

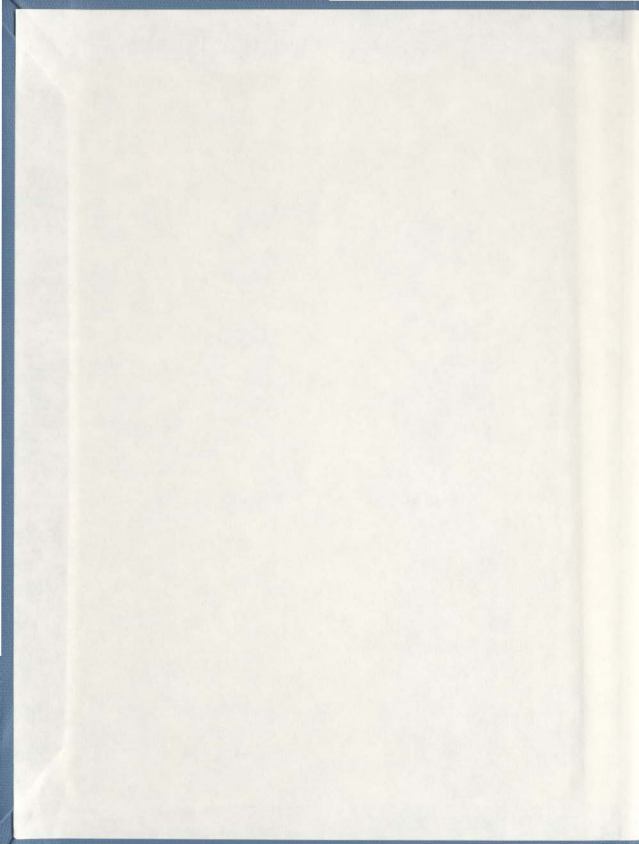
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WITNESSING MARITAL  
VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WITNESSING MARITAL VIOLENCE  
IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WITNESSING MARITAL VIOLENCE  
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Lorna Ruth Bennett

Memorial University, 1989

The primary aim of this study was to gain access to experiential aspects of living in a violent home through exploring the impact of family violence from the perspective of adolescent girls. The essential question asked was "What is it like to grow up in a violent home and what is the meaning of this experience?" The study included five participants between the ages of 15 and 24 years (only one participant was over the age of 20), who were recruited through the local shelter. Unstructured interviews that facilitated spontaneous verbal descriptions was the method of data collection.

A phenomenological method of data analysis was used following the general outline of Giorgi (1975) with some procedural suggestions by Wertz (1985) and Fischer and Wertz (1979). This method involved a meaning unit approach based on analysis of transcribed audiotaped interview data.

Common essential themes identified were: (a) participants experienced lived violence as an integrated whole, which encompassed different dimensions of family life, (b) participants described a sense of enduring the

experience for a lifetime but paradoxically had difficulty recalling the violence. Participants also described, (c) the emotional reactions of fear, helplessness and loss, (d) behavioral reactions aimed at preventing or escaping from the violence, (e) a close bond with mother and/or siblings, (d) a need to make sense of or understand the violence and finally, (f) a need to resolve or "settle" the experience.

Implications of the findings stress the need for assessment to take into account lived dimensions of the experience, in order to determine both the immediate and long term risk for mental health problems in this group.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The family is viewed as one of the most important aspects of the social environment, and is believed to play a vital role in the physical and psycho-social growth and development of the individual (Sedgwick, 1981). Paradoxically, the family has also contributed to the considerable suffering of large segments of our society. This has been expressed particularly in family violence. Stacey and Shupe (1983) have pointed out that the victimization of the family by its own members must be the "ultimate betrayal of what a family is universally supposed to be", (p.63) a supportive haven from the rest of the world.

Family violence as a broad phenomenon has received extensive attention in the literature over the past two decades. Concern began with children who were the direct victims of physical and emotional abuse, and this was followed by marital violence, or more specifically, violence directed towards the wife by the husband (Lystad, 1986). A study by Strauss, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) of 2,143 American couples, documented the extent and seriousness of marital violence in the United States. This survey reported that one couple in six, in a one year period, used some form of physical violence. A 1980 study discussed by Macleod (1987) showed increased awareness of the seriousness of the



problem in Canada, with a report that one woman in ten is likely to be abused by her partner in this country.

Although some studies have found that woman may abuse their husbands or common-law partners, it is generally agreed that the primary victimization occurs to the women in these relationships.

More recently, concern with the problem of wife battering has extended to the more indirect victims in these families, that is, the children. Macleod (1987) treated the problem of wife battering in a comprehensive fashion, taking into account the costs to other family members, especially the children. She stressed that these children may be directly affected by being physically abused themselves, or by witnessing abuse between parents.

It is the unintended victim, the child or adolescent witness, who is more likely to be forgotten. Walker (1979) referred to the insidious form of abuse to which these children are subjected. She stated

These children learn to become part of a dishonest conspiracy of silence...They learn to suspend fulfillment of their own needs rather than risk another confrontation. Like many children who suffer from overt physical abuse, these children learn to be accommodating and co-operative. They blend into the

background. They do not express anger. They do not acknowledge tension...they live in a world of make believe. (p.150)

This study explored experiential aspects of such abuse from the perspective of those who have lived in a violent home. A phenomenological mode of inquiry was judged to be the most appropriate for this purpose. The thesis for this study will be presented in the following form. The remainder of chapter one will outline the rationale, aim and core questions for the study, followed by a definition of terms. Chapter two will present a discussion of pertinent literature. Chapters three and four will describe the phenomenological method and the specific procedures that were followed in the present study. Chapter five will present the findings which include the individual descriptions, the shared themes, and a discussion of caring needs identified by the participants. The final chapter will include a discussion of the identified themes and the implications for nursing practice and research.

#### Rationale for the study

Children and adolescents who are affected in an insidious way by their exposure to violence, as described by Walker (1979), are unlikely to be the focus of research or health care. Generally, research efforts have focussed on the more observable behavioral effects, such as antisocial

behaviour. These effects have been more evident in boys, which has led to the suggestion by some researchers that girls are less vulnerable to the effects of violence (Rutter, 1971). Consequently, girls, particularly adolescents girls, have been largely neglected in the research to date in this area (O'Leary, 1984). Some have suggested that girls may express their response in more subtle, less visible ways and that the impact of violence on them may not express itself until adulthood (Carlson, 1984).

One means of gaining access to these less visible effects is to try and understand the family violence experience from the perspective of adolescent girls. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) have pointed out that access to "adolescent experiencing" is critical to understanding the impact of events in their daily lives. They stressed that the "fluidity" of adolescence, with its inherent contradictions, necessitates research approaches that focus on subjective experience. If this is true for the study of adolescents generally, the complexities of family violence most certainly demands a similar emphasis on "adolescent experiencing".

From a nursing perspective the caring and health needs of this group are a primary concern. Benner (1985) argued that health is a lived experience which is accessed in part through perceptions, beliefs and expectations. Quality of life is viewed by Benner as an important dimension of

health. She stressed that quality of life can be approached from the perspective of the individual's perceptions of his/her "quality of being" not just from the perspective of doing and achieving. She also argued that such a perspective takes into account the individual's interaction with the environment, requiring research strategies that uncover meanings. Questioning adolescents from violent homes about their daily living experiences not only permits access to the less visible effects of violence as a lived situation but also indirectly provides access to quality of life as a vital dimension of overall health in this group.

#### Statement of the problem

The problem for this study was to expand the body of knowledge about family violence through gaining an understanding of lived violence from the perspective of adolescent girls. The essential question addressed in the study was: What is it like to grow up in a violent home and what are the essential constituents or core themes that express the structure or meaning of this experience for the participants? Participants were also asked about what they believed were their caring needs or what they perceived would have been helpful at the time they had lived through the violence.

The adolescent girl was chosen as the focus of the study because of current gaps in the literature and because of her potential risk for problems later in life. My own clinical work with these adolescents indicated that girls' responses to, and feelings about, living in violent families is much less innocuous than we have been led to believe. Some of these girls described their exposure to family violence, as impacting on the total fabric of their daily lives. The primary aim of the present study was to provide a more formalized description of this experience, as a means of sensitizing care-givers to the experiential dimensions of this phenomenon, in order to provide more meaningful direction for care and further research efforts.

#### Definition of terms

For the purpose of this study the following terms were defined:

#### Family violence

Family violence, narrowly defined, generally refers to certain forms of violence, such as direct physical abuse involving some form of injury or intent to injure between family members (Strauss, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). For the purpose of this study the definition of family violence preferred is "any act of commission or omission by family members, and any conditions resulting from such acts or

inaction, which deprive other family members of equal rights and liberties and/or interfere with their optimal development and freedom of choice." (Gil,1975, cited in Pagelow, 1984, p.21).

#### Physical abuse

Stacey and Shupe (1983) used a specific definition of physical abuse which is appropriate for this study. It involves essentially "physical harm or the immediate threat of harm" (p.5).

#### Health

Health encompasses the various aspects of an individual as a whole person and includes biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions. Concepts of health in nursing have broadened in recent years to include quality of life or "quality of being" which takes into account aspects such as personal growth and self-realization (Benner 1985; Smith 1981). For the purpose of this study, health was defined as the individual's opportunity for optimal personal growth and fulfillment and meaningful interaction with the environment.

#### Lived violence

Lived violence was defined as those personal life situations which would be described by the adolescent girls in the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature pertinent to the impact of family violence on children, prior to the past decade, has focused primarily on children who have been directly abused. There has been little attempt to study the possible affects on children who "merely" witness abuse in these families.

Although formal research that has addressed the impact of violence on child witnesses is limited, there are a number of different sources of data that provide some understanding of its possible effects. The following discussion will outline these sources, as well as methodological issues, and research gaps that are pertinent to the present study.

#### Studies of marital discord and divorce

Carlson (1984) noted that one of our earliest sources of data providing knowledge about the possible impact of marital discord on children were studies that examined the effects of divorce on children. Carlson cited the work of Jacobsen (1978), who studied 51 children from 30 families who were going through the process of divorce. Jacobsen found a significant association between interparental discord and behavioral problems in the children. He also found that the greater the degree of marital conflict

preceding the divorce, the greater the behavioral disturbance noted. Similarly, Rutter (1971) reported that children in divorce situations have an increased risk for delinquency. Rutter pointed out, however, that an important issue with respect to the association between "broken homes" and delinquency, is whether the harm comes from the separation, or the marital conflict which is so much a part of these separations. Rutter addressed this issue by comparing the separation effects on the children of homes broken by parental death, with children of homes broken by divorce. He reported the findings of three separate investigations that established a closer link between delinquency and parental discord, than between delinquency and parental death. There was also evidence to suggest that even in homes that were "intact" or unbroken, there was a greater likelihood of behavioral disturbance when marital discord was present. For example, Emery (1982) cited the work of Hetherington and his associates (1979), who observed "that children from broken or intact homes where there is interparental conflict, are at greater risk for problems than are children from broken or intact homes that are relatively harmonious" (p.313). These findings have led to the conclusion that the significant variable in these situations may be the interparental conflict or hostility, not the experience of separation or loss (Carlson, 1984; Emery, 1982; Jaffe, Wilson & Wolfe, 1986).



### Studies of long term effects

Some studies have looked at an intergenerational pattern of violence, and provided evidence of the long term effects of exposure to violence in these homes. These studies are based on social learning theory, which maintains that violence is a learned pattern of response, achieved through modelling violent behaviour (Pagelow, 1984). The common assumption in the literature is that male children model their fathers and become abusers, whereas females model their mother's behaviour and become victims.

A study by Strauss, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) was frequently cited as evidence for a clear pattern of intergenerational violence. Findings from this study indicated that individuals who have grown up in violent homes repeated the abuse in their own homes. Strauss and his colleagues, questioned whether marital violence in adulthood could be attributed to the witnessing of violence, as well as to the direct experiencing of violence. Their findings indicated that experiencing violence directly was more strongly associated with future violence in one's family, although they claimed there was a greater impact if subjects had both witnessed, and experienced, abuse.

Gelles (1972) focused on the likelihood of women from violent homes becoming victims in their own marriages. He noted that women who had observed conjugal violence in their families of origin were likely to be victims of marital

violence in their families of procreation. Like Strauss and his associates (1980), Gelles also noted the double impact of being both a witness and a direct victim, claiming that the more frequently a woman was struck by her parents, as well as witnessing abuse between parents, the more vulnerable to marital violence she became.

Pagelow (1984) questioned the assumptions of some of the earlier studies that stressed an intergenerational pattern of violence, particularly the widely accepted belief that women from violent homes will enter battering relationships. She claimed that in her own study of abused women, three quarters of the women in her sample had never seen their mothers beaten by their fathers. Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) added support to Pagelow's findings. They reported that abused wives in their study were no more likely to have witnessed parental abuse than the nonabused wives.

Kalmus (1984) argued that the inconsistent findings in the literature were related to the fact that researchers failed to distinguish between the effects of experiencing and observing violence in one's family of origin. Kalmus maintained that a distinction between the two forms of exposure, could help to determine which had the greater effect on the likelihood of future marital violence. Based on data from a large scale nationally representative adult sample, Kalmus reported that observing hitting between one's

parents was more strongly related to subsequent involvement in severe marital violence, than being hit as a teenager by one's parents. It was clear from this finding that even the witnessing of violence may be much less benign than one might expect.

Carroll (1977) pointed out that although it is generally accepted that family violence is learned, there is little conclusive research evidence to support the contention that violence breeds violence. Dobash and Dobash (1979) acknowledged that while violent assaults in one's home was one means by which children learn to accept violence, it was inappropriate "to leap to the conclusion that children who witness assaults on their mother are necessarily the seed pods of the next generation of violent families" (p.152). One could also question whether, separating the effects of witnessing violence from its direct experience, would indeed provide more valid data. There is evidence, in fact, that there is considerable overlap in the different forms of violence and situations where children only witness abuse may be rare (Martin, 1977; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Walker, 1979). Some researchers have suggested that we should, rather, be examining the process and circumstances under which the transmission of violence may occur (Carroll, 1977; Macleod, 1987). Macleod while citing evidence for a recurrent pattern of violence in the families in her study, also referred to the failure of the

different family violence theories, to adequately explain intergenerational patterns. Macleod pointed out that such theories do not account for some of the complexities they encountered in their research, such as the strong emotional ties between victim and abusers and the ambivalence in such relationships. Macleod's decision to examine women's understanding of the battering experience was in response to such observations. Obtaining personal accounts from the women themselves, Macleod believed, provided a fuller understanding of the experience and complemented current theories about violent families. An examination of the perceptions of adolescent girls in the present study served a similar purpose.

#### Clinical and anecdotal reports

Clinical reports of children of abused women in shelters also contribute to knowledge about the possible effects of family violence on children. It is believed that most shelter children have witnessed violence directed by their fathers or stepfathers towards their mothers (Alessi & Hearn, 1984; Stacey & Shupe, 1983). Clinical reports of shelter children have provided evidence of a broad range of emotional and behavioral disturbance (Alessi & Hearn, 1984; Carlson, 1984; Davidson, 1978; Martin, 1977; Pizzey, 1974; Walker, 1979). Further evidence of behavioral disturbance in these children, have come from the observations of those

who have provided psychiatric or medical services to violent families (Hilberman & Munsen, 1978; Penfold, 1982).

These reports stressed age and sex differences as well as general characteristics that these children share. Hilberman and Munsen (1978) described the somatic complaints, school phobias, insomnia and enuresis of preschool and younger school-aged child and the aggressive behaviour and school difficulties of the older school aged child. Alessi and Hearn (1984), outlined irritability and fear in the young child and the vacillation between aggressive and compliant behaviour in the older school-aged child.

Alessi and Hearn also described some general characteristics that children, between the ages of two to seventeen years, shared. These included the use of aggressive behaviour to solve problems, developmental regression, high levels of anxiety expressed in numerous somatic complaints as well as a tendency to blame themselves for their parents' battles and to express feelings of ambivalence towards the abusive father. Hilberman and Munsen (1978), as well as Stacey and Shupe (1983), also identified more serious outcomes of exposure to violence, such as depression, suicidal behaviour or overt psychosis.

A gender difference finding was also evident in much of the clinical literature (Carlson, 1984; Hilberman & Munsen, 1978; Penfold, 1982). This was typically expressed as observations of more aggressive and antisocial behaviour in males, and more withdrawn, anxious, and passive behaviour in females.

Some authors have addressed the possible impact of witnessing violence on adolescents. Walker (1979) observed that adolescence is a period when violence escalates, as it is a time of particular stress for "normal" families as well as those prone to violence. A number of themes pertinent to the adolescent surfaced in the anecdotal literature. Walker (1984), Elbow (1982) and Davidson (1978) addressed concerns about the developmental needs of this group. Elbow (1982) and Walker (1984) referred to the difficulty for adolescents to successfully achieve individuation and separation from the parents, because of the complex nature of relationships in these homes. Elbow noted that "the symbiotic bond of the violent marriage inhibits actions or responses that foster appropriate growth away from the family unit" (p.466). She added that the survival of the family unit takes priority over the physical and developmental needs of its members. Walker (1984) claimed, that as children in these homes grow older and more independent, their fathers become intolerant

of the separation and autonomy process necessary for healthy development, and often become possessive and intrusive into the lives of their adolescent children.

Both Walker (1979) and Davidson (1978) described evidence of sexual abuse in these families. Walker claimed that there was a strong connection between marital abuse, and incest upon girl children in these homes. Hilberman and Munsen (1978) also referred to this problem noting that even when fathers were not overtly incestuous, adolescent girls suffered from "perpetual surveillance and accusations of sexual activity" (p.463) by their fathers.

One particularly dominant theme in the clinical reports was the ambivalent relationship patterns between adolescents and their parents. Walker (1979) observed that adolescents do not remain uninvolved in their parents' battles but choose sides, frequently identifying with the father and abusing the mother. This pattern has been reported in both adolescent girls and boys in these homes (Carlson, 1984; Davidson, 1978; Stacey & Shupe, 1983; Walker, 1979). Elbow (1982) also alluded to this pattern as well as noting the ambivalent nature of parent-child relationships and evidence for parent-child alliances. Davidson (1978) reported other disturbing dimensions of this behaviour. She claimed that in some homes, adolescents understood the potential financial hardship that parental separation would bring and frequently tried to prevent their mothers from leaving their

fathers. She argued that these adolescents "no longer care about the mother's suffering, it's just part of the daily routine. They depersonalize her and block her from consciousness and conscience. She couldn't be worth much if she got herself into such a fix now could she?" (p.119). Elbow (1982) attempted to explain this pattern by suggesting that identification with the father is an attempt to deal with a no-win situation. She claimed that the witnesses to violence do not want to identify with the violence of the abuser, or the helplessness of the victim, and developed what appeared to be contradictory behaviour to cope with the dilemmas and distortions in relationships within the family.

In summary, clinical descriptions have contributed to our knowledge about the typical profile and common visible characteristics of children from violent homes. Themes pertinent to the adolescent, particularly the adolescent girl, stressed problems in the area of psychosocial development. There has been speculation in the literature about the possible meaning of, and explanation for, these observations. However, these discussions are based primarily on the theoretical notions of observers, and not on the adolescents' perceptions themselves.



### Systematic studies of children from violent homes

There have recently been attempts to address children's responses to witnessing overt physical violence, through studies of children known to be living in violent homes. Porter and O'Leary (1980) conducted one of the first such studies, and examined the relationship between overt violence directed towards the mother, and behavioral problems in children. Using standardized scales as measures of children's deviance, general marital adjustment and overt marital hostility, completed by the mothers, this study established that overt hostility correlated significantly with problem behaviour in boys, but was not related to problem behaviour in girls. This finding was consistent with earlier gender difference reports.

Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) pointed out that in order to determine the effects of overt violence on children, it was necessary to use comparison groups of women who were not abused, but who had problem marriages. Their study used a sample of women and their school-aged male children, from three different groups: maritally abusive relationships, non-abusive but maritally discordant relationships and maritally satisfactory relationships. It was found that while children from abusive relationships were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, there were no significant differences between the groups. They concluded that while exposure to marital discord and violence may contribute to

behaviour problems, other factors may be involved, and neither discord nor more overt violence was sufficient to cause such problems.

A later study by Hershorn and Rosenbaum (1985), using the same comparison groups as Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981), indicated that the results of their study supported the hypothesis that marital discord and violence are associated with problems in children. Unlike the earlier study, these investigators were able to demonstrate statistically significant differences, between the comparison groups. However, they were unable to provide evidence that children from maritally violent homes, showed more conduct disturbance than children from maritally discordant homes. This may suggest that determining whether the conflict was of a violent, open nature or more subtle and hidden, may not be a critical factor in terms of the impact on children.

#### Studies pertinent to health

Most of the early research studies focussed on the behavioral effects of witnessing violence. Some studies, however, examined the effects on other aspects of the child's life and general health. Westra and Martin (1981) addressed the risk for developmental delays in these children. They pointed out that there has been considerable evidence for developmental delays in children who have been directly abused. They also contended that such delays were

secondary to the family functioning in these homes in general, rather than an outcome of the physical abuse itself. They argued that child witnesses are exposed to the same kind of environment as the abused child, and therefore similar developmental problems could be expected. Their study of nonabused preschoolers from violent homes, supported their hypothesis that these children would indeed be developmentally delayed. They concluded "it is a moot point whether or not the child has been physically assaulted, the child is for all intents and purposes exposed to the same emotional milieu as the battered child" (p.50). This study was a good beginning in the exploration of the impact, of living in a violent home, on normal development. It had particular relevance to nursing research because it stressed aspects of the child's overall health, and not strictly behavioral disturbance.

A recent study by Kerovec, Tuggart, Lescop and Fortin (1986) also examined health in children from violent homes. They investigated biopsychosocial dimensions of health, such as physical health problems, daily living habits and the child's relationships with family and peers. They also examined the threat to quality of life, and optimal development for these children. For example, they questioned whether "the adaptation mechanisms required for harmonious self growth are not endangered by the impairment of one's capabilities in a constantly violent climate"

(p.414). The findings of this study revealed a rather poor health profile in the biological, psychological and social dimensions of health for both the women and the children. Again, like Westra and Martin (1981), they stressed normal development but included a broader understanding of health. Such studies bring attention to the research gaps in this area, but there is a need for further emphasis on quality of life as an important dimension of health. In the present study, exploration of the lifeworld of the adolescent was a way of providing access to health in this respect.

#### Methodological considerations

In spite of some efforts to examine the effects of violence on development and health, most recent research studies have stressed the search for evidence of a direct link, between children's exposure to marital violence and specific behavioral disturbance. It has been pointed out that although the knowledge we currently have seems to point to an association between marital discord and behavioral disturbance, the nature of this association and the significant factors involved remain unclear. Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson and Zak (1985) noted that "at present no direct causal link between family violence and child adjustment can be established. This is due to the fact that the mechanisms by which family violence affects children are poorly understood" (p.663). Some researchers identified some of

the factors and variables that they believed were likely to influence children's behaviour. Some of these included maternal stress, socioeconomic disadvantage, parental psychopathology, and age and sex differences (Emery, 1982; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak 1985).

Gender difference is a factor of particular significance to the present study. A recurrent theme in the literature has been a finding which suggested that boys in violent homes were affected to a greater extent than girls. Moreover, the behaviour more commonly associated with exposure to violence is antisocial behaviour in boys (Block, Block & Morrison, 1981; Emery & O'Leary, 1982; Porter & O'Leary, 1980; Rutter, 1975). A few researchers have not supported the conclusion that girls are not affected by violence to the same extent as boys. Emery (1982) suggested that girls may be affected, but in ways more consistent with their sex role in our society through cooperative, compliant, anxious behaviour. A study by Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson and Zak (1986), indicated that boys "externalised" their feelings and reactions to violence and expressed anti-social behaviour. They found that girls, on the other hand, "internalized" their response and showed more withdrawn, anxious behaviour (p.75). Girls' more subtle, less visible response, led some researchers to suggest that although girls don't appear as vulnerable during childhood, they may suffer higher rates of mental health problems in adulthood

(Carlson, 1984; Wolfe et al., 1985). In any case the unfortunate outcome of this proposed gender difference has been a research bias, with greater attention given to boys than to girls (O'Leary, 1984).

Age difference has not surfaced as a significant variable in the exploration of the effects of witnessing violence on children (Emery, 1982). However, the emphasis in the systematic studies to date, has clearly been on the younger school-aged child with much less attention given to the adolescent age group.

Some researchers have called for more controlled studies and the use of better psychometric instruments in order to account for these other factors (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson & Zak 1986). Perhaps better controlled studies would be a useful approach if the goal was to establish a direct link between marital violence and behavioral disturbance. However, if the goal is to gain a better understanding of family violence and the implications for prevention and treatment programmes, other approaches are needed.

Other researchers have noted the need for methodological improvements and changes in approaches to the study of family violence. Walker (1986) discussed concern with the use of psychometric instruments, to measure the impact of sexual abuse by family members, which is pertinent to family violence research generally. She argued that such measures cannot account for the inevitable ambivalence that

arises as a part of such abuse. Dobash and Dobash (1983) also maintained that traditional methods were not sufficient in family violence research. They discovered through their research that "the perspectives and procedures associated with the generally positivist approach, originally proposed, were simply inadequate and too narrow to capture the dynamics and complexity of what we were being told by those involved" (p.262).

Emery (1982) also noted methodological concerns. He observed that the parental reports of children's behaviour, relied on in the past, often reflected more about the parent than about the child. Mischel (1973) contended that, it was the individual's perceptions of situations and events that ultimately determined behaviour, and therefore should be our focus. Neither greater emphasis on the multiple variables in the situation, nor determining the level of exposure to, or severity of the violence, will further our understanding of how violence is 'experienced' by the adolescents in these homes. Research approaches that are able to capture the adolescent perspective and perceptions will permit us to gain a beginning understanding of the nature of family violence, help us to plan meaningful intervention strategies and perhaps interrupt the pattern of violence.

### Studies of children's perceptions

While some studies have concentrated on the need to account for the multiple interacting and confounding variables in recent research studies, a few have examined the perceptions of the child witnesses. Such an approach was believed to hold potential for eliciting what might be the more significant and more meaningful factors. Although Wolfe and his colleagues (1985), identified the importance of studies that controlled for certain confounding variables, they also stressed the importance of identifying children's individual reactions to violence as well as possible mediating influences. Some of these included such factors as social supports, child personality variables, and previous life experiences.

Researchers who have examined children's perceptions of their family situations include (Emery & O'Leary, 1982; Hazzard, Christensen & Margolin 1983; and Johnson & O'Leary 1987). These studies have primarily used behavioral checklists or scales, that are compared with similar scales used with the parents. When findings in such studies are inconsistent, frequently the validity of the children's reporting comes into question. Johnson and O'Leary (1987) for example, suggested that children should not rate their own behaviour because their reports are often inconsistent with their parents' reports. Edwards (1987) referred to a study by Fromm, who questioned whether the children in her



study, minimized their distress or denied the extent of the abuse. What would seem to be a more important consideration is the meaning such observations may have in understanding the phenomena as a whole, rather than challenging children's reporting as a valid source of data.

Some studies have shown an inclination towards more open, less structured, less pre-determined data collection methods in order to gain better access to the perceptions of the child witnesses. For example, Benich (1983) and Fromm (1983), in studies of school-aged children used projective drawings and semi-structured questionnaires. Scanlon (1985) included play sessions with the children and some unstructured interviews with adolescents. The advantage of such an approach, claimed Scanlon, was that it allowed the children to "direct the conversation to their own special concerns" (p.10). Scanlon admitted, however, that aspects of the data collection dealing most directly with the children's and adolescents' perceptions, was the least utilized method. She also felt that they had relied too heavily on interviews with the mothers, and observation schedules. Scanlon observed that while measures that depended on statistical analysis could inform us about the extent of the problems faced by the children, they were unable to increase our awareness of, and sensitivity to, the unhappiness of these children.

Lombardi (1982) was one of the first researchers to focus on the perceptions of the witnesses by using a phenomenological approach. This was also one of the few studies to use an all female sample. Her study permitted access to participants' total experience in context, and included detailed verbal accounts permitting rich description of the experience in participants' own words. Lombardi used the grounded theory approach and identified specific hypotheses for a beginning theory of family violence. The emerging categories, that formed the basis of her theory were: a) limited escape from the abuse b) limited supports and c) difficulty establishing affectional relationships. These categories reflected situational aspects of the experience, but they did not reflect the meaning of the experience in participants' own terms.

### Summary

A review of the literature revealed that we have some knowledge about the possible effects of witnessing violence on children. The divorce studies, clinical reports, and a few systematic studies of children known to be living in violent homes, have contributed to the current body of knowledge in this area. The review also pointed to certain research gaps such as studies that address adolescents and their experiences. A need for methodological changes, particularly in the study of the effects of witnessing

violence on girls, was also evident. This group has demonstrated a less visible response to violence, which is not as likely to be accessible to traditional methods. Research approaches that capture the adolescent girl's experience would enlarge our present understanding of their needs, as well as add to the current knowledge of family violence generally.

### CHAPTER 3

#### DESCRIPTION OF PHENOMENOLOGY

"Phenomenology is a philosophy, an approach and a method" (Oiler, 1982, p.178). As a philosophy it has its roots in the work of Edmund Husserl, a European philosopher, whose writings were a response to the need for a more humanistic perspective at a time in history when scientific knowledge, as defined by the natural sciences, predominated. Husserl believed phenomenological philosophy was a further development of Greek philosophy which stressed the search for true knowledge through the "articulation of concerns arising from the depths of the human spirit" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974, p.5).

As an approach it has been described as a research attitude or way of seeing and taking the world into account (Giorgi, 1975; Giorgi, 1983; Keen, 1975). The phenomenological approach holds a number of assumptions and beliefs about man that are congruent with research in the human sciences. Giorgi (1983) argued that the mode of inquiry of the natural sciences with its emphasis on objectivity and cause-effect relationships could not address essential dimensions of human phenomena such as consciousness, experience and meanings. The individual is more than a perceiver of facts in the world by way of the senses, rather, the individual also apprehends the world according to hopes, wishes and personal beliefs. A

phenomenological attitude or approach views psychological phenomena in a way that is faithful to the whole person.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote that phenomenology could also be "practised and identified as a manner or style of thinking" (p.vii) or, more precisely, as a method for doing research. Moreover, he claimed that phenomenology was accessible or understood, only through its method.

Spiegelberg (1970) was one of the first individuals to describe the phenomenological method in terms of its practical significance and potential contribution to human existence. Like Merleau-Ponty, he viewed the method as a way of thinking, but he also believed that practising the method was a way of speaking for the phenomenon of being human, and argued that it was in this sense that the human sciences could appreciate its greatest value.

There are a number of core principles and concepts critical to an understanding of phenomenology, and these form the basis for the more systematic application of the method. These will be described, followed by a description of Spiegelberg's (1965) essentials of the method. Giorgi's interpretation of the method, which is the primary framework for the present study, will also be outlined. Finally, the present researcher's perspective, a necessary starting point for any phenomenological study, will be described.

### Core themes

A foundational concept in phenomenology is the "Life World" or the world of everyday experience. Schutz (1970) defined the life world as "the total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, events encountered in the pursuit of the practical objectives of living" (p.320). The life world for Schutz is essentially the "paramount reality" of the individual's daily life. Schutz viewed access to the life world as the basis of understanding in every science. He suggested that in the course of knowledge development, theoretical idealizations have replaced the knowledge of everyday experience and essential meanings have been lost in this transformation. The goal of phenomenology then is to return to this un-interpreted world of experience prior to any further theorizing about particular phenomena.

Another fundamental concept in phenomenology is the notion of "intentionality" of consciousness (Schutz, 1962). Schutz described Husserl's view of intentionality when he wrote "any of our experiences as they appear within our stream of consciousness...are necessarily referred to the object experienced. There is no such thing as thought, fear, fantasy, remembrance as such, every thought is thought of, every fear is fear of, every remembrance is remembrance of the object that is thought, feared, remembered" (p.103). In other words, one's consciousness is always directed

toward objects and events in the world. Valle and King (1978) further enlarged the concept of intentionality by describing it as the individual's relationship with the world. Consciousness in their view is not an internal state but the individual's unity with, or "being-in-the world" (p.8). Giorgi (1970) suggested that it is the notion of intentionality that best explains behaviour and its meaning. He pointed out that if individuals have a meaningful relationship with the world, then it is impossible to explain behaviour strictly in terms of cause and effect. This view challenges the assumptions of the natural sciences which views the world in terms of two separate spheres, the objective external world of facts, and the subjective internal world. Giorgi (1983) observed that "human beings err and sometimes base decisions, not on facts as science would know them, but on hopes, wishes and beliefs that may be counterfactual" (p.211). Therefore a human sciences perspective should be interested in not only the individual's "objective" behavioral response, but also the meaning of the behaviour for the individual.

A guiding principle in phenomenology that arises from the concept of intentionality is that the researcher should give all data a fair hearing (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Data in phenomenological terms refers to any phenomena of, or in, consciousness such as feelings, ideas, memories, hopes and dreams. Any descriptive statement either verbal

or written, fact or fiction, is accepted as phenomenological datum (Wagner, 1983). When all the data of consciousness are taken into account, truth is not based on objective facts, but has many perspectives, and the meaning of an experience is uncovered through an understanding of these different individual perspectives.

Another principle of critical importance to the phenomenological method is "phenomenological reduction". This involves the researcher's absolute attention to the phenomenon, unhindered by previous experience, theoretical notions or hypotheses (Bochenski, 1965). For this reason, phenomenological research does not start with a conceptual framework. Bochenski pointed out that prior knowledge of a phenomenon is not discarded or denied, but is temporarily set aside to allow single-minded concentration on the phenomenon as it appears. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), it is through the process of reduction that intentionality, described earlier, is understood. He claimed that phenomenological reduction does not entail withdrawing from the world, rather what is required is to break from one's typical understanding of it. What is needed he argued, is for us to "slacken the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus bring them to our notice" (p.xiii). In other words we avoid attending to all previous meanings and understanding of a phenomenon so that we may grasp new meanings.



### Essential phases of the method

There are numerous perspectives and interpretations of what constitutes the phenomenological method. The literature does not present a coherent system or approach shared by all phenomenologists (Spiegelberg, 1965). Spiegelberg, while acknowledging that different interpretations exist, also pointed out that there is some agreement about core characteristics. He outlined a number of essential steps or phases common to all those who claim to be identified with the philosophical phenomenological movement. Five of these steps have particular relevance to the present study and will be outlined and discussed. These include the following:

1. Investigating particular phenomena
2. Investigating general essences
3. Apprehending essential relationships
4. Watching modes of appearing
5. Interpreting concealed meanings (p.659)

The first step, investigating particular phenomena, includes the operations of intuiting, analysis, and description. These operations are closely interrelated processes and although specifically described by Spiegelberg as part of the first step, they are applicable to the other steps as well.

Intuiting the phenomena, according to Spiegelberg, is one of the most demanding operations and requires total concentration on the phenomena. He claimed there is nothing mystical about this operation rather one's intuiting should begin in silence and should involve openness, looking and listening, and a sensitivity to the phenomena in every aspect as it presents itself.

Phenomenological analysis is so closely related to the intuiting process that it is difficult to discuss it separately. Essentially, it involves "the general examination of the structure of the phenomena according to their ingredients and their configuration" (p.671). This involves the distinguishing of the elements of a phenomenon and exploration of their relationship to adjacent phenomena.

Phenomenological description is possible once the phenomena have been fully explored intuitively and analytically. Spiegelberg stressed the importance of describing the main characteristics of a phenomenon and the elimination of any accidental or non-essential aspects. He claimed that the main function of description was to serve as a guide to the actual or potential experience of the phenomenon to whom it is being communicated.

The second step "investigating general essences" involves a close attention to the particular examples of a phenomenon that have been fully described in the first step, as a means to determining the essential characteristics of

the phenomenon in a more general sense. Spiegelberg wrote that "in order to apprehend the general essence we have to look at the particulars as examples, i.e., as instances which stand for the general essence" (p.677). It is also through searching and comparing varied examples of a particular phenomenon that one becomes aware of common themes or a pattern which further reveals the general essence. Spiegelberg viewed the general essence, as representing some universal or ideal expression of a phenomenon.

The third step "apprehending essential relationships" is concerned with determining essential connections within the structure of a particular example of a phenomenon, as well as essential connections within the general structure of a phenomenon. This phase tries to determine the specific arrangement and priority of connections between the constituents of a phenomenon both at the level of the particular example as well as at the general level.

The operation of "free imaginative variation" was viewed by Spiegelberg to be an important process in determining essential features of a phenomenon. Imaginative variation involves varying or altering the pattern or structure of a phenomenon to determine whether the change was merely a possible change that doesn't alter the pattern significantly, or impossible without changing the total structure and meaning of the phenomenon. Spiegelberg (1965)

observed that "to see what is essential, not to be diverted and detained by inconsequential features and to keep one's eyes on the central features is clearly involved in seeing life steadily and seeing it whole" (p.64). It is through this process then that the apprehension of the meaningful structure of a phenomenon is possible.

In the fourth step "watching modes of appearing", Spiegelberg stressed the importance of attending to 'how' data presented itself, and not just attending to 'what' appeared as data. Spiegelberg believed that the way a phenomenon presented itself was often over-looked in one's preoccupation with what presented itself. Spiegelberg described "watching modes of appearing" as paying attention to the different perspectives or illuminations of a particular phenomenon, by which an understanding of the phenomenon as a whole was possible.

The goal in the fifth step "interpreting the meaning of phenomena" was the discovery of meanings which were not immediately manifest to our "intuiting, analyzing and describing" (p.695). It involved rather the exploration of hidden meanings of phenomena and was referred to as hermeneutics or hermeneutic phenomenology.

### Giorgi's interpretation of phenomenology

This section will highlight some of the characteristics of Giorgi's approach, pertinent to this study. Some features of his approach are clearly congruent with Spiegelberg's (1965) essentials of the method and also reflect the core themes and guiding assumptions of phenomenology. Variations from, and correspondence with, these philosophical phenomenological roots will be identified. The specific steps in Giorgi's description of one application of the method will also be outlined.

Giorgi (1970) stressed the importance of a match between one's approach, one's method and the content of one's research. Giorgi, whose discipline was psychology, maintained that the content areas for psychological research were unique human phenomena and should be addressed as such. Similarly, many of the phenomena of concern in nursing are those of an essentially experiential nature, such as the individual's response to an illness or life situation, capacity for optimal growth and development and other concerns that pertain to human experiencing and human valuing.

Giorgi (1985b) maintained that phenomenology was the approach most congruent with research in the human sciences. Giorgi believed that his approach could claim to be phenomenological in the sense that it emphasized description, the search for essences or essential

structures, and an openness to phenomena as they presented themselves. However, he believed his approach deviated ,in the strict sense, from philosophical phenomenology.

For example, phenomenology as described by Spiegelberg (1965), emphasized the researcher's description of an experience which took place after the phenomenon had been fully intuited and analyzed. While Giorgi (1985b) emphasized description, he stressed that there are two levels of description. He called for an initial description obtained from the participant which he argued must be a "naive description". Such a description must truly express the situation as lived and felt by the participant. It should not be the participant's analysis of the situation influenced by other's views about what has been experienced.

Giorgi (1971b) stated that, the emphasis in this initial description should be on the phenomenon "exactly as it reveals itself to the experiencing subject in all its concreteness and particularity" (p.9). The researcher's description is based on an analysis of this initial description.

Giorgi's (1985b) approach deviated in yet another way. While he stressed the importance of "phenomenological reduction", (the suspension of all previous theoretical notions about a phenomena),described earlier as one of the core phenomenological themes, he believed another dimension of the reduction process was also necessary. For Giorgi,

reduction also involved total fidelity to meanings as perceived and experienced by participants. This required accepting the situation as it was understood by the participant even when this description was ambiguous or contradicted a more "objective" reality as perceived by the researcher. Giorgi (1985b) defined this dimension of reduction as "the difference between the way in which a situation is (from the researcher's perspective) and the way it is experienced by the participant" (p.49).

Another characteristic of Giorgi's approach, that deviates somewhat from the essentials of phenomenology described by Spiegelberg, is the search for the general essence or essential structure of a phenomenon. Giorgi (1985b) defined the essence of a phenomenon as it's "most comprehensive invariant meaning" (p.70). This view of "essence" is similar to the essence described by Spiegelberg (1965). However, Giorgi did not view the general essence as applicable in some universal sense, as did Spiegelberg. He viewed the essence, rather, as dependent more on the situation and its context. The general essence, in Giorgi's view, was applicable to other "typical" situations with similar contexts.

Some aspects of Giorgi's approach, more closely parallel, Spiegelberg's description of the method. Giorgi (1971a), for example, stressed the importance of treating the research content of a human science, namely experience,

"according to how it reveals itself" (p.5). He pointed out that when one is dealing with human experience, one can find truth in the 'way' a phenomenon appears, and that if one attended to such appearances, one could gain better access to the phenomenon as a whole. He argued, that when we allowed a phenomenon to present itself in whatever way it wished to present itself, we would discover that how something appears, could suggest in its very appearance a more hidden dimension of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1970). Giorgi's attention to the appearance of phenomena parallels Spiegelberg's step four, "watching modes of appearing". Spiegelberg, like Giorgi, observed that the different ways that a phenomenon presented itself was usually overlooked in one's preoccupation with what appears.

Finally, there is an interpretive dimension to Giorgi's approach. He claimed that the researcher was not merely interested in the surface meanings, but also in the more implicit meanings which must be discovered and thematized requiring interpretative procedures (Giorgi, 1975). This interpretative dimension is consistent with another phase discussed by Spiegelberg, step five "interpreting concealed meanings" or hermeneutic phenomenology. Titelman (1979) suggested that the texts of descriptive interviews, such as those utilized in Giorgi's approach, were comparable to the historical and literary texts to which hermeneutics were applied. He claimed that such descriptive interviews were



rarely total disclosures of implicit meaning, rather they required an intuiting of more concealed meanings. The interpretative process in Giorgi's approach suggests that his method has a distinctive hermeneutic character.

Giorgi acknowledged that his approach was guided by and depended on the basic assumptions and foundational concepts of phenomenological philosophy, with some modifications. However he also stressed the need for more specific guidelines and procedural outlines in the application of the method in practical research (Giorgi, 1985b). Giorgi (1975; 1985a) provided a general outline for an application which served as the framework for the method used in the present study. The method consists of the closely interrelated processes of data collection and data analysis. One begins by obtaining a description through a written report or an interview. Giorgi (1985a) summarized the four essential steps of data analysis as follows:

1. One reads the entire description in order to get a general sense of the whole.
2. Then the researcher reads through the text for the expressed purpose of delineating "meaning units" (segments of data expressing a unitary meaning).

3. The researcher then goes through all the meaning units and expresses the psychological insight in more direct terms of meaning units most revelatory of the phenomenon.
4. Finally the researcher synthesizes all the transformed meaning units into a statement of the participant's experience, which Giorgi referred as the situated level description (Giorgi, 1985a, p.10).

Giorgi also described a second level of analysis which aimed to move beyond the particulars of the individual description towards the apprehension of the most general meanings or the "general level description". Although Giorgi pointed out that one would rarely conduct research using one participant, he believed it was possible to learn something about the general essence of a phenomenon from one study participant. In the present study Giorgi's outline for the application of the method was followed, with some procedural modifications which are delineated in the next chapter.

#### Researcher perspective

In a phenomenological study the researcher is very much involved in the research process (Oiler, 1982). There are different views about the nature of this involvement. Giorgi (1975; 1985b) suggested that when thematizing the

structure of a lived experience one should adhere to meanings as described by the participant. In the present study I aimed to be faithful to their descriptions, while acknowledging my own involvement in the process. Darroch and Silvers (1982) refer to the "existential commitment" necessary in phenomenological research. This involves the preservation of the researcher's own presence in the interpretative process. Darroch and Silvers observed that "we can never speak on behalf of another, for we can only uncover and account for how we are speaking for that other...the phenomena we study is ostensibly the presence of the other, but it can only be the way in which the experience of the other is made available to us" (p.4).

Essentially one's account of the other's meanings then, must of necessity, involve a shared meaning in the sense that the researcher reveals her/his vision of the experience of the other. Fischer and Wertz (1979) pointed out that because researchers contribute to the shape of what they discover, that they need to acknowledge their unique perspective. Although a core principle in phenomenology is the importance of the "reduction" process or the bracketing of one's theoretical notions and ideas about a phenomena, it is also true that total reduction is impossible to achieve (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty stressed the value of

bringing to one's attention preconceived notions and ideas to increase one's awareness of the contribution to, or possible intrusion in, the research process and findings.

The core research question in this study was: What it is like to live in a violent home and what is the meaning of this experience for the adolescent girl? Van Manen (1984) suggested that even minor phenomenological research projects require that one not merely raise a question and explore it, but that one must "live or become" that question so to speak. The research question was raised initially for me through my involvement with a group of adolescents from violent homes, but became more meaningful as I sought to "live" the question for myself. This was achieved in part through recalling childhood experiences that evoked a sense of powerlessness, which I suspected would be an important aspect of the experience for participants. I also became more aware of conflicts that were a part of my own family living and more observant of conflict between parents and children in other family situations. This permitted an access to the experience at a personal level, albeit a very limited access.

One's previous theoretical knowledge about a phenomena also becomes integrated as part of one's perspective. Although I did not start with a conceptual framework, a review of the literature did point to themes that could have influenced how I situated myself in the data analysis phase

of the research. A theme of particular interest that surfaced as an outcome of the literature review was the report that adolescent girls sometimes identify with the father and abuse the mother. From a developmental perspective a girl's relationship with her father takes on special importance during adolescence (Conger & Peterson, 1984). One of my expectations at the outset was that this observation would be confirmed in participants' descriptions of the experience and that this could have implications for the overall psychosocial development for girls in these homes.

One's conceptual framework for practice could also influence the form of one's findings. In my nursing framework the individual is perceived as an integrated whole, who both influences, and is influenced by the environment in a reciprocal relationship. In this respect the individual may act upon, as well as transcend his/her environment and thus may help direct the future. Core concepts pertinent to health in this framework include beliefs about quality of life, self-potential and personal integration as essential dimensions of the individual as a whole person.

One's perspective is made explicit so as to identify potential bias and assumptions about the phenomena studied. However, these acknowledged assumptions may also direct the researcher towards the most appropriate method of inquiry

for its phenomena of concern. A nursing framework implies the need for descriptive qualitative methodology that will preserve the integrity of the whole person in a lived situation. Moreover, in a sense, one's beliefs about the nature of person, can serve as a bridge for gaining access to the individual as a person.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

#### Selection of participants

The target population for this study was middle and late adolescent girls who had grown up in and/or were currently living in violent home situations. The criteria for inclusion were: participants must be in the age range of fifteen to twenty years; they must have witnessed physical violence directed towards mother by father, stepfather or other long-term partner; they must have the ability to articulate their experience; and they must have been exposed to family violence within the previous three year period. Participants were not excluded if they were known to also have been directly physically or sexually abused. This decision was based on consistent reports in the literature of the overlap in the different forms of violence within these families. Names of individuals who met the stated criteria, and who were willing to participate, were solicited from the counsellor responsible for children and adolescents in the local shelter for abused women.

#### Pilot study

Prior to conducting interviews for the formal study, four young adult women from violent homes, recruited formally through the women's shelter, and informally through personal contacts, took part in a pilot study. The pilot

interviews served to demonstrate whether the planned interview approach utilizing an interview schedule, was feasible for gathering data. After two pilot interviews it became clear that a more open-ended, less structured approach would be more facilitative, as participants tended not to elaborate beyond the specific questions in the schedule. This open ended approach (see Appendix B) was adapted from Polyzoï (1985).

#### Formal Study

A total of eight participants were interviewed for possible inclusion in the formal study. Four participants were later excluded because they did not meet the stated criteria. For example, one participant had witnessed the abuse of her stepmother only, and two other participants were unable to describe their experience. Another was excluded because of tape recorder failure. One twenty four year old participant, who was originally interviewed for the pilot study, was subsequently included in the formal study because of her particular ability to describe her experience and because she was identified by shelter staff as "very typical" of the adolescent girls who come with their families to the shelter. Five participants were suitable for inclusion in the formal study. It was intended for all participants to have some connection with the women's shelter. However, because of the difficulty obtaining



participants who met the criteria and who were accessible during the data collection period, one participant was recruited through a children's mental health service.

Certain ethical concerns were addressed before initiating the data collection process. Approval for the study was initially obtained through the Human Subjects Review Committee at the School of Nursing, Memorial University. The initial contact with participants was made by shelter staff who had prior counselling responsibility for them, when they were residents with their mothers at the shelter. Shelter policy is such that respect and protection for the individual would be a priority and refusal to participate would not jeopardize their involvement with the shelter in any way. Participants were also told that they could have access to a counsellor during the course of the study if requested. In one instance it was necessary to obtain consent from a mother and in another instance consent from the agency responsible for the adolescent. (Parental or legal guardian consent was obtained when the participant was seventeen years or under, and/or was still living at home).

#### Specific procedure and interview approach

Participants who indicated to staff that they were willing to be involved, were contacted by the researcher by phone. During this initial contact they were informed briefly about the nature of the study, and an interview time

was arranged. Prior to the interview a detailed introduction to the study was given. This included full information about how confidentiality would be protected and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Written consent was also obtained at this time (see Appendices A and C). The mother's consent was obtained when necessary, prior to the interview with the participant (see Appendix D). Some interviews took place in the home and others were conducted in the "teen room" at the local shelter. Participants were asked to describe their experience in as much detail as possible and were asked to consider three time periods: growing up in their home, recent experiences in their home, as well as their future expectations in relation to the violence (see Appendix B). Phenomenologically speaking, one cannot describe what one has not already experienced (Schutz, 1970). However, I believe the meaning of a past experience can sometimes be enlarged by exploring an individual's perceptions and expectations of the future. In any case, the focus of the interviews was on the participants' experience of growing up with violence.

Although spontaneous descriptions were encouraged, some participants had difficulty getting started during the initial phase of the interview. When this occurred, questions identified by Spradley (1979) as being able to encourage description were utilized, such as "Describe a typical day in your home." or "Perhaps you might begin with

your first recollection of the violence". The general approach for encouraging description and elaboration was the Rogerian reflective style of interviewing with participants indicating areas that required further elaboration and clarification (Rogers, 1951). At times probing statements were used but only to assist participants to describe their experience in more detail. When it was felt participants clearly did not want to disclose some aspect of their story, probing was avoided, even when it was felt that this would contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

All interviews were taped and transcribed. They varied between sixty and ninety minutes in length. Following each interview the researcher played the tape and jotted reflections in a personal log. This log included: tentative emerging themes, areas that potentially needed clarification in the second interview, a critique of the interview style, and acknowledgement of factors that may have affected the interview process (for example, during one interview there were several telephone interruptions. It was noted that this seemed to be more of a distraction for me than for the participant). The personal log also helped to identify potential biases and served to highlight my influence on the interview process.

Participants were contacted for a second interview approximately two to three months following the first interview. This time period was necessary in order to

complete the lengthy data analysis process and preparation of the individual level descriptions. The validation interviews were taped but not transcribed. They were primarily for the purpose of confirming specific theme statements, that needed elaboration or clarification, and for validating the individual descriptions. In one instance a theme statement was changed and an individual description clarified but otherwise all individual level descriptions were confirmed. Only one participant could not be contacted for the second interview.

#### Data analysis

The main approach to analysis in phenomenology is a meditative reflective process rather than a process of validation of previously stated hypotheses (Bailyn, 1977). The specific method of data analysis chosen for this study followed the steps outlined by Giorgi (1975) with some procedural suggestions by Wertz (1985), and Fischer and Wertz (1979). The Ethnograph, a computer software programme designed by Dr. John Seidel of the University of Colorado, was also used for the purpose of coding and sorting the lengthy transcriptions, prior to more in-depth analysis and interpretation. After obtaining the transcribed interviews, methodological procedures included the following steps:

### Initial reading

Written transcripts were read several times while listening to the corresponding audiotape. This permitted a grasp of each individual experience as a whole prior to more in-depth analysis. Reflection on, and intuiting of, emerging themes was also possible during these initial readings. At this point the decision was made to convert the transcriptions into a form that could be manipulated by the Ethnograph, as a means of obtaining a more manageable data base. The Ethnograph converted the transcripts into multiple numbered lines of text.

### Discrimination of meaning units

Meaning unit statements were delineated during this phase of the process. This involved isolating those statements judged to reveal some aspect of lived violence. Meaning units are defined by Wertz (1985) as "distinguishable moments" in the transcripts. Giorgi (1985a) clarified this further by suggesting that one identified a meaning unit each time a transition in meaning, with respect to the phenomena, occurred for the participant. Meaning unit statements ranged from two or more line segments. According to Fischer and Wertz (1979) some researchers prefer smaller unit statements while others prefer larger units that better express the flow of a situation. It was my preference to choose larger meaning

unit segments so as not to lose too much of the context, which was critical to understanding the meaning of a particular statement. Statements or questions used to elicit data during the interview were included as part of a meaning unit, if judged to be necessary for understanding the meaning of a participant's statement. Each meaning unit was numbered and coded according to broad category or content areas.

#### Grouping meaning unit statements by topic

Wertz (1985) stressed the importance at this stage of grouping relevant meaning units according to their intertwining meanings and related content. This step was necessary, he claimed, especially for interviews which tended to jump around a lot. Concern for temporality was not as critical in this study because participants were not describing a single event but an overall experience. The more important goal was organizing related content and eliminating irrelevancies, repetitions and redundancies. The sorting procedure of the ethnograph programme was able to achieve the necessary grouping. The operation of imaginative variation was also important here. This involved an exercise in thought where I eliminated or varied some aspect of a statement, to determine how necessary it was to the essential structure of the phenomena as a whole. Imaginative variation is described by both Spiegelberg

(1965) and Giorgi (1985b). Examples of coded segments were statements that pertained to perceptions of father (POF), perceptions of mother (POM), quality of life (QOL), relationships with the opposite sex (RWOS), and participant's response to the violence (PRTV).

The Ethnograph sorting procedure served, not only to organize the data base but also to highlight recurring topics or content areas presented in the participants' interviews. In general, content areas discussed by participants, that seemed most revealing in terms of the lived experience of violence included: (a) the nature and characteristics of the abuse; (b) their perceptions of and relationship with father; (c) their perceptions of and relationship with mother and; (d) their overall response to violence. A number of codes were collapsed and included under these four main content areas as data analysis proceeded. Although other content areas were potentially revealing of the phenomenon it became necessary at this stage of the data analysis to circumscribe or set some limits on the analysis because of the initial broad approach to the phenomenon. According to Giorgi (1975) it is acceptable to circumscribe one's analysis and thematize only particular aspects of a more complex reality. Giorgi claimed that being faithful to a phenomena does not mean capturing the totality of the phenomena in every aspect. Rather "the complexities involved with every day living

force one to study only aspects of any lived situation" (Giorgi, 1975, p.99). The focus in this study was the day-to-day lived experience of violence in the family situation and the meaning of this experience for participants.

#### Condensation of meaning unit statements

Statements of related content previously clustered under the four main content areas were condensed into, non-repetitive, non-redundant statements with all non-essential content eliminated. These statements were sometimes rewritten in the third person or were directly quoted if judged to express the essential meaning with greater clarity by doing so. It was felt that the closer these condensed meaning units were to the original statements and language of participants the greater the likelihood of fidelity to the phenomena as lived. Condensed meaning units were essentially a synopsis of one or more meaning unit statements, taken from the original transcripts. The corresponding meaning unit numbers were included with the condensed statements to facilitate returning to the original protocols for context (these numbers were removed in the final written report). Condensation of meaning units in this step followed the procedure of (Fischer & Wertz, 1979).



Transformation of condensed meaning units to express  
explicit/implicit meanings

The operations of reflection and imaginative variation went into effect to a greater extent at this phase of the data analysis process. Concrete dimensions of the experience were searched for what they revealed explicitly, as well as implicitly, about lived violence. Wertz (1985) observed that once the researcher is firmly in contact with the participants' life world, it is possible to reflect on possible dimensions of the phenomena not directly expressed but highly implicit in terms of the participant's total situation. Imaginative variation also permitted better access to the most essential constituents of the experience. This operation was used to varying degrees throughout this phase of data analysis. For example, the meaning unit statements in one particular interview included the constituents of fear and mistrust. Generally one can mistrust another individual without fearing him/her. In this participant's experience however, these constituents seemed to be essential to the total experience. Moreover, it was the interrelationship between these constituents that best expressed the central theme or meaning for the participant. Similarly, parental neglect was a recurrent aspect of the lived experience of violence for another participant. While the experience in a general sense did

not need to include this constituent, the experience of lived violence for this participant seemed to require the constituent of parental neglect.

#### Synthesis and integration of transformed meaning units

Once the themes were identified by the researcher, it was possible to integrate essential non-redundant themes into a descriptive statement about the experience for each participant. Giorgi (1975) referred to this description as the situated level structural description. I referred to it as the individual structural description. I returned to the participants to validate these descriptions. There was some clarification of specific theme statements but the focus of the validation interview was the accuracy of these individual level descriptions.

#### Search for shared themes or general level analysis

In the final phase of data analysis, the individual level descriptions, and original transcripts were searched for evidence of shared themes and commonalities in meanings expressed. In this study the ultimate goal was to reach the general level structure of the experience through searching for common themes in the individual level descriptions. Wertz (1985) maintained that the researcher must determine which features of the individual structure expressed a general truth and which did not. In a sense then, the

general structure was reached not only by finding common themes across the descriptions, but also by looking reflectively at the individual cases. In this study, although there were shared themes, it was not always possible to find explicit evidence of a particular theme in all the transcripts. For the most part however there was either implicit or explicit evidence of a particular theme throughout the interviews.

A structural approach to the total analysis was also utilized. Essential themes were not viewed as isolated from one another. Relationships between constituents were evident and were expressed in the individual descriptions, as well as in the general level description. A search for relationships however was not emphasized. The primary goal was the description and explication of the essential themes at the individual and general level.

#### Issues pertinent to reliability and validity

Giorgi (1971a) pointed out that science can use different methods in its search for truth and that it can be enriched through such diversification. He also maintained that scientific merit should not be based on a researcher's adherence to specific procedures or to a particular conception of science, but on the basis of the relationship among the approach, the method, and the content being studied. Lived violence is a human experience and involves

the whole person within a particular context. The method used to study such an experience must not compromise the individual's uniqueness and personal perspective. The method and approach used in the present study preserved the integrity of the whole person while providing access to essential truths about a particular phenomenon.

Studies using this method should not be evaluated against traditional scientific criteria such as internal and external validity and reliability (Sandelowski, 1986). Aspects of validity and reliability in qualitative research are discussed below.

Validity refers to a study's accuracy in measuring what it purports to measure (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Sandelowski argued that "truth value" in a qualitative sense, is a more appropriate criteria as opposed to validity in a quantitative sense. She stated:

The truth value of a qualitative investigation generally resides in the discovery of human phenomena as they are lived and perceived by subjects rather than in the verification of a prior conception of those experiences. Significantly, truth is subject oriented rather than researcher defined. (p.30)

In this study an unstructured interview approach facilitated access to participant defined truth. The non-directive style of interviewing allowed participants to discuss those aspects considered to be most significant from

their perspective, rather than what was felt to be important from the researcher's perspective. Leading questions were avoided and reflective or clarifying statements designed to encourage further elaboration was the main interviewing style. Kvale (1983) stressed the value of such an approach in providing the opportunity for on-the-spot validation and initial interpretation of expressed meanings. This facilitated the interrelated processes of data collection and initial data analysis prior to more in-depth analysis.

Wilson (1985) suggested that another way truth value is achieved in qualitative research is through being clear about one's perspective and influence on the study. Sandelowski (1986) referred to this as ensuring "credibility" or faithfulness to the phenomenon as it presented itself. Keeping a diary of the interview process, initial reflections, personal feelings and reactions to participants helped to increase my awareness of how I may have influenced the shape of the findings. An individual having doctoral preparation with knowledge and clinical experience in family violence also read all transcriptions, condensed meaning unit statements and identified themes. This was to guard against interpretive statements and meanings which were not actually supported by the data. Further consensual validation was achieved by interviewing participants after the individual level analyses had been

completed. These procedures strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Sandelowski (1986) also challenged the use of reliability as an evaluative criterion. Reliability in quantitative research refers to the consistency in an instrument's ability to measure a particular outcome. This is sometimes referred to as an instrument's "repeatability" (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Sandelowski argued that repeatability often diminishes validity in a qualitative sense. It is generally accepted in the empirical sciences that one may have reliability or achieve consistent results, even when these results are not meaningful or valid in the true sense. In phenomenology one is interested in the unique situation or variations in an experience that can enlarge one's understanding of the experience in general, rather than the repeatability of previous findings in an exact sense.

Lecompte and Goetz (1982) argued that because human behaviour never remains the same, no study can be replicated exactly even in quantitative research. Kvale (1983) pointed out that during a qualitative research interview an individual may change his/her meanings through dialogue with the researcher, as new aspects of a particular experience are discovered. Thus repeatability is rarely possible. This was evident in the present study. Participants made statements such as "I never really thought about this before

but...." or "you know, it just came to me now..." confirming the tendency for the interview process itself to contribute to and shape the meanings expressed. In phenomenological terms, an approach to data collection that involves dialogue between two human beings is a critical means for gaining access to essential truths (Strasser, 1963). Cassirer (cited in Strasser, 1963) wrote that the spoken word does not only serve to communicate thought content, but also serves "as an instrument through which this content forms itself" (p.83). Van Manen (1984) reflected on a similar insight when he referred to Merleau-Ponty's observation that "when I speak I discover what it is I wished to say" (p.41). Repeatability then, may not be the most meaningful goal, when one is dealing with a human "instrument", as well as a human "object" of study.

Of greater importance than reliability in the qualitative sense is that one's method and procedures be clearly delineated (Sandelowski, 1986; Lecompte & Goetz, 1982; Giorgi, 1975). Giorgi referred to this as achieving reliability of the research process. The real issue he argued is not whether one could repeat the findings but whether another researcher, adopting a similar viewpoint, could also see what the researcher saw whether or not he/she agreed with it.

Another concern voiced with respect to the phenomenological method is the generalizability of the

findings. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to accurately represent a slice of a particular experience in order to sensitize care givers to the nature and depth of this experience. The data from such a study is not intended to be used for the purpose of generalizing to a larger population, but to enhance our understanding of, and contact with, a lived experience (Van Manen, 1984; Sandelowski, 1986). However, general truths can be obtained through a more in-depth understanding of particular examples of a phenomena. Generalizability can, it is believed, be demonstrated through the identification of shared meanings but this is not the primary aim of such a study (Sandelowski, 1986).

In the final analysis one is aware that in any study one gains access only to fragments of meaningful human experience. Strasser (1963) pointed out that any researcher's knowledge of another individual cannot have:

the character of an illumination, a mystic inspiration or an infallible revelation. On the contrary...all insights into man as man even those that have been gained intuitively, are communicated in humble awareness of the fact that they are subject to completion and correction. (p.306)



## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

This chapter will be presented in three sections. Section I will consist of the condensed and transformed meaning units, and individual descriptions for each of the five participants. Condensed meaning units are essentially a synopsis of two or more significant statements in the original transcripts expressed in the language of the participants. The corresponding transformed statements express the central theme or explicit and implicit meanings of the participants' statements. The condensed meaning units and their corresponding transformed statements were organized under four broad categories, which were judged to contain the most relevant and significant statements with respect to lived violence. These included:

1. Individual descriptions of the nature of the abuse
2. Perceptions of fathers, revealing lived violence
3. Perceptions of mothers, revealing lived violence
4. Participants' response to the violence.

Each individual description is a synthesis and integration of the transformed units and encompasses the four broad category areas for each individual participant.

Section II of this chapter will highlight the seven themes shared by all the individual descriptions. Each theme will be supported with illustrative quotations. This section will also present the general level description, which is a synthesis and integration of the seven common themes and represents the essential structure of lived violence in more general terms.

Section III will present a summary of participants' responses to a question about their caring needs. The responses to this question were not subjected to phenomenological analysis. They were included because of the potential implications for care givers, and because their responses demonstrated a need for further exploration of this area.

Note: The condensed units are written for the most part in the language of the participants. All proper names and any other identifying information have been changed to protect anonymity. Fictitious names were given to each participant to facilitate readability and to ensure that participants were perceived as unique human beings and not merely the "objects" of research. Detailed demographic data was excluded, again to reduce the risk of a breach to confidentiality. Participants frequent use of the terms "right?" and "you know?" in the text is typical Newfoundland vernacular. Newfoundlanders sometimes use these terms as punctuation.

Section I-condensed and transformed units

The case of Susan-Individual description of nature of the abuse revelatory of the phenomenon.

Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.

Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.

1. As back as far as Susan can remember she and her siblings were brought up "real strict". They always had a curfew, were frequently grounded, and had a lot of household chores and responsibilities.

1. Susan recalled a particularly strict upbringing as a child.

2. She cannot recall much of her childhood prior to the age of 10. She suspected that this lack of recollection was "because there is nothing to remember, because I was grounded all the time".

2. Susan believed her life experience and recollection of early childhood experiences was limited, because she spent so much time confined to her home.

3. Susan wasn't able to spend much time with friends because of home responsibilities, or because she didn't have permission to participate in activities with her peers. She also felt that her parents drove all her friends away. After a friend had been "kicked out" by a parent, she felt humiliated and wouldn't go around with this friend again.

3. Susan felt that she was unable to have normal peer friendship relationships because of parental restrictions and her parent's attitudes towards her friends.

4. Susan recalled witnessing a "lot" of violent incidents, as well as being told about such incidents by her mother and older sisters. She also witnessed the "after effects" of violence directed at her mother.

5. She described one incident that stands out as the worst she can remember. Following mother's return one evening from visiting an older male friend, her father accused her mother of sleeping with the friend. They were sitting down eating supper and their father threw the table over, hauled their mother up over the stairs while smacking her in the face.

6. During this attack the children were told to stay downstairs but an older sister followed her parents upstairs. "Apparently he raped her...hauled all her clothes off and checked her underwear to see if she had sex with that guy, right...that is low that is disgusting, right?"

4. Susan witnessed violence directly or was aware of violence through her mother and siblings. She also became aware of certain consequences of father's violence toward her mother. (In the validation interview she stated that an example of these "after effects" was her mother's miscarriage subsequent to a beating.)

5. Susan recalled one incident as a particularly vivid one for her. She contrasted the peaceful activity of sitting down for supper with the explosive violent behaviour of her father.

6. Susan did not directly witness this incident but knew what happened through her sister. She viewed the incident to be of a particularly degrading nature.

7. Violent incidents in general consisted of smacking, hitting or punching but sometimes included threats with guns, knives or axes. During these incidents threats to their own or their mother's life were common.

8. Susan described another incident where her father was "getting on right perverted" with her mother in front of them "feeling her up and stuff like that". When told not to do this in front of the children he said "I can do whatever the fuck I wants to do to my wife...whenever I wants".

9. Sometimes Susan was the object of father's physical abuse, particularly when attempting to stop the abuse of mother. "I was there saying you can't do that...and I suppose where I was so young and stupid, I always opened my mouth or something...and he came over to me and he was about to smack me."

10. Violence in Susan's home also included abuse by their mother towards them. "Mom was there trying to protect us but then again she was beating the shit out of us too."

7. Violence involved hands on physical abuse, the use of lethal weapons, as well as threats to their own or their mother's life.

8. Susan expressed the degrading nature of the emotional abuse, mother's and their powerlessness, and father's control evident in such incidents.

9. Susan recalled being physically abused by father, but these incidents were described primarily in the context of her attempts to intervene when mother was being abused.

10. Violence in Susan's family included maternal violence. She saw an incongruence between mother's protective behaviour and her tendency to physically abuse them.

11. When her parents separated, the physical abuse of mother stopped but "telephone abuse" continued. "There was more abuse and more stuff like that...and there were threats and everything else and everyone was into it, everyone was fighting. There was never peace in the family."

12. After her parent's separation Susan moved back and forth between parents. While living with her father, she described him as the "best kind", "half decent" and not abusing her physically although there was "verbal" abuse, for example, "You're like your mother, you're a slut and all this..."

13. Susan recalled an incident where her father told her that she was not his daughter and later required her to go for a blood test to confirm this. When she went to the doctor with father and the doctor refused to do this, her father, "with everyone around", said "You fucking bitch, you're not even mine anyway. I don't know why I bothered bringing you here".

11. After her parent's separation, although the abuse was of a less physical nature, Susan still perceived the ongoing seemingly endless sense of "no peace" in the family.

12. For a time following her parent's separation Susan felt that her father was less physically abusive towards her and she felt more positive towards him, although she still experienced abuse of an emotional nature.

13. Susan described an example of extreme emotional abuse. She felt humiliated and embarrassed in her attempt to comply with her father's demand that she prove she was his natural child.

**Susan- Perceptions of father revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. To Susan, father was the type of person who "creates stress and lays guilt trips" on people. She expressed concern for an older sister who now lives with her father, because she suffers from colitis and she believed her father would make her sister ill. "He's no good for anyone like that, right?"

2. Susan described father as having something definitely wrong with him and needing to see a "shrink". She felt it was hard to believe her father was sane after all the things he had said and done, and the threats he had made on her mother's life. She observed that although her father pressured her mother to see a shrink, he was the one most in need of straightening out.

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Father was perceived as a source of stress particularly for anyone vulnerable to stress. Implicit here was Susan's awareness of mother's vulnerability to father's tendency to "create stress". (In the validation interview Susan confirmed that she perceived her mother as vulnerable to father in the same way she described her older sister's vulnerability.)

2. Susan struggled to make sense of father's violence and believed that some form of insanity was the only logical explanation for his behaviour.

3. After a violent episode her father seemed to back down when he knew that he had hurt her mother enough. He would go upstairs, go to bed and get up and then be the "best kind" again. "He just wanted to let her know I suppose who was in charge and all this. It's stupid."

4. Susan felt her father's abusive behaviour in general was because he would become fed-up with her mother's sickness. He would take advantage of the fact that her mother "was always going around out of it" because of the drugs she was on.

5. After one violent episode her father complained that none of his family cared about him and that he couldn't talk to either of them. Then he went out and started drinking.

6. Susan recalled the Christmas that her parents separated. Christmas time was generally a happy time for her father and for them. "This Christmas, the last Christmas when we were all together was different, it was really different because there was something going on that Dad didn't know about...there was tension in the air, and Christmas was not usually like that in our home."

3. It appeared to Susan that father stopped the abuse when he had hurt her mother sufficiently. His "best kind" behaviour afterward, suggested to her that he just wanted to establish his control and authority, although this doesn't make much sense to her.

4. Susan perceived her father as frustrated with mother's physical health problems. She also believed, that because her mother was on a lot of medication, that she was more vulnerable to father's abuse.

5. Father's justification for abusive behaviour, was his difficulty communicating with family members and feeling that they didn't care about him.

6. The Christmas they separated from father had particular significance for Susan because it contrasted sharply with the generally happy tone in their family at this time of year, and because it was their final Christmas together.



7. Susan's father figured out that they were leaving when he saw all her friends standing around outside their house crying and he went "totally wild...throwing rocks at the car and everything".

8. Susan felt sad and felt bad for her father because "before we left he kissed everyone of us and he said well I love you and all this and that will never change...and he was almost on the verge of crying, right, and we really...our heart went out to Dad, the three of us in the back of the car we were all crying on the way in, right?".

9. She observed a change for the better in her father after her parent's separation. She now believed her parents weren't meant to be together. Although her father was still abusive generally, he never tried to hit her anymore. He also bought things for her and could be quite nice.

7. Susan recalled the intensity of her father's reaction and the sadness of the event in general.

8. Susan felt a sense of loss for them as well as for her father. She felt this loss more intensely because of father's expressed love for them on the day they left. There was a sense of regretting the decision as well as compassion for their father's pain.

9. Susan implied that her parent's separation has been positive because of the improvement in father's behaviour. She believed that this confirmed that her parents weren't meant to be together.

10. Susan thought that while father could be nice sometimes "nice never really paid up you know...I mean you had to pay for him getting you something, right...like he'd buy you a new pair of jeans or something...you had to pay for it in a certain way". For example, after he bought something for her he'd bring it up to her later that he could have paid the telephone bill with it.

11. During a recent contact with her father, Susan observed that she felt absolutely nothing for her father, only pity. She observed that he had lost weight and was looking older and raggedy looking but when he came up and hugged her she didn't respond in kind but said to him "You're not my father remember". She knew that this might seem like a nasty thing to do but to her it was not.

10. Susan felt that her father's approval and acceptance wasn't worth the emotional price or guilt she had to pay. (In the validation interview I sought further clarification of what she meant by having to pay for her father's approval "in a certain way". She disclosed that she had learned through an hypnosis experience, over the summer, that she had been molested by her father as a child. She now feels that her difficulty recalling experiences prior to age 10 was because of the sexual abuse.)

11. Susan realized during a recent contact with her father that she no longer felt any affection for her father. Even his bedraggled and sad appearance was not enough to evoke any real feeling towards him. She reminded father of the time he tried to disown her and claim that she wasn't his natural child. To her, this response was totally justified.

**Susan- Perceptions of mother revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Susan described her mother as really sick and taking too many addictive drugs prescribed by her doctor for stress.
2. Susan's mother went away to another province at one point for help and there was some improvement, however when she got back home "she slipped into it again getting migraines from stress".
3. Susan believed that her mother, unlike her father, did not need a "shrink", all she needed was help in getting off drugs.
4. During a violent attack Susan observed that her mother "couldn't do much" but would freak out real bad.

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as more implicit meanings.**

1. Susan believed that her mother's drug addiction made her mother more vulnerable to her father's abuse. (In the validation interview she stated that her mother's abuse was an outcome of the stress she was under while living with her father.)
2. Susan perceived mother's stress as directly related to what was happening in their home. (She confirmed this statement in the validation interview)
3. Susan believed that her mother was not unstable emotionally but needed help for her drug addiction.
4. Susan viewed mother as helpless and unable to defend herself during a violent episode.

5. She also recalled her mother not allowing them to observe or intervene during a particular violent episode. "The way Mom was she didn't want us to see her being...I don't know...sort of it is like she's being degraded or something...but I wouldn't blame her for that, right, about what happened that day."

6. When Susan and a sibling did try to help their mother, their father wouldn't allow them. "You leave her alone he said, don't help her up, she don't deserve that. He was about to raise his hand to me, and Mom got up and he smacked her instead".

7. Susan described a change in her mother after they left her father and mother got help with her drug aduiction. "She wasn't smacking me around anymore...and she was there saying well you're wise, you can make that decision".

8. Susan said that when her mother did try to abuse her, she would tell her mother that this wasn't right. Susan said her mother realized this herself after awhile "but she was so used to living in violence I suppose".

5. Susan empathized with her mother and understood her need to protect them, and herself, from the degrading nature of the abuse.

6. Susan was aware that intervening on their mother's behalf led to further abuse either emotional or physical, directed at them or their mother.

7. Susan saw an improvement in her relationship with her mother, and less violence, after her mother left her father and received treatment for drug addiction.

8. For Susan, Mother's abusive behaviour was related to the constant exposure to violence in their home. Implicit here is her acceptance of her mother in spite of this abuse and her reluctance to place blame on her mother.

9. Susan described further violence after her mother got involved in another abusive relationship. "Like there about a year and a half ago...with Mom's boyfriend...there was violence there too on Mom's part...Mom got upset with me for getting upset with him and she hauled me across the table and slammed me up against the wall". Susan was also told by her mother to leave home and not come back.

10. Susan recalled saying to her mother "I can't believe you're getting on like this now". Susan said the violence started because her mother's boyfriend didn't like the guy Susan brought home. When her mother said that she didn't like this friend, Susan said to her mother "Why? because he (mother's boyfriend) doesn't like him?"

11. When Susan left her mother's home that night she recalled walking in a snowstorm to the women's shelter, carrying three garbage bags and a couple of gym bags.

9. Susan experienced further direct physical abuse from her mother. She also experienced her mother's rejection when she(Susan) was asked to leave home.

10. Susan was devastated by her mother's support of the boyfriend against her. She perceived her mother as unable to think for herself and emotionally dependent on the boyfriend.

11. The event stood out in her mind more because there was a bad snowstorm and it was necessary for her to walk to the shelter carrying her belongings.

12. Sometime later, her mother asked her to return home. Susan decided that she wanted to "give it another shot". This time when there was another violent episode, her mother defended her even though she got "beat up for this".

13. Susan viewed her present relationship with her mother as being like a marriage relationship "not in the terms you know...she can do whatever she wants but we're together, we'll always be that way, until I leave I suppose".

14. She expressed concern to her mother about the consequences of entering into a marriage relationship with her current boyfriend. She felt "it would be the same thing all over again". She viewed her mother as "totally in love" and willing to do anything in the world for this boyfriend.

12. Susan wished to re-establish her relationship with her mother. Her mother's support during another violent episode confirmed that her mother cared about her, although the switched loyalty meant further abuse for mother

13. Susan viewed her relationship with her mother as a close one. Implicit here is her view of the marriage relationship as she knows it, as an infringement of the other's freedom. To her, marriage should involve permanence and a sense of commitment.

14. Susan believed her mother was overly dependent on her relationship with a current boyfriend, and willing to make unreasonable sacrifices to maintain the relationship. She feared this would lead to the same degree of lived violence as with their father.

**Susan- Response to violence revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Susan recalled being really upset "screeching and bawling", and huddled together with her sisters behind the supper table during a violent episode. "We were really frightened, we didn't know what to do and we couldn't do anything because I was only ten or eleven and my sisters weren't much older."

2. Sometimes Susan tried to stop what was happening, for example, helping her mother up, when she was struck down, or telling her father he couldn't do what he was doing. "I suppose where I was so young and stupid I always opened my mouth or something."

3. Susan recalled learning that her mother's "sickness" was an outcome of father's abuse. Her older sister told her "Mom's going to be in hospital for awhile...she lost the baby or something, right?...I couldn't believe it...because the day before the night she got sick, Dad was after slapping her around a few times and banging her off the walls".

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as more implicit meanings.**

1. Fear and helplessness were experienced in response to a typical episode of violence. There was a felt need to intervene with an accompanying sense of powerlessness in the situation.

2. She tried to intervene to stop the violence. She perceived herself as taking more risks than her older siblings because she was younger and more naive.

3. Susan found it difficult to accept that mother's "sickness" was actually a miscarriage brought on by father's abuse.

4. Susan finds specific violent incidents hard to forgive or to forget. She believed she might be able to forget but finds it impossible to forgive her father, for all the damage he's done. She has had nightmares about her father trying to kill her. She can also recall the type of knife her father tried to use, the way he treated her mother, and the way he hit her.

5. Susan described one incident of abuse her older sister received by her mother as "scary" and expressed the belief that there was no need for this kind of violence. "The perfect family to me wouldn't do that, wouldn't live in stuff like that, right?"

6. Susan recalled not wanting her parents to separate because she wanted a family, although she doesn't remember ever having a family.

4. Recollections of specific violent incidents and of her father's abusive behaviour in particular, are hard to put behind her. She conceded that even though she could forget, she could not forgive because of the impact her father's abuse has had on her.

5. Susan was aware of the difference between her own family and what she perceived as the ideal family. She also feared what the ultimate outcome of such violence could be.

6. Susan expressed the contradictory feelings inherent in lived violence. There was a fear of losing the sense of "family" while having the awareness that as things were, there was no real sense of family. Father's leaving them represented giving up the hope for a "family".



7. In describing the overall impact of lived violence Susan said "It was all pain for us. We had to take everything. Mom took a lot too I must say, but I mean we had to take watching Dad abuse her every day, and then we had to watch...we had to feel the abuse like mentally two of them were abusing us by fighting so much...but physically Mom was abusing us, and Dad was trying to. It was madness in the house."

8. She expressed the need to get away from the violence. "Just anything to get away from the violence, anything to get away from the abuse of both of them, right?...I just wanted to get out of there but just for a short period. I didn't want anyone to separate or anything like that, I just wanted a bit of happiness."

9. She was tired of the ever present violence. She got so used to it after awhile that she didn't bother to cry. She recalled crying the day she and her mother and sisters left her father. "It wasn't because of the violence or anything it was because of the pain...it was real weird."

7. Susan perceived that she and her siblings experienced both the direct and indirect impact of lived violence. There was a sense of never being free of the emotional pain or the chaos associated with living in a violent home.

8. Susan wanted to escape the violence of both parents but did not want her parent's separation to be the price. Happiness for her was not possible in her home as things were.

9. Violence was such an ongoing reality that after a time her usual emotional response ceased. There was a certain irony for Susan, in her tearful response on the day they left father. Although they were in a sense leaving the violence, now her tears were in response to the emotional pain and sense of loss experienced in leaving father.

10. Susan recalled drawing pictures of happy families when she was grounded for long periods. She observed a family next door who seemed to get along well together and so she drew little comic pictures of happy families.

11. She felt depressed when they first came to St. John's after her parents separated. She felt she wasn't ready to get on with her life at that time, and started doing and dealing drugs which she described as her escape.

12. Life for Susan "came shattering down" after her mother got involved with an abusive boyfriend after leaving her father. At this time she left her mother's home and lived in a boarding house for awhile. She found a particular way of coping or "doing herself over". This involved talking to herself about her problems.

13. Susan described her experience as "mind boggling...when I look at it all now it's like bits and pieces of it bouncing around in my head".

10. She coped with being grounded and her feelings of loss by drawing pictures that evoked images of the ideal family for her.

11. She was aware that involvement in drugs was her way of coping with her parents separation and coming to St. John's.

12. Susan found conducting a self-dialogue as an effective way of coping when she felt her life disintegrating, subsequent to her mother's involvement in another abusive relationship.

13. Susan was still puzzled and confused about her experience as a whole. Implicit here is her desire to make sense of all the different aspects of the experience.

14. Susan noted the commonalties in father's behaviour and her mother's boyfriend. "I find him and Dad, they have a lot of things in common...and it's too hard to place, right? I mean they got a streak of violence in them, and two of them are nasty, and two of them appreciate very little."

15. Susan observed a difference in her immediate response to violence now, with how she was growing up. She felt her father would not have "gotten away with it" if she was the way she is now, back then. She said at the women's shelter she learned "I wasn't supposed to be smacked around and no one else was supposed to be smacked around or beat up or raped or any thing else".

16. Susan believed that if she had the knowledge back then that she has now, she could have helped her mother by "hooking her up with the right people." She knows she wouldn't put up with that, not after all her father did.

14. Susan was aware of a pattern in the expression of violent behaviour. She also expressed difficulty understanding the nature of violence in general.

15. Susan attributed the change in her response, to learning more about violence at the women's shelter. Violence had become so much a part of her life that she had viewed it as to be expected.

16. Susan expressed some regret that the help her mother needed was not forthcoming, because they lacked the necessary knowledge of resources available.

### Individual structural description

For Susan, the experience of lived violence began as far back as she can remember. Recollection of this experience, however, is difficult for her prior to the age of ten years. She recalled a strict upbringing with rigid curfews, limited peer relationships and long periods of time confined to her home. She attributed her limited recollection to limited experiences outside her home as a child. Susan witnessed the physical and emotional abuse of her mother by father, and was directly abused by mother and father. Father abused them primarily in response to their attempts to intervene during his attacks on mother. She also experienced father's emotional abuse.

Susan perceived her mother as under a lot of stress, related to their home situation, and as using too many drugs, making her vulnerable to father's abuse. Mother was also perceived as powerless, helpless and dependent. However, Susan believed her mother, unlike her father, was not mentally ill, rather she just needed help with her drug addiction. Mother's abusive behaviour toward them was perceived as related to the constant exposure to violence in their home and the stress she was under. Susan did not hold mother responsible for the violence in general.

Father was perceived as contributing to mother's stress, becoming frustrated with mother's sickness and drug addiction, and capitalizing on mother's weakness. Susan

believed the only explanation for the degrading explosive nature of father's behaviour was some form of mental instability or illness. Leaving father permanently was a painful experience. She felt sadness and compassion towards father and a sense of loss and regret about the break-up of the family.

Following her parent's separation, Susan's mother went to a local shelter and later to hospital for treatment of her drug addiction. Susan was aware of a gradual positive change in her mother, with a decrease in abusive behaviour, and an improvement in her own relationship with her mother. She also saw a change in father's behaviour with less physical abuse towards her, although he was still abusive in an emotional sense.

Following her parent's separation, she went back and forth between parents for a few years. Even though the abuse was no longer of a physical nature, the verbal fighting or "telephone abuse" continued. She recalled an ongoing sense of "no peace" in the family. Although her relationship with her mother was much closer after leaving father, this picture changed when her mother became involved in another abusive relationship. Once again she was abused by her mother, when she tried to interfere in mother's relationship with the boyfriend. Eventually she re-

established her relationship with her mother. Susan felt she could not forgive father for his past behaviour and severed any connection with him.

Susan described her response to violence in her home, as that of fear and helplessness. She also expressed a strong desire to escape from the violence although she did not want her parent's separation to be the price of that escape. She recalled trying to stop her father from hitting her mother during a violent episode, although this frequently led to father's abuse of her, her siblings, or further abuse for her mother. She believed her ability to respond to the violence changed, after she spent time at a shelter with her mother. Now she is aware that such violence is not acceptable, and that no one should be abused by another person and feels she could stand up to abuse if it occurred now.

Susan perceived the overall impact of violence as "all pain" for her and her siblings. While her mother had to deal with father's abuse, they had to deal with witnessing their mother being abused, their mother's abuse of them, as well as father's emotional and physical abuse. Susan expressed a need to understand what violence is all about, and to resolve its impact in some measure. She would like to put her experience of it in the past, and get on with life free of violence, although she is aware that forgetting the past will be difficult for her.

**The case of Anne--Individual description of the nature of the abuse revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Anne's first recollection of violence was witnessing her brother being hit with a belt by her mother. However, Anne said her mother didn't hit them like that all the time.

2. Anne described another incident which she thinks occurred when she was about four. She was in the kitchen and her father had burned some dolls belonging to an older sister in their oven. "I guess he didn't want her to play with them". At this time she also recalled her father having a boot in his hand and he was hitting her mother with it.

3. Anne felt she knew about the violence from what her mother had told her, from seeing it all and from living 17 years approximately with it.

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Although she recalled incidents of mother's physical abuse, she stressed that this was not common behaviour for her mother.

2. Anne recalled an incident of emotional abuse and physical abuse. These incidents were not clear in her recollection. She also struggled to find an explanation for father's abusive behaviour.

3. Anne's experience of lived violence was perceived as occurring from the time she was born, either through witnessing it directly or hearing about it from her mother.

4. Anne described an occasion when she suspected father had hit mother. Her mother had a black eye but denied that Anne's father had hit her. "It just hit my head that he hit her in the eye, you know what I mean. I got that feeling." She observed however that "I got no evidence or nothing...like to prove that he hit her, right?, because it's only mother that can say so, right?".

5. There were other incidents where Anne herself was physically abused by father. One night when she came in late, she was listening to music when her father came into her room and started hitting her for being out late. She was lying on her bed crying when he told her he was going to "starve them all."

6. There were also occasions when father locked them in the house all day, and another when they were locked out of their home for long periods. On these occasions frequently they went without food. She remembered going to a friend's home in order to eat. Her friend's family complained that she ate supper with them too much. She felt she had no choice, however, because she was not being given food at home.

4. Her awareness of father's abuse of mother was perceived sometimes at an intuitive level, when she did not directly witness the abuse and when mother herself would not acknowledge it.

5. Anne described the unpredictable hurtful nature of one of father's attacks. Her crying failed to evoke any response of caring or remorse from father, just more abuse.

6. Restriction of personal freedom and failure to provide adequate physical care was another form of abuse experienced by Anne. She depended on her friend's family in order to meet these needs.



7. Anne recalled father's restricting their use of the shower on some occasions, and cutting off the hot water. She also felt father withheld money from her, even for things she needed. She nevertheless went to her father for money first, because she knew her mother didn't have much money. When father refused, she would ask her mother, who would slip her some money without father's knowledge. She was always careful not to waste money that mother gave her.

8. Anne's parents had frequent arguments which she described as "natural".

9. "Here I am trying to concentrate on working and listen to arguments. It's impossible, right?...so I said frig this and closed the book and went out --- I'd keep it to that, cause I can't take the homework book out with me, cause the first thing father would say is "Where are you going with that"...and he'd think I'm running away or something and I won't come back home. He'd think, I'd just go to school and I wouldn't come back home, that's where I'd have the book in my hand, see?."

7. Some aspects of the abuse were part of the fabric of daily living. Her father controlled such things as whether or not they took a shower and whether they were given any money. Anne reluctantly asked her mother for money, knowing that it would be a sacrifice for her. She was especially careful to buy only what she needed with mother's money.

8. Daily arguments between parents, led to the conclusion that such arguments were to be expected and a normal part of parental interaction.

9. Anne was unable to complete homework assignments because of the arguments at home. In this situation, she couldn't leave her home with her books, because her father would think she planned to stay out, go to school in the morning and not come back home.

# **Anne--Perceptions of father revelatory of the phenomenon.**

## **Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Anne thought that "if father wasn't living home we'd get along a lot better but I mean there is nothing I can do about that, right?".

2. Anne saw herself as not listening to father and not wanting to go by what he said. "At first I did but after awhile I said - forget it he's not going to change. I'm not going to listen to him, right? there's no sense."

3. She recalled standing up to her father on one occasion. "I stood up sort of, and I said come and hit me and I said you'll see where you'll end up. Right there and then he didn't hit me and that's the very first time I ever said it to him, right?"

4. Anne didn't trust her father. "I didn't trust him with any of us right, my sisters and brothers, including me, right?"

## **Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Anne believed her father was the primary source of conflict in her family but felt powerless to change this situation.

2. She did not respect or support father's authority in their home. At one point she believed father would improve and she made an effort to gain his approval. Now, she has abandoned any hope that father will change.

3. Anne discovered that an effective way of protecting herself against father's abuse was to take an aggressive stance herself.

4. She experienced a sense of general mistrust in father whether it pertained to her, her mother or her siblings.

5. Anne felt her father put on an act of good behaviour for company in the same way some people cleaned up their house for company. Some people have told her that her father is a "good man". Anne felt that this was because they have not seen his "bad parts" which outweigh his good parts, in her view. Her father did this, she believed, in order to get her to come home. (Anne is currently under the protection of the Child Welfare Department).

6. Anne recalled one Christmas when they got along with father and there were few arguments. "We just got along a lot better. Father never complained or nothing, right?. I mean since father wasn't saying anything we weren't going to say anything because the last thing we needed was another argument, right?"

7. Anne viewed her father as not giving mother much opportunity to make her own decisions. "Let's say she couldn't go out with another woman, or hang around and go to dinner some place, or go over to her place...like father would tell her to, right?...like he'd say "Why don't you go out for awhile...then, like father

5. Father was perceived as a phony, who put on a facade of good conduct, generally in order to impress others and specifically, in order to get social services to let his daughter come home.

6. Getting along with father was an uncommon experience. Anne tried to maintain this situation by being careful not to do anything to precipitate an argument and to prolong the sense of peace.

7. She perceived that her father controlled mother's coming and going. Her mother's freedom as well as her confinement was based on his decision for her, rather than her own.

would say "No I'll give you a run down or something like that, but sometimes he'd let her walk down by herself or with one of us."

8. Anne does not feel any affection towards her father. "If I give him a hug or anything I just don't feel right." Anne said that if she's going anywhere for a long while she'll give her mother a hug and a kiss but with her father she won't.

8. She felt uncomfortable expressing affection towards father. She would express her love for mother, if she was, for example, going away for awhile, but does not show a similar expression of love towards her father.

# Anne - Perceptions of mother revelatory of the phenomenon.

## Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.

1. Anne felt she had a basic idea of what her mother has been through in their home through "living approximately 17 years with it."

2. Anne believed her mother still had it hard at home, based on her observations when she returned home for short periods, although things have settled down somewhat.

3. She believed her mother couldn't discuss her feelings with Anne or with Anne's siblings because father was always around and because "she can't just pop out and tell us, right?"

4. Mother was perceived as going along with father because of the situation she was in. Anne felt she really didn't have much choice in this.

## Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.

1. Mother's "living through" the experience was also "lived through" by Anne.

2. Mother's situation at home, as perceived by Anne, hasn't changed all that much in spite of the passage of time.

3. Communication with mother about her feelings in relation to the violence was limited. Anne believed such feelings were difficult for her mother to express, and because mother was not free to disclose her feelings when father was around.

4. Mother was perceived as essentially powerless and vulnerable because of father's control.

5. Anne believed she knew how mother felt because she compared it to what she would feel in the same situation. "I don't know, she's got it all inside, you know what I mean and she can't let it go yet, right?, and the only way she can let it go is by getting mad at something over the stupidest things or something, right?"

6. Anne could tell things weren't right for mother by the way she acted, although her mother doesn't say so. "I'll be there saying, smile mother, things like that and she'll smile right and then all of a sudden she wouldn't smile again. She'd smile, if I asked her to smile, she'd smile for me. Then she'd turn away and she wouldn't be smiling."

7. Anne recalled her mother threatening to divorce her father on one occasion and kicking him out for three days. "I mean whatever happened between them two must have really, let's say shot her up there, right?"

8. There was one occasion that Anne recalled seeing her mother happy. It was Christmas and her mother did the cooking, and wanted to do it, and she had nothing

5. Anne empathized with mother's feelings about the abuse. She described what she believed her mother's feelings were, as well as her own more implicit feelings in response to the abuse. This was expressed as an anger, not yet ripe for full disclosure, which revealed itself as reactions to trivial incidents.

6. Although Anne's mother did not talk about the way she was feeling, Anne experienced a sense of mother's unhappiness, by her behaviour and general expression.

7. She was aware of mother's anger towards father because of her threats of divorce and kicking father out. However, the problems were not shared with the family.

8. The emotional climate in Anne's home was such that happy family times were rare. She recalled a special Christmas when mother was happy and this set the tone for one of

but smiles on her face the whole Christmas. "I was glad to see mother that way, because it was the best Christmas we ever had."

9. Anne wanted to buy her mother a bottle of wine as a gift but didn't have the money. She told her mother this, and her mother said "That's Ok" and Anne said "I'll get it for you one Christmas, some Christmas".

10. Anne felt that mother couldn't share her problems with father because "in a sense he is her problem". However Anne had a plan to go to the mainland to bring back her grandmother, who she believed, would spend time with her mother and eventually provide the help her mother needed. She believed that if her mother was with her grandmother, her father would not be able to come and take her away. Anne "figured" that if mother could get the help she needed she would eventually get a divorce.

11. Anne believed mother feared father, and was unable to control certain situations for fear that father would hit her or the children. She believed mother had other fears about father as well, although she's not sure what these were.

the best Christmases she can remember. Implicit here is the impact of mother's suffering on the family.

9. Anne wanted to give some indication of her love for mother but was not able to do so in a tangible way. She conveyed to mother a sense of hope in the future and a belief that things would get better for her and for them.

10. Anne believed mother needed protection from father and help for her problems. She believed that her grandmother might be able to provide this. Fantasizing about ways to get help for mother, such as the plan to get in contact with grandmother, provided her with a hope that things would improve for mother in the future.

11. Mother feared father's potential to harm her or the children. Anne also believed mother had certain unnamed fears about father as well.

12. Anne has observed her mother try to stop her father from hitting them. However father would hit her (mother) then, and her mother would start crying.

12. Although Anne felt mother had little control over father she has observed her mother intervene to stop her father's abuse of them. However this generally led to further abuse and suffering for mother.



# **Anne-- Response to violence revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Anne recalled crying in response to her mother's hitting her brother with a belt. She also felt scared and confused because, she explained, she was so young and didn't know the difference.
2. Anne found that she thought about the violence a lot. "It was in my mind and it just wouldn't get out of my mind and it's still in there of course."
3. Anne described her response to a violent incident. "I don't know, I just didn't like it and mother started crying over it and after seeing her cry it was even harder, right?"
4. There was one occasion when Anne's father confined them to their house all day. She and her siblings planned to pack up their bags and leave by climbing out a window, although they didn't do this.

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. When she was younger Anne had no knowledge of the extent of abuse to expect. She experienced fear and confusion as an early immediate response to witnessing abuse. She implied that as time went on she became more accustomed to the violence.
2. She recalled ruminating about violent episodes a great deal and still has difficulty not thinking about it today.
3. A painful dimension of Anne's experience was empathy for her mother's suffering.
4. As a way of coping with the frustration of being confined to their home all day, Anne recalled that she and her siblings collaborated as to how to escape.

5. Anne frequently stayed on the bus that took her home from school because she didn't want to go in the house with her father. "I'd probably get off at a friend's house, maybe even my boyfriend's...I'd stay until late because then all I'd have to do was sleep and get up early and go again,...and I'd probably go out with my friends. I'd be drinking and things like that and I wouldn't go home until I'd sober up a bit because I knew if I came home drunk, like I was afraid father might get in a racket with me."

6. Anne felt that her mother was still living in a situation of potential abuse, but that nothing happens now ever since she started running away from home. "I ran away and I came back eventually. I went to (a girl's shelter) and then when I came back home things were Ok for about a week...then it got back to the same old way and then I kept running away you know, probably every month or something."

7. Anne feared the potential outcome of the violence "I just don't want father to do anything to mother...cause I mean you hear of families being abused and all of a sudden the wife gets killed by the husband or something like that."

5. Escaping the home situation, in particular her father, became the prime motivating and guiding factor in her day-to-day living.

6. Anne believed that her running away controlled father's abusive behaviour to some extent. When she saw an improvement in the violence after the first time she ran, she continued to run as a way of maintaining the peace.

7. Anne's attempt to stop the abuse through running away, was a response to a fear of what the violence would ultimately lead to. From Anne's perspective mother's survival may depend on her success in stopping the abuse.

8. For Anne the worse thing about living in her home was "just basically the way the family was or maybe still is, I don't know because I haven't been living there now".

8. For Anne the family's way of being and the general emotional climate in their home, was what made it the most difficult for her.

9. Anne felt that if father wasn't living at home they would get along better but "there is nothing more I can do about that, right?"

9. Anne felt a sense of helplessness about the conflict and the situation at home. Implicit here was her need to have some control over what was happening in her home.

10. She also expressed future concerns. "I used to think that if I ever had a kid I would never lay a hand on him...I wouldn't even smack it on the hands...Like to my sister I'd say "Swear to God when I have a kid when I'm older, I'll never lay a hand on him...and you know, I think I would be like that, cause I know for one thing, when I hit my sister, I didn't like it."

10. She expressed concern about her own potential for violence in the future. She felt that her reaction to hurting her sister indicated that she hated violence and will likely stick to her vow not to abuse her own children.

11. Anne has found that after living through violence and growing up and away from it, that she wondered why it happened. She also remembered wondering why it had to be done that way and that there could be more reasonable ways to solve problems.

11. In reflecting back on her experience, Anne felt a need to understand the meaning or purpose of that experience. She also questioned whether violence should ever be used as a means of discipline.

12. Anne was told by her sister that when Anne was home, there seemed to be more arguments and that after she'd leave, father would be the best kind. Anne said she found this to be surprising and was still wondering about it now. Anne herself had often gotten that impression, so after her sister told her this she felt she might as well "forget it" and "go on-the-run more times".

13. Anne thought that when she went home that she was going to try and get along with her sisters as a means of preventing arguments. "At least that way I'll know that if I'm getting along with my sisters, the first thing father is going to do to is try to get along with all three of us,...cause if he don't try to get along with me, where I'll be so close to my sisters...they'll go against father for being against me...and so he'd have to get in a fight with all three of us."

12. Anne questioned her own responsibility for what happened in their home. It had seemed to her that her presence in the home would precipitate arguments. When her sister informed her that she also had made this observation, Anne decided it wasn't worth trying to work things out, so she continued running away.

13. Resolution and prevention of abuse was seen as possible through establishing a closer bond with siblings so that neither one of them could be singled out as the target for father's abuse.

### Individual structural description

Anne's experience of lived violence took place from the time she was born, seventeen years ago. Her first recollection of violence was of her mother hitting her brother with a belt. She stressed however, that this was not common for her mother and was perceived more in the context of discipline than abuse as such. Recollection of the violence did not come easily. She perceived her father as both emotionally and physically abusive towards her mother. Anne was aware of father's abuse of mother at an intuitive level as well as through witnessing specific incidents of violence. She also observed consequences that were a likely outcome of the violence, such as mother with a black eye.

Anne herself was also physically and emotionally abused by father. Some aspects of this abuse pertained more to her overall daily living experience and quality of life, such as her father's restriction of her personal freedom and failure to provide adequate food and shelter. Daily arguments between parents were common and considered to be normal parental behaviour. The home environment generally was not a peaceful one. Anne described the difficulty trying to do homework because of the noisy arguments in the home.

Mother was perceived as having been "through a lot", yet not sharing her feelings about their life situation with them. Anne empathized with mother's failure to disclose her

feelings, explaining that this would be emotionally painful for her mother and because her father's presence in the home did not allow her the freedom to be open. In spite of mother's failure to disclose feelings, Anne had an intuitive sense of her mother's unhappiness. Anne believed her mother experienced a great deal of anger toward father and on occasion had threatened to divorce him. She recalled one occasion when mother seemed happy, and this set the tone for one of their best Christmases ever. She believed her mother needed help for her problems and protection from father. She fantasized about ways she could get help for mother in order to provide her with a better future. Anne believed mother feared father's potential to hurt them or herself, and suspected there might be other unnamed fears as well. Her mother was perceived as having little control over father, although she sometimes intervened to stop father's abuse of the children. This often led to further abuse for her mother.

Anne believed her father was the primary source of conflict in her family. She perceived father as controlling mother, as well as them. She did not respect father's authority and although at one point she thought father might change, after a time she relinquished this hope. Anne also did not trust her father and felt uncomfortable expressing affection towards him. Father was perceived as unauthentic and capable of being a "good" person in order to impress

certain people. When father was agreeable Anne was careful not to do anything to aggravate him in order to maintain a sense of peace.

For Anne, the family's way of being has been the most difficult for her to handle. Anne experienced fear and confusion in response to witnessing episodes of violence, particularly when she was younger. Her ability to empathize with mother's suffering made violent episodes even more painful for her. She also ruminated about violent episodes and continues to do this today. She felt a sense of helplessness in response to father and fearful of the potential outcome of his abuse--her mother's death at his hands. Much of her behavioral response was aimed at stopping or escaping the violence. Anne, in reflecting back on her experience, wondered why it happened and struggled to resolve as well as understand her own place in the violence. She believed that resolution and prevention of further abuse could be achieved through a closer bond with her siblings. Finally, she feared her own potential for violence in the future, although she believed she hated violence and would not abuse her own children.

**The case of Gina--Individual description of the nature of the abuse revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units in the language of participant.**

1. The experience of violence for Gina seemed like a long time ago, like years, but began as far back as she can remember.

2. Sometimes now when she thinks about the violence "it's like half of it didn't happen".

3. Sometimes an incident such as her father's waking up in the middle of the night hungry, would precipitate a violent episode. Gina viewed this as just an excuse to fight.

4. Father's violence towards mother got much worse after a little brother died of crib death. This was because her father blamed her mother for her brother's death.

5. One really bad incident stood out in Gina's mind. Her father punched her mother in the face and shattered her dentures. Gina remembered her mother choking and blood going everywhere. When she tried to come to her mother's aid, her father said "Let the old bastard die".

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Recollection of the violence seems to have receded somewhat but Gina was aware of it from her earliest recollection.

2. For Gina sometimes her past experience takes on an aura of unreality.

3. Some of the incidents that precipitated violence were so minor that Gina viewed them as her father's trying to justify his violence.

4. A significant family incident led to an escalation in father's violence.

5. A particularly violent incident stands out in her mind. Gina remembered not only the physical violence but her father's indifference and coldness towards her mother.



6. Gina's father also abused the children in their home, especially the girls. Her father believed that Gina was not his biological child (as she was conceived while he was in prison). She believed that his resentment of women, because of this, led to more abuse of the daughters in their family.

7. Father's abuse of the children was sometimes of an emotional nature. She recalled that to her father she was "nothing but dirt...I was kicked out all hours of the night and I was nothing but his little bastard".

8. Gina also described her mother's "tendency to violence". She remembered walking across the floor as a child and her mother came "up with the hand and gave it to me and blood was going everywhere." A nurse visited at this time and gave her mother a "nerve sedle" and after this everything would be fine

9. After the violence got really bad and Gina's mother wouldn't leave her father, Gina left home at 18 and gradually got her sisters to move in with her. There was one sister left at home and when father started to abuse her, Gina arranged a court order so that she could also take care of this sister.

6. Father's abuse extended to Gina and her siblings particularly the daughters, which she attributed to father's negative view of women in general. This, she felt, was an outcome of his belief that her mother had been unfaithful to him.

7. Emotional abuse directed at Gina consisted primarily of attacks on her self esteem.

8. Her mother was also sometimes abusive towards Gina and her siblings particularly when they were younger. Mother's violence however, was described in the context of emotional illness for which she was receiving treatment.

9. The violence became so severe that Gina left home at eighteen, and gradually assumed responsibility for those siblings she believed to be most at risk for father's abuse, namely her younger sisters.

10. On one occasion after Gina was out on her own, she returned to her home in response to a call from a younger sister that her father was threatening to harm her baby. When she went down he started to "flick me around."

11. Further abuse since leaving home has also been in the form of verbal threats. On one occasion he threatened to take one of her sister's children away from her. "He honestly thinks that he can come up here whenever he wants and make us all go home".

12. Gina recalled that they were taken from their mother twice as children. Their home was always dirty and the teachers would send them home with notes saying they weren't clean. Gina was given most of the responsibility for caring for her younger siblings.

13. They were all like little robots, when they were small. They were never allowed to speak, they didn't laugh, it was like army life. "You were required to be home from school at a certain time, and with any luck there'd be supper...it was like that ongoing."

10. Violence for Gina continued even after leaving home particularly when she would try to protect her siblings from father's abuse.

11. Ongoing abuse was primarily of an emotional nature. Gina believed her father still felt he had control over them.

12. Another dimension of the abuse for Gina was her mother's failure to assume parental responsibilities. Much of the responsibility for the younger children was given to Gina, who was the eldest girl.

13. Gina painted a picture of rigid rules, unrealistic expectations, parental neglect and an impoverished emotional climate.

14. Gina's mother was out a lot and Gina would be "stuck" home with father. Her mother expected her to stay up and awake until she got home because she didn't want father to burn the house down. Gina didn't understand then, that her father could get so drunk that anything could happen. She recalled not feeling safe, getting up, walking back and forth trying to stay awake.

15. Gina recalled that they always felt unsafe. Her parents would take the rent money and spend it and then it was their (the children's) responsibility to get it. "We'd steal what ever it took to get it and that's as true as God's word, it's hard to admit right now but that's just the way it was."

16. Gina and her siblings were never allowed out, weren't allowed to be in any activities, weren't allowed to have boyfriends, and could not have friends in their home. Special occasions such as Halloween could precipitate a violent episode, "because it meant, see, all of us going out...He'd always start in and we'd never get through the door, it was like we weren't supposed to go out".

14. Gina was responsible for safeguarding their home when mother was out because father could not be trusted to protect them. This necessitated struggling to stay awake and on guard, not fully understanding the possible consequences yet being aware of a sense of insecurity.

15. Gina and her older brother assumed most of the responsibility for meeting basic family needs. This necessitated activities, particularly for her brother that she is now ashamed of, but this was their reality at the time.

16. A dimension of Gina's experience was the control father maintained over their freedom to participate in the activities and relationships that were a normal part of growing up.

# **Gina--Perceptions of father revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Gina described her father as coming from a terrible family background where he himself was severely abused by his mother. She felt she could forgive her father because she was able to see where he was coming from.

1. Gina was sensitive to her father's suffering as a child and could forgive him in some measure for his abusive behaviour in light of his own suffering in the past.

2. Gina saw her father as not happy with himself and as having a low self-esteem. In order to feel good about himself she believed he had to have power over something. "When he can't get the power off Mom, he'll pick on the kids."

2. She believed that her father's self-esteem was dependent on, and related to, his need to have control over others and indirectly this contributed to his abusive behaviour.

3. "Now Dad, it's like, I don't know, one minute you wants to shake him you know...and he regrets a lot of it now. I can see his guilt, like he'd sit there and cry. I mean Paul (another brother) is dead now and he treated him like shit..."

3. Gina expressed ambivalent feelings about her father. She felt a certain compassion for father's sadness and regret but was also aware of feelings of anger and intolerance towards him.

4. Gina viewed her father as trying to "psych them out" as a way of making them believe certain things about the world. Whatever father said was believed as the truth. Because of this, she felt somewhat naive about the world, as they were never allowed out anywhere. On one occasion she was permitted to go to camp although father wasn't overly fond of the idea. She remembered her father's hurt feelings because she didn't want to come home from camp.

5. Gina observed that her father kind of played games with her mother "like one minute he wants her and the next minute he doesn't. He knows how much she needs from him, like I don't know, it gets really confusing".

6. Gina believed that she was somewhat of a favorite to her father. Her mother was gone much of the time and although she wasn't her father's natural child "there was part of him that really cared for me". However, she didn't really like her father at that age and didn't understand what he was doing to the family.

4. Father's control over them extended to their experiences of home as well as the world. She perceived father as feeling threatened and hurt that she didn't want to come home after a happy camp experience.

5. She saw her father as exploiting her mother's dependency on him. For her, this behaviour was difficult to understand.

6. She felt that her father cared for her in spite of the fact that he knew she wasn't his child. However at that time she didn't reciprocate these feelings because she couldn't accept his abusive behaviour.

**Gina-- Perceptions of mother revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Gina described her mother as being sick and having bad nerves. At one point she was taking a lot of pills and was suicidal, following the death of an infant son from crib death. "I think they kind of accused Mom of smothering it,...so she went through a hard time then".

2. Gina attributed her mother's neglect of their home to the fact that she was "too stoned" to clean up.

3. During an episode of violence when her mother was being beaten, Gina recalled that she (mother) would pick up one of the little ones thinking that this would protect her from father. Gina's father would hit her anyway and this would enrage Gina.

4. Gina observed, that in spite of the fact the violence got worse, her mother would not leave the situation. Gina questioned why her mother took the abuse.

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Gina perceived her mother as having emotional problems. This was particularly so following the death of a son whose death was attributed to her mother. Gina believed her mother's depression was directly related to this event. (Under the category, nature of abuse, there is evidence that father attributed blame to mother and there was an escalation of violence.)

2. Mother's use of drugs was perceived as a factor contributing to her neglect of home responsibilities.

3. Gina's mother was perceived as being willing to jeopardize the children's safety in order to protect herself from abuse.

4. Gina believed that her mother could have and should have left the violence.

5. Gina described her mother as denying that their father had hit them, when the police were called to their house by a neighbor. (In the validation interview Gina said that her mother denied the violence directed at herself as well.)

6. She also described mother as wanting her Dad's attention exclusively. "All she wants is Dad you know, it's just a man. It doesn't make a difference who it is just as long as there is somebody there". Gina was not sure what it was her mother needed from her father. She just knew that she (mother) had to have his constant reassurance and that somehow she wasn't complete without him.

7. Mother was seen as so weak that she wanted Gina's father's alcoholism to continue, for fear that he wouldn't need her anymore if he got treatment for his alcoholism. "I honestly believe that she thought, if Dad stopped drinking he wouldn't need her."

5. Her mother was perceived as protecting father at their expense.

6. Gina believed her mother was dependent on father at the expense of her and her siblings. To Gina, her mother defined herself in terms of her husband or a relationship with a man in general.

7. Mother's weakness and dependency was perceived as contributing to father's alcoholism.

8. Gina believed that her mother was jealous of her, and blamed her for much of the violence. She observed that when her father abused her (Gina), he often felt guilty and over-did it, the next day, giving her special attention. Gina's mother, who may also have been beaten the night before, was really jealous of this attention. "There were times she'd get so angry, the next day you could see it in her eyes, all she wanted was me gone."

9. She felt her mother was a "bit on the wild side" for example, going out with other people, or spending their money for clothes for herself. Gina viewed this as encouraging father's abuse.

10. Gina believed there were things mother could have done to prevent the violence. Her mother knew, for example, that Gina was not her father's child. She believed that when their father was mistreating them, that her mother could have given her up for adoption.

8. She perceived a relationship between father's abusive behaviour, his subsequent guilt and behaviour towards her and mother's reaction and attitude towards her.

9. Gina blamed her mother for father's abuse, believing that father's abusive behaviour was somehow justified because of mother's irresponsible behaviour.

10. Gina believed her mother could have prevented the violence by putting her up for adoption. Implicit here is her belief that this also would have protected her, as well as her siblings from further abuse.



11. Gina believed she had been convinced by her father that her mother was a bad person. "Well, she used to go out, but of course she couldn't deal with him as a person, so she had to go out, you know. She was out whoring around...doing whatever she could. I don't really know if it was as much for the sake of getting out or if she really was as sleazy as he was saying, because I think if she was really that sleazy she would have left us all, you know."

12. In spite of Gina's belief that mother could have done things to prevent violent episodes, for example, having food ready for father when he awakened in the middle of the night, she questioned whether this would have prevented an abusive episode. "I suppose she kind of knew that if it wasn't that it would be something else."

13. Mother at the present time is seen as living in a world where she pretends the violence didn't and doesn't happen. "Dad is supposed to be a really good man right now...our childhood was so wonderful you know and everything is just rosy now".

11. She had initially believed her mother was guilty of all the things her father accused her of, but questioned the logic in this, in view of the fact that her mother stayed with them. She suspected rather, that her mother's absences were more of a necessary retreat, in order to cope with what was happening at home.

12. Gina expressed contradictory feelings about mother's responsibility for preventing violence. On the one hand she believed mother should have tried to placate father, but she also suspected that father's violence was not directly related to these incidents.

13. Gina perceived her mother as denying the reality of the past abuse, as well as their current life situation. Implicit here is her resentment of mother's perspective.

**Gina-- Response to violence revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit and implicit meanings.**

1. During one bad experience when Gina's father punched her mother and shattered her dentures, Gina recalled putting her hand down her mother's throat to remove the dentures. She remembered thinking that her hand seemed really small. Her next recollection is of being in the bathroom repeatedly washing the blood from her hand.

2. Gina said that after this incident she was different, "there was something inside me...it's like there was an innocence gone or something, I was never the same after that". She felt she also wanted to go back and to go inside herself. This was a strange experience for her.

3. Gina recalled her siblings screaming or crying during violent episodes. She herself would be unable to breathe when the fighting would get really bad, but yet "you would never let on".

1. Gina recalled her reaction following one of her father's attacks on her mother. She was unable to recall the entire sequence of events but remembered trying to wash her mother's blood from her hand, after removing the dentures. There was also a sense of her perception being altered in some way, and a desire to undo the horror of the incident.

2. Gina viewed this incident as changing her in some way permanently. She felt a sense of lost innocence because of having to witness this incident. The need to retreat or go back inside herself represented a retreat to a safer place and was not a common experience for her up to this point.

3. Gina observed that her siblings response was primarily an emotional one. She found her own immediate reaction was more a physical one of not being able to breathe. In a sense not breathing was a way of hiding her feelings of fear and anxiety in response to the violence.

4. Sometimes they were required to sit and eat supper during a violent episode. Gina said, her parents believed that, "eating was supposed to be the answer." She started overeating at this time and was 13 years old and about 160 pounds.

5. She also recalled wanting to run from these situations. She knew that she couldn't because she was afraid her father would abuse her younger siblings, whom she loved and saw as very helpless. She was also concerned that they wouldn't get enough to eat or be properly dressed if she left.

6. Gina described being very much afraid of her father. She believed that her father got pleasure from her fearful response to his abuse. As she got older, she tended to show more hate than fear and this would enrage her father. "You'd be there trying to hide your facial expressions around him."

7. Gina felt her parents almost took her childhood. "It's like they gave us life and they robbed us of theirs."

4. Gina believed that being made to eat during violent episodes contributed to her pattern of overeating, in response to stressful situations.

5. Gina's love and sense of responsibility for younger helpless siblings prevented her from leaving the situation. She feared either that they could be physically abused, or not be physically cared for adequately.

6. Gina saw her father as trying to control even their responses to his violence, with the only acceptable response being fear. As she became older and her feelings changed from fear to hatred, it became necessary to guard against disclosing these feelings to father.

7. She felt a sense of loss and grief for what she perceived has been a lost childhood, because her parents did not give anything of themselves to their children.

8. More than anything Gina still felt anger towards her mother for giving all the responsibility of caring for their home and her siblings to her. "But I suppose the worse thing I ever really hated was that she left everything to me you know and me to put up with Dad, it's like I was married at twelve."

9. Gina also had a sense of not being reared up in safety. "Like, you know, home life was so bad and like, you were never reared up where there was somewhere safe, so like you kind of thought, like no where in this world is there somewhere safe if this is what home is, you know".

10. Gina and her siblings never really thought about doing anything about leaving the situation at home. "I mean as youngsters we were all we had, you know." They were afraid to get out of it because twice when they were taken from their home, they were all separated and put in foster homes. "It was just terrible, so when we got back together it was like, now try to make this work, you know and not tell anybody anything."

8. Gina still resented her mother for giving her not only the responsibility for her siblings, but for dealing with her father's abusive behaviour as well, at a very young age.

9. Gina felt that her frame of reference for judging the security of the world was her own experience of home. If this was the best and safest place, relative to the world, then the world must be a threatening place indeed.

10. In spite of the abuse, Gina and siblings did not want to leave their home. Their bond with each other helped them to cope with their experience and gave them a determination to stay together.

11. Gina felt that both parents saw her as the problem, and that they felt there probably wouldn't be as much violence if she wasn't there. She believed her mother should have put them up for adoption. "Like if I was to have a child right now and I didn't know this man was going to treat it that way like I'd give it up for adoption."

12. When Gina's mother would deny that they had been abused when police were called to their house, Gina's reaction was, "Inside you'd say what was true? She'd deny it and we'd be there thinking, like are we that bad of kids you know...what's going on? Like half the time the kids were even younger than me and they were even more confused."

13. Gina made the observation that their father would be violent during the evening but it would not be referred to in the morning. "It's like this (the violence) shouldn't be talked about. When we were small we would come home and Dad would beat the shit out of the house, and the next morning Dad would be complaining that our marks weren't high enough."

11. Gina struggled with what would have been her mother's dilemma, and determined that things might be much different for her and her family, if her mother had chosen to give them up. Implicit here is a need to make sense of and understand why the violence occurred.

12. Gina expressed the confusion and perplexity in response to the abuse, and mother's failure to protect them. If mother denied that they had been abused then they must deserve such abuse. She suspected that her younger siblings had even more difficulty making sense of these situations.

13. Gina viewed father's behaviour as difficult to understand. She believed that in her family there was a tendency to ignore the violence and to focus on other much less serious concerns.

14. Gina recalled that she didn't really think about what was happening but concentrated on tomorrow. "It was like you couldn't really sit there and say this is happening today because you would have went nuts". She focused on reaching a time when they could all get out. "I was gonna get 18, I was going to get a part time job...and I was going to get the kids out of there".

15. When Gina's older brother left their home, it was his plan to get a good job on the mainland and then to send for them. "I mean this was kind of like a fantasy because I wasn't old enough to leave yet...like Paul was finally lucky enough to get away and then he died. So then all the kids kind of sat back and thought, to get away from this have you got to die?"

16. Gina believed that one positive outcome of living in her home has been her close relationship with her siblings. "I think if things had been different, as six kids, probably we wouldn't get along as well as we did. Like...if somebody here can't make their rent (sisters share an apartment now) there's always somebody here to carry the load. I don't know, like you can always turn to the kids now."

14. Gina found a way of coping with the experience by focussing on the future, and planning on how they could all escape the violence. As soon as she reached legal age, she wanted to leave home and get herself into a situation where she could get her siblings out of the situation as well.

15. Prior to the time Gina had been working towards escaping the violence, her older brother filled this role. It was a fantasy that enabled them to cope. When her brother died (killed in a car accident) the hope of escape was lost and there was a sense that death might be the most realistic escape for them.

16. The close relationship that Gina experienced when they were siblings, continues even now. She believed that this would not be the case if they hadn't found it necessary to lean on each other, as a way of coping, when they were children.

17. Gina stated that "I don't think I would have grown up as much if I didn't live in that world. Like I don't think I'd be as me as who I am today, right, if I wasn't in that world."

18. Gina and her three sisters currently live together. "I still got the girls here with me now, and I don't know what you'd call this right now, but I suppose it is something we didn't get at home. They all goes out to work and they all got their own lives, but like it's still a security of having your family around."

19. Gina said that she and her siblings are trying to work through a lot right now, and occasionally they talk about the past. Gina viewed her mother as trying to create a "portrait" of their lives as children but this she believed was confusing. Rather her siblings wanted to know what really happened in the past.

17. For Gina, growing up in violence has contributed to her definition of self and she isn't dissatisfied with her self-image. She implied that she possessed a certain maturity that could not have come, except through this experience.

18. Part of the resolution of the experience for Gina and her siblings was experiencing, in some way, the safety and community of family that was not possible for them growing up.

19. Resolution was also possible through sharing past experiences openly with other siblings. Gina viewed this as opposite to her mother's approach which was to not acknowledge what was their reality. (In the validation interview Gina referred to this process as getting things "settled". She believed that sharing the past helped them in the settling of the past. She implied that this is an ongoing process.)

20. Gina described one of the ways she and her siblings deal with conflict now. " When either of us are feeling like the way Dad used to get, we'll always say smack! smack! smack! It's kind of like stopping and laughing...like that's what Dad would have done when things didn't go his way. And then we'll laugh and we'll talk about him...it's kind of like lighten the tone or something until we can talk about it like normal people."

21. Gina recalled waking up in the night,hungover, and looking in the mirror and thinking recently, "I'm already turned into Dad. But see, in your mind you're trying to be the one with power, I don't know, like you'd sooner be the violent one than the weak one, you know what I'm saying...I don't know, like I've worked so hard to get the kids out of the house, you know, I finished my nursing, things were going great and all of a sudden I ended up with a guy just like Dad."

20. Gina and her siblings found a strategy for putting distance between situations that generate their anger. She acknowledged that potential violence was present but they consciously reminded themselves of their father's violence and this helped them to cope with angry feelings and prevented actual violence.

21. Gina struggled with her tendency to fall into abusive situations. For her to be like mother it meant you were weak and scared, yet being like father meant abusing alcohol and being violent and she doesn't want that either. Gina felt a sense of failure, in that, in spite of her efforts to cope with and escape the violence she fell into a situation like the one she has tried to escape.



Individual structural description

For Gina the experience of lived violence takes on a certain unreality for her now, but the experience goes back as far as she can remember. Gina's father abused her mother physically and emotionally. Father's abuse extended to Gina and her siblings, particularly the daughters in the home. She attributed the greater risk to the girls, to her father's general resentment of women, as a result of her mother's infidelity, while he was in prison. Gina observed an escalation in the violence following the crib death of an infant brother, whose death father blamed on mother. Mother was also described as having a "tendency to violence", although this was described in the context of stress and treatment for her "nerves".

Other dimensions of the abuse for Gina were the rigid rules, expectations on the older children for assuming parental responsibility, restricted activities and friendships, an impoverished family environment, and physical neglect.

Gina viewed her mother as being emotionally vulnerable with a tendency to abuse drugs. Mother was also seen as overly dependent in an emotional sense on father, at the expense of Gina and her siblings. Gina expressed contradictory feelings about mother's participation in the violence. On the one hand she believed mother could have prevented the abuse. She believed, for example, that while

they were growing up, mother was immature and irresponsible and in a way encouraged her father's violence because of this behaviour. She also believed her mother could have placated father more, to prevent violent episodes, and she resented her mother's tendency to protect herself from abuse before she would protect the children. On the other hand, she also acknowledged that her father would tend to justify his behaviour and that there was little mother could do to stop the abuse. While Gina felt more anger towards mother than father, she acknowledged that her father had her convinced that her mother was "this very bad person", and that much of mother's neglect and absence from their home was a necessary retreat from father's abuse.

Gina felt a similar ambivalence towards father as she felt towards mother, although she felt she could forgive father more than mother because he was abused as a child and she felt a certain empathy for his suffering. Father's abusive behaviour, from Gina's perspective, was closely related to his low self-esteem and his need for power and control. Father could bolster his self-esteem through his control of mother or through control of the children. Father was also perceived as exploiting her mother's dependency on him, wanting her one minute, rejecting her the next. Gina observed evidence of her father's guilt for past behaviour and grief for his lost children (two siblings died). While she felt compassion for father's sadness and

regret, she was also aware of some anger and intolerance towards him as well. Gina believed that in spite of her father's abuse there was a part of him that cared for her although at the time she didn't reciprocate these feelings and didn't understand what he was doing to the family.

Gina's overall sense of what it was like to grow up in a violent home was that of not feeling safe, both within the home and in relation to the world. She also felt a sense of loss and grief for what she believed was not provided for them as children. This loss encompassed aspects of their physical care and protection, but more importantly the innocence and security of childhood. During specific violent incidents she recalled not being able to breathe and having a strong fear response. As she grew older this sense of fear changed to hatred and she found it necessary to guard her facial expressions so as not to disclose these feelings to father, for whom the only acceptable response was fear. After one particularly violent episode, she felt that she was changed in some way permanently, and retreated into herself as a means of protecting herself emotionally.

Gina struggled to make sense of her experience and to understand what was happening and why it was happening. An important way of coping with the experience for Gina was the close bond that developed between siblings over the years. In spite of the abuse there was a strong motivation to stay together. When they were removed from their home and

separated from each other they resolved to stay together and make things work, after they were returned to their parents. Gina and her siblings focused on their plans for the future and escaping from the violence. Even today there is an effort to stay together (Gina lives with two younger siblings) as a means of maintaining the security and sense of family.

Attempts to resolve the experience was evident in their "trying to work things out" by talking about and trying to understand the past. Gina believed that living in a violent home contributed to who she is as a person, and gave her a closeness to her siblings that is uncommon for many. She described conscious efforts to deal with, and prevent, any tendency for violence between them today, although she was aware of violent patterns repeating themselves within her family in general.

**The case of Kim--Individual Description of the nature of the abuse revelatory of the phenomena.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Kim's mother married her stepfather when Kim was six years old. Up until that time, Kim did not live in violence but experienced "emotional abuse" because her mother was an alcoholic.

2. Kim felt her stepfather rejected her from the beginning. "He didn't you know...he just did things, like send me to bed without any supper and just anything at all to let me know that he didn't want me around."

3. Kim believed the violence began about four months after her mother married her stepfather but she had difficulty recalling specific incidents. She knows it happened a lot but she feels she has blocked it out somehow.

4. Kim recalled being behind a chair that her mother was sitting in, while her stepfather was beating her mother. Her mother told her to go, and when she came back she remembers her mother holding a big wad of hair, that she kept for years.

**Transformed units expressing explicit and implicit meanings.**

1. Violence began for Kim when she was six years old. Even prior to this Kim felt she was abused because of her mother's alcoholism.

2. Kim believed her stepfather's abuse was not of the physical kind but she did not feel accepted by him.

3. Kim knew when the violence began and that it occurred frequently, but she has little recollection of it and believed she may have blocked much of this from her awareness.

4. She did not witness the full attack but Kim, remembers her mother keeping a wad of hair, that her stepfather pulled from her head on one occasion, which for her was a constant reminder of the violence.

5. During another really bad night, her stepfather had her mother on the floor with a razor blade up to her throat. On another occasion, he threatened everybody at a party in their home, with a rifle.

6. Kim recalled that her stepfather would frequently wake her mother up and start beating her for no reason.

7. Although Kim's stepfather did not physically abuse her, he did give one of her younger siblings a bloody nose and threw another one over the stairs.

8. After she was 15, Kim's parents lived in the States without her and Kim visited during the summers. At first her stepfather would be on his best behaviour. "The way any violent man doesn't want someone outside the family knowing. I guess where I wasn't living in the family anymore, maybe he just wanted to show me...look how good I treat your mother." However when a visit lasted longer than two weeks, Kim felt it must have been too much for him because after the second week "he beat her (mother) up".

5. Her stepfather's violence frequently involved threats with potentially lethal weapons.

6. Her stepfather's attacks occurred when mother was especially vulnerable such as when she was sleeping.

7. Kim's stepfather did not physically abuse her but did abuse her siblings.

8. Even the short visits during the summer months were not without violence. Kim believed her stepfather's good behaviour was because she was now being treated as a non-family member when it was his custom to put on a good front. However this behaviour could not be maintained. Implicit here was Kim's view of her stepfather's lack of acceptance of her and her view of the effect her presence in the home had on him.

9. Kim observed that even though her stepfather hadn't had any contact with her mother for over a year he was still "out to kill" her mother. She recalled an incident when her parents were separated. One of her siblings left the door unlocked and her mother was in the kitchen. She turned around and the next thing she knew, she got a punch in the face. "He did her real good that time, he broke her nose, broke her tooth...he just walked in and did that and walked out again."

10. While growing up in her home, Kim recalled a teacher saying she had an "unnatural dependence" on her grandmother. Kim believed there were times that she lived with her grandmother out of necessity because her mother "was in a state or something or she was drunk".

11. Kim's stepfather's family knew what was happening "but they were all the same you know, I guess they all thought that was the way things were supposed to be".

9. Kim felt her mother was still at risk for abuse even now. Her stepfather's attacks sometimes took place unpredictably, and without provocation, during an unguarded moment. Kim viewed his ability to control and to continue to victimize them, difficult to understand.

10. Kim depended on extended family members for emotional support because of the violence and alcoholism in her home.

11. Kim did not receive support from her stepfather's family because they also had violent tendencies and violence was perceived as a normal way of life.

12. Kim felt she was viewed as different by school friends because everybody in school knew what was happening at home. She had one close friend whom she really adored, however she felt this friend did not want to get close to her because of her problems. Generally, she tended to make friends with those in her class who were "left out kind of thing" or had problems similar to her own.

12. She felt friendships were difficult to maintain, once friends became aware of her home problems. She felt that she tended to make friends with those who also experienced home problems or who could not make friends easily.



# Kim--Perceptions of stepfather revelatory of the phenomenon.

Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.

1. Kim viewed her stepfather as crazy and unpredictable based on his violence and the behaviour that went along with the violence. "Who can come home and haul somebody out of bed for no reason by the head of the hair and start beating them for no reason...it was just totally cracked, you know he was gone."

2. Kim believed her stepfather was able to talk around everything and talk himself out of anything. "If you met him on the street he'd be the most charming guy you know - what a great guy you know-- wonderful guy -- give you the shirt off his back kind of thing."

3. What she remembers about her stepfather as a child and from what her mother tells her about him, he was the only person she called Dad and she adored him.

4. Although it's hard to remember the affectionate feelings she had for him, she recalled jumping up in his arms calling him Daddy, when he returned home from work with a present for her.

Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as more implicit meanings.

1. Kim was convinced that her stepfather's irrational unprovoked treatment of her mother, could only be explained by insanity on his part.

2. Kim resented her stepfather's ability to create an impression of being a generous, likeable, convincing person. She viewed this behaviour as inconsistent with her experience and knowledge of him.

3. Kim recalled as a child experiencing positive caring feelings towards stepfather.

4. The image of affection and a father-daughter relationship remained but she could no longer evoke the feelings associated with this image.

5. During a visit with her mother and stepfather in the States, Kim recalled him to be quite charming and nice to her initially. She was nice in return but only for the sake of her mother.

6. During the four years Kim lived with both parents, from age 6 to 11 years, Kim felt that as she got older she loved her stepfather less and less. "On the last of it I don't think I loved him anymore."

7. During a court case where her stepfather charged her mother for making obscene phone calls Kim recalled feeling nothing but hatred, pure hatred. Right now, she wants to forget her father or to "wipe him off the face of the earth...he's the only person in the world I would like to do away with."

8. Kim also described the fear she experienced during the court appearance. "All I could feel for him was a tiny bit of fear at that time, because we were in the middle of a courtroom. I didn't figure he'd do anything but every now and then I'd get a twinge and think you know, fuck, he could haul a knife or anything...and then I'd reason it over calmly, and I'd say, fuck, he's not going to show his true colors in court."

5. Even though her stepfather was pleasant and nice to her during visits with mother, she reciprocated only to show respect for her mother's feelings.

6. Feelings of love toward her stepfather, gradually eroded over the years that she was exposed to the violence between her parents.

7. Love was replaced by hatred for her stepfather and there was a strong desire to forget him. Kim felt his death would facilitate this process for her.

8. Feelings of fear and mistrust of stepfather are experienced even in a protected environment. Kim was aware such feelings were irrational but found it necessary to reassure herself.

9. Kim felt somehow defiled for having known her stepfather. "It's almost like a big green slimy monster came and touched you or something...and you can't get the slime off you."

10. Kim didn't believe her stepfather was worthy of the time she was giving him just talking about him at the present time. "I think...just because I'm giving him the time to think about him you know, he's getting this from me, I don't want to give him anything."

11. In the past she recalled giving her stepfather her love but she feels he didn't want that, now she does not want to give any more of herself to him.

9. Kim felt that living with her stepfather has had a permanent impact on her and while she sought to rid herself of a feeling of having been victimized by him she has not achieved this.

10. Kim felt compromised somehow, just giving her stepfather the time it took to reflect on her experiences of living in their home.

11. For Kim her stepfather's lack of acceptance and rejection of her in the past justified her current reluctance to invest any more of herself in him emotionally.

# **Kim--Perceptions of mother revelatory of the phenomenon.**

## **Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Kim described her mother as knowing when a violent attack was about to occur. Prior to one incident Kim recalled her mother saying "he's going to break, it's coming I know". Kim could also feel this, but believed it was her mother's nervousness that made her feel this.

2. Kim described an incident when her mother made obscene phone calls to her father when she was drunk. Kim observed that the same police who had come to her home on other occasions and had seen her "mother's blood on the walls and her bones broken" didn't lay charges then, but charged her mother for the phone calls.

3. On one occasion Kim woke up thinking her father was in their house. She woke her mother up reluctantly, because she knew her mother was really nervous. After looking around the house and confirming that he wasn't there, her mother started crying. "I guess she was worried and didn't want to get me worried."

## **Transformed units expressing explicit and implicit meanings.**

1. Kim observed that her mother seemed to intuitively know when her stepfather was about to be violent. Kim believed her own anxiety was a response to mother's cues.

2. Kim did not attribute blame to her mother for her behaviour toward stepfather, and resented the injustice and unfairness of her mother being punished for an offence much less serious than her stepfather's abuse.

3. Kim perceived her mother as generally nervous and anxious, yet trying to hide her feelings in order to protect Kim from the same anxiety. An implicit theme here is an empathy between mother and daughter. (This transcription unit does not clearly indicate mother's general nervousness however Kim validated this during the second interview.)

4. When Kim was 15 years old her mother decided to move back with her stepfather. Kim said her mother tried to get her to go back as well, but she was too afraid. She said that her decision was also influenced by the fact that her mother's alcoholism had contributed to problems in her relationship with her mother.

5. During her separation from her mother she moved from foster home to foster home, quit school and moved from job to job. She had been drinking a lot and was in a "bad state". She felt things had been building up over the previous three or four years, and felt she had to get things worked out with her mother one way or another. When her mother separated from her father she made the decision to go back to the States.

4. Coping with mother's alcoholism and the strain in her relationship with mother influenced her decision not to go back to face further violence from stepfather.

5. While Kim was living on her own she went through a period of personal disintegration. During this time she wished to reestablish her bond with mother, but felt she could not do this while her mother lived with her father. Her mother's separation gave her the freedom to try. (During the validation interview Kim confirmed the difficulty being close to mother, as long as mother stayed with father. She also stated that she would always desire a stronger bond with mother in spite of the difficulty achieving this.)

6. Through counselling, Kim said she knew she was "basically ok" but she wanted to go back and see if "Mom still treated me the same even though I'm ok you know...so I got that worked out anyway. Now I know for sure that it wasn't my fault". (Kim clarified this further in the validation interview explaining that her mother treated her badly in the past and blamed her for her own (mother's) unhappiness. When Kim saw no change during the visit, in spite of the change in herself, she concluded the problem must be with her mother.)

7. Kim felt that working things out with her mother was accomplished through "accepting the fact that things aren't going to change between us and then just living with it, and saying well this is the way it's got to be and just work with that."

6. Kim had felt she was responsible for mother's unhappiness. Going back was a way of confirming her own self acceptance achieved through counselling.

7. Working things out with mother meant an acceptance of the reality of the way things were, more than gaining a closer bond with mother. Implicit here is a sadness about the failure to achieve this.

**Kim--Response to violence revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. More immediate reactions to violent incidents included staying close to mother or behind her, screaming, running away or attempting to stop the abuse as she got older. "I was going to hit him over the head with my guitar but I didn't want to hurt the guitar so I hit him with a book."

2. The only way Kim can remember her past reactions to violence, is by how she reacts to it today. She recalled witnessing a violent incident in a friend's home recently. She remembered hyperventilating, screaming, crying and not knowing what to do. "I wanted to help but I couldn't, I couldn't go out and I couldn't go the rest of the way up the stairs...I got dressed just in case I had to go out."

3. Kim recalled not standing up to her father during a violent incident. "I always ran and hid...No I was just too frightened to (stand up to him)."

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as more implicit meanings.**

1. Kim expressed different immediate responses to her stepfather's violence, ranging from running away, to trying to intervene.

2. Kim expressed the paralysis, fear, and sense of responsibility experienced in response to witnessing a violent incident. She believed this reaction was comparable to how she reacted in her own home.

3. Kim was unable to intervene when her stepfather abused her mother but always ran and hid. There was a sense of regret about not having done so, and an awareness that fear prevented her from doing so.

4. Kim felt she must have been terrified of her stepfather when she was young and believed that, perhaps this was why she blocked out the fear. She knew for certain that she is terrified of him now, particularly when she goes to visit her mother.

5. During a recent visit, even though Kim's stepfather no longer lives with her mother, it was necessary to pass his street coming home from work. She recalled having an asthma attack and nightmares "halfdreams" every night because she was so totally frightened.

6. Kim recalled being "too afraid" to go back to the States to live with her mother and father. She felt that if she had been less assertive about this she "would be six feet under by now...I would have done it myself".

7. During a Christmas visit she recalled that just living in the house was very hard. One night she woke up believing her stepfather was in the house and she recalled crying and shaking while opening her presents.

4. Kim suspected she was terrified of her stepfather as a child because of how intensely she fears him now. She also thinks that her inability to remember much of the earlier years was because fear blocked out the experience of it.

5. Even though Kim's stepfather no longer lived with mother, Kim experienced asthma attacks from what she believed to be intense fear reactions from having to walk close to where her stepfather lived, in order to get home.

6. Kim believed that refusing to go live with her stepfather and mother, prevented her from committing suicide, as an outcome of the violence.

7. Just living in the house where much of the violence had taken place, evoked a response of fear and anxiety.



8. Up until Kim was 14 years old she observed-- "I was the best little girl in the world, I was...I tried not to leave any trace of my existence". She recalled thinking that she had to put every thing back in its place because she never knew, for example, that if she moved the sugar bowl to the table, that it might start something.

9. Kim felt that she has had problems socially because of this, and that only recently has she been able to make noises without feeling she was bothering someone or that she was going to start something or "have somebody not love me because I'm making a noise or something, right?"

10. Kim also recalled feeling that there was something wrong with her. "You know if I wasn't who I am this wouldn't be happening to me."

11. Although she expressed the desire to forget her experience of living with a violent stepfather she does not want to "totally forget, like I want to remember that this can happen".

8. Even minor incidents could precipitate violence, therefore Kim was overly compliant and cautious in her conduct in order to keep the peace. (During the validation interview Kim challenged a statement I made, suggesting that she blamed herself for the violence. She stated however, that she must have felt in some way responsible because she believed that by being "perfectly good" she could make the abuse stop.)

9. Kim felt that, both socially and interpersonally, living in an abusive home has had an impact on her, in the sense that she has always felt that her behaviour determined other's acceptance of her.

10. Kim experienced guilt and low self-esteem in relation to the violence in their home. (Participant did not confirm the guilt feelings in the validation interview)

11. Kim wanted to put in the past recollections of living with a violent stepfather, but she also wants to have a sense of having learned something from the experience and wished to retain that dimension of the experience.

12. Kim feels that there are still a lot of things about violence that she does not understand, and the whole area of violence will always be a priority with her if she pursues the kind of work she wants to get into. (Expressed an interest in counselling adolescents and young adults.)

13. Kim wouldn't "recommend" her life experience. She believed that perhaps if she could go back and do it a different way she would, but she does not regret it nor does she think she would change it now, having the realization that she has learned from it.

14. The experience as a whole has brought her into contact with some really good people that are helping her work things out and the experience has also provided a direction in her life and has given her insight into other people's problems.

12. She believed that by pursuing a career in counselling individuals from violent homes, she would be able to help others as well as herself. This would, in a sense, fill the gap she experiences in her need to understand the experience.

13. Kim expressed the somewhat contradictory feelings of acknowledging the value of the experience and desire not to change it, while at the same time realizing that if she could go back and have things different, she would.

14. Resolution of the experience has been possible for Kim in the sense that the experience has not been meaningless. Rather it has enriched her as a person and given her some direction as to what she will do with her life.

Individual structural description

The experience of lived violence began for Kim, when she was six years old, shortly after her mother married her stepfather. The main period of violence took place between the ages of six and ten while she was living in the States. They returned as a family to Canada when she was nine years old. Her father stayed with them for a year and then returned to the States without them. When Kim was fifteen years old her mother went back to the States to reunite with her husband, and Kim stayed in Canada, as a ward of the court.

Kim's stepfather was both physically and emotionally abusive towards her mother. These incidents were perceived as unprovoked and unpredictable in nature, involving hands on physical beatings, as well as threats of harm with lethal weapons. Kim had difficulty recalling specific violent incidents. She knew they occurred frequently, but believed that she had blocked them from her awareness. Kim was not physically abused by her stepfather but did not feel loved or accepted by him. Episodes of physical abuse directed toward her mother continued during her visits with her mother during the summer months. Even after her mother's separation from stepfather, the abuse and threats continued. Kim depended on her maternal grandmother for emotional support during her growing up years. While she had some friendships she felt different and isolated in her

peer group, because of her peers' awareness of her family situation.

Kim viewed her stepfather's irrational treatment of her mother as an indication of some form of insanity on her father's part. She recalled feeling affection towards father as a child, but was unable to evoke these same feelings today. At the present time she felt hatred, mistrust and resentment towards her stepfather and wanted to forget about him entirely, believing his death would facilitate the process of erasing him from her memory.

Kim perceived her mother as a generally anxious, vulnerable person, particularly when anticipating a violent episode. She perceived her mother as trying to protect her from her own (mother's) anxiety and fear, although she claimed her mother wasn't able to do this. Kim felt that her relationship with her mother was strained, which she attributed to mother's alcoholism. She believed her mother blamed her (Kim) for her (mother's) misery and unhappiness. Kim sought to have a closer relationship with mother. She felt this was not fully possible while her mother was still living with her stepfather. A recent visit was made to restore the relationship with mother, and to absolve herself from responsibility for mother's unhappiness.

In describing her response to the violence Kim recalled not being able to intervene, and running and hiding as a younger child. She expressed regret at not being able to do

this and acknowledged that fear prevented her from doing so. She suspected that she must have been terrified of her father when she was younger because of how intensely she feared him now. She remembered keeping a very low profile in her home while growing up, and trying to be very exacting about her behaviour, for fear of precipitating the abuse. Indirectly she felt some responsibility for the abuse in the sense that she believed her compliant behaviour would stop the violence. This is still a problem for her socially and interpersonally, because she feels that others' acceptance of her is dependant on her "good" behaviour.

Although Kim wanted to put recollections of the violence in the past, she didn't want to entirely forget, but wanted to have a sense of having learned something from the experience. She expressed the contradictory feelings of acknowledging the value of the experience and not wanting to change it, while also being aware that if she could actually go back and have things different, she would. Resolution of the experience has been achieved to the extent that, for her, the experience has not been meaningless. Rather she felt it has enriched her as a person and given her some direction to her life. Establishment of a closer bond with mother is a goal, and an important dimension for further resolution of the experience for her.

**The case of Mary-- Individual description of nature of abuse  
revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units  
expressed in the language  
of participant.**

1. Mary experienced violence in her home as long as she can remember. "20 years to put up with stuff like that, right, I mean that's a long time...you can only take so much."

2. Mary's only sibling, a younger brother, was abused by her father. On one occasion when her brother was only an infant her "Dad just took him and put him up on the wall like this, right ready to smack him with his fist because he was crying".

3. Mary recalled that she also always got "smacked around" by her father. On one occasion her father pulled a knife and threatened to kill her.

4. Mary felt her father's abuse was "without reason half the time" or occurred in response to minor events. "I mean a kid walking on the floor with boots on, you're not going to kill him, right?"

**Transformation of  
condensed units expressing  
explicit as well as  
implicit meanings.**

1. Violence has been a lived reality for Mary her whole life. There was a sense of having endured an experience that was beyond the limits of endurance.

2. Mary witnessed the abuse and threatened abuse of her brother when he was only an infant.

3. Mary herself was regularly abused. She recalled one incident when father's abuse involved the threat of death.

4. Father's abuse was perceived as irrational and without justification.

5. Mary's mother was also physically abused by father. Mary explained that what used to happen most of the time was, that when Mary's father would try to abuse them, her mother would try to stop him and then she would get hit.

6. Mary recalled a specific episode of violence involving mother where her father locked her mother in their cellar-like basement. When Mary called the police he threatened them, as well as her mother, with an axe.

7. Mary recalled an incident as a child when she witnessed her father force her mother to have sex with him. "I mean I never ever thought of anybody forcing anybody to do anything. But I mean I'm after seeing a lot of stuff done, being forced, right?"

8. Sometimes the threat of violence existed even during periods of separation from father. Mary recalled one incident when she and her mother stayed with her grandfather. "I mean Pop never had nothing to do with Mom taking off...and Dad came out, and you know those carpet knives how sharp they are and threatened to kill him, (her grandfather) right?"

5. Mary was aware of a pattern in father's abuse of mother. Mother was generally the object of father's violence, if she tried to interrupt his abuse of the children.

6. Sometimes the abuse was of a more threatening nature that had elements of both physical as well as emotional abuse.

7. A significant incident of witnessed violence was the sexual assault of her mother by her father. Mary implied that there were other incidents of a similar nature that expressed father's control and mother's powerlessness.

8. Even her mother's retreats from the violence did not protect them from the ongoing threat of violence.

9. Mary recalled always going around with a bag on her back and taking off because of the frequent retreats from father's abuse. "I mean you don't really feel like a family when you are all the time leaving."

10. Things were also rough for Mary because her father expected too much of her. "I always had to be perfect...like everything had to be done right. I had to be doing real good in school. I had to do what I was told. He was right strict, right? And everywhere I'd go, I had to take my brother. It was like he was my own kid".

11. Mary wasn't permitted to have friends in, neither could she go to friends' homes. Her friends were also aware of what she went through. "When dad would start everyone would know, right?"

9. Mary had a sense of never being entirely settled at home, and an absence of a sense of family as an outcome of their frequent retreats from the abuse.

10. Another dimension of the experience of living in a violent home for Mary was her father's demand for compliance with strict rules of performance and excessive home responsibilities.

11. Normal peer relationships were not possible both because father restricted contact with friends, and because she felt embarrassed by her father's behaviour.



# **Mary--Perceptions of father revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Mary viewed her father as hot-tempered, lacking in control and a very violent man. "Sometimes he might be violent and sometimes he just don't speak...he just mopes around. If you asked him something he would just look at you, give you a sly look, right? But I'd sooner see him like that, than violent."

2. Mary viewed her father as moody, frustrated, and unhappy especially during times of unemployment. "It seems like when he's working and pulling in money he's honky dory - but once he goes on unemployment, they cuts his money right down and he seems to be depressed/deprived more or less. He just gets so frustrated, he gets mad then."

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Father was perceived as withdrawn, violent and unable to control his anger. Mary found his episodes of withdrawal easier to cope with than his violence.

2. Mary perceived a relationship between father's violence and his general unhappiness and frustration during times of unemployment.

3. Mary described her father's family as not communicating with one another and fighting all the time. Her grandmother also used to beat her uncle with a cord. Mary's father never talked about this. "If you went to talk about it, he'd get angry...I don't know if he felt he didn't have to(talk), or probably that's what his problem is, his childhood, trying to keep it all in, right?"

4. Mary recalled that the last time she and her mother left, her father went to a marriage counsellor and a psychiatrist and gave the impression he wanted to change. "He should become an actor...He'd get on the phone and start crying and begging her to come back and everything will change."

5. Mary saw a change in father after she had her own child. He treated her son better than he ever treated her and her brother. Mary believed her father felt some responsibility for what happened in the past and was trying to make up for past mistakes and make things better.

3. Mary was aware of conflict and violence in father's family of origin although father does not talk about it. She struggled to understand and justify father's abusive behaviour.

4. Father was perceived as insincere and not to be trusted. She resented his attempts to manipulate her mother by playing on her feelings.

5. Mary believed her father felt guilt for past violence and was trying to compensate and make amends through his relationship with her son. (This explanation was not spontaneous but in response to my question about what she viewed as the basis for this change.)

6. Mary's father still lives with her mother sometimes but Mary has limited contact with him. "He knows I don't want him here, right, but I'll just speak to him to pass myself." Mary does not believe she will ever have the kind of relationship with father, that she has with her mother, because of what she put up with for 20 years.

7. Mary said that a counsellor told her "that deep down inside there's some love there for him (father), right?...but I don't know it seems like every time he does something wrong...it's just more going away, right? (Participant's eyes filled up at this point)

8. Mary felt she would not take her father in if he left her mother, although she would have no hesitation taking in her mother and brother. "I'm not stooping to his level. I'm not going to sacrifice my happiness just to make him happy anymore."

6. Although Mary's mother continued the pattern of living with father for awhile and then leaving him, Mary does not want a relationship with her father. She was polite, but only to avoid conflict.

7. Mary expressed a sense of regret and loss over her relationship with father. She alluded to feeling love at one point but believed that this had gradually eroded over the years.

8. She felt that a relationship with her father had been at a price and she was unwilling to pay that price any longer.

# **Mary--Perceptions of mother revelatory of phenomenon.**

## **Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Mary said that when there was an incident of violence, her mother "had to stay and take it", but if father went out to the shop or to work she would pack up their things and leave.

2. Mary described her mother as sacrificing her own happiness for her father's sake. "It's like she don't think she can do without him, right?. It's like she didn't think she could get going on her own...and she was just afraid that she wasn't going to be able to make it, and then go really far in debt with her bills and stuff like that."

3. "She's no good for the tough...like if she saw that we only got two meals a day instead of three, she felt bad...and she used to get depressed because she felt we weren't getting what we deserved. Like at least when we were home we had food, we had clean clothes...I guess she just figured that it was better off home."

## **Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Mary perceived her mother as powerless during a violent episode and as leaving the situation only when an opportunity presented itself that was safe for them.

2. Mary viewed mother as dependent on father, lacking in confidence and fearful of the responsibility and financial worries when trying to make it on her own.

3. Mary perceived her mother as vulnerable and weak, and feeling responsibility for letting her children down. Implicit here is Mary's exoneration from blame for mother, whom she perceived as reluctant to leave the violence because of concern for her children.

4. Mary's relationship with her mother was a close one. "Me and Mom are that close, we're just like sisters. I wouldn't let anybody hurt her for the world. And if she ever wanted anything and if I had it, I'd give it to her, right?, supposing it left me short, because she was always there when I needed her."

5. Mary described the nature of the support she gave her mother while growing up. "When I was young I had to grow up fast right...it felt like I was trying to sacrifice myself, so her and Bobby could be happy and so that we'd be able to stay out on our own."

6. Mary said that she was unable to talk to her mother about the violence. "When I was smaller I wouldn't dare let her know anything like this, right?. But I mean, now that I'm older we talk about a small bit. But I mean that's not a subject like you really get into."

4. Mary described a close bond and mutually supportive relationship between her and her mother that grew out of the difficulties that she experienced growing up in a violent home. (The basis for the close bond between mother and daughter was discussed by Mary in the validation interview.)

5. Mary was willing to provide her mother with parental-like support, giving up much of the freedom of childhood and adolescence so that they would be able to escape the violence.

6. In spite of the close bond between mother and daughter Mary did not feel the freedom to discuss the meaning of the violence for her. Implicit here is her fear of mother's reaction to these feelings.

# **Mary--Response to violence revelatory of the phenomenon.**

**Condensed meaning units expressed in the language of participant.**

1. Mary felt she would do anything to keep the peace in the house. "So if there was--let's say dishes in the sink, you'd do them, so he wouldn't say nothing and get angry. ...Before Bobby came I didn't want him to hit Mom, right?-- and I didn't want him to hit me, so I figured if I'd do it, it would keep the peace, right?"

2. On one occasion Mary called the police when father locked her mother in the cellar. "I just had to go across the street and phone the cops, right? And the cops came down... and Dad threatened them with an axe...told them if they came in he'd kill them and he had an axe to Mom's throat...I felt worse then if I had to just stay there, like I knew he'd let her out sometime, right?-- but I didn't know how long and I was afraid, right?. It felt like to me that if I had to stay in the house, he would have brought her up and everything would have been alright."

**Transformation of condensed units expressing explicit as well as implicit meanings.**

1. Mary assumed the role of peace keeper in the sense that she tried to take care of everything that could provoke a violent outburst from father. She saw herself as protecting her mother, her brother, and herself from abuse in this role.

2. Mary expressed the dilemma this situation presented for her. There was a desire to protect mother and stop the violence, but Mary felt her intervention had aggravated rather than abated the violence. There was a mixture of fear, responsibility, ambivalence and guilt inherent in this situation for Mary.

3. Mary also described her reaction to father's sexual assault on her mother "I mean that really made me feel low...right low...it's like stuff that's after happening. I mean it still haunts me because to think of it makes me sick. I mean I never ever thought of anybody forcing anybody to do anything, right? But I mean I'm after seeing a lot of stuff done, being forced, right?"

4. Mary has been unable to forget most of what has occurred in the past. Dreams about violence, TV images such as seeing a child or somebody being beaten, bring back memories of these events. "I mean that will always come back on me, right? like make me feel I am back there."

5. Mary believes that as hard as she tries to "put the past behind" and try to go on with the future, she doesn't think she will ever be able to do this totally, because there will always be something to remind her of these events.

3. Although Mary did not directly experience the assault, she empathized with mother to the extent that she experienced feelings analogous to the victim. Recalling the incident evokes similar feelings even today.

4. Various events of a violent nature that Mary witnesses today evoke some of the same feelings she experienced at home, making it difficult to suppress memories of the violence.

5. For Mary resolution of the experience of the violence and a focus on the future requires putting violent memories totally in the past.

6. Mary felt confused over the fact that father's violence occurred in the absence of abuse of alcohol. "You'd be able to blame some of it on it, right?...but I never, well I saw Dad drunk once. And I've never seen him drinking other than that. So that confused me even more, right?"

7. Mary did not feel she understood what was happening as a child, and that if anybody said any thing about her father, she picked up for him. Now that she has learned more about abuse it makes her feel strange that she had to put up with it. "I mean I wouldn't want anybody to go through something like that, for no reason."

8. Mary recalled her father always putting her down and telling her that she wasn't perfect enough. "He was after putting me down that much...that I felt like I was down that far, right?...I mean I didn't think I was good enough for anybody, right?...It was like I was trying to be somebody else, not myself."

9. Mary felt afraid and tense around father and wouldn't turn her back on him. "I mean he'd really scare you, right?--because you don't know what he's able to do and your all the time looking over your shoulder."

6. Mary needed to justify, excuse and understand the meaning of the violence. If her father had been intoxicated at the time of a violent episode it would have been more understandable, less confusing and would have exonerated her father from blame somewhat.

7. Prior to learning about violence Mary somehow felt her father's behaviour could be defended. Now she feels a sense of regret, and a need to understand its purpose, through her growing awareness of violence in our society, and the suffering involved.

8. Mary experienced a low esteem and a feeling that she could not be her real self in order to meet her father's demand for perfection and in order to gain his approval.

9. Mary experiences fear and mistrust in response to father's potential for further violence, which she is unable to predict, therefore she is unable to let down her guard.



10. Mary said that she would not put up with abusive behaviour from her father today. It still scares her to know that she has to stand up to her father, but being on her own and in her own home, enables her to do so.

11. Mary recalled wanting to stay away from the violence once they were on their own. She didn't want her mother to go back to her father because she believed they would only have to leave again. "I figured if we got out and even if it was tough, we'd try to make ends meet, right?, and by the time a year or two goes around you'd be pretty steady on your feet."

12. Mary is concerned about a younger brother who, when he gets mad, starts punching. She says that she tries her best to change this behaviour in her brother. "Because if he doesn't change soon he won't be able to, right? " She also says that it is hard for her to think that her brother may grow up to be the same way as her father.

10. Mary still experiences some fear of father but feels she has a better sense of control over his abusive behaviour now. Being independent of father has given her this confidence and sense of control.

11. For Mary there was a desire to escape the violence even at the price of some hardship initially. Mary felt certain that there would be a reoccurrence of the violence if they returned to father.

12. For Mary there was an expressed fear of further violence in future generations of her family and a need to prevent such violence.

### Individual structural description

Mary's experience of violence stretched back over the past twenty years. She was both the direct object of father's abuse and witnessed the abuse of her mother and younger brother. The abuse was both physical and emotional. The usual pattern for father's abuse of mother was, when mother would try to rescue one of the children from father's violence, she herself would be hit. The emotional abuse took the form of father continually telling her she didn't measure up to his expectations. To Mary, father's abuse was irrational and without justification. An incident which has particular significance for her was witnessing her father raping her mother. The severity of the abuse was described as less now but it still occurred even during periods of separation from her father. For example, on one occasion when they sought refuge at her grandfather's home, her father came there and threatened their lives.

Another dimension of the abuse for Mary, was the chaotic nature of family living, because of their frequent retreats from father's abuse. Mary also recalled father's strict demand for perfection and her excessive home responsibilities. Normal peer relationships were restricted because Mary was not allowed out and friends were not allowed into her home.

Mary perceived her father as non-communicative and very violent. This she believed was related to the poor communication and the abusive tendencies of his family of origin. Mary believed her father was also unhappy and therefore tried to make those around him unhappy as well. Mary perceived a difference in her father's attitudes towards her son, in comparison to the way he was when she was growing up. She attributed this to her father's guilt and remorse about past behaviour and desire to make things better in the future. Generally, however, Mary viewed father as insincere and resented his ability to put on an act of promised change which she perceived was an attempt to manipulate her mother's feelings.

Mary viewed her mother as vulnerable and dependent on father. This dependence was related to her inability to manage financially, and her sense of inadequacy about being able to provide for her children. Mary recalled the parental-like support she gave her mother, so that her mother would feel strong enough to be on her own, which would enable them to escape the violence. Mary believed her relationship with her mother was a close one through their shared experience with father's abuse.

Mary experienced a mixture of fear, ambivalence and personal responsibility in response to specific episodes of violence. There was a need and responsibility to intervene for fear of the possible consequences, while also fearing

that taking action could contribute to more violence. An ongoing sense of fear and mistrust of father was experienced as a general outcome of lived violence, even since separation from father. Being independent however, has given her a better sense of having control over the abuse. Mary assumed the role of peace keeper in her home, by ensuring there was nothing to aggravate father's abuse such as uncompleted chores. Feelings of low esteem and an inability to be her real self were also part of her experience. Even though she was not always the direct victim of father's abuse, she empathized with her mother to the extent that she experienced feelings as if she were the victim. There was also a desire to escape the violence even at the price of some hardship while on their own. Resolution of the experience for Mary necessitated a putting into the past memories of the violence, although she felt this was not possible because various incidents (TV and movie images) continued to evoke feelings and memories of the past. There was also a struggle to understand the meaning and purpose of the experience. Learning about violence has left her with a sense of loss and regret about what happened in her family and the purpose of it. Finally, there was also a fear of violence repeating itself in the future.

## Section II - shared themes

This section will outline the core themes or essential constituents, that express the general structure of lived violence. Essential relationships between these constituents, where evident, will also be explicated. For the most part, core themes were common to all the protocols. In some instances, a theme was identified if it was present in one or two interviews, but expressed in such a way that it had meaning for the general structure. This was based on Wertz's (1985) contention that one can find evidence for the general, in the particular example of a phenomena. However, most explicated themes are shared in some way by all the interviews either explicitly or implicitly.

Giorgi (1975) identified the lived situation as the basic unit of research, in phenomenology. The complexities of the lived situation in this study, namely violence, necessitated the presentation of findings at the individual level under four broad areas: the nature of the abuse, participants' perceptions of mother, participants' perceptions of father and participants' response to living in a violent home. Other aspects of the participants' lived situation could express meaningful dimensions of the experience. However, only those essential themes that make explicit the broader structure of the lived experience, will be presented. The goal was not to present an exhaustive

description of lived violence but to be faithful to those aspects of participants' lived reality chosen for explication.

Essential Themes were summarized as:

1. " I can't seem to remember"--Participants describe a sense of having endured the experience for as long as they can remember, yet having difficulty recalling specific incidents of the violence.
2. " It was all pain for us"--Lived violence as a phenomenon encompassed different dimensions of family interaction yet was experienced as an integrated whole.
3. " We didn't feel safe (fear); "We didn't know what to do (helplessness); "They took so much" (loss)-- Essential emotional constituents of the experience included feelings of fear, helplessness and loss.
4. " Anything to get away from the violence"--Escaping the violence was a prime motivating factor in day-to-day living. Much of their behaviour was described in the context of preventing, stopping or escaping the violence.
5. " I wonder why it happened"--The need to understand the violence was another dominant theme particularly the need to understand mothers' and fathers' participation in the violence.

6. " I just take everything in my stride"--The establishment of a close bond with mother and/or siblings was described as an important means of coping with the experience.
7. " I'm a bit stronger and wiser"--Resolving the experience was expressed through efforts to "forget" or "settle" feelings about, and recollections of, the experience.

Illustrative quotations and explication of themes

Theme #1: "I can't seem to remember it."

Participants felt that they had experienced the violence for their lifetimes. Paradoxically, in spite of this, participants expressed difficulty recalling specific violent episodes. When participants began to talk, however, they were able to describe in depth some of the feelings and thoughts about the experience as a whole.

- "I can't remember anything at all about myself under the age of 10...I can't...gone".

- "That stuff that was going on years ago, that's too much for anyone, right?. I had 15 years of it."

- "I know it happened a lot but I just can't seem to remember it...I know I've got it blocked out but I just can't seem to remember it, no matter how hard I try."

- "I can only remember one incident, one or two, I'm not sure...all I know is just that incident Mother said, plus I know from seeing it all, from living 17 years approximately with it."

- "As far back as I can remember, far back ...I thinks about it now and it's like half of it didn't happen."

Theme #2: "It was all pain for us."

Sometimes a particular theme statement by a participant seemed to express an aspect or dimension of the phenomena that had general applicability although explicit evidence for this theme could not be found in all the interviews. Wertz (1985) referred to this as seeing general features in individual structures. Van Manen (1984) also spoke of the tendency for specific statements to stand out as possibly representing an essential aspect of a phenomenon generally.

It became clear, early in the data collection process, that lived violence did not pertain solely to the indirect experience of witnessing violence. In all but one interview the violence was described as, both directly experienced by participants in the form of physical abuse by father and/or mother, and indirectly experienced through witnessing the abuse of their mothers and/or siblings. An impoverished quality of life in these homes, expressed by excessive household responsibilities, unrealistic parental demands, restricted peer friendships and limited opportunities for



involvement outside the home, was also part of the picture. Lived violence in this sense was an all encompassing phenomena experienced as a whole rather than one aspect of their daily lives. The following theme statement by a particular individual illustrates the general truth of this theme.

"It was all pain for us. We had to take everything, Mom took a lot...but I mean we had to watch...we had to feel the abuse mentally, two of them were abusing us by fighting so much but physically Mom was abusing us and Dad was trying to...It was madness in the house."

Theme #3: "We didn't feel safe" (Fear)  
 "We didn't know what to do" (Helplessness)  
 "They took so much" (Loss)

Participants expressed a number of emotional reactions to the violence. These included the interrelated constituents of fear and helplessness as well as a sense of loss, which surfaced in all interviews as core dimensions of the total phenomenon either explicitly or implicitly. Fear for some participants also involved a sense of insecurity and fear of the unknown, and not just fear of the violence itself.

Fear:

- "Like you know, home life was bad and like you were never reared up where there was somewhere safe so like you kind of thought, nowhere in this world is there somewhere safe you know."

- "I mean he'd really scare you, right?-- because you didn't know what he was able to do, and you're all the time, looking over your shoulder kind of thing."

- "I just don't want father to do anything to mother...because I mean you hear of families being abused and all of a sudden the wife gets killed by the husband or something like that."

- "I'd have an asthma attack every night walking home you know. I was totally frightened out of my wits, I really was. If a car slowed down I'd take off running."

Helplessness:

Helplessness as a constituent is closely related to feelings of fear. Both these feelings tended to be present during a violent episode. Usually participants indicated that they hadn't known what to do or how to intervene during such incidents. However, even when action was taken, there was a fear of the consequences of one's actions.

- "I just had to go across the street and phone the cops... I felt worse than if I had to just stay there, like I knew he'd let her out sometime (Mother was confined to cellar) but I didn't know how long, and I was afraid."

- "And we were sitting there with food all over us (father had upturned the supper table) and we were crying and we were really frightened and we didn't know what to do and we couldn't do anything, because I was only 10 or 11 and my sisters weren't much older."

- "I wanted to help but I couldn't. I couldn't go out and I wouldn't go the rest of the way up the stairs... I got dressed just in case I had to go out."

Loss:

Loss was expressed as a missed childhood or an absence of a sense of family, as well as a loss of meaningful relationships particularly their relationship with their fathers.

- "I bet you, we've been out of that house more times than we've been in it. I'm always going around with a bag on my back... and I mean you don't really feel like a family when you are all the time leaving."

- "I suppose it was something we didn't get at home like they (siblings) all go to work, and they all have their own lives but there's still the security of having your family around."

- "I didn't want them (parents) to separate because I wanted a family, but I can't remember having a family you know, I really can't."

- "I got really tired of it...I never even bothered to cry...I forgot what it was like to cry, because when we left (father) I cried...That was the first time I cried in so long and it wasn't because of the violence or anything it was because of the pain. It was real weird."

- "Like they almost took my childhood, right? It's like they gave us life and robbed us of theirs...but I suppose the worse thing I ever really hated was that she left everything to me you know and me to put up with Dad, its like I was married at twelve."

- "It made me feel real good that someone else got a good life and it used to make me really sad, I mean to know that I couldn't go out. I mean I couldn't have no friends, like most of the friends sleep over to other people's houses, I wasn't allowed to do that."

Participants also indicated feelings of loss in their expression of feelings towards father. Although they described feeling intolerance or hatred towards their

fathers, a recurrent underlying theme was a gradual erosion of feelings for and relationship with their fathers as an outcome of the violent behaviour over the years.

- "Last going off I don't think I loved him anymore...you know as I got older I loved him less and less. It's hard to remember what it was like to love him."

- "(Counsellor) used to say that deep down inside there was some love for him right...but I don't know, it seems like every time he does something wrong, it's just more going away, right?" - "He (father) came up to me and hugged me and kissed me and I had no feelings left for him, you know."

Theme # 4: "Anything to get away from the violence"

Participants expressed a strong desire to stop, or escape from the violence. Sometimes the need to escape didn't go any further than a fantasy about what it would be like to live differently. Other times, specific behaviour believed to have the potential to change or prevent the violence pattern, was initiated by a participant.

- "Just anything to get away from the violence, anything to get away from the abuse of both them."

- "I was the best little girl in the world I was...I tried not to leave any trace of my existence...I never knew when you know if I moved the sugar bowl from the table to the counter, if that was going to start something."

- "I was going to get eighteen, I was going to get a part time job...and I was going to get the kids (younger siblings) out of there."

- "He (boyfriend) told me I should run away and see if that would clear it (the violence) up...and I believed it would, so I ran away."

- "I felt that responsibility to keep the peace...before Bobby came I didn't want him (father) to hit Mom, and I didn't want him to hit me, so I just figured if I'd do it (household chores) it would keep the peace."

Theme # 5: "I wonder why it happened."

The need to understand and make sense of their experience was another underlying theme throughout the protocols. This encompassed the need to understand the violence itself but, more specifically, their mothers' and fathers' participation in and accountability for the violence.

- "After going through it and eventually growing up out of it, I wonder why it happened and I'm still wondering."

- "It's mind boggling...when I look at it now, it's like bits and pieces bouncing around inside my head, and it's too hard to place, right?"

- "When it comes to violence and things like that...that's always going to be a priority with me...there are lots of things about it that I still don't understand and I want to."

In addition to attempts to understand violence generally, other statements more specifically illustrated attempts to understand fathers' as well as mothers' behaviour. Participants, for the most part, empathized with mother who was perceived as vulnerable and weak with little control. This was seen to facilitate fathers' abusive behaviour. Mothers' vulnerability was expressed as drug or alcohol addiction, as well as financial and/or emotional dependency on father. Only one participant attributed more blame to mother than to father, in her effort to understand why the violence took place.

- "I couldn't understand what he (father) was doing, you know, to the family."

- "I mean I saw Dad drunk once and I never saw him drinking after that. So that confused me even more...I couldn't understand him."

- "It's like she (mother) can't do without him...she's no good for the tough".

- "Mom is an alcoholic...you know the typical alcoholic family kind of thing." (Participant's perception of mother's vulnerability to abuse as an outcome of her alcoholism was confirmed during the validation interview.)

- "She was so sick, right?, her nerves were so bad...Mom was taking a lot of pills. All she wants is Dad you know, it's just a man, it doesn't make a difference who it is just as long as there is somebody there."

- "Mother was going along with father of course...you know the situation she's in right...she has no other choice anyway."

Even though mother was perceived as vulnerable, she was for the most part not held accountable for the violence. There was evidence that even when some degree of blame was attributed to the mother, participants were able to empathize with the mothers' situations and feelings and were aware of the dilemmas and no-win scenarios the violence created. Generally participants comments indicated that they exonerated mother from any blame.



- "I compare it to if I were in that situation. I know I'd feel the same way...she got it all inside, you know what I mean and she can't let it go yet, and the only way she can let it go is by getting mad at the stupidest things."

- "She got depressed because she felt we weren't getting what we deserved...I guess she just figured we were better off home."

- "Like he had me so convinced that Mom was this really bad person. Well she used to go out but of course she couldn't deal with him so she had to go out you know."

- "The way Mom was she didn't want us to see her being...I don't know...sort of it is like being degraded or something...but I wouldn't blame her for that, right?, about what happened that day."

Participants' perceptions of fathers focused almost entirely on the need to understand why fathers were abusive. The meaning of fathers' abuse varied with participants. Some viewed it as a response to father's own unhappiness or low esteem. Others felt it could not be explained in any other way than, that father was irrational or insane. All participants made either implicit or explicit reference to fathers' need for control and fathers were clearly perceived as the primary source of conflict in the home.

- "She can't tell father (about problems) because of the fact that he's involved with them, he is her problem in a sense...I think if father wasn't living at home we'd get along much better."

- "I know there's definitely something wrong with him. He really needs to see a shrink or something...its hard to believe he's sane, right?"

- "Like he's not happy with himself half of it is, like for one thing he has no self-esteem at all...really he's got to have power from something to feel something about himself."

- "He was crazy, he wasn't predictable...who can come home and haul somebody out of bed for no reason by the hair of the head and start beating them...it was just totally cracked, you know he was gone."

- "He seems to want everybody to have a bad time. He don't want anybody to be happy probably because he feels that he's not happy himself."

Theme # 6: "I just take everything in stride."

Closely related to efforts to escape and understand the violence were participants' attempts to cope with and get through the experience. One primary means of coping, for participants, was the establishment of a close bond with mother and/or with siblings. For three of the participants, the bond was with mother. For two participants, there was also a close relationship with siblings. Only one

participant did not describe such a relationship as a way of coping. She, however, attributed much of her own personal disintegration to an impaired relationship with mother. She also expressed a desire to resolve her feelings toward her mother and a need for a closer bond as a way of resolving her feelings about the violence in general.

- "Me and Mom we are that close we're almost like sisters. I wouldn't let anybody hurt her for the world. And if she ever wanted anything and if I had it, I'd give it to her supposing it left me short because she was always there when I needed her."

- "I just take everything in stride and once he (mother's new relationship) says something out of line to mother I got to jump in right...because as far as I'm concerned me and Mom are married, not in terms like you know...she can do whatever she wants but we're together, we'll always be that way until I leaves I suppose."

- "I mean as youngsters we were all we had you know...it was terrible so when we got back together (Participant and her siblings were removed from their home at one point) it was like now try to make this work you know and not tell anybody."

- "If I'm getting along with my sisters the first thing father is going to do is to try to get along with all three of us...cause if he don't try to get along with me where I'll be so close to my sisters...they'll go against father for being against me."

Theme # 7: "I'm a bit stronger and wiser"

Participants also expressed a need to resolve or "settle" the experience. This was evident in the emphasis they placed on trying to forget the experience as well as trying to accept and see some purpose in it. Some participants believed forgetting was the way to resolution although this was described as an extremely difficult process.

- "As hard as I'm trying to put the past behind me and try to go on with the future, I don't think I'll ever be able to do that totally."

- "The best thing to do is to try and forget about most of it, right? , but I find it really hard to forget about what happened."

- "He's just like a part of my past. I want to forget about him altogether...like not totally forget like I want to remember this can happen."

- "It was in my mind and it just wouldn't get out of my mind...and it's still there of course."

Resolution also involved facing up to the reality of the abuse, working through or coming to terms with one's feelings about it and also achieving a sense of empowerment or ability to deal with abusive behaviour if they were confronted with it again. There was also a desire expressed not to repeat the pattern of violence in their own families and relationships.

- "I wouldn't want to recommend it for anybody, and I suppose if I could go back and do it a different way, I would, but I don't regret it you know. I don't think I'd change it now, on this end of it knowing that I've learned things from it."

- "I don't think I would have grown up as much if I didn't live in that world. Like I don't think I'd be as me as I am today if I wasn't in that world...you know we're (participant and her siblings) trying to work through a lot right here, occasionally we talk about the past."

- "He knows that since I'm on my own that I won't take no more of it...no more abuse like that from him...like this is my house and what I say goes so I don't have to take any of that anymore."

- "I'm a bit stronger and wiser...I'm a bit older and wiser because when I went to (local shelter) up there they taught me that I wasn't supposed to be smacked around or beat up or raped or anything like that, that wasn't the way it was supposed to be."

General structure of lived violence

Lived violence was experienced as an integrated rather than as a fragmented experience. This included the witnessing of father's abuse of mother, father's and/or mother's abuse of siblings, and in some instances the direct experience of father's and/or mother's abuse of participants themselves. The general emotional climate and overall quality of life was also part of the experience as a whole. In addition, violence is lived through by blocking aspects of the experience from one's awareness. Paradoxically, there was still a sense of having endured the experience for a lifetime.

The daily "living through" involved the more immediate response to the violence expressed as fear and helplessness as well as a more long term sense of loss with respect to family and childhood experiences as well as meaningful relationships, particularly with father. An important means of coping with these feelings was achieved in part through a close bond with mother or siblings. Attempts to escape or stop the abuse was achieved through specific behavioral responses to the violence such as peacemaking efforts, running away from home, or fantasizing about a different life.

Understanding and resolving the experience were constituents that described the aftermath of lived violence (none of the participants were living in violence at the time of the study). Understanding involved seeing some purpose or explanation for what had happened. In resolution, the adolescents struggled to come to terms with the experience both through acknowledging and accepting it, and/or forgetting the reality of the past. Resolution was an ongoing process and no participant implied that she had fully achieved this goal. The interrelationship between the constituents, understanding and resolution, was evident through the participants' desire to put the past behind, but not to lose connection with the past entirely, as it was perceived as contributing to and shaping their present and future reality.

### Section III - caring needs

Although the interview approach was open-ended and participants were encouraged to describe those aspects of their life that were significant in terms of the violence, they were also asked a specific question about their caring needs. They were asked what they felt would have been helpful to them, or what would have made things better for them, during the years they were growing up in a violent home. In retrospect, I think this question perhaps should have focused more on current caring needs as well but I was specifically interested in what they believed would have been helpful during the more difficult years when violence was a daily experience. At the present time, although they were still exposed to some aspects of this violence, participants were for the most part living away from home, their fathers were not as abusive at the present time or their mothers were not currently living with their fathers. This question was not considered part of the structure of lived violence as such, but it was addressed in more general terms. Participants, in response to this question, generally indicated that having someone to talk to about what was happening at home was a felt need. There was also an indication, however, that disclosing feelings about the violence did not come easily either between family members or outside the home situation.



- "It was really too bad, all I really had was my sisters and none of my sisters wanted to talk about what was going on".

- "I never had nobody but Mom, right? I mean I couldn't get right into details with her because she thought I was too young to know what was on the go".

- "I didn't want to talk to no one because I didn't trust no one, see".

Although disclosure of the violence was difficult, some participants described situations that could be interpreted by helpers as clear evidence that something was not right at home. Their need for acceptance before they would be able to share feelings about their home experience was also evident.

- "I never did tell anyone in school like I'd go to school and I'd be probably crying over something and I'd go to the guidance counsellor, I'd make up a story why I was crying...I'd probably say I broke up with my boyfriend...but really it wasn't that, it was just because of what happened that morning, an argument or a fight or something."

- "Well I tell you for somebody to have gotten through to me as a child I think they would have had to take time to break down my anger just to reach me...you definitely would have had to put up with my anger for a long time."

Some participants offered concrete suggestions for ways that children in violent homes could be assisted.

- "The kids you know now, who are in that kind of a situation, if there was like a centre or something for kids somewhere they could go...like I don't know as a child it never crossed my mind to even think about getting out."

- "If they had more knowledge of it (the violence) I mean because if I had known stuff like that I mean I wouldn't have to put up with half of what I put up with...I mean nobody even talked about (the local shelter) or nothing like this, right? But I mean they have more knowledge now."

One participant described her mother's learning about the shelter for women on a local radio station and calling for help and going there for refuge. At least three participants made specific reference to the difference counselling, which they had received through the local shelter, had made in their lives. Other participants interviewed, but not formally included in the study, also made reference to the value of such counselling.

The most poignant expression of a caring need spoke of a desire to have someone to notice and acknowledge that there was a problem, and in so doing, to remove some of the guilt and responsibility inherent in the experience for her.

- "I wanted somebody to notice that things were going on... I just wanted somebody to take me and tell me this isn't your fault, you don't deserve this, and this isn't the way it should happen. and you do deserve to be loved and cared about."

There are clearly limits for health professionals who provide counselling for the child victims in these homes. One participant reminded us that counselling or talking about her experiences helped, but for her this was not enough.

- "At least to talk to them (counsellors) would have helped a bit but it wouldn't help a lot, but at least a bit and I'd be hoping that, no more things like that right... and the only way I knew that was by him stopping. I used to wonder when he'd stop doing things like that."

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The following discussion will address the common themes identified in the study, in relation to pertinent literature, and to the findings of previous studies in family violence research. Implications for programmes of counselling and intervention, future research directions, as well as limitations of the present study will also be identified. There are aspects of the findings at the individual level that are worthy of discussion, however, I have chosen to focus the discussion at the general level of analysis only.

#### Discussion of themes

In a phenomenological study the way a phenomenon presents itself can be as significant as the more clearly evident constituents of the phenomenon. Giorgi (1970) believed that while we strive to understand what is revealed, there is truth to be found in the way a phenomenon appears. The first theme, "I can't seem to remember it", is pertinent in this respect. All five participants made some reference to difficulty recalling specific violent incidents. One participant, denied any knowledge of early childhood experiences prior to the age of ten, altogether. In some instances, even after consent had been obtained,

participants failed to keep interview appointments or left verbal or written explanations for why they could not meet a commitment on a particular day. During the interviews, some participants initially understated the extent and severity of the violence, as well as their response to it. As the interview progressed, this pattern changed and it became apparent that they had been exposed to more violence than they had originally disclosed. During the outset of the data collection process, I considered this pattern of behaviour to be a limitation of the study. However, later I determined that it contributed to an understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. Some researchers have found that girls show a more "internalized" response to witnessing violence, expressing anxious or depressed behaviour (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986). Participants' initial reluctance to participate or talk about their feelings did lend support to this finding. The girls in this study, not only had difficulty recalling, but also disclosing aspects of their experience.

Such a difficulty has previously been identified in the literature on child sexual abuse. Shearer and Herbert (1987), pointed out that many victims of sexual trauma "repress virtually all memories of sexual victimization" (p.172). Other sources reported similar observations. Gelinas (1983) referred to the characteristically "disguised presentation" of family incest and the difficulty women have

recalling the experience in general. In the present study at least two participants made a veiled, as well as more specific reference, to having been sexually abused. Another stated that she did not believe she had been sexually abused but added, "of course I don't remember do I". It is possible that participants' failure to recall the violence was related to previous experiences with sexual abuse. It is also possible that the victims of family violence in general, characteristically suppress recollections of the violence. Clearly, assessment of family violence needs to take this into account. Failure to disclose victimization, in any form, may not necessarily indicate that it has not occurred. Gelinas (1983) stressed the need to assist these individuals in such disclosure and implied that appropriate treatment depends on the helpers' ability to do this.

The second theme "It was all pain for us" also revealed an important truth. The lived experience of witnessing violence for participants in this study, did not occur in isolation from other dimensions of the family violence experience as a whole. Only one participant did not make some reference to having been physically abused by one or both parents, in addition to having witnessed violence directed towards their mother and/or siblings. Moreover, their response to violence did not occur as a reaction to recurrent episodes of violence interspersed with times of relative family peace. Rather it was the day-to-day living

in between the violent episodes, that accounted for their experience as much as the violence itself. The ongoing sense of "no peace in the family", restricted peer relationships, awareness of mother's stress and unhappiness, and father's pervasive control, were all interacting dimensions of the total experience. The literature clearly acknowledges the considerable overlap in the different forms of violence (Lombardi, 1982; Scanlon, 1985; Stacey & Shupe, 1983). In spite of this, a number of researchers believe that studies of family violence should try to separate the effects of witnessing violence, from the effects of directly experiencing violence, maintaining that the impact is likely to be different (Pagelow, 1984). Others have called for the determination of the degree of exposure to, and severity of the violence believing that these are the critical variables in establishing the impact of exposure to violence (Emery, 1982; Porter & O'Leary, 1980).

From the perspective of the participants themselves, whether or not they were "pure" witnesses, or aware at an intuitive level, or through seeing the "after-effects", was less important than their total integrated experience of living in a family where violence occurs. Participants in this study responded to the general emotional climate and "the way the family was" and not just to specific violent incidents. Westra and Martin (1981) also referred to the emotional environment in violent families, noting the

similarities in the homes where children are primarily witnesses, with those where the children were directly abused. They pointed out that it was not the abuse per se that was similar, rather it was the families' way of interacting and the emotional milieu which exerted the main impact. A number of other researchers lend support to this argument. Sturkie and Flanzer (1987) studied adolescents who had been directly abused and found little difference in the emotional impact on these adolescents and their non-abused siblings. Farber and Joseph (1985) in another study of maltreated adolescents found no differences between the subjects in their study who had been abused only once, and those for whom violence involved a pattern of abuse from early childhood. They concluded that it was the pattern of parent-child interaction rather than the course of the experience of violence that exerts the greater impact. The findings of these studies and those of the present study suggest that attending to the abuse itself may not be meaningful from the adolescent's perspective.

Different emotional responses to violence were expressed as another theme in this study. One such response that surfaced, was the expression of feelings of loss. Loss was described as the absence of a sense of family, a missed childhood and the gradual erosion of feelings toward, and relationship with, father. The experience of loss, either actual or perceived, has been clearly linked to depression



in the literature, with depression being viewed predominantly as a reaction to loss (Glaser, 1978). It has also been acknowledged that depression exists in young children, as a result of psychosocial environmental factors, particularly parenting behaviour, and that an environment characterized by deficient parental behaviour may contribute to depression in children (Blumberg, 1981). Others have documented that while adolescents are more autonomous than younger children, they are no less vulnerable to inappropriate or inadequate parenting (Sturkie & Flanzer, 1987).

Blumberg (1981) observed that parental abuse and neglect are the most significant causes of depression in children. Discussion in the literature of a possible link between family violence and depression in the children, has focussed on those who have been directly physically abused. The findings of the present study indicated that adolescents experience violence as a whole and therefore even when the primary experience is that of witnessing the violence, the risk of depression may be just as significant. A number of studies support this suggestion. Sturkie and Flanzer (1987), in their study of physically abused adolescents, for example, found that there were no differences between levels of depression in the maltreated adolescents and their "nonvictimized" siblings. These researchers concluded that the problems associated with adolescent maltreatment

resonated throughout the family system. In the present study, loss was identified as an essential constituent of the experience. Feelings of loss in adolescent girls in these homes may indeed be a manifestation of depression.

Of further interest is whether the experience of loss in adolescents in violent homes, puts them at greater risk for depression later in adult life. A number of researchers who have observed recurrent gender difference in their findings which suggest that girls are less vulnerable to the effects of witnessing violence, have questioned whether they will suffer higher rates of mental health problems in adulthood (Carlson, 1984; Emery, 1982; Wolfe et al., 1985). If these girls tend to internalize their response to violence, as suggested by Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson and Zak (1986), then one of our research goals should be to further validate feelings of loss in other studies, and to determine the possible relationship between this experience in adolescence and depression in adulthood.

Another emotional response described by participants was fear. This reaction is identified by a number of researchers as a general response to witnessing violence particularly in younger and school aged children from violent homes (Hilberman & Munsen, 1978; Martin, 1977; Pizzev, 1974). Some of the behavioral symptoms seen in girls such as anxious, clingy, withdrawn behaviour, described by Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, and Zak (1986), may be an

expression of fear but for the most part the nature of the fear for these children is not described in the literature. Lombardi (1982) described some aspects of the fear that are similar to the description of fear by participants in the present study. Fear, for Lombardi's participants, involved both the immediate response to violent episodes as well as an ongoing sense of fear subsequent to the violence. Some participants also expressed fear of the ultimate outcome of the violence, namely mother's death. One variation on the fear theme in the present study, is that fear was experienced as a sense of insecurity or lack of safety in relation to the world at large. This understanding of fear has implications in terms of caregivers' attempts to help victims of family violence. The victims' frame of reference for judging the world is based on their experience of home. Issues of trust and safety in relationships with caregivers are inevitable in this respect. The identification of adolescents who are at risk will need to take into account lived dimensions of violence including a broader understanding of fear as a response.

Another theme identified was evidence of a close relationship between mother and daughter as a means of coping with lived violence. There has been some suggestion in the literature that a close or positive relationship with a parent can mitigate some of the effects of exposure to violence in the home (Emery, 1982; Hetherington 1984;

Rutter,1971). Rutter suggested that while a good relationship with one parent was not enough to remove the negative effects, it could go a long way to lessen its impact. Hetherington (1984) observed that, even in families lacking in cohesiveness, an exceptionally good relationship with one parent may buffer the effects of a poor relationship with a rejecting or abusive parent. Emery (1982) cited an earlier study by Hetherington which indicated that the parental relationship which had the optimal buffering effect was with the mother. Positive father-child relationships did not appear to mitigate the detrimental effects of marital conflict.

Four of the five participants in the present study described a close bond with mother or a desire for such a bond. While no conclusion can be drawn, it seemed clear that the participants themselves perceived their relationship with their mothers as significant in terms of their coping response. The study by Lombardi (1982) that examined perceptions of the witnesses also found that the girls in violent homes depended on their mother as a way of coping or getting through the experience. Participants' relationships with mothers, identified in this study, was strengthened in part by their heightened sense of empathy with her suffering and vulnerability. There was no evidence to support Davidson's (1978) observation that adolescents

often cease to care about their mother's suffering and "depersonalize her and block her from their conscience" (p. 119).

However, while the bond with mother may buffer the impact of the violence, the tendency to empathize with mother may also put the adolescent girl at risk for problems similar to mother. Recent family violence studies have attempted to identify a possible relationship between the behaviour disturbance in children and maternal stress and/or illness (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson & Zak, 1985). In these studies it was found that there was a relationship between mother's adjustment and the degree of disturbance in the children. The implicit assumption was that mother's stress as an outcome of the abuse contributed to her parental effectiveness. Participants in the present study perceived mother as vulnerable and stressed but this heightened their concern for mother and seemed to facilitate the relationship with mother, even when mother herself had been physically abusive. Only in one case was mother's adequacy as a parent questioned. Even for this participant there was a certain element of support for mother which made her ineffectiveness more understandable. Macleod (1987) argued that the suffering of the mother becomes the suffering of the children. There is an interrelationship then, between the mothers' and the adolescents' response to the violence,

rather than a cause-effect relationship. The response of care-givers should be to meet the needs of both mother and daughter, in order to adequately address the needs and suffering of the adolescent.

Three other essential themes identified are closely interrelated constituents of the experience and have particular relevance for the development of programmes of intervention. These include: theme four, which addressed participants attempts to escape from or prevent the violence; theme five, which expressed their need to understand the violence; and finally, theme seven, which expressed their efforts to resolve or "settle" the experience.

Participants' behaviors directed towards escaping the violence are meaningful and should be included as part of the assessment information. Frequently adolescents express their suffering behaviorally, and caregivers will not gain access to the details of family violence, unless they try to make a connection between such behaviour and possible victimization in the home. The peace making compliant behaviour identified by some participants is not likely to be taken as a possible indicator of family violence, because it does not create much problem outside the home. It was clear that compliant behaviour from the adolescent girl's perspective was goal directed. Similarly, running away from home, described as another means of escape by a participant,

would likely bring the adolescent into conflict with the law leading to the label of 'delinquent' or 'young offender'. When such behaviour is understood within the context of the experience of lived violence, the response of the community as well as professional groups may be different.

Theme five, "I wonder why it happened" and Theme seven, "I'm a bit stronger and wiser" have particular relevance to health as it relates to these adolescents and will be discussed in this context. In the literature review, it was pointed out that family violence researchers who have concerned themselves with the impact of exposure to violence on health have tended to stress physical health or overall psychological functioning (Fromm, 1983; Westra & Martin, 1981). Broader conceptualizations of health for the victims of family violence acknowledge the importance of personal actualization and quality of life (Kerouac et al., 1986). Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1984) study of adolescent experience provided an understanding of the adolescent's struggle for meaning that is pertinent to the findings of this study.

Participants in the present study, in spite of the extreme nature of the abuse described, indicated a desire to see some purpose or meaning in the experience and also struggled to come to terms with or "settle" past experiences. This theme has particular implications for intervention and counselling. Current programmes of

intervention have stressed support, the identification and expression of feelings, and problem-solving in helping children to cope with or settle such an experience (Alessi & Hearn, 1984). Similarly, Macleod (1987) described programmes for children in shelters that assisted children to learn about the violence and how to live without using violence to have their needs met. Clearly these are essential programme goals. However, the participants in this study suggested a need for greater emphasis on assisting the adolescent to utilize past experiences. They do not wish to see their past experience in a violent family as totally meaningless. There was a need rather to maintain some kind of link with, and understanding of, their past.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) pointed out the difficulty adolescents in general have "negotiating the hard realities of everyday life" (p.222). They found in their study, that when adolescents were confronted with difficult external circumstances, they worked to reconstitute their lives in ways that they could control and understand. In other words they tried to create some kind of "internal order" out of external disorder. Such a struggle takes on special meaning for the adolescent from a violent home. Participants in this study indicated that even in these circumstances there is an effort to negotiate some kind of internal order. One participant's need "not to forget completely" past experiences is congruent with



Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1984) contention that adolescents try to redefine past events, such that the integrity of the self is preserved while permitting further growth. This was further evident in one participant's statement "I don't think I would be as me, as I am today if I hadn't been in that world". Such disclosures powerfully confirm the need for caregivers to assist these individuals to take into account past experiences in order to allow them the freedom to move on. Intervention programmes should acknowledge and support this struggle, in order to set the conditions for personal growth and meaningful lives.

#### Discussion of caring needs

One aspect of the caring needs described by participants has particular implications for assessment and counselling for those at risk in violent families. The difficulty participants described in disclosing their experience of violence to teachers or guidance counsellors needs to be accepted as a hurdle that will have to be dealt with as part of any initial assessment.

Macleod (1987) observed that the general ability of professionals in all types of services, to identify victims of family violence is poor. Dobash and Dobash (1979) discussed the medical profession's failure in this area, particularly their tendency to prescribe tranquilizers and other psychotropic medications to abused women. This

tendency leads to a pattern of drug abuse, and possibly further victimization, rather than the identification of the violence. Three participants in this study described their mothers' abuse of prescription drugs or alcohol and two participants believed their mothers' addiction increased her vulnerability to father's abuse.

Polk and Brown (1988) identified the nursing profession as another group that, although in a unique position to have direct early access to victims of family violence, fails to identify those at risk. Our approach to assessment must move us beyond the initial veiled or disguised references to abuse. One participant's reference to fabricating a story about breaking up with her boyfriend rather than tell about the abuse to a guidance counsellor, was a good example of the difficulty with disclosure. Another participant expressed her, and her siblings', resolve to make things work at home and not tell anybody anything for fear that they would be taken out of their home and separated from one another. The failure to disclose becomes more understandable in this context. There are indeed certain family myths in our culture and keeping the family together may not always be in the children's best interest. However, from the perspective of the participants themselves fear of family disintegration was indeed a deterrent to disclosure. Those in caregiving positions need to be more concerned about the integrity of the family, and need to be more

innovative in responding to family violence, otherwise "caring needs" from the victims' perspective will be undermined.

One other caring need identified, acknowledged the work already being done, and the need for ongoing support and funding in this area. Participants' need for more information about family violence and the change that occurred when they became aware that what they were experiencing "was not the way it was supposed to be" spoke to the importance of education about violence and its impact. A participant in the pilot interviews also made reference to her discovery "that this wasn't normal what was happening in my home". It was this insight that in fact provided her with hope for the future. One generally thinks of education about violence as a way of preventing the intergenerational pattern of violence, but such education is also necessary in order to provide encouragement and hope for those actually living through this experience.

#### Limitations of the study

While it is not the goal of a phenomenological study to generalize to a larger population, there are a few cautionary notes that may be helpful to those interested in expanding on this study. A significant limitation for this study in view of the phenomenological approach was that four, of the five participants interviewed, had received

counselling through the local shelter. The demand for a "naive description" stressed by Giorgi (1985b) may not have been achieved in the full sense which may have influenced the structure of the findings. The meaning of lived violence for adolescents who received such counselling could be different from the meaning of the experience for those who have not had the benefit of such support. For example, theme seven "I'm stronger and wiser now", could have reflected more what these participants learned through their contact with the women's shelter. It may not be an essential constituent of lived violence outside the framework of such contact.

Another potential limitation is the age range of the sample participants. While a broad age range (15-24 years) ensured variation in the descriptions, the different developmental needs of the different age phases could have had a bearing on how participants perceived and interpreted their experience.

Finally participants were chosen on the basis that they had lived in a violent home, were able to articulate their experience and were willing to participate. In the literature review, adolescent girls were identified as a hidden group because of their less visible "more internalized" response to witnessing violence. Those who were willing to participate, and those most verbal about such experience, may not represent the most hidden group of

adolescent girls who live in these homes. Those who internalize their feelings to the greater extent, would possibly not only find it difficult to express their feelings, but would also be unwilling to agree to participate in such a study.

#### Suggestions for further research

Future studies need to explore the experience of adolescent girls who have not had the benefit of counselling. The themes identified in this study also need to be explored in more depth for further validation using larger samples and other recruitment sources.

This study explicated aspects of the lived violence situation that stayed close to the immediate family situation. Other aspects were described by participants that also need to be explored. For example, participants reference to peer relationships particularly their attitudes about, and towards, opposite sex relationships is a potentially rich source of knowledge pertinent to the intergenerational pattern of violence described in the literature. Of particular concern is the adolescent girls' potential to enter abusive relationships in the future. These girls' relationships with the opposite sex seems to be a logical starting point for such research. One participant made the following statement: "Out of a whole bunch of guys, the one that treats me worst or whatever, I'll go for him

you know, not because I want to be treated badly, but because I think if I'm special enough then he'll treat me good, you know." The description of such feelings expresses the complexities involved and the need for further research focusing specifically on dating relationships. As yet there are no clear answers to what may contribute to future victimization for girls from violent homes. However, more in-depth study of these girls' dating relationships, using a similar methodology utilized in the present study may provide understanding of this pattern.

Participants' descriptions of violence as an integrated total phenomenon, affecting all aspects of daily life and family interaction, suggests that our research efforts should acknowledge the overlap in the different forms of abuse in these families. Furthermore, our approach to the study of family violence needs to account for this total context. Pagelow (1984) noted the tendency for different disciplines to choose a particular focus and single-mindedly follow this focus not taking into account other aspects of the phenomenon as a whole. If researchers collaborated and coordinated their efforts, there could be better integration and we could better serve the total family interests. More importantly we would be able to discover solutions and approaches that are meaningful for the violent family as a whole.

### Concluding remarks

The present research study used a phenomenological mode of inquiry which permitted description of experiential dimensions of the lived experience of adolescent girls who witness marital violence. The individual descriptions and themes identified confirmed the value of this method in highlighting such an experience "in all its concreteness and particularity" (Giorgi 1971b, p.9). It culminated in the explication of an essential structure of lived violence which enlarged our understanding of this phenomenon that is applicable to others who share this experience. Gaining access to the meaning of this experience provided a logical starting point for planning programmes of intervention and providing direction for further research. More importantly, such an approach served to "unify and enhance the experience of the individual...rather than devaluing and alienating that experience" (Gadow, 1980 p.80). It is only in this way that the interests of a human science are served.

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## APPENDIX A

## Introduction to the study

My name is Lorna Bennett and I am a Registered Nurse. I am presently conducting a study of adolescents who have witnessed the physical abuse of their mothers by their fathers. It is my understanding that you have had this experience and you have indicated a willingness to talk about your feelings and reactions and ways of coping in a home where this occurs. I am particularly interested in your thoughts, feelings and ideas about anything that you believe personally affects you in your home. I may ask some specific questions about what your life is like in terms of your day to day experience in your home, your school life as it relates to your home life, your friendships, your hopes and dreams, and your goals for the future. However, you are free to talk about anything that you feel will help me to understand your experience more fully.

The purpose of this study is to help us to understand such experiences in a way that will enable us to help you and others like you more effectively. Because some of what you share may be sensitive, feel free to stop the interview at anytime. These interviews will remain confidential. However should you share anything which I believe is critical to your well-being this information will be passed on to your counsellor. (Participants not residing at the shelter will be informed that they may have access to a



counsellor if requested). Some of your responses may become part of a final written report, but your name will not be used nor any other identifying information. You are also free to withdraw from the study at anytime.

The interviews will be audiotaped and involve several short interviews or two or three longer interviews if you prefer. You will be approached in four to six weeks time for a final interview to help me to clear up any questions I may have about the earlier interviews. A copy of a final study report will be available to your counsellor and can be shared with you at your request. If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact me at 737-6695 Memorial University School of Nursing.

## APPENDIX B

**Interview approach**

I'm interested in what it is like for you in your home on a day-to-day basis. I'm interested in three time periods, growing up in your family, the present time and what you expect your life to be like in five years time?

I would like you to talk about what you think, feel, hope, and fear as it relates to different aspects of your experience. You will need to use your imagination when you talk about the future and for the past you will need to think about those memories that stand out the most in your mind.

I have no particular questions to ask. I'm interested in you telling me in your own words what growing up in your home has been like for you, what it is like for you now, and what you expect things to be like in the future for you. You can talk about whatever comes to mind. I will help you where I can but only to enable you to keep describing your experience in as much detail as possible.

## APPENDIX C

**Adolescent consent form**

I understand that the purpose of this study is to learn more about adolescent girls' experience living in a home where there is physical abuse of their mother by their father.

I understand that this interview will be taped.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at anytime.

I understand that I may have access to a counsellor not directly involved with the study at my request.

I understand that all my responses will remain completely confidential unless informing a counsellor is believed to be essential to my well-being. I understand that a counsellor will also be informed of any evidence of abuse or neglect, and this information may be reported to the child welfare department. I understand that the study may involve several interviews approximately 90 minutes in length, and, one additional shorter interview in four to six weeks time.

Dated at St.John's, \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

**Parent's consent form**

I understand that my daughter \_\_\_\_\_ will be interviewed for the purpose of talking about her experiences in our home where she has witnessed the physical abuse of her mother by her father.

I understand that there may be several taped interviews over a period of four to six weeks.

I understand that these interviews will be treated confidentially although any information considered to be essential to my daughter's well being will be passed on to a counsellor. I understand that a counsellor will also be informed of any evidence of abuse or neglect and may be reported to the child welfare department.

I understand that my daughter is free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Dated at St. John's \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_





