THE MEANING WOMEN ATTACH TO THEIR EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Submitted by

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DECLARATION

I, Sheila Da Silva, hereby declare that this research which I have submitted to the Department of Psychology at the University of Fort Hare East London has not been submitted for any other degree at any other institution. I further declare that this research is my own work in design and execution and that all references and materials have been appropriately acknowledged.

_____________________      ______________
Sheila Da Silva       Date
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HSRC</td>
<td>Human Sciences Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPV</td>
<td>Intimate Partner Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study investigates the meaning that women attach to their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). It seeks to explore how women who have experienced violence in the context of an intimate relationship understand, or make sense of, that experience. It is important to investigate this in order to address some of the assumptions that often inform understandings of the phenomena. Moreover, such information can be used to inform the design and implementation of appropriate interventions.

Nine women who had previously experienced violence within the context of an intimate heterosexual relationship participated in this study. For ethical reasons only women who had extricated themselves from those relationships were interviewed for this study. Participants’ accounts were therefore retrospective. The women who participated in this study constituted a homogenous group in terms of their level of education, geographic location and employment status.

Data was collected through personal, face-to-face interviews which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data in the form of text was analyzed following Willig’s (2001) criteria for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Disclosure of the women’s experiences, how they made sense of their experiences, as well as the resources they identified as available to them are reported in the results and analysis chapter.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The study presented herein focuses on the meaning women attach to their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). The purpose of focusing on subjective experience is to explore in detail how women make sense of their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the meaning they attach to those experiences. The focus on subjective experience and meaning in this study identifies it as a phenomenological study because it involves a detailed examination of the participant’s life world rather than an objective account of the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

It is not enough to understand what causes abuse. This is because if people understand IPV as something that happens only as a result of, for example, some ‘fault’ with men (e.g. unemployment, stress, or drug and alcohol abuse) then correspondingly those are the individuals at which any intervention must be aimed. But this is only one approach to understanding the phenomenon. Arguably, we also need to know how women make sense of their experiences and the role this plays in their decision to remain in or to extricate themselves from those relationships. While women’s understanding of their experiences of IPV has been addressed in previous research, the focus of those studies tended to remain quite narrowly on material considerations or women’s concern over the potential impact of parental separation on minor children. In this study I investigate the meaning women attach to their experiences of violence as an additional factor impacting their decision to extricate themselves from an intimate relationship.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can be variously defined. Dawes et al. (1998) describe IPV broadly as the use of violence between two people who are either married, or unmarried and cohabiting and who consider themselves to be a couple. Hotaling and Straus (1990) identify common forms of violence between intimate partners. In the first instance the authors describe intimate partner violence as “an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury” (p. 336). The authors cite slapping, pushing or shoving, and kicking as examples of this type of violence. The authors also acknowledge that while intimate partner violence occurs at a physical level, it more often takes place at a psychological level. This type of abuse includes insults, blaming, accusing, and withholding access to material resources such as household income. The authors observe that this type of abuse often goes unnoticed by others because it is less visible than, for example, bruises on skin (Hotaling & Straus, 1990). In South Africa, and in other countries around the world, it has been noted that women are much more likely to be the victims rather than the perpetrators of intimate partner violence (Dawes et al., 1998).

Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise and Watts (2003) maintain that violence against women is widely recognized as a serious human rights abuse. Increasingly, it is also being recognised as an important public health problem because of the poor outcome for women’s physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2003). For example, injuries from lacerations, fractures, and damage caused to internal organs. It can also include unwanted pregnancy or miscarriage and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI’s) such as HIV/AIDS. At a psychological level IPV can lead to low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, mood disorders and suicide (Kirkwood, 1993; WHO, 2005).
Thus, recognition of the seriousness of IPV was strengthened at key international conferences during the 1990’s, such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).

2.1 Prevalence of IPV

The table below is accessed from a multi-country study report on women’s health and domestic violence against women. The study was conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2005) and reports on the lifetime prevalence of physical violence among ever-partnered women. The study purposefully included countries where little data was previously available. These statistics are reflected in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Multi-country study of lifetime prevalence of physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner among ever-partnered women (WHO, 2005, p.6)

The statistics reported in Figure 1 (above) indicate that the lifetime prevalence of physical violence against women ranges from thirteen percent in Japan to sixty-one percent in
provincial Peru. Moreover, in countries where large cities and provincial settings were both studied, the overall levels of partner violence were consistently higher in provincial settings characterized by rural populations (WHO, 2005).

In comparison with global prevalence rates, Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratska and Schrieber (1999) report on the prevalence of physical violence against women in three of the nine South African provinces. Prevalence rates in for the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and the Northern Province of South Africa are indicated in Figure 2 (below). These statistics report lifetime prevalence as well as incidence in the past year (Jewels et al., 1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Ever physical violence % (n)</th>
<th>Physical violence in past year % (n)</th>
<th>Physical violence and threats in past year % (n)</th>
<th>All women % (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>33.8 (106)</td>
<td>37.8 (42)</td>
<td>36.3 (49)</td>
<td>31.0 (396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>37.9 (119)</td>
<td>43.2 (48)</td>
<td>43.7 (59)</td>
<td>32.8 (419)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Province</td>
<td>28.3 (89)</td>
<td>18.9 (21)</td>
<td>20.0 (27)</td>
<td>36.3 (464)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: South African study on prevalence of abuse by current or ex-partner (Jewkes et al., 1999)

It must be noted that the comparison of global and national trends in the prevalence of intimate partner violence is not unproblematic. Variations in prevalence statistics within the global study and between the global and national studies are partly due to sampling and methodological differences. Despite the obvious shortcomings of making such comparisons, they do nonetheless give some indication of the South African situation in relation to other countries in the world. For example, the prevalence rates of intimate partner violence in South Africa compared with countries such as Brazil (province), Thailand, Tanzania and Namibia.
Given that intimate partner violence has far reaching health and emotional consequences for women, and considering the high prevalence rates globally and in South Africa, much research has been focused on identifying factors associated with this phenomenon. This information is useful for identifying appropriate areas for intervention strategies.

2.2 Socio-economic factors and IPV

Research on factors associated with IPV tends to identify and differentiate between different level factors. Thus, the analysis of IPV is often approached contextually to include not only individual, but family, socio-cultural and economic factors implicated in IPV. These factors are briefly outlined.

2.2.1 Patriarchy and opportunities outside of the home-place

In national survey research on the topic of IPV undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Dawes et al. (1998) found a pervasive patriarchal ideology in the domestic sphere to be an important factor behind the high rates of intimate partner violence and child abuse in South Africa. This observation is also made in the findings of other South African research on the topic. For example, Strebel et al. (2006) undertook research that sought to explore how men and women in a community in the Western Cape constructed their gender identities and gender roles, and how these understandings related to the occurrence of intimate partner violence within the community. The results of the study indicated that traditional notions of femininity and masculinity within the community perpetuated differential relations of power between women and men. For example, women were expected to stay at home to care for the family while men were expected to go out to work to provide
for the family. Furthermore, women were expected to be submissive to their husbands while men were expected to be the decision makers in the relationships (ibid).

Interestingly, the participants in the study conducted by Strebel et al. (2006) acknowledged that gender roles were changing as women were increasingly able to secure employment outside the home. Indeed, the researchers found that the participants in their study viewed women who earned salaries as having more power in their relationships with men than women who did not. South African statistics indicate that women are increasingly taking up employment outside the home, and this is a trend that Strebel et al. (2006) believe impacts on the traditional status of men as breadwinners.

The social expectation in South Africa that men should be the main providers for their families means that when men are unable to do so they may feel that they have failed in their social role. Unemployed men who feel that they cannot measure up to their expected roles are likely to feel frustration, guilt and rage which can manifest itself in violence towards vulnerable intimates (Dawes et al., 1998). Dawes et al. (1998) also make reference to academic arguments that this sort of violence (IPV) serves to restore a man’s sense of power.

2.3 Individual and family factors associated with IPV

Research into individual factors often includes data on the woman’s level of education (e.g. WHO, 2005), financial autonomy (e.g. WHO, 2005; Strebel et al., 2006) previous experiences of victimization, level of social support (e.g. WHO, 2005) and whether there is any history of violence in her family of origin (e.g. WHO, 2005). Research into (male) partner factors often includes data pertaining to the use of drugs (e.g. Dawes et al., 1998;
WHO, 2005; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2003), employment status (e.g. Dawes et al, 1998; WHO, 2005), whether he had witnessed violence in his family of origin (e.g. Dawes et al. 1998; WHO, 2005), and whether he was violent towards other men (e.g. WHO, 2005).

2.3.1 Alcohol and drug dependency

Dawes et al. (1998) maintain that alcohol and drug misuse is a factor in partner violence because excessive alcohol consumption lowers inhibitions and alters judgment. It may also stimulate aggressive behaviour in some individuals (ibid). This finding is consistent with international research. For example, after examining the findings of various studies, Garcia-Moreno et al. (2003) conclude that alcohol use directly affects cognitive as well as physical functioning and reduces an individual’s ability to regulate his/her own behaviour, leaving the individual less capable of negotiating a non-violent resolution to conflict within intimate relationships. This conclusion is based on the following findings: fifty-five percent of the respondents in an American study on IPV, fifty-five percent of the respondents in England and thirty-two percent of the respondents in Wales reported that their partners drank prior to a physical assault. In Australia thirty-six percent of intimate partner homicide offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (ibid).

2.3.2 Violence in the family of origin

Dawes et al. (1998) acknowledge that male perpetrators of domestic violence are likely to have experienced violence in their families of origin. For example, they could have witnessed violence between their parents, or experienced harsh and excessive punishment or abuse as children (Dawes et al., 1998). This cycle of violence is present particularly in children who
grew up in violent homes as they learn to shape their behaviour based on the behaviour of significant others such as caregivers and older siblings. Furthermore, the authors suggest that children who observe intimate partner violence in their families tend to be desensitized to the consequences of aggression and are likely to regard violence as a legitimate means of achieving one’s goals or resolving disputes (Dawes et al., 1998).

This literature is a useful source for understanding common factors associated with intimate partner violence both in South African and abroad. Moreover, these factors have been found to impact on women’s decisions to remain in, or to extricate themselves from such relationships.

### 2.4 Factors impacting on women’s decisions to remain in violent intimate relationships

From a review of research on intimate partner violence, Wilson (1997) grouped common barriers women identify as impacting on their ability to extricate themselves from those relationships. They are: personal or emotional factors, material resources, institutional barriers, and socio-cultural factors.

The findings of a study conducted by Barnett and Lopez-Real 1993, (cited in Wilson 1997) revealed that the most often cited reason provided by women for remaining in an abusive relationship was the hope that their partner would change. The respondents also doubted their ability to support themselves financially. Barnette and LaViolette 1993, (cited in Wilson 1997) suggest that many women are unable to leave violent relationships because they are economically dependent on their partners. Page 1984, (cited in Wilson 1997) argues that this is exacerbated when minor children are involved because of the additional financial
burden that children present to a woman who does not have an income of her own. Moreover, Pagelow (cited in Wilson, 1997) argues that if a woman is unable to leave with her children then she is likely to stay in order to protect her children from the violent partner.

Martin (1981, cited in Wilson 1997) suggests that sex-role conditioning by society reinforces the idea that the woman’s primary responsibility is to make the marriage work because marriage should serve as her primary source of satisfaction. Gelles and Cornell (1990, cited in Wilson) acknowledge that many women are hesitant to break off relationships in communities where divorce is taboo and where divorced individuals are likely to suffer stigmatization. Wilson (1997) concludes that for this reason many women who experience violence in the context of an intimate relationship remain in that relationship because of normative social and cultural expectations. Indeed, a study conducted by Alsdurf (1993) in the United States and Canada found that battered women were more likely to contact the clergy than any other professional (except the police) after the first battering. However, after subsequent incidents of abuse respondents indicated that they were less likely to contact the clergy (ibid). Seeking to understand what would account for this the authors surveyed the attitudes and opinions of five thousand seven hundred (5700) church ministers in the United States and Canada. The findings of the survey revealed that: twenty-six percent of the ministers agreed that a wife should submit to her husband and trust that God would honour her action by either stopping the abuse or giving her the strength to endure. Fifty percent of the ministers expressed concern that the husband’s aggression should not be overemphasized and used as justification to break up the marriage, and twenty-one percent of the ministers felt that no amount of abuse could justify separation. Only seventeen percent of the ministers believed that physical violence should compel a woman to separate from her husband (ibid). Alsdurf (1993, cited in Wilson 1997) concluded that the opinions of the ministers reflect
commonly held socio-cultural values, which Wilson argues accounts for the lack of social and other institutional services available to women who have experienced abuse.

Similarly, results of the WHO (2005) multi-country study reveal that women tend not to report their experiences of intimate partner violence to formal services or people in positions of authority such as religious or traditional leaders, health personnel, and the police. Rather, that informal networks, including friends, family and neighbours, usually provide the first point of contact for women who are experiencing violence in the context of an intimate relationship (WHO, 2005).

Results of the WHO (2005) multi-country study also reveal that in all settings (across all participating countries) women who had experienced severe physical violence were more likely to seek support from an agency or authority than those who had experienced moderate violence. In the context of severe violence, help-seeking comes about as a result of being badly injured, its impact on the children, or encouragement from friends and family to seek help. But even within this context respondents were hesitant to seek help because they considered the violence to be ‘normal’ (socially or culturally sanctioned), or because they feared it would lead to further (retaliatory) violence, result in them losing their children, or bringing shame to the family. Many women said they would not be believed, or that reporting the abuse would not help (WHO, 2005). The finding that women tend to talk informally to someone rather than to seek formal help may in part reflect that an individual’s response to violence may take time to develop.
2.5 Women’s understanding of their experiences of intimate partner violence

Understanding how women make sense of their experiences of IPV is a complex task because women understand, or attach different meanings to, those experiences. Moreover, McCoster, Bernard and Gerber (2003) and Van der Hoven (1989) have acknowledged that the differential circumstances of women play a role in the ways in which women make sense of their experiences of IPV.

In South Africa, McCoster et al. (2003) conducted a study of six women’s understanding of their experiences of IPV. The participants in this study had not only experienced IPV as adults – in the context of their own relationships – but had grown up in homes where they were exposed to IPV at a young age, as the children of parents who engaged in violence. Not surprisingly, these participants described IPV as a way of life. The participants acknowledged that these experiences had impacted on their self concept and had contributed to their loss of self-esteem. Moreover, in the context of their own intimate relationships the women participating in the study spoke of a sense of wounding that occurred at a psychological level and which resulted from the denigrating remarks of their intimate partners (ibid).

In addition to the sense of wounding, the women participating in the McCoster et al. (2003) study spoke about the perceived control their partners had over them. Participants described the different forms this control took as physical, sexual, social, and economic. Moreover, from participants’ descriptions it emerged that a central aspect of their partners taking control in their lives involved isolating the women from their support networks. This was achieved in part through their partners’ excessive displays of jealousy and possessiveness, which the
women initially misread as mere interest or infatuation, and which had the effect of isolating them from family and friends.

In Van der Hoven’s (1989) study of a sample of women living in Gauteng province who had experienced IPV, three primary perceptions of intimate partner violence emerged: that men who are abusive are themselves victims and are therefore not blameworthy; that men become abusive as a result of external stressors; and that women provoke violence. These findings resonate with the findings of other South African research. For example, Dawes et al. (1998) argue that men who are abusive towards their partners have mood disturbances such as depression and anxiety, and they also tend to be antisocial and narcissistic. Dawes at al. (1998) also found that many men who are abusive towards their partners are likely to have experienced violence in their families of origin, including witnessing violence between parents, or experiencing harsh punishment or abuse as children (Dawes et al, 1998). Dawes et al (1998) also acknowledge that the social expectation that men should be the main providers for their families, even when they are unemployed, can be experienced by men as a deep failure both at a personal and social level. Therefore, there is a loss of the power and control that is associated with male identity and status. Unemployed men also feel frustration, guilt and rage which may be displaced through violence towards vulnerable intimates. Moreover, some women place the blame on themselves, believing that that if they had not dressed in a certain way or spoken the way they did that their partners would not have ‘retaliated’ (ibid).

2.6 Aim and rationale

The aim of the study was to explore and understand women’s perceptions of domestic violence in the context of an intimate relationship. By getting to know and understand
women’s perceptions of violence, the answers to society’s common questions of why or how women remain in abusive relationships will not be assumed. It is easy for people to make assumptions when they hear of an incident of intimate partner violence. While many studies on intimate partner violence, both in South African and abroad, tend to focus on the causes and consequences, this study will contribute to the topic by investigating how women attempt to make sense of their experiences of violence in the context of an intimate relationship.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodological decisions and techniques that were employed in the study. The study takes an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to the study of intimate partner violence following an inductive theme of inquiry. Willig (2001) describes Interpretative Phenomenological Approach as an “attempt to unravel the meanings contained in accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the texts and transcripts” (p.53). It entails an empathetic approach to exploring participants’ subjective worlds and the meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. This approach involves a series of steps in which the researcher identifies themes and then integrates them into meaningful clusters, first within, and then across cases (Willig, 2001).

3.1 Participants

Nine women who had experienced violence within the context of an intimate heterosexual relationship participated in this study. For ethical reasons only women who had extricated themselves from those relationships were invited to participate. This criterion for participation was established in order to minimize any potential harm arising from participation in the study. For example, if a participant was currently involved in a violent relationship she might have been put at greater risk for harm by participating in the study, especially if her partner became aware of her participation in this research. Furthermore, there would be a greater chance of causing harm by talking about a currently distressing or frightening experience. Thus the participants must have experienced IPV at least five years prior to participating in this research.
All the participants were equivalently educated, having attained some form of post-secondary qualification. All of the participants were employed at the time of the interviews. Participants lived in the same geographic area in the Eastern Cape Province. The sample was racially diverse. Three white women, two black African women, and two coloured women and two Indian women participated in the study.

Participants were all aged between thirty and forty years. However, as participants’ accounts were retrospective it should be noted that the violence on which they reported took place when they were in their early twenties. This is in line with the findings of Bachman and Saltzman (1995) who observed that women experience IPV most often in their younger years – from their mid-teens to late thirties. Eight of the nine participants are presently married or have a current intimate partner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Current age</th>
<th>Age at time of abuse</th>
<th>Partners age at time of abuse</th>
<th>Race group</th>
<th>No. of children</th>
<th>Currently in a relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziyanda</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marissa</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murganah</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lira</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not in a relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Sampling strategy

Snowball sampling was used to access women who fitted the participant profile. Robson (1993) describes snowball sampling as a technique where the researcher identifies one or more individuals of interest from the population. After they have been interviewed, they are used as informants to identify other members of the population, who are themselves then used as informants. This technique is used when a population is difficult to identify or access. It was an appropriate strategy in the context of this research because it is difficult to identify women who have experienced IPV. This is because IPV still remains a taboo topic within society and, consequently, the researcher expected that it would be difficult to identify women who had had this experience.

The researcher approached a woman and told her about the research. Coincidentally, that woman had experienced intimate partner violence and voluntarily talked about it. This participant identified other women whom she knew had also experienced intimate partner violence and the researcher was thus able to make contact with other women who had experienced intimate partner violence. One limitation of this sampling strategy is that snowball sampling is a form of non-probability sampling, which means that it will not be possible to generalize the results of this study to the broader population (Robson, 1993).

3.3 Methods of data collection

3.3.1 Personal interviews

Data was collected through open ended face to face interviews. Kahn and Cannell (1957), describe interviews as a kind of conversation with a purpose. Marshal and Rossman (1999)
suggest that the researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participants’ views, and must also respect how the participant frames and structures the responses. Berg (1995) describes interviews as a social interaction between equals in order to obtain research relevant information. However, unlike ordinary social interaction, interviewers do not participate with the purpose of voicing their feelings, thoughts or observations. Interviewees are the ones who share their feelings, experiences and beliefs with the interviewer. Personal interviews were an appropriate method of data collection for this study because they allow the interviewer to gather in-depth data about pertinent aspects pertaining to specific events. They also allow the researcher to explore the meanings that people attach to their everyday experiences (Marshal & Rossman, 1999).

Most of the face to face interviews took place in the participants own homes. The interview was modelled on a conversation between two equals. By having the conversation the researcher was able to gather data on the discussion of intimate partner violence. Once the conversation proceeded, each participant had a story to tell about their experience of violence. This was an opening for the face to face interviews. One average the interviews lasted between one and a half to two hours.

3.3.2 Interview guide

The face to face, personal interviews (Berg, 1998) were semi-structured as a number of predetermined questions that were designed to tap into participants experiences were posed to each participant. These questions are asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order. The open-ended questions allowed participants to tell their stories using their own words. Kvale (1996) states that open-ended questions are useful because they may yield
spontaneous, rich, descriptions where the subjects themselves provide what they experience as the main dimensions of the phenomena investigated.

The interview guide consisted of introductory questions; questions that pertained to the actual experience; probing questions; follow up questions and closing questions. An outline of these questions appears in Appendix 2. Introductory questions are questions that asked the participants to describe themselves and where they are from. This was a nice question as it broke the ice. The next question asked the participants to tell a story of one particular incident where they had experienced partner violence. Once the participants had told their stories, the researcher asked questions in relation to the stories told. These questions are probing questions. Follow-up questions are questions in which the participants were asked to describe how long the abuse lasted for; the form the abuse initially took etc. The last question in the interview guide asked the participants whether they had anything else to say. This was a closing question as it ended the interview (Kvale, 1996).

The personal interviews were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim according to the transcription conventions provided by Silverman (2000). These conventions are listed in Appendix 3.

3.4 Methods of data analysis

Data in the form of text was analyzed by means of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Willig (2001) maintains that Interpretative phenomenology is an approach to research that is informed by some of the principles and methods associated with a branch of philosophical thought known as phenomenology (ibid). Phenomenology explores both that
which appears in an individual’s consciousness as well as the manner in which it appears. Willig (2001) describes phenomenology as the study of a subject’s subjective experience of the world and an attempt to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects’ consciousness in order to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experience and to explicate its essential meaning (ibid). Husserl (cited in Willig, 2001) suggested that it was possible to transcend presuppositions and biases and to experience a state of pre-reflective consciousness, which allows for this description of phenomena as it presents itself to us.

Willig (2001) maintains that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a version of the phenomenological method which accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to the research participants’ life worlds. Even though IPA aims to explore the research participants’ experience from his or her perspective, it recognizes that such exploration must implicate the researcher’s own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant (ibid). As a result, Willig (2001) argues that the phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of the participant’s experience (ibid).

Willig (2001) maintains that the first stage of analysis in IPA involves the reading and re-reading of the text which is derived from the transcribed interview recordings. By reading and re-reading the text the researcher makes herself familiar with the text, becoming aware of phenomena as it occurs in the text. In this study, reading the text made me familiar with the different experiences described by the participants as well as their different responses to it.

In the second stage of analysis, Willig (2001) explains that the researcher is required to identify and label themes that characterize each section of the text (Willig, 2001). For example, one of the themes I picked out was the differences in the initial understanding of
abuse. I looked for different descriptions of the meanings participant’s attached to their experiences. Within and across interviews texts I was able to identify ways that the participant’s understood the abuse and these different ways were coded.

Willig (2001) states that the third stage of the analysis involves the introduction of structure to the analysis. In this stage the researcher lists the themes identified in the second stage and thinks about them in relation to one another (ibid). Some of the themes formed natural clusters. I could see relations between codes and group these codes together. For example, ‘self blame’ and ‘blamed by partner’ are two separate codes that pertain to the issue of blame in relation to the violent event.

The fourth stage of analysis involves the production of a summary table of the structured themes together with quotations that illustrate each theme (Willig, 2001). This process was facilitated by the use of ATLAS.ti.

3.5 Computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data

A programme called ATLAS.ti was used to manage the data that was gathered from the face to face interviews. ATLAS.ti is a qualitative analysis programme developed to assist in the analysis of large bodies of textual data (Buhr, 1997). This analysis software enables the researcher to analyse textual data with more rigour, for example, by making it possible to count the number of times a particular phenomenon occurs in the interview texts. Apart from mapping out the results hermetically ATLAS.ti can also export data to Excel which was done in order to create frequency charts.
An example of the mapping of codes, code categories and the associated quotations derived from the interview texts generated with the assistance of the ATLAS.ti program is provided below.

Figure 3: Example network view of code category, codes, and quotations.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ellsberg and Heise (2002) emphasize that the World Health Organization (WHO) have published guidelines for addressing ethical and safety issues in domestic violence research. These guidelines are needed to minimize harm, ensuring participant safety, minimizing participant distress and protecting privacy and confidentiality.
After explaining to the participants the reason for the research, they were asked to complete the Consent Form for participation in research (Appendix 1) whereby they agreed to take part in personal interviews. The researcher did inform the participants that the discussion would be recorded on audio-tape and they were assured of privacy and confidentiality. In the process of transcribing the interview discussions the researcher replaced the participants’ real names with pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the women who participated in this study. Other identifying information such as where the women lived or worked was also changed or omitted in order to further protect their identities.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The main objective of the study was to understand how women who participated in the study made sense of their experiences of violence within the context of an intimate heterosexual relationship. Four main themes emerged from the analysis of the data. They are: speaking about the experience; initial understanding of the experience; subsequent understanding of the experience; and resources for resistance.

In the remainder of this chapter each of these themes is presented along with extracts of coded instances which illustrate the themes. Each theme identified in the results of the study will be presented for discussion. These themes will be illustrated with extracts from the transcribed interviews. Bar charts are also included in order to depict, diagrammatically, the frequency of coded instances.

4.1 Speaking about the experience

The first theme identified in the data emanated from the participants talk on their decision to disclose their experience of violence in their intimate relationship. The data stemmed from a question in the interview that asked the participants whether they spoke to someone about the incident of abuse (Appendix 2). This theme is derived from the following sub-codes: ‘friend’, ‘own family’, ‘in-laws’ and ‘counsellor’. The frequency of each of the sub-codes is illustrated in the bar chart (page 24). By looking at the bar chart, the frequency axis illustrated how often the codes were cited. It is important to note that some participants cited more than one person with whom they chose to disclose, thus the number
of coded instances on occasion exceeds the total number of participants in the study. ‘Friend’ was cited three times, ‘own family’ was cited four times, ‘in-laws’ were cited once and ‘counsellor’ was also cited once in the responses given by the participants.

![Chart 1: Disclosure of experience of violence to significant others.](image)

Below are extracts from the interviews in which participants explicated the nature of their disclosure with significant others.

**Friend**

This code refers to instances where participants talked about disclosing their experiences of violence with a friend, as illustrated below.

**Extract 1: Ziyanda**

.hmm I told one of my closest friends(.) she told me that a woman has to do what a woman had to do(.) which was make my own decision (smiling) that she was not going to make a decision for me about my life
In Extract 1 Ziyanda describes her experience of disclosing to a friend her experience of violence in an intimate relationship. Ziyanda explains that her friend’s response was to remind Ziyanda that any decision she might make in response to the event needed to be her own decision. Ziyanda’s friend’s response is significant because it acted to affirm Ziyanda’s agency at a time when Ziyanda may well have felt less in control.

**Own family**

This code refers to instances where the participants’ described their experience talking to a member of their own family about their experience of violence in their intimate relationship.

**Extract 2: Murganah**

((Smiling)) I have told my two sisters (. ) they asked why I put up with such behaviour and why I was still there (. ) and that I should not put up with such things because I was working and I could look after myself

In this extract Murganah describes her sister’s responses to her disclosure of the incidence. Her sister’s responses are significant in the first instance because much like Ziyanda’s friend’s response in the previous extract Murganah’s sisters also make a point of identifying Murganah’s strengths. However, more than Ziyanda’s friend, they go further to make the point that Murganah ought not to “put up with such things”. This is different from the first extract where the participant was told to make her own decisions. It can also be contrasted to disclosure to a parent.

**Extract 3: Patricia**

I told my dad eventually what was happening and he said he was coming to fetch me
In-laws

This code refers to instances where the participant described her experience of IPV to an in-law. In this case the participant’s mother-in-law.

**Extract 4: Teresa**

I used to confide in his mum (.) but she would always brush the stories away and talk about something else

In this extract Patricia reported that she told her mother-in-law about her experiences of IPV. Teresa describes her mother-in-law’s response as dismissive. This response is qualitatively different to the previous responses participants received from their own families.

Counsellor

This code refers to an instance where the participant described her experience of IPV to an individual who was trained to give guidance on personal, social or psychological problems.

**Extract 5: Sidney**

.hmm I only talked to the counsellors (.) they told me that from what they had heard (.) I was not the one with the problem

In this extract Sidney reported her experience of IPV to a counsellor. The counsellor responded by telling Sidney that she is “not the one with the problem”. The significance of this response to the participant pertains to the fact that many of the participants understood the violent event to be some sort of retaliation from a partner for some or other perceived wrong doing. The counsellor’s statement contradicts that perception.

The different quotations that describe the codes of this theme illustrate that five of the participants did talk to someone about their incident of abuse. The people that they spoke
to included their friends, family members i.e. parents and siblings, in-laws and a counsellor. WHO (2005) suggested that women tend not to report their experiences of intimate partner violence to formal services or people in positions of authority, such as religious or traditional leaders and the police. Rather, that informal networks, including friends and family, usually provide the first point of contact for women who are experiencing violence in the context of an intimate relationship (WHO, 2005). Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel and Amin (2003) maintain that the degree of support a person receives from parents and others, following disclosure, can diminish the negative long term effects of abuse.

The above quotations (appearing in Extracts 1, 2, 3 and 5) illustrate that by telling family members and friends, the participants received support from them. For example when Murganah told her sisters what had happened; her sisters told her that she should not put up with such behaviour. In Patricia’s case, her father told her that he would come and fetch her. However, by telling others for example in laws, support was not given. For example when Teresa told her mother in-law what had happened, her mother in-law used to dismiss the disclosure.

Four of the nine participants admitted that they did not talk to anyone about their experience of abuse they spoke about during the interview. Their reasons centred on embarrassment, pity, fear of judgement, or that the partner had apologised for his behaviour. Hague (2001, cited in Nangolo and Peltzer, 2003) maintains that people are not aware of abusive relationships because women are not willing to disclose abuse. Women are not willing to disclose experiences of abuse because they do not want to experience embarrassment, pity or stigma from friends and family.
Pagelow (1984, cited in Wilson, 1997) suggest that some women do not disclose abuse because some men appear genuine when asking for forgiveness, saying that the occurrence was an accident, and promising that it would never happen again.

4.2 First understanding of abuse

First understanding of abuse is a theme that is derived from a group of sub-codes that pertain to the participants’ explanations of the way in which they initially made sense of their experiences of abuse within the context of their intimate relationship. Data came from a question in the interview that asked the participants’ how they understood their first experience of abuse (Appendix 2). The sub-codes from which this theme derives were: ‘control/power’, ‘drugs/alcohol’, ‘blame by partner’, ‘self blame’, ‘disbelief’, and ‘thought he would change’, ‘feared for my life’, ‘didn’t see it as abuse’. The frequency of each of the sub-codes is illustrated in the bar chart (page 29). This bar chart illustrates that ‘blamed by a partner’ was cited eight times, ‘drugs/alcohol’ was cited six times, ‘control/power’ was cited five times, as was ‘didn’t see it as abuse’, ‘thought he would change’ was cited three times. ‘Feared for my life’ and ‘self blame’ were cited three times, ‘disbelief’ was cited twice.
Chart 2: First understanding of abuse

Below are extracts from the interviews in which participants explicated their initial understanding of the abuse.

**Drugs and alcohol**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they understood the violent event to have been linked to excessive alcohol consumption or being high on drugs.

**Extract 6: Sidney**

.hmm Alcohol (.) and with regard to him I suspect drugs

**Extract 7: Michelle**

In his case I know that it was alcohol and marijuana

It is important to note that while most participants reported that their partner had been drinking excessively or was high on drugs at the time the violent incident occurred, that
the participants did not view alcohol and drug use as the only explanation for what happened. In other words, while drugs and alcohol use were often implicated they did, according to the participants, not constitute the primary or sole cause.

**Blame by partner**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ narratives where they describe the event as being constructed by their partners as a ‘rational’ response to their (the female participants) wrongdoing.

**Extract 8: Susan**

I have never cheated on him. (.) I insisted that it never happened but he refused to hear or believe what I said (.) he called me a whore and a slut (.) I got annoyed and upset with his accusations (.) so that I lashed out and said ‘yes’ to everything he accused me of (.) as he believed what he was saying was true (.) he punched me in the eye (.) then he grabbed a knife that was on the table we were sitting at and tried to use it on me

In the scenario depicted above Susan believed that her partner would not accept that she had never cheated on him and thus believed that by confirming his allegations of adultery he would desist from the accusations and peace would prevail. Unfortunately, by admitting to something she did not do only gave fuel to his anger, thus resulting in his abusive behaviour.

**Self blame**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ narratives where they described the event as being caused by their own actions. In other words, where they blamed themselves for the violence that occurred. This is illustrated in the extracts below:
Extract 9: Michelle

Most of the time I thought that I deserved that kind of treatment

In this extract Michelle reported that she deserved to be treated in that manner.

Extract 10: Marissa

In a way I blamed myself because I had taken the argument a little bit too far

These two extracts illustrate that the two participants saw themselves as the cause of their partners’ behaviour. It is interesting to note that by the participants blaming themselves they justified their partners’ behaviour.

Disbelief

This code refers to instances in the participants’ narratives where they recount the disbelief they felt in relation to the violent that had occurred.

Extract 11: Marissa

He pushed me with such force that I could not make out but I remember being so shocked (. ) I could not believe that this was happening to me (. ) and I was thinking how he could push me into the cupboard

In this extract Marissa reported that she could not believe that IPV was happening. She remembered feeling shocked and wondering how he could push her into the cupboard. By deluding herself into believing that the actions of her partner were not of an abusive nature, she is unable to acknowledge that a problem exists within the relationship and with him.

Extract 12: Patricia

I could not believe it (. ) this was not the man I married (. ) he was never like that when we got together and eventually married
In this extract Patricia realized that the way her partner was behaving was not the man she fell in love with. By realizing this Patricia is acknowledging that a problem exists in the relationship and that the problem is instigated by her partner.

**Thought he would change**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they thought or believed that their partners would change. This is illustrated in the following extracts:

**Extract 13: Susan**

Once the abuse started (. ) I believed that he would change (. ) he would be the man he was in the first year of the relationship (. ) -he always painted this beautiful picture of us (. ) as the perfect family

In this extract Susan acknowledges the existence of the abuse but her focus is on the image he painted of a perfect family, thus leading her to believe that he would change because a perfect family does not include abuse. What Susan did not realise is that her partner’s actions were not commensurate with that of the notion of a perfect family.

**Extract 14: Sidney**

He was a mastermind (. ) he could convince anybody how nice and kind he was (. ) I always thought I would help him change because underneath it all he is this nice (. ) charming guy

In this extract Sidney understood that there were two sides to this man and she hoped that his ‘better side’ would prevail.

**Feared for my life**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of violence where they described the fear they had for their own lives.
Extract 15: Susan

When this incident happened the thoughts running in my mind were that I knew that he was capable of using that knife to kill me

Susan acknowledges that her partner’s abusive behaviour posed an actual threat to her life. This kind of acknowledgement played a role in helping her to make the decision to extricate herself from the relationship.

**Didn’t see it as abuse**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV in which they indicated that the incident they experienced as abuse.

Extract 16: Patricia

( . ) Even until now I did not see it as abuse ( . ) there was once that he hit me in the face and gave me a blue eye and he never did that again ( . ) but most of the time he would just push me around ( . ) and in my mind I did not consider pushing ( . ) compared to hitting ( . ) as abuse ( . ) he was just softening my mind for myself

Extract 17: Michelle

I did not see it like he was abusing me ( . ) When you are really in love with someone there is not even a thought that crosses your mind that his behaviour could be something in an abusive way or anything negative

In the above extracts, the participants viewed their respective partners’ conduct as loving, thus blinding them to the fact that they are being abused. In not viewing their respective partners’ conduct as abusive, both Patricia and Michelle did not acknowledge that a problem existed within their relationships. As such, they were unable to effect the changes required to end the abuse or the relationship itself.
**Control/power**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they recount incidents which they viewed as their partner’s attempts to control their behaviour.

**Extract 18: Susan**

I understood that experience as my partner trying to have control over me (.) - he was obsessed with me (.) I say so because he prevented me from going places (.) from having friends and from seeing my family

In this extract Susan saw the violence as a means of asserting control over her. Other ways that he did this was by isolating her from her support base for example her family.

**Extract 19: Murganah**

.hhh .hmm I thought that he just wanted to please his family (.) that he wants to show his family that he is in control and the man of the house

The above extract indicates that Murganah’s partner was insecure about his masculinity. By asserting control over his partner, he believed that he was the “man” and in control of his domain. One of the long term repercussions of this kind of abuse is that the woman loses her independence within the relationship and assumes an identity prescribed by her partner.

The different quotations of the codes of this theme indicate that three of the nine participants admitted that alcohol contributed towards the occurrence of the abuse. Dawes et al, (1998) maintain that alcohol and drug misuse is a factor in partner violence, as alcohol consumption lowers inhibitions and alters judgement. It may also stimulate aggressive behaviour in some individuals (Dawes et al, 1998).
The three participants admitted that it was alcohol and drugs because after their partners had taken it, their behaviours changed as alcohol consumption lowers inhibitions and they became aggressive which resulted in the participants experiencing abuse.

Three of the nine participants blamed themselves for the abusive relationship, while two of the remaining participants were blamed by their partners for causing the abuse to occur. Van der Hoven (1989) suggested that a perception of IPV was that some women felt that they deserved the violence or provoked it. With regard to being blamed by a partner, Barkuizen (2005) in a study illustrating victims’ experiences of the cycle of abuse maintained that the partners of the participants were abnormally jealous and often accused them of adultery. In Susan’s case for example, she experienced what Barkuizen (2005) describes because her partner called her names and accused her of cheating on him.

Two of the nine participants admitted that they did not believe that what their partners were doing was actually abuse. Two of the remaining nine participants believed that their participants would change. Ochberg (2002) suggests that some women do not believe that the abuse is taking place and hope that their abusive partners would change because they were trained from infancy to love an abusive parent. They were trained to equate love with the intimate enduring dependence on one who provides life’s necessities and who also hits and hurts. Furthermore, they may love their partners because relief from punishment is so rewarding that they had learned to savour this feeling while denying the pain of physical abuse (Ochberg, 2002). In Susan’s case for example, she hoped her partner would change because in the first year of their marriage, he always painted a beautiful picture of them as a family. While in Sidney’s case, her partner was a nice guy. These two examples could indicate that the notion of love made these participants hope that their partners would
change and be the men they were when they started having a relationship with the different women. With regard to not believing that what their partners did was abuse could also be associated to the idea of love. For example, Patricia did not believe that this was the man she married because he was never like that when they got together.

One of the nine participants admitted that she feared for her life once the abuse began. Kirkwood (1993) and WHO (2005) highlight that violence against women has far reaching physical and psychological consequences. It also has been related to a number of serious health problems. In Susan’s case for example, she knew that her partner was capable of using the knife to kill her. This clearly illustrates what Kirkwood (1993) and WHO (2005) highlighted.

Three of the nine participants admitted that control and power was a way of understanding their partner’s abusive behaviour. McCoster, Bernard and Gerber (2003) maintain that the most pervasive characteristic of control was the women’s awareness of the presence of jealousy and possessiveness in their relationship. Control meant isolating women from family and friends as they were seen as the property of their partners. In Susan’s case, she was prevented from going places, from having friends and seeing her family. While in Murganah’s case, her partner wanted to show his family that he is in control and the man of the house.

4.3 Subsequent understanding of the experience

The following theme identified in the data emanated from the participants later understanding of their experience of violence. The data stemmed from a question in the interview that asked the participants how they later understood the abuse they experienced.
This theme is derived from the following sub-codes, namely; ‘survival’, ‘control/power’, ‘realized he wouldn’t change’ and ‘self worth’. The frequency of each of the sub-codes is illustrated in the bar chart below. This bar chart illustrates that ‘control/power’ was cited seven times, ‘realized he wouldn’t change’ was cited three times. ‘Survival’ was cited twice and ‘self worth’ was cited six times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Later Understanding of the Abuse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 3: Subsequent understandings of abuse

Below are extracts from the interviews in which participants explicated their understanding of the abuse once they had left their intimate relationships.

**Control/power**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they were told by their partners how they should behave.

**Extract 20:** Susan

((Frowning)) Now that I am out of that relationship I understand abuse (.2) as a form of control (.) that (.) if you do not do what your
partner wants (.) he tries to mould you into what he wants by .hh acting as the father figure and you the child

Extract 21: Ziyanda

I see abuse as a form of suppression, as a way of trying to control the other person (.) to get you to do things their way just to please them

The above extracts are indicative of the fact that once a person is out of an abusive relationship that person, with a certain amount of objectivity, is able to see the partners conduct for what it was.

Survival

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they realized that they needed to leave their abusive situation as there were dire consequences to remaining in such relationships.

Extract 22: Susan

If I had remained with him most probably I would be dead today

Acknowledging and accepting a partner’s conduct as abusive and taking steps to move away from such a relationship is the first step to surviving an abusive relationship.

Extract 23: Sidney

I ended up in hospital (.) I was a cutter (.) I used to cut myself and I realized I was losing control (.) (.2) it was a choice to survive for my daughters (.) not for him (.) but for me and my daughters that I made that choice to leave

Acknowledging and accepting a partner’s conduct as abusive and taking steps to move away from such a relationship is the first step to surviving an abusive relationship.
**Self worth**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they realized that they deserved better treatment from their partners.

**Extract 24: Sidney**

.hh I took a transfer and I saw what I was capable of (.) ((Smiling)) people recognized me as a person (.) they recognized me as a worker and I had family support

By participating in her work and the community Sidney realised her inner strength as well as her capabilities, something she believed she did not have whilst in the relationship as evidence by her self mutilation.

**Extract 25: Patricia**

.hhh I do not really know (.) I started seeing my value (.) I was better than this (.) I did not deserve what he put me through

In this extract Patricia was later able to acknowledge her worthiness and increasing her self-esteem.

**Realized he wouldn’t change**

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they realized that their partners would not change.

**Extract 26: Lira**

.hh after five years he did not even try to get a job (.) and I saw that he was not even trying to make an effort to change (.) ((smiling)) I was hoping that he would change for the better but (.) I saw that he had given up on himself and that he was not going to change ever

By becoming aware of her partner’s conduct Lira realized that her partner would not change.
**Extract 27: Susan**

With regard to my partner I think he was abusive because (.) his father is abusive and he copies his father’s patterns

Once Susan had left her partner she realised that her partner’s conduct was a repetition of her father in-laws behaviour. This gave her the encouragement to not to return to that relationship.

Four of the nine participants admitted that once they had left the abusive relationship, they still understood their relationship as one of control and power which was exerted by their partners. For example, Susan highlighted that now that she is out of the relationship she was in, she understands abuse as a form of control. Four of the participants admitted that they had realized their self worth once they had left the abusive relationship. For example Sidney realized what she was capable of and people recognized her as a person. Patricia started seeing her value. These two cases illustrate that by realizing that you are an individual who needs to be treated well, it can provide a reason for leaving disruptive relationships.

Two of the nine participants admitted that survival was a reason for getting out of their relationships. Garcia-Moreno et al. (2003) acknowledge that violence against women is widely recognised as a serious human rights abuse because of the poor outcome for women’s physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. For example, Susan realized she would not be alive today if she remained with her abusive partner.
4.4 Resources for resistance

This theme identified in the data emanated from the participants talk on what they thought eventually made them leave the relationship. The data stemmed from a question in the interview that asked the participants what eventually made them leave the relationship (Appendix 2). This theme is derived from the following sub-codes: ‘parents/siblings’, ‘children’, ‘friends’, ‘institutional’. The frequency of each of the sub-codes is illustrated in the bar chart below. This bar chart illustrates that ‘family’ i.e. ‘parents/siblings’ were cited five times, ‘children’ were cited four times. ‘Friends’ and ‘institutions’ were each cited three times.

![Resources for resistance chart]

Chart 4: Resources that made it possible to not return to the abusive relationship

Below are extracts from the interviews in which participants explicated their resources for resistance. The description of family and friends can be found in (page 24).
Family, friends and institutions

This code refers to instances where the participants made use of their families, friends and institutions as methods of assistance for them not to return to their abusive relationships.

Extract 28: Teresa

When he realized I was not dead he came looking for me at their house as he knew them too and they told him that they had not seen me (. .) when he left my (. .) friends phoned my sister who came fetched me and took me to my parents (. .) the next day I went to the police station and filed a report against him and started my divorce proceedings.

Extract 29: Susan

After the incident with the knife the next day with my family’s support (. .) I went to the police station and got a court order against him (. .) and that was the end of my relationship.

It took a threat to their lives in order for Teresa and Susan to leave their partners. With the support both participants received from their friends and family members they were able to take action against their partners.

Children

This code refers to instances in the participants’ accounts of IPV where they used their family as methods of assistance for them not to return to their abusive relationships.

Extract 30: Sidney

It was a choice to survive for my daughters (. .) not for him, but for me and my daughters that I made that choice to leave.
Extract 31: Lira

(0.2) my children came into the picture (.) - they were disturbed by the way their father would beat and throw me around (.) they were actually scared and frightened of their father (.) - I could see that their childhood was going away very fast

In these two extracts the participant’s children gave them a reason to leave their partners.

The quotations of the codes of this theme indicate that most of the nine participants admitted that friends, family members i.e. parents, children are the forces that helped the participants not to return to their previous relationships. Yoshioka et al, (2003) maintain that the degree of support a person receives from parents and others, following disclosure of abuse can reduce the negative long term effects of abuse and provide a reason to leave the abusive relationships. For example in Teresa’s case, her friends contacted her sisters who supported her by phoning her parents to come and fetch her and her parents supported her when she went to the police station. In Susan’s case, her family supported her too when she went to the police station and got a court order against her partner. In Lira’s case, her children provided her with support when she realized that they were scared of their father and she did not want them to grow up in such an environment.

It was important for the participants to disclose their experience particularly in light of the fact that the initial experience of partner violence was very confusing for them. It was confusing for them because in the context of a romantic relationship the participants did not expect this to happen. They described how their partners were loving men before and this seemed to be out of character for the men to behave like that. It was also confusing because the participants did not see what was happening as abuse. Furthermore, the initial experience of partner violence was confusing because the participants blamed themselves.
They blamed themselves because their partners tried to rationalize their behaviour by saying that the participants brought it upon themselves.

What happened over time was that the participants saw it more and more an issue of power and control. Instead of accepting their partners excuses the participants started seeing their own value. They started seeing this from other people i.e. friends and family. Here the role of other people was important because they made the participants see their own value. Particularly the family gave the participants the support to leave the abusive relationship.

The results of this study show that the support of other people i.e. friends and family was very important for the participants. This support helped the participants to see their own value and worthiness and to extricate themselves from the relationships they were in. These were very important resources.

This study is different from other studies done in South Africa because it showed that the support from people was important as this support helped the participants extricate themselves from the abusive relationship and it also helped the participants see their own worth. Other studies (Wilson, 1997) show that material resources are important. In this study material resources were not really important because the participants had means to support themselves as they were all employed. In fact, many of the participant’s partners were unemployed and therefore financially dependent on them.
The main objective of the study was to understand how the women who participated in this study made sense of their experiences of violence within the context of an intimate heterosexual relationship.

My study showed that the participants preferred to disclose in informal networks such as friends and family members. Informal networks were important because the initial experience was very confusing for the participants. It was confusing because in the context of a romantic relationship the participants did not expect partner violence to occur. Confusion also occurred because the participants found it difficult to view what was happening as abuse. Furthermore confusion occurred because their partners would try to rationalize their behaviour saying that the participants brought it upon themselves. The informal networks were important because they helped the participants make sense of the confusion they were experiencing. A clearer understanding of their experiences was a first step to responding appropriately to it.

Over time and with the support of family and friends the participants began to view their partner’s behaviour as, more immediately, an issue of power and control. As the participants had support from others they started seeing their own value and the family in particular gave them the support to leave the abusive relationship.

The support that the informal networks provided gave the participants the encouragement to go to formal networks such as the police, lawyers and courts of law. The participants were able to go to formal networks once they had understood that the experience was not
their fault that their partners would not change their behaviours and that if they did not leave the relationship there would be dire consequences to it. For example Susan knew that her partner would kill her. These formal networks were important because once the participants had understood their experience of partner violence they went to formal networks that made it possible for the participants not to return to their abusive relationships and to protect themselves against their partners. For example Teresa filed a report against her partner and started divorce proceedings.

This study showed the importance of informal and formal networks as each of these networks played a role in the participant’s initial and later understanding of intimate partner violence. Formal networks such as the police and courts made it possible for the participants not to return to the abusive relationships and it also helped the participants to protect themselves because they were able to obtain restraining orders or get divorced. If the participants had not gone to the formal networks and if they had remained in the relationships they were in, there is the chance that they could have experienced serious, if not fatal, injuries. Furthermore, these participants would never have learnt that they deserve to be treated better.

The limiting factor experienced in conducting this study was that it was not easy to access women who have experienced intimate partner violence, as it is a taboo topic that women do not wish to speak about. There was a lack of literature on what makes women leave abusive relationships and women’s understanding of intimate partner violence. The sample for the personal interviews was supposed to be ten women but only nine women were included, since most of the women contacted for the study did not feel comfortable talking to a complete stranger, although they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.
Abuse is a pattern of behaviour used to control another person. For many years women were considered the property of their husband; consequently, wife abuse was not just “tolerated” but thought to be an appropriate way for a man to discipline his wife (Kittleson, 2005). This patriarchal view continues to foster domestic violence today. The family as a basic unit of society has valued the right to privacy. Unfortunately this belief has led to hiding domestic violence as well as preventing women from seeking help. Stereotyping of women as submissive, nurturing, and passive, contributes to the continued oppression of women and to men’s belief that they can harm women with impunity (Kittleson, 2005).

As the study showed that women are isolated from support groups there needs to be work-based advised centres where women will have access to formal networks of support and they will be able to talk about their experiences of partner violence.

The above study showed that women understand intimate partner violence in different ways. A number of factors like alcohol, upbringing, unemployment and patriarchal ideology played a role in the participants’ perception of abuse. Abuse was not understood as having a single definition; it consisted of a number of factors that played a role in the participant’s understanding of intimate partner violence. This study also showed the importance of informal and formal networks as these networks helped the participants understand the abuse they experienced and it also helped them to get out of the abusive relationship.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS’ CONSENT FORM

I ________________, agree to participate in this research. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The topic of the research is women’s perceptions of intimate partner violence.

2. Participation is limited to a series of interviews which will be conducted over a period of time. Each interview will take approximately thirty minutes to complete.

3. As intimate partner violence is a sensitive topic to talk about, the participant reserves the right not to answer any question that she does not want to answer.

4. Participation in this research will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form.

5. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

__________________________     ________________
Signature of research participant                                                     Date

__________________________     ________________
Signature of researcher                                                                   Date
APPENDIX 2: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, what do you do and where do you live and who you live with?

2. Can you tell me a story about an incident—one specific incident that comes to mind where you experienced abuse from an intimate partner?

3. How old were you at the time and how old was he?

4. Were you able to talk to anyone else about this incident?

5. What was your understanding of that experience at that time?

6. For how long did the abuse continue?

7. What form did the abuse take initially; was it verbal or physical?

8. What do you think eventually made you leave the relationship?

9. What made it difficult for you to leave the relationship?

10. What made it easy for you to leave the relationship?

11. What do you think makes men abusive?

12. Is there anything that has been on your mind that you would like to talk about?
APPENDIX 3: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS (Silverman, 2000)

[ ] Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker’s talk is overlapped by another’s talk.

= An equal sign at the end of the line and one at the beginning of the next sentence indicates no gap or pause in conversation between the two speakers.

(2) The number in brackets indicates elapsed time in silence in tenths of seconds.

(.) Indicates a tiny gap in the conversation, no more than one tenth of a second.

_ Underlining indicates stress via pitch or tone.

: Indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound, number of colons is indicative of the length of the prolongation.

CAP Caps lock indicates especially loud sounds in relation to the other talk.

.hh Indicates out breath, number of h’s are indicative of the length.

(word) Possible hearings

(() Transcriber’s inability to hear the word that was said.

(italics) Indicates participants’ displayed emotion.