does when we leave, to fetch us. When he got there, this was discussed and discussed and they found that 'no, go back to him' and I went back.

The outcomes of the discussions were in favor of the husband and a decision was reached that she was to stay with him. She stayed in the marriage and the abuse continued.

Nomilile also often sought help from her uncle, who was a father figure in her own family. When she had had enough of the abuse, she would leave her husband but he would follow her to her uncle to ask for apology for his behavior 'because he was drunk'. Her uncle would decide that she should return to her husband. The statement shows her frustration with the system:

You see, old people have got this thing that if he did not beat you ... they don't see any problem. So, my uncle would say, 'my niece, he did not hit you, it's just a problem of alcohol like anybody else.

It appears that even when she ran to her own relatives, hoping for protection, the emotional abuse she suffered was not taken seriously.

Seeking help outside the family.

Nomilile did not involve neighbors in dealing with the abuse. She preferred to keep it as a family matter, reporting that she was ashamed to think that the neighbors were aware of their domestic problems. She believed that she and her husband gave the impression of being a 'stable' couple and she was reluctant for the truth to be revealed. Sometimes though, she felt the neighbors knew what was really happening and wondering why she tried to keep up the façade, "it bothers me, I sometimes think they see it as my stupidity ... it is like people are wondering why I put up with this". Despite this, she did not reveal her marital problems to the neighbors and seek help.

She, however, said that she talked to some women who had also experienced violence in their homes. These were women she met at work who she felt able to share her experiences with because they had undergone similar kinds of abuse. It also seems that she was able to talk to these women because they lived outside her community and that they were unlikely to embarrass her by telling neighbors. She talked to them about the idea of moving out, but they discouraged her from this. She then doubted the viability of this action. She feared that she would be blamed for anything that may happen to her children or to him. It seems that the commitment she had in this marriage operated against her leaving because she felt personally responsible for the wellbeing of her family.

Reaching current help seeking decision.

Nomilile gave a number of reasons why she ultimately sought help from the women's counselling centre. Firstly she realised that the abuse did not come to an end. "This is why I finally got out for help, it is clear that there will never be a change until I die". Nomilile said that she realised that following the traditional ways of resolving her family conflicts, by consulting the family for help, had not been successful. Secondly she was also concerned about the effect that the unhealthy domestic situation had had on their children. Though she reported that the abuse was getting worse daily, it became clear that she was shocked into action when he beat her with sharp objects. This how she described the incident:

As he was throwing it [the weapon] to me, it hit the wall... So, I think this is what made me to go for help, I would not know what he would do next... Maybe tomorrow he will just kill me, I don't know.

Immediately after this incident she went to the counselling centre for advice. It appears that a threat to her safety was a turning point for her.

Nomilile knew what she wanted when she went for help. She was not keen on the idea of a protection order and said that this was no solution to her problems:

I want him to be punished, but not by the police. I don't like having police in my house.

She expressed many concerns about the idea of the protection order because she had difficulty perceiving her husband's abusive behavior as a crime. As the people around her were influencing her perception, it was not surprising that she saw him as not deserving such harsh treatment. Additionally, she had fears of being accused of having an affair with the police, and being blamed by her husband's family for having done something wrong. She therefore did not apply for the protection order.

For her the struggle still continues as she has to consider more and more challenges that make it difficult to reach a decision as to whether to stay in the relationship and hope for change or to leave the abusive relationship. On the other hand she considered moving out and leaving him. She believed that her staying with him made him continue his abusive behavior, and that moving out would expose him for the abuser that he was. However, she was faced with a number of concerns like her husband going after them, and how safe she would be if she lived in a squatter camp with no man to protect them.

Summary.

Nomilile reported that her husband emotionally abused her and the children whenever he was drunk. She initially excused her husband's behavior as the result of alcohol, also because she still loved him. She, however, would be distressed and seek help from her husband's relatives. A series of meetings that were held by his relatives did not bring solution to this problem. She then consulted her mother-in-law about seeking help outside the family who disapproved of this idea and instead referred her to the elder people in rural areas. When she ultimately sought help from the elders

people, it was decided that she should return and stay with her husband. Even when Nomilile sought help from her own relatives, emotional abuse was not taken seriously and she was expected to stay with her husband 'because he did not hit her'. This made her reluctant to reveal to her neighbours, although she felt that they already knew about their domestic situation. She was only able to talk to women who lived outside her community, who would also share their own experiences of abuse and they discouraged her from leaving the marriage. When her husband hit her with a sharp object, Nomilile realised that her life was in danger and went to the women's centre for an advice. She, however, was not keen to apply for a court interdict, as it was apparently suggested. She felt that her husband's behavior was not a crime. By the time she was interviewed she still hoped to get somebody who would be able to get through to her husband and make him stop the abuse.

The next chapter will give a discussion of the case studies by exploring the themes that emerge from the women's narratives.

CHAPTER FIVE.

DISCUSSION.

5.1 Introduction.

This chapter attempts to explore significant themes emerging from the participants' stories. In spite of the differences between the women's personal experiences, their narratives allowed similarities in the way they went about seeking help to be identified. The research material highlighted the complex nature of the women's help seeking processes and the significance of their context in influencing this. Several factors seem to have influenced the women's reactions to the abuse. These can be understood as either constraining or triggering them to seek help outside their families.

This discussion will adopt a process perspective and trace the different stages of these women's help seeking processes. It will begin with their attempts to deal with abuse as isolated individuals, then moving on to show how they sought help within and outside of the family, until they reached a turning point, where they decided to get formal help. Although each woman's actions are unique, they are nevertheless presented and discussed in the following categories:

- Recognising and defining the abuse.
- Seeking help in the family.
- Seeking help outside the family.
- Economic constraints to help seeking.
- The turning point.

These factors are artificially separated from one another here, but need to be understood as influencing each other.

It should also be noted that at the time of the interviews all the women interviewed, with the exception of one, were still in relationships with the abusive husbands whom they sought help against and that the abuse was still ongoing, despite their attempts to stop it. Their endurance of long histories of abuse and the fact that they were still in these relationships raises a familiar question, '*why do they stay?*' A lot of literature

attempts to answer this question (de Sousa, 1991; Gelles, 1986; Kemp, 1998; Motsei, 1993), it is hoped that the material in this study will expand this body of knowledge. However, the study itself is focused around the question of '*what do women actually do in response to the abuse?*' As the case studies presented in the previous chapter suggest, leaving their marriages was, in most cases, an option they could not contemplate.

5.2 Recognising the abuse.

The onus is on the abused woman to identify her situation as dangerous rather than on others to enquire about it. George (1999) proposes that it is the woman's own acknowledgement of the problem of abuse that facilitates her help seeking. The women's stories suggested that they initially failed to report the abuse to anyone and that some women seemed reluctant to overtly define their abusive situations. This was partly because they claimed to still love their husbands and clung to the hope that their husbands would change.

The narratives, however, suggest that what appeared to be passiveness was actually a process of defining their situation and recognising that what was happening to them was indeed abuse. Lempert (1996) has made a similar claim that the initial silence can be viewed analytically as the abused women's internal act of defining their situations. The discomfort a woman suffers and the way she defines this experience is based on a subjective individual perception and interpretation. As Lee (1996) has noted, such a definition usually reflects the person's cultural values, beliefs and expectations. Helman (2000) asserts that the meaning attached to an experience is culturally determined and that this is often more important than the pain itself. For African married women, the definition of their situation is complex as it involves the uncertainty of how to behave with the new family, and the new family's expectations of how a newly wed woman should behave. As these women did not report the abuse initially or receive help with interpreting it from people outside their relationships, they were forced to remain with their own explanations and internally ascribed meanings.

However, they may have experienced difficulty in trusting their own opinions, especially where these differed from the ones around them. The living arrangement of

the newly wed couple, which is often to continue living in the husband's parents' household or at least to accept their authority, seems to relegate them to the same status as children. Under these conditions it may have been that the women felt even less certain of their own interpretations of their experiences and unable to make important decisions about their lives.

Although they often did not say it directly, the women's stories sometimes suggested that they felt that they were being blamed by others and also blamed themselves because they were abused. In consequence, they then chose not to reveal the violence. The ability to disclose and therefore to seek help depends, in part, on the extent to which the survivor blames herself and suffers guilt about having been abused (Washkansky, 2000; Arendse, 1998). Internalised blame is suggested by these authors as being one of the constraints in seeking help. This appears to be the phase in which, in many of the narratives, the women reported that they were silent about the abuse and were wishing that somebody would define the way they were treated as being abusive and hopefully rescue them.

In addition to doubts about their definition of their situations, it also appeared that the women might have been reluctant to acknowledge the abuse to themselves. Denial has also been suggested as being one of the reasons why women stay in abusive relationship for years before seeking help (Arendse, 1998). In this study, denial occurred when some women found other reasons for their husbands' behavior as they tried to define their situations. They denied that their husbands were abusive and blamed external factors, like alcohol, absolving their husbands from all responsibility. The abuse tended to be ignored and to be seen as being a direct result of the alcohol. Only one woman in this study reported that her husband did not drink alcohol, the rest associated the abusive incidents with their husbands' drunken episodes for a while before going to seek help. It became clear that they blamed alcohol, and were reluctant to blame their husbands.

For the women who had experienced more emotional abuse and less physical abuse it was hard to acknowledge the behavior as being abusive. This prevented them initially from seeking help. Additionally, their husbands' denying that they were abusive also constrained the women from confidently defining it as a problem worth seeking help

for. Instead they tried to create stability, as is traditionally expected from wives (Lempert, 1996), until the husband became violent. Taylor & Steward, (cited in Arendse, 1998) maintain that denial may be related to the fear of the woman admitting even to herself that her life is in danger.

It seems that the women were further silenced by threats from their husbands, and these certainly delayed their initial active help seeking. Initially they adapted their behavior in order to survive the situations they were in while they were involved in an internal process of constructing their own explanations of the incidents. In addition to these barriers that prevented the women from seeking help, the African women in this study faced additional barriers pertaining to their cultural values which restrict their independent choices and decision making.

Even though these women would seem to be passively staying in abusive marriages from an outsider's perspective, their narratives suggest that they were in fact seeking help from a variety of informal sources. This appears to support Gelles and Strauss's (1979) argument that a typically abused wife is hardly passive. This argument also challenges the application of the construct of 'learned helplessness' to battered women. As Marano (1993) claims, the stereotype that women who remain in relationships are fragile, passive, docile and self-deprecating does not do justice to their attempts to get help. Lempert (1996) argues that their passivity is only viewed as such from the outside, whereas it is an active strategy. It seems that the women engaged in an internal process of assessment in which they tried to determine whether the acts were actually abusive and what were the appropriate ways to respond to these.

In summary, the women in my study were not just passive victims of abuse. The fact that they were not seen as actively seeking help does not mean that their wills were broken or that they had not been struggling. The narratives revealed that they were initially caught up in defining their situation and recognising its abusive nature. The following sections show their persistent help seeking attempts despite the repeated failures by the systems they approached.

5.3 Seeking help in the family.

5.3.1 The family-in-law.

Of the eight women interviewed, four women reported that they hoped that others, especially their parents-in-law would intervene without the women having to directly ask for help. The situation that these women were in, that is being newly weds, prevented them from going to the in-laws for help. They often hoped that the abuse would be noted by significant elders without them having to report it first. They seemed to be caught between loyalty to their new families and the fantasies of being rescued. As collective values often influence the Africans' decision making, it seems that they feared being alienated from the families should independent decisions about the abuse be made.

The interviews suggested that when the women defined their husbands' behaviors as abusive and no longer had fantasies about being rescued, the husbands' families were the first to be approached for help. This is consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Artz, 1998; Hermans, 1999), where it was found that the route traditionally taken by a married African woman who had problems with her husband had to go to her mother-in-law first. Similar to Hermans' (1999) findings, it seems that this approach allows the matter to be kept within the family first, and it is only when the immediate family members fail to address the woman's problem that other members of the extended family, like aunts and uncles, become involved. These expectations and obligations towards the husband's family reflect the traditional cultural belief that a woman is 'married by' the husband's whole family as she is referred to as '*our wife*' (Armstrong, 1998).

The view of the family as a private unit in Western ideology encourages the idea that battering should be seen as individual problem (Maconachie et al., 1993). This, of course, carries its own difficulties. On the other hand, the African collective nature sees abuse as a bigger family matter (Chikanda, 1992; Loubser, 1999) which may make it harder for women to reach out for outside help without consulting the family. The women are obliged to preserve not only their individual interests but also the collective interests of 'the family' into which they are married, if they are to get support of the kin.

The women, who reported seeking help from their husband's family, expected them to be effective in stopping the abuse because of the position of authority that the parents have in the families. However, they often experienced being disappointed when these family members failed to address or stop the abuse. Although all the women I interviewed lived in the township, away from the parents-in-law who lived in the rural areas, their narratives revealed that they too adhered to this cultural value of being 'married by' the husbands' families and were therefore determined to keep the matter within the extended family. In instances where the in-laws were in the rural areas, the nearest relatives or kin were their main sources of support and were called in to deal with the reported abuse. It seems that many saw the action of seeking help outside the family as being equivalent to ending the marriage, which they were reluctant to do.

The narratives however, revealed that the counselling within the family was often not seen by the women as effective in solving their problems. The women suggested that their mothers-in-law were often reluctant to find their sons in the wrong. In response to their requests for help, the women sometimes faced what they experienced as further victimisation and degradation, as Artz (1998), has noted. This suggests how biased the family could be in resolving disputes, particularly in favor of their family members, the abusers. Harris and Dewdney (1994) warn that the members of the informal network are not always reliable sources of help, some may side with the man against the woman (particularly members of his family of origin). This may have been part of the reason why many of the interventions by the families failed.

From the women's descriptions it appeared that the primary goal of these interventions seemed to have been family reconciliation and sometimes did not, from the women's perspective, perceive their rights and interests as values worth preserving. Instead, the manner in which the relatives tried to reconcile the couple often demonstrated a strong tendency to hold the women accountable for the welfare of their husbands and children. Ironically, when they received sympathetic responses and care from the husbands' relatives this kept the women going, further hindering them from reaching out for 'outside' help even when the relatives' attempts were ineffective in stopping the abuse.

When the repeated attempts by relatives in the township to stop the abuse failed, the couple would even be referred to the rural areas for resolution of their disputes and intervention in the abuse. This may be based on a belief that the elder and wiser family members in the rural areas would be able to stop the abuse. These meetings of the 'higher family courts' could often only happen several months after the incidents of abuse and therefore could not address the emergencies of violence in the family. It is also possible that people involved in these discussions could be men who may also adhere to the belief that wives are husbands' property and they therefore have the right to discipline them. It is therefore not surprising that the outcome of those attempts would be in favor of the man, in this patriarchal system. The women's narratives reflected the strong belief in the authority of the elders and the importance of having couples living in the townships maintain the links with the kinship in rural areas. Inevitably, the women's faith in this system prolonged their stay in the abusive marriages when they submitted to the elders' decisions.

Many African societies are known to be patriarchal (Chikanda, 1992). According to Chikanda, the women are rendered peripheral and have little say in what happens in their lives. The men take responsibility for decision-making and resolution in this patriarchal family structure, and also do not allow the couple to have complete independence and autonomy. In these women's stories, there may be acknowledgement of the woman's situation of being abused but nothing seemed to be done to stop the violence, instead she has to return to her husband and the cycle continues. In contrast to Swartz's (1998) suggestion, that the popular sector may advise the person in distress for further help, however, these family members often did not refer the women for further help. Instead they often prevented them from getting outside help for the abuse. It is possible that these family members or kin did not want them to get professional help because they were anxious about the stigma of wife beating. It seems that shaming the family was defined as a problem and that the individual's suffering was of secondary importance to the family name (Lee, 1996).

For two of the women in this study, their attempts to report to the husband's relatives did not always receive attention. In some instances the extended families failed to respond to the women's complaints. The women who experienced this, felt undervalued by the family and they eventually seem to have stopped consulting them

and seeking their intervention. It also seems that being ignored by the relatives influenced their perception of the seriousness of their problems and fed into doubts about the legitimacy of their complaints. In summary, the women first sought help from their in-laws and they persisted despite repeated failure by these family members to stop the abuse.

5.3.2 The women's family of origin.

A harder decision for the women to make was whether to involve their own families. Some did run to their families when they were in physical danger. However, the women told of having difficulty revealing their experiences of physical abuse, even to their mothers. When they were with their own mothers, they would often suffer in silence, not opening up about the abuse until the mothers noticed the signs of distress. There are a number of possible reasons for their reluctance to reveal the abuse to their own families. Firstly, it seems possible that some did not tell because of the hope that their husbands would change. It seemed they wanted to protect their husbands from the prejudice of their families. Secondly, it seems that they were ashamed to admit to having failed as a wife. According to Lempert (1996), choosing not to tell means that their husband's actions are rendered invisible to others. Lempert sees this maintenance of invisibility as a face-saving strategy and a way in which abused women claim their sense of self. Thirdly, the women seemed to feel the need to be loyal to their husbands and their husband's family. Fourthly, women are socialised into succumbing to sexual, physical and mental abuse without complaints (Chikanda 1992). Therefore, running away from an abusive relationship is seen as a weakness in the woman and also in her family of origin.

When the women ultimately told of the abuse they suffered, their families sympathised with them but could not help them in anyway other than letting them confide in them and supporting them. This coincides with Artz's (1998) conception of the role of the women's family. Maconachie et al. (1993) maintain that in African customary law, the marriage is seen as a social and economic alliance between two families and that wives are the links between the two families. It therefore is a huge responsibility for a woman to maintain the link and it is important to use the established procedure, which ensures the continued connection between the two families. The family is the social institution that is expected to advocate for it's

member but such experiences suggest the dilemma they find themselves in concerning this issue. Family members, therefore, were reported to both support and constrain the women in abusive marriages, as Armstrong (1998), has also suggested.

5.3.3 Leaving the husband as a help seeking strategy.

Similarly to what literature suggests (Kazarian & Kazarian, 1998; Maconachie et al., 1993), the women in this study followed a pattern of leaving their husbands and returning repeatedly. However, this pattern was complicated by cultural factors. When these women spoke of leaving their husbands, it had a different meaning to permanently ending the marriages. Instead they viewed it as a temporary arrangement. The women did not want to end their marriages, they wanted help to stop the abuse. After having been unsuccessful in getting help from their husbands' families, some of the women resorted to the Xhosa traditional use of their families as refuge or tribunal (Van der Vliet, 1991). It appeared to be one of the women's help seeking behaviors, and it differed from leaving the marriage in that they left for short periods, from a day to a number of months. The women were not going into hiding, instead they stayed with their families of origin, who were known to the abusers. The narratives suggested that this behavior was close to the Xhosa custom of *ukutheleka*, in which the women could return to their families and the husbands would have to apologise formally and even pay more cattle for the wives to return to their marital homes (Van der Vliet, 1991). Through this the women hoped for a change in their husbands' behavior, as well as to communicate to their relatives their need for protection. However, it seems that this strategy was not serving the traditional dual purpose, as suggested in the literature. Instead, it appeared to serve only the women's male family members' interests, that of getting more 'cattle'. The women's interests of demanding better treatment in the marriage, in this instance, stopping the abuse, was often ignored. As Armstrong (1998) argues the custom of apologising acknowledges the unacceptability of the violence but at the same time also makes it hard for the woman to complain about it again, if the man has apologised. In general this strategy, however, did not seem to stop the abuse.

While the literature suggests that women who leave the relationships are forced to return, citing co-dependence as the factor (George, 1999), cultural pressures is an additional factor for Xhosa women. Several women reported being *told* by the elders

of their families to return to their husbands. Interestingly, the members of their families also did not refer the women for professional help, despite their failed attempts to help in the situations.

In several research studies, the use of shelters for abused women was another option when women decided to leave their husbands (Arendse, 1998; George, 1999; Maconachie et al., 1993; Pahl, 1985; Shir, 1999;). Shelters were not referred to by any of the participants in their interviews and it is possible that they were not aware of their existence. The reason for this may be because of the history of the non-existence of such facilities for African women. Instead, the women seemed to be exhausting the support from the family and friends, which is culturally sanctioned to some extent, before they could consider other institutions.

In summary, the women made use of their own families for sanctuary more than any other resource. They did not leave permanently, but with the expectation that the husband would follow and fetch them, as is traditionally expected. They followed this traditional way of seeking help, exhausting the possibilities within their families before they moved further, looking for help. In this section it emerged that the families control marriages, thus serving as a factor that restricts women from reaching outside for help. Armstrong's Zimbabwe study sums up the power that the extended family has in this regard, which seems to be supported by this study:

A woman who might act powerfully in her job, who may have the courage to stand up for herself in social situations, may still feel powerless when it comes to deciding to leave the marriage because this is a decision in which the whole extended family has a say (Armstrong, 1998, p. 53).

5.3.4 The significance of marriage.

The narratives suggested the importance that the women ascribed to their married status as the reason for their reluctance to seek help. Most of the women were determined to stay married. Even when it seemed that no relationship existed between them as a couple. They simply wanted the abuse to stop. Only two women reported considering getting a divorce, though they were still having difficulty reaching that decision at the time. This is consistent with Armstrong's (1998) finding that some

women remain married in name only, while they lack emotional and material benefits that most women expect from the marriage.

The women also indirectly referred to a complicated relationship between marriage by civil rites and customary union. Three of the women in the study, who were married according to customary law and did not have a civil marriage, reported that they demanded a civil marriage as another attempt to stop the abuse. They seemed to attribute the abuse to the fact that they did not possess a marriage certificate. They seemed to believe that a marriage certificate would bring stability into their marriages and eventually stop the abuse. They, however, found that the abuse did not stop even when they had a marriage certificate. However, the certificate seemed to offer them a sense of belonging and written proof of being a wife. It may be that civil marriages were state sanctioned, therefore desirable rather than customary unions which were previously denied recognition. Although the customary union is now partially recognised by South African law (Human Rights Watch, 1995), it is possible that some women still believe that they might not get protection if a certificate is unavailable. It seems they saw it as a necessity in order to approach formal services for help and its absence prevented them from seeking this help.

The women reported additional pressures on the African woman to stay in an abusive marriage. One of the women described the stigma attached to leaving the marriage and being called names by peers. At some level, this seems to have discouraged them from exercising the option of leaving the marriage permanently as returning home is not socially condoned.

This section revealed that the norms surrounding marriage and the status of being married constrained them from seeking help. It was important to these women to remain married and they were determined to deal with the abuse while in the marriage rather than considering leaving the relationship. Some reported demanding civil marriages despite the abuse they had already experienced.

5.4 Seeking help outside the family.

5.4.1 Community members as sources of help.

Some women reported that they used people in their community as sources of help once the family had failed them. However, three women did not readily make use of the support from the neighbors from the beginning, as it was embarrassing for them to disclose marital problems to people outside the family. For these women, it was only when there were severe beatings that the neighbors sometimes got involved and offered help during a crisis. But once neighbors knew, it seemed that it became easier for the women to ask them for assistance, whether for protection when in danger or for other practical assistance related to the abuse.

The women experienced mixed responses when they approached neighbors and other residents in their community for help. The support given by some neighbors suggested that wife beating was unacceptable to the community members. In some cases they reported that the men in the neighborhood intervened, sometimes challenging the husband to fight them instead of beating the powerless wives. This response by the neighbors seemed to make it easier for the women to ask for their help, possibly because they had shown their sympathy and did not seem to blame them. In many cases where the community intervened, however, the intervention was often directed towards pacifying the abuser rather than helping the woman. It might be expected that these concerned neighbors would suggest that the women visit professionals for assistance as an appropriate resolution of the problem as well as taking the burden off their shoulders. However this did not appear to be the case in most of the stories. Only two women reported that the neighbors suggested that they seek professional help.

Few women reported experiences where community members seemed reluctant to intervene in times of urgent need for help. This apathy possibly emerged from the perception that the couples were married and the man had paid lobola, as one of the women suggested. The cultural significance of lobola was denying them the possibilities of getting help from these informal sources. Whether they were neighbors or strangers, some incidents described by the women revealed that community members sometimes chose not to help in what is viewed as a 'family matter' even in times of danger. Artz (1998) also found that women in the community did not give

support to abused women because they did not want to interfere. The concerns about interfering in 'private' domestic disputes are well recognised in the literature (Maconachie et al, 1993; Pahl, 1985; Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). Here, however, these may have been aggravated by the lobola system which suggests that the men has bought his rights to the women.

For some, the community leaders in the townships were another potential source of support that was also approached to stop the abuse. Depending on the kind of difficulties they were experiencing, like when there were death threats or the husband kicked the woman out of the house, two women asked the street committees to intervene. According to one of these women, she found street committees to be ineffective in their intervention. She moved on to seek help from the taxi organisation. It is important to note that there is recognition and use of community members who are perceived as having power, irrespective of whether their power is related to the issue at hand or not. However, no one seemed powerful enough to stop a man intent on beating his wife. Although consulting the taxi organisations was mentioned in only one woman's story, the possibility that it may form of many women's experiences cannot be dismissed.

5.4.2 Seeking medical attention.

Several women reported sustaining severe injuries from stabbings or being beaten with dangerous objects. It seemed that when they approached the doctor or the clinic, their expectations were only that they would receive medical attention, such as stitches and bandages for the wounds. This was consistent with what Washkansky (2000) found that the women were not seeking to deal with psychological sequelae of abuse. It seems that their mental health occupies a position of lower priority after physical health and other basic needs. None of them were willing to report their husbands as being responsible for the injuries.

Women who sought medical help reported that they gave false reports either voluntarily or because their husbands were present to make sure that they did not reveal the real cause of the injuries. Some of the false reports included accidental injuries, or being mugged. This was consistent with the findings by Maconachie et al. (1993) that battered women may return numerous times to the same practitioner for

attention without mentioning the battering. It appears that in the process they lost hope that their husbands would change and they had had enough. When they finally told the truth and were encouraged to lay charges, for some this became a realisation that they had been abused and had a right to protection from the justice system.

5.4.3 Alternative help.

Two women reported that they consulted with the traditional healers to help with the family situation where they felt powerless. Interestingly in one case, this was a joint venture by both the woman and her abusive husband, whereas in another case the husband chose to consult alone. Judging from the stories the two women told, this seemed to be an indication that the abusive husbands also acknowledged that there was a problem in their relationship. However, traditional healers are known to diagnose the cause of problem as existing 'out there', not within the control of the people concerned, as the explanation is often 'micro-social (family or community) and supernatural (Freeman & Motsei, 1992). Such explanations may be manipulated by the abusers to their advantage thus suggesting that they are in powerless positions, regarding changing their behavior. Freeman and Motsei (1992), point out the disadvantages of such explanations, stating that they may result in community disharmony, 'because the guilt is put onto the neighbors or consociates'. This may, however, preserve the couple's marriage while absolving the abusive husband of any responsibility for the abuse.

5.5 Economic constraints to seeking help.

A consideration of the economic status of these women and the role it may have played in their inability to seek help is important to explore. As most of the women interviewed were either unemployed or earned too little to sustain themselves and their children, it would be expected that financial constraints would be one of the issues that influenced their decision to seek help as well as in the actual help seeking process. However, though women hinted at the fears of losing financial benefits from the husbands, their narratives did not emphasise this as being the most important reason. The possible reason for this may have been that these women live in communities where economic deprivation is a way of life. They had little expectation of being economically supported by their husbands.

5.6 The turning point

As the earlier discussion suggested that these women were not passive, they were active in developing their own strategies to stop or cope with violence (Lempert, 1998). They had had many experiences of seeking help within the informal systems. At some point, however all the women made a decision to reach out to more formal sources of help that brought them within the range of this research project. No single factor was identified by all the women as a trigger to seek formal help. They, however, identified several factors that served as their 'turning points' and these are discussed in this section.

According to three of the women, a turning point, which made them to finally reach out for formal help, were incidents in which their children were also beaten. The women did not want their children to grow up in violent homes. Of the three, one woman who experienced a long history of emotional abuse was concerned about the emotional effect of the abuse on the children. She observed that her children were scared of their father. Armstrong (1998) argues that a woman's desire to protect her children can trigger her to seek help. Many women seemed to accept violence directed at them, but refused to accept it when it was directed towards their children. This idea is supported by Arendse (1998) when she maintains that it is only at a stage when the abusive behavior is enacted on the children that the women realise its severity and seek professional help. It also emerged that in two cases the children were used in the implementing of the initial step. Two women reported sending the children to the agency to report on their behalf, 'as the children will be listened to'.

In general, it did not appear to be the severity of the assault or injury that pushed the women in this study to seek outside help. It seems that the cumulative effect of the repeated abuse and failed attempts to deal with it effectively is what may have led the women to seek help beyond the confines of the family. The women sought help when it became intolerable for them. For some women this seemed to happen after the husbands destroyed property rather than when they were beaten or stabbed. Two women, who had previously sustained injuries from the abuse and never laid charges, interestingly laid charges of destruction of property and were then referred for counseling services. It seems it was easier for them to report destruction of property and seek help for that than seeking help for physical and emotional damage.

As the families became involved in the initial stages of help seeking, they also influenced the women's decision to come out for help outside the family. Most women reported that their husbands' families prevented them from seeking help outside the family. According to one woman, however, she ultimately got approval from the family to get outside help. It seems, however, that the 'permission' by his family to get outside help does not necessarily mean that the woman will come out for help, a lot more is involved at a personal level, such as losing hope that the husband would change his behavior and even loss of love for the husband. A third person may identify abuse and suggest that a woman seeks help, but it depends solely on her whether to take that advice or not. According to Armstrong, "for some women, the only factor that triggers them to get help or leave the abusive relationship is the realisation that the relationship is over, which happens when the husband finally tells her that he does not love her any more"(1998, p.51).

The women also reported the role of the media in enlightening them about their status of being abused and empowering them in breaking the isolation. Two women reported that they got the information from the community radio thus helping them to recognise the abuse as well as influencing them to seek professional help. It seems that lack of knowledge about whether they were abused and what services were available for them was another constraint in seeking help. Arendse (1998) maintains that awareness about the services available to them also influences the women's decision to seek help.

5.7 Summary.

This chapter acknowledges the actions of the women in attempting to deal with the abuse, which are often not seen by the public. The African married women can be seen as staying in the abusive marriages for years thus being labeled as being 'dependent', 'masochistic' or even 'passive'. While they may appear passive from the perspective of formal helping agencies, they in fact seem to be actively seeking help, exhausting the informal resources available to them. The interview material revealed their actions, which are influenced and constructed by their culture and the dilemmas they have to face in the process. They seemed to have experienced repeated victimisation as well as being failed by the institutions that they consulted for help.

CHAPTER SIX.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

In this chapter I attempt to make recommendations on the basis of my research. Because I conducted the research in a counselling organisation, I have particularly stressed the recommendations that would be useful for them. This study has shown the resilience and determination of African women in their attempts to seek help for abusive marriages. Asking abused women to tell their stories led to a greater understanding of what these women were confronted with and how much they had to struggle with in order to get help. This is not only important to acknowledge but also to tap into their resilience as an important resource. The study highlighted the complexity of the help seeking process by Xhosa women which is influenced by the individual, familial and societal factors. It suggests that their process of help seeking begins with the women's recognition and definition of their abusive situations and the realisation that it warrants help.

At individual level, the barriers that prevented women from seeking help have been identified as similar to the reasons for staying in abusive relationships, such as love for their husbands and hope that things will improve, denial, shame, and fear of further violence. It seems that the women may have considered the act of complaining about the violence to be humiliating for them, and reflecting them to be 'bad wives'. Such perceptions which may have damaged their self-esteem and self confidence suggests a need to validate of each woman's experiences and empowerment of women who have suffered abuse. It is therefore essential that the counsellors begin by working on helping them regain their own self worth and value.

The most important lesson from this study is the women's persistence in seeking help within the family, especially in the husbands' families. This may represent the value they place on their marriages and that the women attach a lot of importance in their sense of belonging to their families. Though they regarded the family as the first source to go to, the same family can at times be oppressive to the women. The traditional expectations of keeping it within the family despite failed attempts by families, however, delayed them in getting more effective help outside the family.

Additionally, the sympathetic responses from the family members by acknowledging their situation prevented them from looking any further for help. This on its own makes them invisible and 'hard-to-reach clients' for professionals. It also implies that there might be a large number of women who are caught in the 'traditional route' of seeking help within the informal sources and do not reach the point of seeking outside help. Some may become discouraged by repeated failed attempts and give up trying to get help. The implication of this may be that such women may not be able to eventually reach the women's counselling agencies for help. However, it would be unfair to attribute such failure to their own psychological limitations while the systems have failed them.

This highlights the need for the helping agencies to incorporate the families in their education strategies with the emphasis on the role of the family concerning the issue of seeking help for abuse. The family should be at the core of the programmes which focus on marriage expectations and problem solving within the marriages. For example, women can be targeted and sensitised on the issues traditional participation of mothers-in-law on the issue. The mothers-in-law may be a target group which could result in a shift in their thinking and challenge the social attitudes that frowns at and discourage attempts to reach out for outside help.

Another point of significance is that the women seemed to follow a similar pattern in seeking help. This pattern reflects their first steps as beginning by reporting the abuse to the husbands' families for mediation before going to their families for sympathy and support, and then they requested the community members' intervention. This suggests that getting help from the informal sources of help was significant for them. In spite of the hindrance by these informal support networks, they might be a potential resource for mental health workers. Because most women reach out primarily to them for help, empowerment should be extended to reach as wider groups within the community as possible. Given the South African situation of limited resources, this highlights the need for greater collaboration between the informal sources of help like family, neighbours and community leaders and the professional helpers, if helping the abused women is to be effective.

Additionally, the study suggested that the women only wanted the abuse to end, not to end their relationships (State response to Domestic Violence, 1995). This means that those professionals they reach out to for help must take into account what these women see as appropriate help on individual situations. What needs to be emphasised and noted is the need for the counsellor and the individual woman to co-construct what works best for the woman. Inability to do this can render the counsellor unable to access the client's world. It is important to note that several people they trusted have betrayed these women. They may approach the agencies with ambivalence and fears of not being believed, not being taken seriously, and expecting to be failed once more. It is also suggested that the training of counsellors be designed to take on the issue of secondary victimisation, which is often experienced through repeated failed attempts to get help.

As the literature suggests that wife abuse is better understood within the macrostructure of the society, this study also provides insight into the role of informal sources for example, the neighbors and community leaders, in supporting the women while at the same time restricting them from reaching the professional services. While these were perceived as influential and important people, the study revealed them to be powerless in their attempts to deal with this issue. However, they seem to have a potential if they were to work differently. This calls for recognition of their potential therapeutic value, which should be cultivated into therapy and the benefit of the women. For example, their lack of power can be addressed by setting up backup structures with the legal organisations and the police to help provide the needed service and support in a co-ordinated manner. It is this influential position that can be used by working closely with them in making them advocates for the women.

The helping agencies focusing on the solutions should acknowledge the significance of the women's extended attempts to get help from those who, according to Western standards, are not regarded as professionals. Attempts to educate them about a role they can play in helping hundreds of women through prompt referral for professional help would be a great step. What is needed here is early intervention by both the informal support network and the helping agencies. This is a challenge for professionals to draw upon and utilise the already existing support structures within the communities and shift their values to benefit the abused women. A comprehensive

community intervention would be cost effective and alleviate the possibility of sabotaging the helping process.

The implications for the study are that it suggests intervention approaches that require an in-depth exploration of women's beliefs and values. A better understanding of the women's help seeking behaviors informs the professionals' intervention strategies on how to effectively help them without disregarding their cultural values. This research, therefore, provided important insights for the training of counsellors on how to be better equipped to help these women. Taking cognisance of these insights may help trainers to adapt their methods and focus of training in order to bridge the gap between cultures and to make intervention more effective.

This study highlights the need for further in-depth research into the problem in order to formulate more culturally sensitive assessment, intervention strategies and training programs. The issues raised by these interviews emphasise the very unique and specific problems encountered by these women and the fact that potential interventions need to be tailored to address these issues. There is still a great deal more to know about how people change culturally sanctioned attitudes. It is suggested that there is a need for continued research which pays closer attention to the microdynamics within specific groups in order to capture the process of changes. This will further inform the mental health workers to find ways of helping the women whilst keeping the richness of their cultural values and in training of counsellors.

This study has contributed to putting the issue of cultural influences on the agenda of domestic violence in South Africa. It is hoped that it contributed to an understanding of some social influences that appear to be inherent in cases of domestic abuse.

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