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Killing ostriches: Young women, family violence and youth work

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Killing Ostriches

Young Women, Family Violence and Youth Work

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Abstract

Using a phenomenological approach, this study, "Killing Ostriches" sought to investigate the experience of violence in the home of a small group of young women living in the northern suburbs of Perth. Seven young women between the ages of 17-26 took part in the study. Five of these young women claimed to have experienced violence in their family of origin and the remaining two, introduced for triangulation purposes, claimed not to have done so.

The study sought, not only to explore the lived experience of violence in the home for these young women, but to also investigate their experience of youth work practice. Accounts of family violence provided indicate the significance and meaning of family violence for participants. What the study was not able to do is to provide accounts of aspects of youth work practice perceived as beneficial or detrimental by the young women involved in the study as none of them were aware of the availability of youth workers. They were unaware of other supports available to them and were also scared that if anyone found out, their situation would become intolerable. Each of these women chose not to disclose to anyone outside their immediate environment. For some of these young women I was the first person to whom they had disclosed much of their story.

The study provides a better understanding of why it is that young women who have experienced violence in their family of origin do not disclose to others who might be in a position to support them and possibly stop the violence. The young women in this study were isolated from their peers and any support mechanisms that might have been available

to them. The study, therefore, provides further insight into why it is that young women living in a violent environment choose to remain silent thereby maintaining the isolation associated with family violence.

What is clear is that young women who have experienced violence, no matter what form that violence might have taken or where it is placed on the continuum of violence, have a need to discuss their experience with an individual they feel confident will support them according to their needs. What is also clear is that these particular young women were not aware of anyone who might fill this role. The literature shows the importance of identifying at least one attachment figure as early as possible in life, with whom a secure attachment may be developed.

The women in this study have greater awareness of the issues involved in family violence than do many youth workers and other professionals to whom they might realistically go for help. What this study has shown is that there is need for further research based on the needs and experience of women, such as those involved in this study, to effectively answer the original research subquestion relating to youth work practice. It also suggests that youth work practitioners should be involved in such research.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief :

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

Judy Kulisa

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a youth work practitioner I became intensely aware of the *normality* of violence as part of the everyday experience of many young people, especially young women. The majority of young women housed in a young women's medium term accommodation service in which I was employed were predominantly escaping family violence. When these young women developed sexual or *romantic* relationships, it was not unusual for these to also be abusive and violent. I sensed that many of the young women attending a drop-in centre, at which I was also employed as a youth worker, were profoundly unhappy. They seemed unable, however, to identify *the problem* or how to change their situation. Some of these young women demonstrated potentially harmful behaviour such as unsafe and *indiscriminate* sexual activity, excessive and unsafe alcohol and other drug use, or self-mutilation. Others were either extremely introvert or extrovert in their behaviour and some appeared to lack social skills. I was aware of their lack of trust in self or others and in their diminished self esteem. Even the most extrovert, when in conversation, might demonstrate feelings of self-doubt and a sense of pointlessness. It was not unusual for young women, as well as young men, to demonstrate suicidal ideation. Alone, none of these can be taken as indicators of family violence or child abuse. But with knowledge of the individual, suspicions arise.

Research claims that between one in three and one in ten families in the Western world experience violence in some form (Allbrook, 1992, p. 12). My claim is that this violence is culturally and socially constructed; and that our society is founded in violence and

oppression. There is, however, no one clear and universally accepted understanding of what is *violence*.

Australian Law is based on British Common Law and historically, it has been socially acceptable for men to beat their wives and their children (according to the 'rule of thumb' of British Common Law [Roy, 1977, p. 112]) provided that the rod was no wider than the man's thumb. As a result of campaigns initiated by the women's movement since the 1960's, violence against women and children is now perceived as a *social problem* (Mugford, 1989). Concern about violent crimes (Dow, 1993), domestic violence (Stannard, 1987; Hatty, 1987; National Committee on Violence Against Women [NCVAW], 1991) and child abuse (Grunseit, 1987; NCVAW, 1991) has increased. The New Left political movement and the *second wave* feminism of the 60's and 70's gave political emphasis to *oppression*. Feminists linked to the New Left began to recognise the connection between the roles which they had *naturally* assumed and the oppressive situations which were being fought against in places like Vietnam and Czechoslovakia. "(N)ew left men who had been so concerned about the fate of the Vietnamese had been happily dominating, denigrating, and exploiting new left women and those women had finally had enough" (Curthoys, 1984 quoted in Hopkins & McGregor, 1991, p. 2).

A common theme identified in a number of studies during the 1990's is an assertion that violence is part of the culture in which we live (Allbrook, 1992; Blanchard, 1992; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995; Draper, 1991; Kulisa, 1992; Omelzcuk, 1992; Osofsky, 1997; Walshe, 1995). So whilst it remains acceptable to use violence sometimes, and whilst the definition of *violence* is undetermined, society will in some circumstances, continue to

condone or collude with behaviour that is effectively *violent* and damaging to those affected by it. Although it is acknowledged that the individual is not to blame for these violent social structures, they are responsible for their actions within them (Astor, 1991 quoted in Allbrook, 1992, p. 5). Through passive acceptance of oppressive behaviour the individual becomes responsible for the continuation of violence. The title "Killing Ostriches" was adopted in recognition of the prevalence of this *passive acceptance* of behaviour within the family, which often is, effectively, violent. The title aims to suggest that it is necessary to either *kill* the *Ostriches*, with their heads in the sand, or make them aware of what is happening around them. This, in turn, will make it easier for those affected by violence in the home to seek out support in dealing with the issue.

During previous research (Kulisa, 1992) I became aware that youth workers frequently felt frustration and helplessness concerning their inability to support young women who have experienced family violence. My experience in youth work settings concurs with this perception. It is difficult to raise the issue of violence with young people who are experiencing it on a daily basis and, although unhappy, consider their situation to be *normal*. Research undertaken as part of my undergraduate study, referred to above, indicated that, for these reasons, the education system was unable to effectively deal with issues of family violence, and that youth workers were unable to effectively support young people who are experiencing that violence.

1.1 Background

Existing research has identified that there is a great deal of *'separation'* in the ways that different professionals view and deal with behavioural *'problems'* which could be indicative of violent family situations (Allbrook, 1992) and suggests that at a local level service providers should work effectively together to deal with these issues. For example, within the education system, young people who display behaviour which is classified as conduct disorder are treated as *the problem*. It is the young person themselves and the behaviour that is treated. Whereas, in another setting, the environment in which the young person lives and the family situation might be taken into consideration and intervention designed accordingly. In developing appropriate ways of working with young people and training for service providers, Allbrook suggests that young people who have experienced family violence would be the most appropriate source of information. In other words, in order to find out how youth workers can effectively support young people they suspect to be surviving family violence we should ask young people who have survived violent family situations.

According to existing studies (Allbrook, 1992; Blanchard, 1992), little meaningful intervention currently takes place to assist children who are either secondary or primary victims of family violence. Although the incidence of family violence is high, youth workers and other professionals feel helpless to support young people who are victims, but who are unwilling to share their experiences (Omelzcuk, 1992; Allbrook, 1992). It is suggested that the reasons for this are because young women either experience misplaced feelings of *guilt*; or feel an inability to share these same experiences because they do not understand that

family life for them is in any way *different* (Allbrook, 1992). In some subcultural groups it is not different from many of their peers, and, therefore not considered worthy of mention.

1.1.1 Definitions

Although a number of definitions of violence have been offered (Allbrook, 1992; Kulisa, 1992; Blanchard, 1992) there does not appear to one commonly accepted definition that encompasses violence in all its forms. The definition of *domestic violence* most commonly offered to Allbrook by youth workers concurs with the definition accepted by the Western Australian Domestic Violence Task Force (1988) that "domestic violence refers to physical, emotional, verbal or sexual abuse occurring within the 'home'" (Allbrook, 1992, p. 30). Omelzcuk offers a definition of *'abuse'* (1992, p. 49), and the terms *'abuse'* and *'violence'* are, on occasions used interchangeably. A definition of *'violence'* is not offered, neither does she offer any discussion as to what difference, if any, there is between *'abuse'* and *'violence'*.

For the purpose of this study, *'violence'* is defined as 'any act based on an abuse of power (or *oppressive behaviour*) which has a negative affect on the well being of others' and encompasses that definition adopted by the Western Australian Domestic Violence Task Force (1988). This definition includes all forms of violence and abuse previously acknowledged (for example *physical, emotional/psychological, social* and *sexual*) and incorporates neglect and intimidation.

1.2 Significance

This study set out to identify what it is that youth workers do that young women who have experienced family violence believe made them feel better about themselves. It also set out to discover how youth workers helped them to cope with feelings of isolation and self doubt reported to result from a violent family environment (Omelczuk, 1992; Blanchard, 1992; Allbrook, 1992; Walshe, 1995). Further, it attempted to identify youth work practice which made these young women feel better able to cope with their situation. These aims have been based on the assumption that it is important to have an understanding of the impact of practices in order to avoid reinforcing social structures that are effectively violent. These aims were not achieved.

The study did, however, provide a better understanding of why it is that young women who have experienced violence in their family of origin do not disclose to others who might be in a position to support them and possibly stop the violence. It is commonly accepted that family violence often goes unreported. For this reason, according to the National Committee on Violence Against Women (NCVAW, 1991, p. 14), children and young women living in violent relationships frequently remain isolated. The young women in this study were certainly isolated from their peers and any support mechanisms that might have been available to them. The study, therefore, provides further insight into why young women living in a violent environment choose to remain silent thereby maintaining the isolation associated with family violence.

Using a phenomenological approach, the study sought to investigate the experience of violence in the home of a small group of young women living in the northern suburbs of Perth. It also sought to investigate the experience of these young women of youth work practice. Using the words of the young women themselves, I have described their experience and, using an inductive method of analysis, have interpreted their meanings. Accounts of family violence from the young women's perspective have been provided. These accounts indicate the significance and meaning of family violence for these young women. What the study was not able to do is to provide accounts of aspects of youth work practice perceived as beneficial or detrimental by the young women involved in the study. None of the young women involved in this study were aware of the availability of youth workers whilst they were living in a violent environment. They were unaware of other supports available to them and were also scared that if anyone found out, their situation would become intolerable.

Findings of this study indicate the necessity to involve youth work practitioners, and young women who have experienced family violence, in further research which will better enable youth workers to make contact with other young women whose experience is similar to participants in this study. I still believe that by gaining an understanding of the perception and experience of young women of the phenomenon of family violence and youth work practice, practitioners will be in a better position to formulate effective policies and practices to support other young women to deal with the effects of living with violence.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine young women's accounts of their own experiences. The objectives of the study are four-fold:

a) to describe the lived experience of a group of young women in Western Australia who have experienced violence within their family;

b) to interpret those descriptions, using the open process of analysis described by Colaizzi (1978) and known as 'Colaizzi's Steps';

c) to extrapolate themes which might provide insight into their experience of the phenomenon; and

d) to derive from these data recommendations for youth work practice, theory development and further research.

1.4 Research Question

The question which formed the basis of inquiry is:

> **"What are young women's lived experiences of family violence?"**

The subquestion:

> **"How young women, who have experienced family violence, believe that youth workers can support other young women with similar experiences"**

The use of a phenomenological approach necessitated that I ask an open question of each participant. Each participant was asked, therefore, to "tell me about your life".

Whilst listening to their responses, it became clear that the experience of the young women spoken to did not include any encounters that would enable them to provide much information relating to the research subquestion. With the exception of one participant, these young women had no formal knowledge of youth workers during their experience of violence and were unaware of formal supports that might have been available to them.

1.5 Organisation of Thesis

Chapter 1 has provided a basis on which the study was developed, together with an historical overview and background to the study. In Chapter 2 the methodological and conceptual frameworks adopted for this study are discussed. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the experiences as described by participants. Chapter 5 discusses a variety of literature developed in Australia, Great Britain and in the United States of America. The literature explores various aspects of *violence in the family*, the *nurture or nature* argument, *violence* and its effects on *child development*, and how *youth work* and *school* settings have approached the subject. It is considered necessary to explore all these areas to fully understand the themes identified in the data. The concluding chapter, Chapter 6, draws together more closely information gained from this research and from the literature, and the implications of this for the future of youth work practice.

Appendices include the Informed Consent Letter and Form and follow the List of References.

Chapter 2: Method

The methodological approach used here is phenomenological and the conceptual framework follows closely the Ecological Systems theory outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979). The purpose of this Chapter, therefore, is to assist the reader to understand the various components of these two frameworks and to demonstrate the links between them. By exploring important considerations of a phenomenological approach and, then, the research design (which includes the Conceptual Framework), these links are made clear. Justification for the preferred method of analysis is provided together with discussion regarding the limitations of the study and ethical considerations.

2.1 Methodology – A Phenomenological Approach

The focus of this study is the *lived experience* of young women who have encountered violence in their family of origin. For this reason a phenomenological approach, based on that described by Crotty (1996) as appropriate for nursing research, has been chosen. Central to any phenomenological investigation is the question "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990, p. 68). It assumes that the personal experience of the phenomenon together with external cultural influences and encounters, which have built on the sub-conscious of the individual, effect the development of *meaning*. Therefore, *reality* is different and has different meanings for each individual. Understanding this reality and the social construction of *meaning* (Morse, 1991, p. 28) is the essence of phenomenological inquiry. "An important tool in obtaining these meanings is ordinary language, which is well adapted for explaining a pattern of social interaction in terms of reasons and rules." (Harre & Secord, 1972, p. 9-10).

Through inductive analysis of *ordinary language* the phenomenological researcher develops an understanding of why things are as they are. Through discussion and checking back with participants a joint understanding of the meaning of the participants' language is reached. The researcher offers that joint understanding to the readers of the research who determine for themselves how closely that shared meaning reflects their experience.

A phenomenological approach was chosen to gain an understanding of how the young women involved perceived themselves, their lives and their experience. It was important to gain an understanding of how these young women *'felt''* about themselves, their lives, the violence they experienced and the perpetrator. It was also important to gain an understanding of what supports these women had experienced and the effect for them of any attempts at disclosure as well as to understand how they feel their lives have been affected by their experience in their family of origin. It is important to have an understanding of how they see themselves compared to others that they know or grew up with. What I wanted to know is what is it that youth workers can do that would assist other young women with similar experiences. In order to answer this question it is important that I have a deep appreciation of the 'essence' of the meaning of the experience of violence for these young women. To gain this appreciation I needed to explore with them that experience and use their own words to develop the meaning wrapped up in the words they used and their descriptions. Using this methodology, I was able to identify much of what I set out to do. However, rather than defining a prescriptive process on which to build policy and practice for youth workers with similar young women, I discovered that this particular group of young women were ignorant of the supports available to them.

Although it was clear that they had an understanding of what they would have found useful, they were unaware of how, in their particular situation, they could have accessed this assistance.

Validity

The necessity for concern on the part of the qualitative researcher regarding the quantitative conventions of reliability and validity is questioned by Munhall & Oiler (1986) who claim that the richness of data which is itself "compared and contrasted again and again" is sufficient to provide "a check on their validity" (p. 116).

Claims for validity in qualitative research, however, can be made when the conventions of the method are rigorously adhered to (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rigour in qualitative research, according to Sandelowski (1986, p. 29), entails ensuring that issues of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality are addressed. It is appropriate to discuss issues of *'credibility'*, *'auditability'* and *'fittingness'* or, as described by Guba & Lincoln (1989), *'confirmability'*, *'dependability'* and *'transferability'*. A phenomenological study can only be generalisable within the context of the inquiry (Patton, 1990; Munhall, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Sandelowski, 1986; Dey, 1993). According to Sandelowski (1986, p. 31),

> qualitative researchers...argue that generalizability is itself something of an illusion since every research situation is ultimately about a particular researcher in interaction with a particular subject in a particular context.

Once analysis commenced, the interview transcripts were scoured several times to identify *significant statements* within each of them. From here themes were

identified and clustered together, then integrated into an "exhaustive description of the investigated topic" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61). A comparison of the synopsis made of interviews and these exhaustive descriptions were then made to ensure the validity of these descriptions.

2.1.2 Credibility

For phenomenology to be considered to have *credibility* it must describe the experience of the individual in such a way that they can recognise it as being theirs. If the study "presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 30) then it can be said to have *credibility*. This process is assisted and enhanced by the *auditability* and the *fittingness* of the study. Sandelowski (1986, p. 30) discusses "truth value in qualitative investigation"; her claim is that it is of necessity assessed through "the discovery of human phenomena or experiences as they are lived and perceived by subjects". Guba and Lincoln (1989) call for *'confirmabiltiy'* rather than *credibility* and suggests the need to ensure "that data... can be tracked to their sources, and that the logic used to assemble the interpretations into structurally coherent and corrorborating (sic) wholes is both explicit and implicit in the narrative... " (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). Processes of *confirmability* are also discussed by Miles and Huberman (1984) in the context of accessing participant feedback to *'confirm'* interpretation of the data. After transcription of the interview, this information was put together in an abbreviated form indicating the feelings expressed by the participant and an overview of their lives. This is what was then presented to each participant for discussion. No changes were indicated at this stage.

In this study, analysis has attempted to reconstruct the experience for the participants in such a way as to give meaning to it that is consistent with the experience as perceived by these women. By constructing a synopsis of the interview which participants confirmed was both accurate and clear, confirmability of this interpretation has been achieved. Adoption of the ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), as the basis for the conceptual framework within which analysis was undertaken has ensured that the experiences described, and the interpretations given to these descriptions, are authentic representations of the meaning given to those descriptions by participants. Further confirmability was achieved through the revisiting of participants to discuss how accurately the statement which covers the 'fundamental structure' (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61), of the phenomenon reconstructs and makes sense of their own understanding of their experience (Crotty, 1996, p. 168).

2.1.3 Fittingness

A responsibility of the phenomenological researcher is to ensure that the findings of the study could comfortably *fit* into other situations and contexts outside the situation that is the subject of the study. *Fittingness* has been achieved when people, other than those involved in the study, find its results "meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences. The findings of the study...(must also) 'fit' the data from which they are derived" (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 31). In other words, in the process of analysis and the development of findings the integrity of the original data should be maintained. A balance must be attained between empathetic understanding of the experience of the participant and "the necessary degree of

detachment and perspective to allow them (the researcher) to use the... data to generate in-depth understanding of very sensitive topics" (Cowles, 1988, p.178).

Fittingness has been attained in this study by matching information in existing literature to discussion around the findings identified from the interviews. According to Colaizzi (1978, p. 61), step 6 of the analysis process is the formulation of an unambiguous "statement of identification of (the phenomenon's) fundamental structure." It is this descriptive statement that has been worked together with supporting literature to ensure that the findings 'fit' the phenomena. The Thesis has therefore been arranged with the literature review following the research findings rather than before as is customary. In this instance the *phenomena* that these findings need to *fit* is the meaning of the experience of family violence to the participant as well as to others who may have similar experiences. According to Crotty (1996) nursing

> ... phenomenology is about addressing, identifying, describing, understanding and interpreting the experiences people have in their day-to-day lives and precisely *as* those people have the experiences and understand them. (Crotty, 1996, p. 14).

Therefore, *fittingness* is attained not only when the participants are comfortable with the interpretation made by the researcher, but also when others could recognise their own understanding of similar experiences within this interpretation.

2.1.4 Auditability

Sandelowski (1986, p. 32) also suggests that the uniqueness of individual experience and interpretation is central to phenomenology. It was, therefore, necessary for me, as researcher, to prove consistency through an *'audit trail'*. This is based on the

assumption that clarity of description and explanation of each step of the research procedure is a qualitatively acceptable alternative to the instrument testing of quantitative research. Other researchers are thus able to follow the *"decision trail"* of Sandelowski and, "(i)n addition...arrive at the same or comparable but not contradictory conclusions given the researcher's data, perspective, and situation." (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 32). *Auditability* is achieved when others can identify and follow the process and accept the interpretation as valid.

For this study the audit trail follows the steps outlined by Colaizzi (1978) each of which have been developed as separate files and stored on disc. The explanations and examples used by Colaizzi (1978) were followed closely in the development of the analysis for this study.

2.1.5 Triangulation of data

A further step in data collection and analysis was triangulation of data through the collection of information, using the same methodology and asking the same broad question ("Tell me about your life") to a further group of young women who, in this instance, claimed not to have experienced family violence. My reason for choosing to introduce *triangulation* to the process was that the *experiences* of one young woman in the group who claimed to have experienced family violence appeared to be within a range commonly experienced by young people but not generally considered to be *violent*.

Analysis of data took similar form in as much as a synopsis of the interview was developed and reintroduced to participants for their comment. Limited further

analysis of this data took place as it was quite evident that the experience for these young women, together with their interpretation of events, was very different to that of the group who claimed to have experienced *violence* in their family of origin.

2.2 Design

The study used a phenomenological approach to explore family violence as experienced by a small group of young women, aged 17 - 26, living in Perth, Western Australia. Only those young women who identified as having experienced violence in their family of origin volunteered to be involved. A second, even smaller, group of young women who claimed to have come from a non-violent family were used as triangulation to the study.

2.2.1 Sample

The sample involved in this study was a purposive, self-selecting one. It comprised of a total of seven young women, all of whom volunteered to be involved. Five claimed to have experienced violence in their family of origin and two claimed that they had not. Those claiming to have experienced family violence were willing and able to explore that experience. It was decided, once potential participants became known to me, to extend the upper and lower limits of age range originally decided upon. The original decision regarding the range of ages to include in this study was made for two reasons. The lower end of the scale was chosen because of legal and ethical considerations relating to *informed consent*. The upper end of the scale was chosen because it was felt that women older than 25 might have life experiences which would impact on their ability to accurately relate their experiences of

disclosure and support. The youngest woman, the 17 year old, who agreed to be involved, however, was living away from home and had been for six months prior to the interview. It was considered that she was sufficiently mature to give consent in her own right. The eldest women, 26 years old, was keen to talk and had not fully disclosed her experience as a child previously. Although she had since studied psychology at university she had not consciously explored her experiences in any formal way prior to our agreement to her involvement.

Of the seven women involved in this study, only one had not continued her education. Three of the young women had not completed year 12. Two were in the process of doing so and anticipated university entry the following autumn. Two participants had repeated, or were repeating, year twelve; one had gone to university as a mature age student and the other was not sure where she was heading. The ability of the young women to concisely describe their experience appears to relate to their academic experience. This is displayed by the difficulty experienced by the young woman who left school prior to year 12 in relaying her story.

Two of the seven young women volunteered to be involved as part of the checking mechanism (triangulation) of the study. These women were also self-selecting and purposive. Both were known to me previously, were aware of the study and volunteered to be involved. Both young women are living at home with their parents. The younger is 19 and the older 23. The younger was in the process of studying year 12 and the elder had studied Commerce at University and travelled extensively in the United States.

2.2.2 *Instruments and Procedures*

Being a phenomenological approach, the main instrument used was myself as researcher. I contacted each participant and arranged a time to meet with them, gain their informed consent, in writing, and then undertake the interview.

Having identified young women who fitted the criteria of my study and who were willing to talk to me, I then made contact with them by telephone to introduce myself and explain the concept of the study. All of the young women contacted agreed to meet with me and to be involved. They each demonstrated a level of interest, apprehension and surprise. None of them were convinced, initially, that their story was really what I wanted. For each of them there appeared to be concern that I would *judge* them by what they revealed to me.

At the first meeting, I explained in greater depth the purpose of the study and the process to be followed. I also left each participant with a letter explaining who I was and giving detail about the study and about the process. At this point each person was asked to complete and sign the permission form to satisfy ethical considerations. The interview was then conducted at this first meeting.

The interview question ('Tell me about your life') was open and designed to gain an understanding of the lived experience of the sample as they grew up; for five participants this was in a violent family situation. It is on the experience of these five that I will concentrate in my description of the interview process. Each participant, including those who did not claim to experience violence in their family of origin, expressed concern that they would not be able to provide me with information that

would be of use to me. Without fail, each of them gave me a great depth of information. They were each able to explore the experience and its meaning to them. They explored their emotions at the time of the experience and now. They also explored and discussed their feelings towards the family member(s) responsible for the violence; they discussed their feelings towards other family members whose actions or behaviour made the violence possible. Attempts to disclose to people outside the immediate family structure at various stages of their childhood were also discussed, and the effect of the result of those attempts on future action was explored.

An interesting result for some of the participants is that through the process of disclosure to myself, they were able to identify that the perpetrator would not have been able to sustain the violence (physical, sexual, or emotional) without support from others. In at least one case, the participant was able to disclose for the very first time that she had been sexually abused by an entirely different family member, her grandfather. Her reason for agreeing to be part of the study was because she had been abandoned by her mother and neglected by her father. Until she spoke to me, she did not include the experience of abuse by this other family member in her dialogue of experiences of family violence. Another participant also disclosed that she had been sexually abused by an entirely different family member and that this was something she had not previously disclosed. She did, however, include this in her understanding of the violence she had experienced within her family of origin. What she had not done was to disclose to anyone else for fear of causing further discord within her family. So, although not intended to be such, the interview process proved to be therapeutic for each young woman who participated.

Each interview was audio taped (with permission from the participant) and then transcribed verbatim. In some instances, however the recording was not clear. On these occasions, with the use of my notes and recollection, I was able to gain an understanding of what was being said. After transcription, an overview of the young women's story was drawn up and presented to them at my next visit. They were each asked to comment as to its accuracy at that time, and invited to contact me if they later decided that something had been omitted or wrongly reported. This copy was left with them. All participants agreed that it was not only accurate but explained clearly what they had described. Surprise was again displayed; for each young women recognised something about their lives they had not previously seen.

Analysis of the tape recorded interviews, which had been transcribed verbatim, followed the steps as outlined by Colaizzi (Valle & King, 1978, p. 48-71). Phenomenological inquiry is usually analysed using one of a number of methods of coding. These may include the open coding techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), or phenomenological analysis as discussed by Patton (1990, p. 407-410). Analysis of qualitative data cannot be "mechanical or rigid" (Patton, 1990, p. 404). It does, however, need to follow simple rules which are clearly outlined and become the main component of the *audit trail* of qualitative analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the use of open coding requires *concepts* within the data collected to be identified and, through *constant comparative* analysis, these are grouped into *categories* then further examined for *properties* and *dimensions*. With the aid of *code notes* made throughout the analysis process, these concepts and categories are organised and further analysed until judgements are made that can be

supported through their *credibility* and *fittingness*. Patton's (1990) process of phenomenological analysis differs in as much as the researcher must firstly make themselves aware of existing

> ... prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions... .This suspension of judgement is critical in phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher's personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself. (Katz, 1987 cited in Patton, 1990, p. 407).

Once this has been achieved it is necessary to organise the data into meaningful clusters which are further organised into invariant themes. From these the "true meanings of the experience for the individual is described" (Patton, 1990, p. 409).

2.2.2.1 Discussion

Historically, literature on phenomenological methodology claims the necessity for the researcher to *bracket* their "prejudices, viewpoints (and) assumptions" as claimed by Katz (cited in Patton, 1990, p. 407) above. Bracketing is used to distance the researcher from their own preconceptions and *taken for granted* truths in an attempt to maintain objectivity. More recently, however, there is an emerging body of thought which would dispute the practicality or even the capability of an individual to set themselves aside from their personal viewpoint. Oakley (1979) suggests that research work takes place ***because of*** individual assumptions and is justified based on the viewpoint of the researcher.

> The point is that academic research projects bear an intimate relationship to the researcher's life, however 'scientific' a sociologist pretends to be. Personal dramas provoke ideas that generate books and research projects. Clearly, all kinds of other excuses can be found for the production of the book or the project; these may get the projects passed by committees and the books published, but they do not wholly explain why they exist. There were times in the course of the research when I began to confuse my roles – researcher, pregnant woman, mother, feminist, participant observer and so on. I found such confusion disturbing but healthy, for it indicates the artificiality of the boundaries we set ourselves. Human experience is often not as neat and tidy as we strive to make it. (Oakley, 1979, p. 4).

Supporting Oakley's position, Schultz (1994) discusses the value of *subjectivity* and the potential to challenge preconceptions through maintenance of subjectivity. An advantage of this approach is that the researcher is aware of personal "values and prejudices, and possibly those of her own culture, which may challenge the 'givens' that are fundamental to practice... .Such personal challenges may be a common feature of nursing [or youth work] practice, but the difficulties in facing them, and justifying their place, in research may be balanced by the reciprocal benefits" (Schultz, 1994, p. 414). Rather than removing oneself from personal assumptions, beliefs and values Schultz proposes the processes of *reflexivity* through which the researcher makes themselves aware of pre-existing knowledge and understandings and the effect these might have on their interpretation and collection of data.

> It is the skill and experience of the researcher as an individual, in interpretation and understanding, that will overcome bias and prejudice... .The reflective elements in qualitative nursing research recognize the researcher's own perception and knowledge. This requires self-knowledge and experience, both of which the qualitative research process can also provide. Personal experience recorded and reflected upon can be itself be (sic) an informant as research data, a concept that some see as revolutionary (Reed & Robbins 1991)... .It is both conscious and explicit when the researcher is 'conversing with (the) materials' (Bamberger & Schön 1991). (Schultz, 1994, p. 414-416).

From this perspective, rather than minimising the experience of the researcher, this experience and understanding is acknowledged to play an important role in the researcher's understanding of the experience of the researched; and, therefore, in their ability to interpret the data collected in a manner cognisant with the research participant's experience.

Ahern (1999) also discusses what she refers to as "reflexive bracketing". "The advantage of this process is that the researcher's energies are spent more

productively in trying to understand the effects of one's experiences rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate them (Porter, 1993)" (Ahern, 1999, p. 409). She argues that by *honestly* exploring "the values and interests that may impinge upon research work" (Ahern, 1999, p. 408), the researcher identifies themselves as part of the "social world that they study (Frank 1997)" (Ahern, 1999, p. 408). In any case, Schultz (1994) argues that the process of qualitative research is an experience in empathy which relies heavily on the previous experience of the researcher together with their own preconceptions of ideas and values for interpretation. Williamson (1998) suggests that Husserl identified the need for awareness in subjectivity; the need for an understanding of self as well as that of the external world and its impact on the individual in order to interpret data collected using phenomenological methodology in an honest and open fashion.

For the reasons discussed above, I have chosen not to attempt to *bracket* out the effects of my upbringing, previous experience and social knowledge. I have, however, taken the time to develop a conceptual framework which explains any preconceptions, values and assumptions that I may make in the interpretation of the data collected from the young women involved in this study.

The understanding which informs this study, therefore, is clearly set out in the following Conceptual Framework.

Conceptual Framework

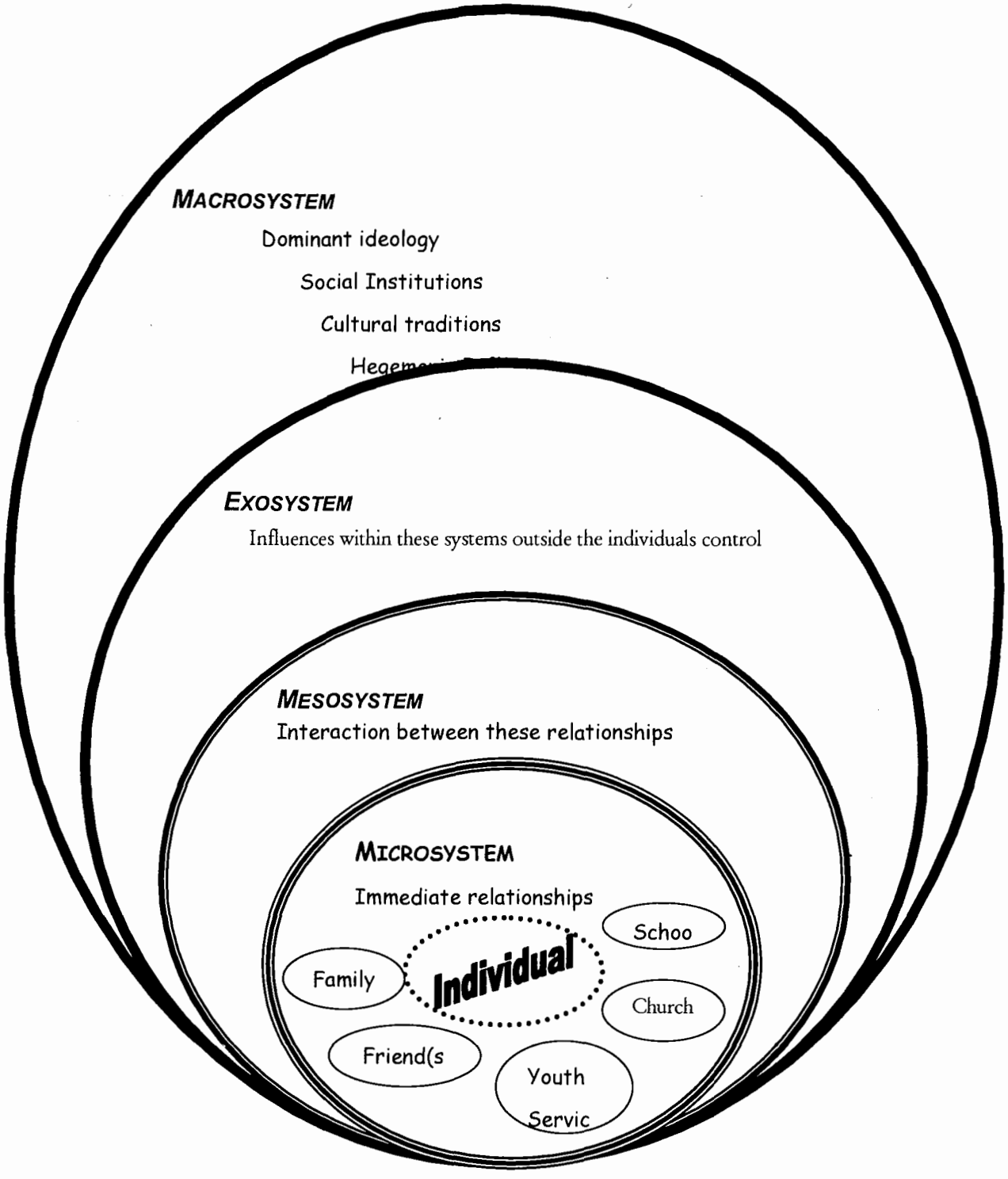

Diagram: Conceptual Framework - based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological

2.2.3 *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework adopted for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). According to Bronfenbrenner, ecological system theory assumes that "what matters for behaviour and development is the environment as it is *perceived* rather than as it may exist in "objective" reality" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 4). The experience for the individual, therefore is affected by the ecological environment which "is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). Therefore, behaviour and development are affected primarily by forces external to the individual. These *forces* are explained through his description of the various nested structures, or systems, all of which have influence on the environment and therefore the perception and experience of the individual. These descriptions are outlined below. The link made between phenomenological methodology and ecological systems theory is the need to discover the experience of the phenomenon as perceived and understood by study participants.

The decision to base the conceptual framework for this study on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is based on its ability to clearly articulate the importance of the external environment to construction of meaning and understanding for the participant. It also enables me to discuss my own ideological perspective of social structures and their effect on the individual. Along with this is an understanding (based more on symbolic interactionism than on nursing phenomenology or ecological systems theory, but compatible to both) that the individual interprets and gives meaning to their world according to interactions with others - people,

situations and things – and with themselves (Blumer, 1969). Correspondingly Bronfenbrenner claims that the individual is influenced by, and influences, the ecological system within which they exist. This takes place at a number of different levels – micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems.

The Microsystem – Surrounding the individual are a number of relationships that make up the microsystem. It is the interaction between the individual and these specific parts of the microsystem, which are important here. Each has a different meaning for the individual and each responds in a different way to the individual. In turn the individual responds differently to each of these. It is at this level that the individual defines their own identity and their relationship with others within their microsystem. In this study the participants experienced the microsystems of their families, peer group, school and other community groups. Their experiences of violence occurred within the family microsystem but impacted on their ability to participate in all other microsystems.

The Mesosystem - At the level of mesosystem, these different parts of the microsystem interact with one another separate from their interaction with the individual. The examples used are interaction between the family and the school, church and the school or family. For these young women, the interaction at the mesosystem level would also include interaction, or the effect of lack of it, between natural parents who are separated or other members of the extended family. Interaction between parent and school, or parent and social or legal systems would all take place at the mesosystem level. The mesosystem affects the individual and is affected by the individual, but not necessarily through contact with the individual. The individual has limited control here. In this study, young women's attempts to

disclose their experiences of violence in microsystems outside that of the family were generally unrewarding. A discrepancy between the family microsystem experience for these young women, wherein violence was the *norm*, and the understanding within other microsystems (such as school and friends) that violence is bad, resulted in an incongruity for participants. The act of disclosure, therefore, generally resulted in isolation of the family microsystem experience, rather than a supportive approach which could have strengthened the mesosystem and facilitated the young women's development. Participants needed to decide whether to maintain secrecy or, in specific circumstances only, to disclose. Where microsystem experiences are not conflicting, that is where violence not only occurs at home but in, for example, the homes of relatives, there is less incongruence which may lead to an understanding that violence is normal. Another possibility is the individual either may seek violence in later relationships or become uncomfortable in relationships not based on violence. These are both situations experienced by participants.

The Exosystem - The exosystem operates to affect the situation for the individual but in a way in which the individual has no control. For example, government policy affecting mandatory reporting or decisions made regarding child custody or support have an impact on individuals. Information supplied by one participant suggests that teachers at her school might have suspected that she was the victim of violence. Rather than directly speaking to her, a series of *visitors* came to the school and spoke to her class about domestic violence and child abuse. This was a decision made which affected her deeply, not in the way the school obviously anticipated, and over which she had no control. The exosystem involves decisions and actions made at a local school level, local government level, state government level or federal government level. They may also be made by individual management in the local

offices of state and federal government departments - the Education Dept, Family & Childrens Services, and such like.

The *Macrosystem* - The macrosystem affects the individual through influences of dominant ideology, culture and hegemony. It is assumptions made at this level which will affect decisions made at all the other levels by government, by school, by family and by the individual. There is much discussion in western literature (eg Eisenstein, 1979; Walby, 1990; Vincent, 1993; Giddens, 1990; Sargent, 1988; Gergen & Davis, 1985; Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984; Roy, 1977) of how hegemonic ideologies such as patriarchy and the importance of privacy within the family and the home function to support violence in the home. This study is undertaken within this cultural framework which has strongly impacted upon these young women by creating a context which shaped their experiences. The concept of macrosystem is further explored in the following discussion.

2.2.4 Assumptions within this framework

Inherent in the approach taken to analysis of data in this study are social constructionist assumptions. This framework assumes that the basis for women's oppression is two-fold (dual systems theory) - patriarchy and capitalism; society is constructed according to the needs of men and capital. Women are oppressed, therefore, not only as a class but also by gender. All forms of oppression are constructed according to these two systems: racism and sexism are inter-woven as the means by which patriarchy and capitalism are maintained (Eisenstein, 1984, p. 355-357). As individuals we are socialised and constructed according to our gender.

Within this framework an important source of experience and influence, the family, is the primary source of socialisation (Bullbeck, 1993, 1993, p. 471; Eisenstein, 1984, p. 23; Giddens, 1990, p. 76). Family relationships are formed according to socially defined expectations. The individual, or society, can only define itself according to the information available and to the understanding given to that information (Gergen & Davis, 1985). The construction of the concept of 'family' is based on underlying social structures (Walby, 1990, p. 2) which, according to dual-systems theory, are informed by capitalism and patriarchy (Walby, 1990, p. 5). Compatible with this is the argument that the individual's interpretation and experience of the world, whether physical, emotional, social or economic, is also constructed according to the political and social context in which it exists (Gergen & Davis, 1985, p. 5).

The conceptual framework which forms the basis for this study assumes that people learn how to interpret the world from their experiences; they are influenced by experiences within their family of origin which is, itself, impacted upon by culture and social organisation. Australian social and cultural institutions are, like those of the remainder of the Western world, inherently patriarchal and based on the needs of capital. The influence of these institutions on the family and, therefore, the individual is all pervasive and impossible to ignore but, most commonly, unseen.

The understanding which informs this study maintains that the adult *personality* and patterns of behaviour are primarily formed by experiences and influences encountered during childhood and adolescence. Recent research in the area of brain development suggests that the development of *personality* is affected by experiences in childhood which affect the development of the brain and, therefore, patterns of behaviour and response in the adult (Shore, 1997). Whether we accept theories of

socialisation or brain development, perhaps the most important source of experience, and therefore the most influential is the *family*. Childhood experiences, often within the family, affect the way people are. The physical, emotional, social and economic environment, as well as experiences encountered in any of these areas will affect how each individual interprets and experiences the world. The interpretation of a situation is defined by a commonly accepted understanding, which will change according to moveable social and historic variables. The major influences impacting on the family to affect individual understanding, according to this framework, are the institutional organisation of power - or veiled state coercion (Vincent, 1993, p. 137), patriarchy (Giddens, 1990, p. 729; Sargent, 1988, p. 114) and capitalism. Expectations for behaviour, in most societies, are different according to social and economic standing, age and gender. The boy child will, himself, be viewed differently to the girl child. Girls, therefore, will experience similar events differently to a male child of the same age in the same family. Moreover, the individual will interpret the event according to personal translation of previous experience (Johnson & Newcomb, 1992, p. 127).

The contemporary understanding of the institution of family has evolved over time. Although it is taken by the more conservative in society to be a *traditional* institution comprising two parents (a mother and a father) and dependent children, the notion of family as a living arrangement has been developed to suit the social needs dictated by economic and political changes. Since medieval times these social needs have determined a variety of family forms (Giddens, 1990; Haralambos, van Krieken, & Holborn, 1996). Included among them are: the nuclear family working in conjunction with a larger community for the purpose of production; the extended family working together and living as one unit; together with more current mixes of

conventional nuclear family, living groups which are not based on kinship, single gender two parent families, and single parent families.

Proponents of the theory of biological determinism maintain that

> ... the healthy psychic development of a human individual requires that a strong mother-child bond should be established right at the start of a human infant's life and that this bond should be maintained for a substantial part of childhood. (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 294).

It is on this argument, therefore, that assumptions regarding the *nuclear family* are based and used to assert the concept of sex (or gender) roles within the family. The concept of *family* has, as already stated, evolved over many centuries, with the current popular arrangement of nuclear family being among the most recent.

In medieval Europe the nuclear family took the form of a small biological family grouping sharing living arrangements, whilst having heavy involvement in the immediate community for the purpose of livelihood (Giddens, 1990, p. 389). This form of family unit was bought together for economic reasons as

> an integrated production unit, with all family members - wife, husband and children - working co-operatively in the production process. Although women had the main responsibility for child-rearing, they also had an important economic role in the household, production being something of an economic partnership... (Giddens, 1990, p. 390).

The family was not, as we know it today, an insular institution maintained by emotional attachment. Rather, family

> ... was open to support, advice, investigation and interference from outside, from neighbours and from kin, internal privacy was non-existent. The family, therefore, was an open-ended, low-keyed, unemotional, authoritarian institution.... It was also very short-lived, being frequently dissolved by the death of the husband or wife or the death or very early departure from home of the children... (Stone, 1977, cited in Giddens, 1990, p. 389).

With the advent of industrialisation, as people were forced from the land, the family unit moved away from the rural community and into a more *closed* family unit in which it became economically more viable (for the owners of production rather than workers and their families) for women and children to be excluded from the workplace. From this economic arrangement has developed the contemporary concept of *the nuclear family* and a conservative expectation that *a women's place is in the home* (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984, pp. 293-294). The notion of *romantic love* has also evolved with the nuclear family, which in turn has been *romanticised* and fictionally considered to be a partnership based on mutual need. From the 16th century to current times *family* has remained, like other social and political arrangements, patriarchal (Giddens, 1990, p. 389).

> Women are frequently powerful within families, but they may exercise their influence in an indirect way. Whereas men can legitimately be assertive in a family context, women often disguise whatever power they may posses, because it is seen as illegitimate. A woman may have a 'nag' (sic) her husband, or risk appearing 'bossy', or use stratagems to 'get round him' to get her own way. While men may use similar devices on occasion, they are generally able to assert their influence more directly. If these inequalities are changing, it is only quite slowly. (Giddens, 1990, p. 397)

Imbalance of power and economic dependence is seen by feminists to be the basis of women's oppression (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 293-300). As women became enslaved (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1984, p. 296) within the family, so too did they become the property of their husband or, as children, their father. For many years it was considered socially acceptable for men to beat their wives and their children (according to the 'rule of thumb' of British Common Law (Roy, 1977, p. 112) - which is the basis of Law in Australia) provided that the rod was no wider than the man's thumb. Today physical violence, as well as sexual and emotional violence in its many forms, is recognised as a 'social problem'. Certainly, there has been an increase

in concern about violent crimes (Dow, 1993), domestic violence (Stannard, 1987; Hatty, 1987; National Committee on Violence Against Women (NCVAW), 1991] and child abuse (Grunseit, 1987; NCVAW, 1991). From a feminist perspective, women and children do not have sufficient *power* within the family, or, for that matter, in society, to protect themselves from the effects of violence.

If the basis for women's oppression is an imbalance of power within the family, then an imbalance of power within a strongly competitive capitalist and patriarchal society must be seen as the basis for the oppression of men (this is discussed further later in this section). Men, therefore, in order to feel powerful in some area of their life will exercise power, sometimes violently, within their family.

The family itself is not a static entity, rather it is socially, culturally and historically manufactured and understood according to other social, cultural and historic variables. *Family*, as with the rest of the world, is understood according to specific "terms ... which ... are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people." (Gergen & Davis, 1985, p. 5). More than this, ""terms of understanding" are neither automatic, genetic, or in any way *natural*. Rather, they are the result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship..... Languages are fashioned in a manner similar to games [and] rituals..." (Gergen & Davis, 1985, p. 5). The individual, therefore, is responsible for their own understanding and situation inasmuch as they choose to agree to the rules of understanding employed in any given situation. This choice, however, can only be based on the symbolic meaning attributed by the cultural norms of the individual (Bulbeck, 1993, p.162). Only limited information and, therefore, alternatives are available; *choice*, for the individual, cannot constitute an *informed* or *free* choice. It

is only when the symbolism is analysed and the interpretation questioned that *ways of experiencing* can change.

The construction of the contemporary western definition and meaning of family has evolved as a consequence of the industrial revolution. The advent of mechanisation and capitalism has formed the construction of *family*, and, therefore, the meaning of experience for women and female children within the family. The meaning of experience for men and male children has also been constructed in this manner, but is not included within the interest area for this study. The meaning of *being male* (masculinity), however, is very pertinent.

As a result of the industrial revolution, and the consequent "separation of the workplace and the home" (Giddens, 1990, p. 170), the meaning of *being male* and of *being female* has changed. Prior to the industrial revolution peasants "had clear distinctions between their needs and the demands of their oppressors." (French, 1985, p. .200). This distinction is no longer clear. Men have become unsure of their position and have needed to find other ways of defining their role in society and within the family.

> If in the face of the loss of any illusion of volition and autonomy men were to maintain 'manhood' that was defined as volition and freedom from necessity, they had to degrade even further women and other groups considered inferior. This (the age of industrialisation) was the age of the many imperialist ventures in Africa and the savage treatment of Africans by Europeans, of blacks by whites. ... Out there, far from the machine, a man could still feel like a man. In the cities, controlled, regulated, bought and sold - like women - men ... adopted an image, still popular today, of hardheaded hardheartedness, of harshness and brutality, toughness, *realism.* (French, 1985, p. 201).

What has evolved, therefore, is an

> ... intractable problem of everyday gendered violence .... intimate violence (that) has occurred chronically in a social system which has been

> oppressively patriarchal and increasingly capitalistic in form. Women [and many men] had little or no access to effective public power in this system. The colonial and post-colonial state was comprehensively in the hands of a certain fraternity of powerful males. (Saunders & Evans, 1992, p. 214).

The role for women, therefore, has been cast according to their marital or social position, but in direct contrast to that of men.

Historically, where women are included in the meaning of *family* they have been attributed the dual role of being the upholders of social morality whilst also being childlike and, therefore, requiring protection from significant male others. Where they have been *excluded* from the meaning of family, that is where they have of necessity provided for themselves and their children (without a male *breadwinner*) through desertion, death, sickness or poverty, however, they have been classified as *whores*, of lower social standing, or in some way *wanting* (French, 1985, p. 193; Summers, 1990). Based on biology, women's experience, therefore, is different to men's experience. Their understanding, or construction, of power and the abuse of power - violence - is different to that of men. *Ways of experiencing* will be different for them, purely because they are female. If women experience lack of power and violence in the family, female children will also experience lack of power and violence. And it is this experience in childhood which will form their expectations and consequent experience of family relationships in adulthood.

2.2.5 Analysis

A phenomenological approach as a research method was decided upon because of the necessity to explore the lived experience of the participant and to acknowledge the experience of the participant as well as the researcher involved in the process of investigation. This aspect of the research process is paramount to Colaizzi.

According to Colaizzi (1978, p. 48-71) scientific psychological research, as it has been historically practiced, is unethical. Colaizzi bases this claim on the use of experimental methodology in scientific psychological research and the associated requirement to induce a psychological phenomenon in order for it to be studied. Further, claims Colaizzi, the use of this form of experimental methodology is only necessary because of the scientific psychological researchers understanding of *objectivity* and the perceived need to remove the experience of the subject (and of the researcher) from the research process. Colaizzi (1978) does not discuss the concept of *subjectivity*; rather he redefines *objectivity* to be inclusive of *experience* in order to legitimise the investigation of the experience of a phenomenon.

The process of analysis described by Colaizzi is the process used in this study. It consists of seven separate steps which are used to organise data and build upon concepts as they emerge. The following are the steps followed in the analysis of data collected in accordance with the description used by Colaizzi (1978, p. 59 and p. 61).

1. Read the transcript of each interview "in order to acquire a feeling for them, a making sense out of them." (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). At this stage I compiled a descriptive synopsis of each interview which was then introduced to participants for their comment. Feedback received at this point did not suggest any amendments that should be made to the transcript.
2. Extract from each transcript "significant statements" that is "phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Where a *significant statement* from one transcript closely resembles that of another they were worked together, thereby removing repetition of statements.
3. Formulate a meaning for each *significant statement*. From what the subject has said move to an interpretation of what they mean. This step involves leaping "from

what...subjects say to what they mean" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) in order to "illuminate those meanings hidden in the various contexts and horizons of the investigated phenomenon which are announced in the original" interviews (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Colaizzi (1978) warns here of the danger of introducing meaning and concepts which were not part of the original statement. It is important, therefore, for the analyst to "go beyond what is given in the original data and at the same time, stay with it. He must not formulate meanings which have no connection with the data" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59).

4. The meanings thus *formulated* are then organised into "*clusters of themes*". This step involves yet another *leap* inasmuch as it is necessary to extend "what is given in the meanings to themes given with them" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). At this point it is necessary to check back with the original transcripts to ensure two things. Firstly that all meanings included in the original are incorporated into the clusters; and secondly, to ensure that there is nothing included in the themes which "isn't implied in the original" transcript (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). At this point it is necessary to be aware of any contradictions that may appear in the themes; not from the point of needing to exclude them from analysis, but to ensure that they are not ignored. Contradictions are not contra-indications, they simply add greater depth to the data.
5. Step five is the introduction of what Colaizzi describes as an integration of what has been found so far into an "*exhaustive description of the investigated topic*" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61). This descriptive statement is arranged around each theme and comprises separate thematic descriptions.
6. This "*exhaustive description of the investigated phenomena*" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61) is then formulated into an unambiguous "*statement of identification of its fundamental structure*" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61). Or, as Crotty (1996) has said, it is at this moment that the data is *tested* to see whether it

> ... is of the essence. Is what we are describing that which makes the phenomenon the phenomenon that it is? Would it be this phenomenon if what we are describing were not there? Is what we are describing really characteristic of the phenomenon as precisely

this phenomenon, distinguishing it from other, perhaps similar, phenomena? (Crotty, 1996, p. 168)

It was at this stage that Triangulation was introduced to ensure that the data so far collected and analysed was, in fact, representative of the phenomenon of the experience of young women of violence in their family of origin; rather than being representative in any way of the experience of young women growing up.

This statement will remain descriptive.

7. The final step of the analysis is to return to each subject to ask for feed back on how the findings so far relate to their experiences. Has something been omitted? Any new data is then included in the final results.

2.3 Limitations

Finding young women, aged 18 - 25, who identified as having experienced violence in their family of origin was not a simple task. In fact, it became necessary to extend the age range by the inclusion of one woman who was 26 years old and another aged 17 years. Predominantly the participants involved in this study were known either to myself or to professional associates of mine. I attempted to find participants through advertisements in a number of youth services, women's refuges, training organisations and at University. I even attempted to place an article in the newspaper. The article was not used and I had no contacts from these sources. Participants in my study came to me through personal contact and through an advertisement in the form of a flyer placed with a women's health service with which I am involved.

When approaching the different agencies I spoke in depth to the staff or to management committee members explaining what I required and how I intended to

undertake the study. I found it necessary to assure these people that the young women with whom I spoke would not be intentionally intimidated or disturbed by the process and that if this proved to be the case I would ensure that they were linked with suitable counselling or support.

The reality of the process was that the young women involved reported that they experienced a therapeutic advantage to disclosing their story and to being interviewed by me. The interview was not designed to be therapeutic, but the nature of the experience of *baring one's soul* to another in a non-judgemental and non-threatening setting, proved to be so for them.

I believe that the inability of other professionals working with my target group to provide me with access to young women willing to talk to me relates to their lack of knowledge of me and to the intimacy of the experience to be studied. Where I had developed a good relationship with the professional, or was well known to them at a personal level, I received a more positive response to my request – this did not necessarily result in any participants, however. The one agency that was able to refer a young woman to me is one that I have direct contact with through the Management Committee; the worker was confident of my professionalism. I also believe that the lack of volunteers through youth and community agencies also relates to workers' inability or hesitancy in broaching the subject with their client group. Lack of knowledge and understanding of professionals able to support young women who are experiencing violence in their family of origin is an important theme highlighted throughout this study.

As has already been stated, the majority of my participants were either young women already known to me or to someone who knew me well. With one exception, they each have completed, or were in the process of completing, Year 12. Two of the young women who claimed to have experienced violence had gone on to study either Social Work or Psychology at University. Therefore, the participants in this study cannot be claimed to be representative of all young women living in this region.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Only young women who were either 18 years of age or over, or who had left the family home and were considered to be *independent* were included in this study. Each was asked to read a letter explaining the purpose of my study and their proposed involvement in it. They were each invited to ask any questions they might have of me and then completed an informed consent form.

Throughout the interview participants were encouraged to only discuss what they were comfortable with, and at no time were any of them asked for detail about which she had not previously offered information. Each participant was also made aware that, if at any time she began to feel uncomfortable, she could ask for the interview to be stopped. On a number of occasions the tape was stopped, either so the participant could regain composure or to enable her to specifically discuss something, or information about someone, she did not want recorded on tape.

Each participant was also made aware that if, through the process of the interview or study, she felt she was in need of counselling that I would be able to provide her with the relevant referral. At the time of the study I was not asked for this information by

any participant; however, one participant has since contacted me for information regarding appropriate and available counselling. Generally, it was claimed that the process of discussing their experiences with me proved therapeutic to them. "However, when the qualitative researcher delves into the private worlds and experiences of subjects, sometimes evoking strong emotional responses and sometimes pursuing thoughts that might otherwise never be revealed, consideration of the common ethical issues may not be enough" (Cowles, 1988, p. 163). Cowles (1988) discusses the necessity for researchers to be able to identify when intervention is appropriate and when data collection should continue. The emotional response displayed by each of the young women claiming to have experienced family violence throughout her interview, and the necessity for me to be aware of the potential for intervention, is reflected in Cowles' (1988) discussion of "Issues in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics".

Currently, copies of the original tape are maintained by myself, as are copies of the transcript on disk and in print. Once this thesis has been marked these copies will be destroyed. Transcriptions (without identifying information) will be kept securely, material containing identifying information will be shredded, tapes and diskettes will be wiped clean.

2.5 Summary

In this Chapter I have outlined the methodological approach and conceptual framework used for the study. Adopting a social constructionist perspective, I have attempted to emphasise the importance of the environment in which the individual exists, and the social structures that affect them. I have also attempted to

demonstrate the importance of understanding how the individual interprets these things in their everyday life and the meaning they give to them and to the behaviour of others. The following two chapters explore the women's experience and the strategies they adopted for survival. This is done by using the women's words and by attempting to gain an understanding of what the experience was like for them - the meanings that the women themselves gave to their experience.

Chapter 3: The Women's Experience

In this chapter the experience of the women is told from their perspective. More than this, it is told using their own words. Verbatim extracts from participant interviews make up the greater part of this chapter, and the next. The decision was made to use the words of the women themselves, to use *their* language, because the stories this, and the following chapter, tell are those of the women themselves. According to Harre & Secord (1972, p. 9) "(a)n important tool in obtaining...meanings is ordinary language". The language of these women, then, has been used to reveal the meanings that they give to their own experience.

3.1 Introduction

The women involved in this study have been placed into two separate groups:

a) those who claim to have experienced violence in their family of origin; and

b) the triangulation group who do not.

The young women in the first group comprise:

- i. Joy, a 20 year old Social Work student from the country
- ii. Phoebe, a 17 year old high school student, living with an aunt
- iii. Michelle, 26 years old with a degree in Psychology and working in the youth work field
- iv. Stephanie, 23 years of age, living independently on a disability pension
- v. Caroline, 18 year old, living at home and repeating year 12

In the triangulation group are:

- i. Anna, 18 years of age, repeating year 12 and living at home
- ii. Lucinda, 23 years old and living at home after touring extensively in the USA. Lucinda has a Commercial Studies degree.

These are not the women's real names. For the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, the names used are pseudonyms adopted by the women for the purpose of this study.

The following description of the ***Women's Experience*** uses the information gathered only from the first group of women. The reason for this is that the study sought to discover an appropriate role for youth work practitioners in the support of young women living in a violent home environment. I decided to use a triangulation group from a non-violent background to clarify differences in experience between young people who recognise that their family environment was a violent one and those who claim to have had a supportive environment.

It has been decided not to use the descriptive statements of the two women used in triangulation of this study as the information provided by them does not add to the descriptions of the other five. What the information gathered from these two women does do is to reinforce the feeling of violation experienced by the others. The level of violence experienced by one of the five sits quite low on the continuum. However, although some of the actions of her parents and siblings might be accepted as being within *the norm* of family interaction, especially when taking into consideration the experiences of the triangulation group, *her experience* is of violation and extreme distress. This is very different to the young women in the triangulation group.

3.1.1 Experience of participants

The experience of participants was quite diverse and stretched along a continuum - with extreme physical, emotional and sexual abuse at one end. Two participants were sexually abused as young children:

> *"He (natural father) was physically abusive to my mother and sexually abusive to my mother as well. He sexually abused my brother and myself."*
>
> *"I was also abused again by a guy next door."*
>
> *"... my brother and myself were abused by a(nother) family member."*
>
> *"He (grandfather) sexually abused me (from a small child to around 6 years)."*

one was regularly physical beaten:

> *"... he (natural father) began hitting me when I was 2. ... sometimes and dad would grab me and basically just throw me, but I always used to come back and then eventually he just started hitting me across the face and the head. Even across the legs, backside. A lot of the time it was just a huge slaps or punches in the stomach... It was sort of once I was 12, it was just full on at the time. He used to use a piece of wire, fencing wire, across the backside and... just throwing rocks and things like that when you'd done something wrong,"*

another was neglected and emotionally and physically abused:

> *"My mum always lost her temper really, really easily. ... she just lost the plot heaps... She never, ever held us. We were always in somebody else's arms... . She never picked us up or anything like that.*
>
> *... (Sister 1 year older) must of been about 5 or 6, but she expected her to look after us. Like (sister) used to baby-sit us when they went out - she was only about 7 or 8. Like she had to look after three (younger) girls. She couldn't do that, she was too little. She used to hide behind the bar because she was scared of the dark. You know, and they used to go out. Both my younger sisters had like a nervous disorder. Mum used to lock, mum and dad used to lock us in our room. Mum like when we went to bed she just used to shut the door.*
>
> *... my mum she used to throw things around. She hit me with a chair in the head when I was 7.*

> *... If I'd go out she go "you look like a tart" or "you look like a slut", you know. And I'd just feel so bad, you know. And she just did that all the time. Like my dad didn't even let us out in the first place... "*

The remaining participant, who claimed to have experienced violence, probably sat at the lower end of the continuum in comparison. The effect on her mental well being was, however, quite dramatic. Her description of her experience was compatible with emotional abuse in the form of lack of support and nurturing which is not uncommon among the young women I have worked with elsewhere:

> *"I can't remember my parents ever telling me that they love me.*
>
> *... not really a feeling of that much happiness in our house, except maybe sometimes you know on birthdays - not even all day - just at the beginnings of days and stuff. There was a lot of yelling and fighting in my family in my house. Its a lot of yelling over stupid little things, and after a while the pressure kind of builds up on you and it feels like the house is kinda pushing down on you. All the bad feelings and the hate and the anger - its kinda like squashing you in. And its kinda feeling like living in that house for too much longer is just gonna kill ya. Or you just... I was just gonna snap."*

In this study the perpetrators of violence ranged from grandfather, father, mother, next door neighbour, baby-sitter, siblings and stepsiblings. For most, it was a combination of several of these individuals together and separately over a number of years and instances. With one exception, stepparents were seen to be supportive. Only one participant claimed to have received support from grandparents or extended family, and this she was unaware was available until she moved out of the violent situation.

The two participants interviewed in order to triangulate my findings claimed not to have experienced violence. They claim to have grown up in stable and supportive families:

> *"I was a pretty happy child... . I got on pretty well with my family and I was quite a good student in primary school and I felt that they were quite proud of me... "*

> *"It was a happy family I mean we were always going on holidays together. Always doing things together. (Sister) and I you know we did well at school and mum and dad were always involved in a lot of school things."*

Their description of feelings and experiences, however, would suggest that at various times and in various ways their experience in their particular family could also be described as violent:

> *"The main thing that was horrible is that at the time they had started going through my room and searching through my things and I had journals and stuff that they read and then they turned around and announced everything in it during the (counselling) session, which was really horrible. So I went through a stage where I was really unhappy."*

During adolescence, of the two participants interviewed for triangulation, one was given total freedom to come and go as she pleased and spent little time at home. The freedom and privacy of the other young woman were controlled and restricted by parents whom she considered to be over protective:

> *"... they pretty much liked and accepted everyone. I don't think we really talked about that very much. As I say when I was young I never came home that much. Every weekend I was at someone's house and I don't know what they thought about that. I didn't discuss it with them I just went straight over to someone else's house from school and stayed there until about six and that was it and stayed there on the weekend."*

> *"It wasn't until I started being a rebellious teenager that I ever had any problems... . I think I was pretty normal but they obviously didn't... . Really 'trapped', I felt because I didn't have any of my own space and 'cos my room really was regularly ransacked... So of course I felt very angry about that and my only way of expressing myself was that I wrote journals and I stupidly still write them now, although I know they don't read them now. But those were regularly read and when I sort of realised that I had to rip them all up and didn't have that and 'cos they wouldn't let me go out or anything, I didn't have that so I did feel quite trapped. And at that age I had like my first boyfriend. I wasn't even allowed to go to the movies with him, you know that kind of thing. And I wasn't allowed to talk to him on the phone for very long so I was really frustrated. It was horrible, 'cos I felt like a grown up and you always do, and I think I was a lot more mature than I was given credit for. Like I might be about to go out somewhere and mum would say, oh I have a bad feeling about it so I wouldn't be allowed to go. Which would drive me mad."*

The difference between the triangulation group and the main study participants is in *how* parenting was experienced by them. For those in a basically supportive environment the effect, although traumatic at the time, was short lived. They were not left with emotional scars in the same way that the other five women have been. When asked how they feel about their parents, both Anna and Lucinda responded:

> *"I do get on really well with my parents I feel very happy with them... "*
>
> *"I have a good relationship with them. More so with my mum I think than with my dad. I fight a lot with my dad but that's because we are so similar that we know about each other what we don't like in ourselves, I think."*

3.1.2 Attempts to disclose

Disclosure was something with which none of these young women felt comfortable with. The emotion evoked during their interviews with me was quite moving. Only two participants described attempts at disclosing to others; the remainder claim that disclosing was never attempted. Predominantly participants had not previously disclosed much of the information they shared with me. One young woman had never even told her friends of the extent or character of the abuse she experienced, and had not shared with her mother an account of her third experience of sexual abuse. One participant told snippets of information to elders at the church to which she belonged. She did not disclose the complete situation, but gave them sufficient information to ensure their sympathy and attention. She failed to even acknowledge to herself that being sexually abused by her grandfather constituted family violence. It was only whilst exploring her life with me that she identified this aspect as part of the bigger picture and as an important experience for her.

The young woman who attempted to tell a primary school teacher was so put off by the experience that she never bothered to speak to anyone about her violent background until she was much older. She described attempts made later by the school to broach the subject of domestic violence and abuse during class. But claimed that, rather than giving her support, she found these attempts patronising. They made her feel extreme anger and confusion. Discussion in class, she felt, demonstrated the lack of understanding that the teacher, or her classmates would have of her situation. The more the topic was discussed the more she refused to consider talking to anyone.

3.1.3 What they wanted

These young women would have liked to have known that people really did understand what was happening for them and that neither they nor their families would be judged by people to whom they might disclose. They wanted to know that there was someone who would understand and support them in what they chose to do. The repercussions of mandatory reporting was something that these young people would have found difficult to manage. Mostly, they were afraid that they may be forced to press charges or face the perpetrator with accusations. If they could have spoken to someone that they knew had the power to stop the problem, without being made to face the perpetrator, they would have done so without any question.

3.2 The Women's Experience:

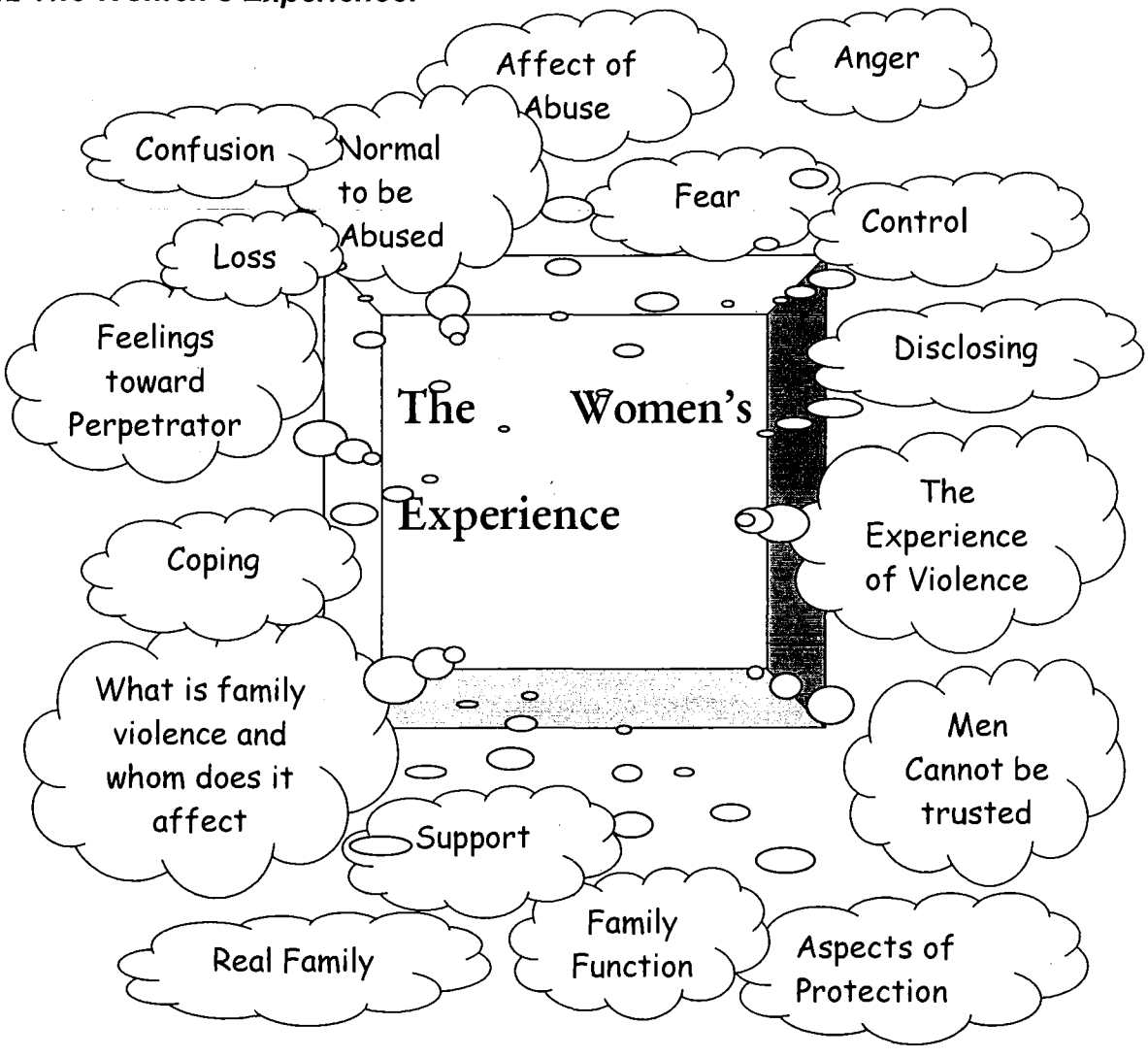

Fig 2. Emerging Themes

3.2.1 What is Family Violence and whom does it affect?

Young women spoken to for this study considered themselves to be both primary victims and, in many cases, secondary victims of abuse. All but one participant claimed to be both the recipient of violence in many forms and witness to violence perpetrated against other family members - frequently another parent. In each instance the participant believed

herself, at least initially, to be alone in this experience. Disclosure, however, enabled participants to recognise that most members of their families were also victims. The findings here reflect the results of "trauma organization" as discussed by Bloom (1995), who claims that:

> as... (her team) learned more about the profoundly negative impact of traumatic experience on generation after generation within a family, we realized that many of our social systems, including the family, are trauma organized (Bentovim, 1992). By this we mean that the repeated experience of trauma becomes one of the central organizing experiences in the individual, in the family, and in larger social groups. Our development as a species has been so profoundly influenced by the intergenerational strain of trauma that we really have no clear idea of what health looks like... (Bloom 1995, p. 405).

This can be seen more clearly as we look at who were identified as the victims.

3.2.1.1 The 'victims'

Where the mother was a victim the violence was frequently perpetrated by the participant's father, but not on all occasions:

> *"I can remember him (natural father) being physically violent.... he used to hit my mother all the time. I have recollections, and my mum has also told me, - one time he hit her with a chair and then she'd just got a new nightie for Christmas from her mother and he tore it and stuff like that. I just remember stuff like that and bits and pieces."*

> *"She was actually not only beaten by my dad but by his father as well."*

In at least one situation the father only became violent towards the mother after learning of the abuse of his daughter. In this case, the participant's grandfather was the primary perpetrator of violence against herself and her mother; a situation with which the participant's father was unable to deal:

> *"I then found out that my mum had been (sexually abused by the participant's grandfather) as well when she was a child."*

"... there was one night when I remember he (dad) and mum were in the kitchen and they got into a big argument and he was threatening to hit her and that was.... I remember just lying on my bed in total fear, that was just.... that was the scariest thing.... I just didn't know what to do. I just never saw my dad in that light, I just didn't think he was that type of person. That was like..... for me that was like he lost total control."

In two distinct cases (of five studied), the perpetrator was the participant's natural father and the other primary victim the participant's natural mother. For one, as already mentioned, the grandfather took on this role. For another, the mother was the primary perpetrator and the father and siblings were seen to be primary and secondary victims of her abuse. The remaining participant's experience of violence was less physical, and she found it difficult to distinguish between the behaviour of both parents. Where participants actually witnessed violence towards their mother, it was frequently experienced as more traumatic than that experienced by the participant herself:

"There are some things that I remember very vividly, particularly where it comes to my mum and her actions and what she's done.

Most of the stuff that (I remember) has got something to do with mum when she was younger... I feel the main reason why dad did begin to hit me was because I used to intervene, protecting my mum. Sometimes he used to just beat her so badly that she'd end up on the ground. She'd basically be black and blue, sometimes she wasn't breathing properly and there was one time I even thought she was dead. Because there was just no response at all... That one when I thought my mum was dead I was 4."

"... that was a very horrible night that night because I remember um I so much didn't want him to hit mum and I didn't want that to happen or that situation to be happening."

"I think you feel frightened (witnessing violence against your mother). I mean, I think for the most part of it I've blocked most of my memories out so my brother, my brother sort of filled me in on the bits and pieces, but him and I we used to sort of share - go into each other's rooms because we were so scared and I think I can remember being frightened of my, of him, of our father."

Jenkins and Bell (1997) also found that family violence "is particularly traumatic to youth... and (that) witnessing of a parents' victimization or death... is one of the most life-altering events that a child can experience... " (Jenkins & Bell, 1997, p. 21).

Although all participants perceived their father to be responsible for some form of violence or neglect towards themselves, the father was also described as *victim* on two occasions. In these instances the participant perceived her father's abuse or neglect as a reaction to his situation and, for at least one father, it was as a response to the violence displayed towards him:

> *"My dad used to be really good when we were little; up until when I was about 8 because then he lost his job. And he had no self worth left. So he, he lost the plot then. But before that.... like all my relatives said that if it wasn't for him us kids would be dead now, cos my mum used to lose the plot so badly. And... like one time mum was throwing things around and us kids were just so scared and dad just grabbed us and took us to our Nan's but my mum grabbed (older sister) and locked her in the house with her. So my dad had to, like he dropped us off at my Nannas and then he went back and got her."*

> *"My brother and my dad just went into.... they were just drinking day in and day out. They just went on this total binge for - it went on for years...."*

The brother of three participants became a victim either directly, by experiencing the same form of violence as the participant; or, indirectly, as a result of the environment within the family. Dysfunctional, or maladaptive, behaviour such as excessive drinking was then displayed. The use of maladaptive behaviour to escape a sense of helplessness evoked by a violent environment is discussed by Bloom (1995, p. 408). Step-siblings were identified as victims by only two women. Neither of them witnessed abusive or violent behaviour towards step-siblings; it was more an awareness of their being victims that was sensed.

Grand and great grand parents were classified as victims by three participants. One participant, Michelle, took the time to discover that the grandfather who abused her had experienced an abusive and controlling childhood from which he had failed to recover. Her response was that he was primarily a victim within his family of origin and then became victim once more to his own behaviour. Bloom (1995, p. 405 & 406) describes this as "traumatic reenactment" and explains it as the traumatised child's attempt, even in adulthood, to reclaim control of themselves and their environment. Michelle identified her grandmother as a victim, married to an abusive man who demonstrated hate and lack of respect for women:

> *"... he had been brought up by women that were very dominating women, um, and basically had no, I guess life of his own. And wasn't able to come out from under that control of women."*

Another Grandmother was seen to be a victim of her own inability to display emotion to her children:

> *"Nan can tell (my sister), you know, that she really cares about mum, but um she says she doesn't know how to tell mum."*

In the final instance, the great-grandmother identified as victim was actually beaten by the participant's mother in a fit of rage:

> *"So mum just picked the salad tray up and started hitting her (great grandmother) over the head with it and she just like knocked her out and left her there all bashed up and just left the house. My great grandmother managed to crawl to the phone and rang for an ambulance... "*

3.2.1.2 Perpetrator's Partner as victim

The inclusion of perpetrator's partner in the category of *victim* was variously described by the young women to include the same abuse experienced by themselves and sometimes other forms of violence. The type of abuse experienced by the perpetrator's partner is not

always known to the participant, rather they are aware of the negative impact of the partner's behaviour.

Joy's mother suffered repeatedly from Bi-polar disorder. This is defined as a chemical imbalance of the brain characterised by periods of elevated mood swings with increased energy and activity (mania) or lowered moods with an associated decrease in energy and activity (depression) (Long, 1995; Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; World-Book-Multimedia-Encyclopedia, 1997). According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (1998) and Long (1995), this condition may be exacerbated by stress. According to Joy, the stress experienced by her mother during several years of violent attacks by her husband (Joy's father), together with the awareness that the violence against her daughter continued, was sufficiently stressful to make maintenance of the condition difficult. Joy described her mother as *suicidal* and unable to cope with any further pain or deal with difficult situations. Joy felt protective towards her mother and perceived her mother to demonstrate guilt for not protecting her from abuse:

> *"... that's had huge consequences on my mum having to see him doing that to me and that still bothers her now. She feels guilty for what I've been through and I don't see it as her fault."*

On the whole, participants expressed a recognition of the vulnerability of the perpetrator's partner and their inability to defend themselves, or those for whom they had responsibility, from the actions of the perpetrator. There was an extreme sadness linked with this acknowledgment. These participants did not blame the partner; rather they felt sorrow and pity for them. They believed the perpetrators' partners to either be unaware of the acts of abuse, or unwilling to acknowledge their damaging and detrimental nature:

> *"... I was 16 and she (mother) actually told me that he (natural father) had sexually abused me because I couldn't remember because I had blocked it out, I know I felt resentment towards her then. But she didn't know it was going on until afterwards...*
>
> *I think she smokes a lot because of it, she doesn't deal with her problems very well, like my sister. She blames herself a lot and I don't want her to blame herself more, because its really not her fault."*

As discussed, this could be considered to be indicative of what Bloom (1995), describes as "social organization around trauma... (becoming) more normal than health" (Bloom, 1995, p. 405). What is also seen here is involvement of the whole family, including the abuser, as a *victim* in some sense. This, together with the betrayal of trust experienced by participants is described by Draper, Kirby, Nolan, Orr, Poole, Roxburgh and Shalit (1991, p. 63) as 'spiritual abuse':

> *"... the other kids actually didn't know that I was being hit. My dad had very controlled anger, he may have yelled at me in front of them. But he used to take me - he had a 3km laneway and he used to take me up there and then he'd do his bit. Yeah, he was very controlled."*

3.2.2 The Experience of Violence

3.2.2.1 Witnessing the violence

Each participant claimed to have witnessed violence against one parent on a fairly regular basis. Two participants witnessed the abusive parent physically beating the non-abusive parent regularly and excessively. These attacks by one parent on the other were described as extreme and unprovoked and were experienced by the participant as traumatic. The attacks described were so violent as to cause extensive injuries, and, as mentioned earlier, on one occasion a participant believed that her mother was dead on the floor in front of her. As well as fists, the abusive parent used items commonly found around the house with which to

attack the other. For example, participants witnessed one parent hitting the other with a chair, or throwing plates directly at them:

> *"... she just used to do stupid things all the time. Throw plates, knives - my dad's got a scar on his stomach from where she threw knives at him."*

Where the main offender was not a parent, family discord became such that a parent considered to be normally non-violent, became quite angry and aggressive, threatening the other with physical violence. In most instances, witnessing one parent using physical violence against the other, or even just threatening to do so, was an extremely frightening and intimidating experience. This experience of witnessing the victimisation of a parent has already been discussed and is reinforced by Jenkins and Bell (1997). Using Bloom's (1995) analysis, the actions of parents who respond in this way could be considered as "abnormal reaction(s) to an abnormal situation (and that this) is (in fact) normal behaviour" (Bloom, 1995, p. 407).

3.2.2.2 First hand experience

Generally the violence described encompassed a wide range of forms, degrees and frequency. In some instances the violence was one off, or it could be regular and repeated; with one perpetrator or several. Caroline said she thought she and her brother were just the sort of people who get sexually abused:

> *"... (brother's) thing was twice and me three times and it just seems that both times we've been a target for sexual abuse. Maybe, maybe because we appear vulnerable or something."*

This concept is also discussed by Bloom (1995) who claims that "these children learn to be helpless. As a result they are easily revictimized." (Bloom, 1995, p 409).

The range of violence to which participants were subjected at the hands of fathers, grandfathers, mothers, stepbrothers and baby-sitters included emotional and physical abuse and neglect as well as sexual abuse. Each young woman described at least two or three forms of abuse they experienced as they grew up. Those young women who were sexually abused were not also physically abused, although one was witness to the physical abuse of her mother. Each young woman spoke of verbal abuse, emotional abuse or neglect. Other forms of neglect were also identified, for example, part of the violence Joy experienced was belittling and insufficient food for her age and activity:

> *"... dad used to call me fat, ugly and worthless all the time. I actually ended up developing anorexia three times throughout my teenage years, until I was 18. There was heaps of it emotional and verbal stuff... . A lot of it too was just yelling. I mean. Just verbal Shit coming out of his mouth. So it was... I mean he isolated me too. I mean even when I was, you know, having to work out there, but if my friends wanted to come up and see me they weren't allowed to. Even at times he prevented me from seeing my mum."*

The physical abuse described was, in most cases, extremely violent and resulted in severe bruising, lacerations, or unconsciousness. One participant, when a small child, was lashed out at by her father whilst attempting to defend her mother from a beating. Her father hit her so hard that she was thrown across the room:

> *"I feel the main reason why dad did begin to hit me was because I used to intervene, protecting my mum.... dad would grab me and basically just throw me..."*

Two of the five participants reported being sexually abused as small children. One of these was sexually abused by three different people - her father, a baby-sitter and a step-brother. For both, the first perpetrator was responsible for ongoing abuse over a period of time - a

minimum of months to several years. The second and third instances for the one participant were one off situations, only one of which her mother is aware:

> *"She doesn't know that my brother or I have been abused by by the other (separate) family members... I cos I didn't actually realise that it was abuse until this year and I told my brother and actually came to terms with it. But, um, she doesn't, she doesn't know... "*

Details of the abuse were not discussed and are not consciously remembered by at least one of these young women. Only after she began to discuss details of her childhood with another family member was she told of the nature of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father.

The abuse experienced by one participant included social isolation. She stayed with her father, weekends and school holidays, on a farm geographically isolated not only from neighbours, but also from those whom she identified as *family* - her mother, brother and step-father. The nearest neighbour was several kilometres away. During these stays she had no contact with friends. The isolation from other family and friends was complete: she could not ring her mother, or anyone else, for the entire time she stayed with her father:

> *"There was one time I hadn't seen her in a month and a half or something. I wasn't even allowed to ring her. She wasn't allowed to ring me. And that just made things really hard because I was so close to mum."*

Emotional abuse was not uncommon and incorporated verbal abuse which happened on a regular basis. This took the form of threats of violence, negative image comments, or incessant shouting. Two of the participants reported being regularly subjected to *"put downs"*. Constant reinforcement of their lack of physical beauty or emotional or intellectual worth was experienced. They were told that they were *'too fat'*, *'too lazy'*, *'too self-centred'*, *'too stupid'*, *'too ugly'*, *'looked like a slut'*, *'would never amount to anything'*, *'no-one would*

ever love' them. Another participant reported being constantly reminded that she could do better or be better. When she did do well, however, she did not receive praise or reinforcement:

> *"Because you wait... you may do things good and you wait and you wait for the approval and praise but it just never comes. So you think, well why bother. After a while you stop trying. And after a while I did stop trying."*

A further young woman reported being told that she is *'self-centred'*. She also claims to feel as though she has not received the same love and attention as did other members of her family:

> *"But my sister's always had a close relationship and mum's always... . She seems to... I don't know... maybe be more attentive to (brother) and (sister) than me."*

Another participant, Phoebe, claims that her mother *'borrowed'* money from her without asking or giving her the opportunity to say *"No"*. The money was never repaid. Her mother regularly took varying sums of money from her:

> *"I had no money (when I left home). I had nothing. My mum had borrowed most of my money. Sort of permanent 'borrow' because she never paid it back. And that was like four or five hundred dollars she's borrowed off me. She'll never pay it back, I'll never see it again. And I used to work hard for that money. Cos I got paid $20 a day to work from 8 in the morning to 5.30 or 6 o clock at night. $20 for that!"*

Another participant reported being promised money as a reward for doing well at school, but of never receiving the promised money even though she felt she had deserved it:

> *"In my last year my dad did tell me that for every 'A' I got I would get $100. It was kinda pressure, that was... .*
>
> *But, um, I did a course called Introduction to Childcare. I shoulda got him with the 'A's then - because I passed. I got really high marks on my test. (I didn't get anything then either). I thought he was just pulling my chain anyway."*

When Joy was a young child her father would regularly beat her during emotional outbursts. As Joy got older the beatings became more controlled and regular. Her father would hit her with any implement that came to hand on the farm; sometimes it was fencing wire, sometimes it was his fists. They were not smacks, but deliberate and violent beatings. Although she was never sure what would result in a beating, she knew for sure when she had crossed the line. Displays of anger did not accompany the beatings, they were a form of chastisement planned and executed in a deliberate manner:

> *"... the other kids actually didn't know that I was being hit. My dad had very controlled anger, he may have yelled at me in front of them. But he used to take me - he had a 3km laneway - and he used to take me up there and then he'd do his bit. Yeah, he was very controlled."*

One participant reported herself and her sisters being locked into their bedrooms at night, or as punishment. She was not clear whether the rooms were physically locked or whether the *key* operated through *fear of retribution* if they left the room or made any noise:

> *"... when we went to bed she (mum) just used to shut the door. Like, she wouldn't give us a story or put a tape on or listen to singing or what ever she'd just shut the door, turn off the light "go to sleep". That was it and we was all too scared to come out."*

All participants reported violent outbursts of varying degrees and occurrence. These were in some instances parents shouting at each other; sometimes at the participant or a sibling. Sometimes the outbursts were of a more physical nature - hitting, punching, throwing. When objects were thrown, it was sometimes at the participant sometimes at a sibling or the other parent; alternatively things like crockery and ornaments were just thrown around. Participants reported that these outbursts induced a great deal of *fear*, leaving them feeling traumatised:

"... there was one night when I remember he and mum were in the kitchen and they got into a big argument and he was threatening to hit her and that was.... I remember just lying on my bed in total fear, that was just.... that was the scariest thing.... I just didn't know what to do."

"(Witnessing that) I think you feel frightened. I mean, I think for the most part of it I've blocked most of my memories out."

Another theme common to all participants was the description of situations that could be perceived as *neglect* in some form. For some, it was a lack of a sense of being loved by their parents. For one, it was being deserted physically by her mother and emotionally by her brother and father. For another, it was being deprived of love, from an early age, by either parent, but particularly her mother. This participant also reported being left as a small child in the charge of a sister just one year older, as well as being left in a parked car during summer for a considerable length of time. On that occasion she was also without shoes and so burnt her feet when *rescued* by her grandmother:

"Like one time my Nanna found us - all four of us - or three of us - were running around in the car park at Heathridge Shopping Centre. We had no clothes on; it was like the heat of the day; boiling feet, you know from the road - running on the road. And my Nanna was up at the shops and she saw us. So she grabbed us you know, went in the shops and said "(Mother's name), why are the kids running around?". She says "Oh, that's (sister's) fault." She was sitting in the car and she was supposed to look after us and she didn't... I was only little. (Sister) must of been about 5 or 6, but she expected her to look after us!"

Yet another participant reported being *'used as a slave'* by her father, whilst being deprived of adequate food to enable her to do the hard physical work required of her on his farm:

"I used to get a lot of neglect too from dad. You know with food. He never used to feed me properly because he used to think I was fat. So I never used to get breakfast and I used to get a small lunch and sometimes he would give me a bigger one and then at dinner time I'd get a normal one like everyone else. But I didn't get sweets or anything like that and I used to be absolutely starving. I used to work such long hours on the farm for him. I used to get up at five and finish, particularly in the summer, at seven or half past seven.

So it was a very long day and very exhausting. I used to actually come home under weight, very pale, just skin."

3.2.3 Confusion

A sense of confusion (encompassing feelings of vulnerability, shame, guilt, innocence, and negative self-image) could be traced throughout these women's stories. According to Richie and Richie (1981) "punishment makes children critical of themselves... .children who have been subjected to a constant barrage of control... may simply feel vaguely guilty much of the time" (p. 56). A sense of guilt, therefore, is closely linked to the experience of confusion for these women. The cause of the confusion and how it manifested itself was, however, different for each of them. For most, *confusion* related to the inability of others to *listen* and to acknowledge what was happening for them. They found they were told what to do, how to feel, and how to react when they attempted to discuss their situation with others.

For Michelle and Caroline, *confusion* was tied up with a sense of vulnerability. Caroline was concerned regarding the welfare of a young child now in the care of her abuser. She knew that to ensure this child's safety she would have to disclose yet another incidence of abuse - an incidence she had not previously shared with anyone. She felt extremely vulnerable. Already seeing herself as a family *outcast* she was not willing to expose herself to further blame, rejection and disbelief from them - particularly from her mother. She felt guilty that she was unwilling to take this step and therefore to take responsibility for the safety of the child. Caroline was afraid of being hurt more than she already had. She was reluctant to face once again the turmoil of feelings that she had finally managed to suppress in order to maintain normality in everyday life:

"Well, I don't want, I don't to deal with it with mum cos mum would again just be over the top saying "Oh well why didn't you say anything?" and then she'd start blaming herself and then she'd start blaming me for not telling her. I just don't want to deal with it. That's all. But... And then and then they'd sort of say well maybe I was making it up or something just to be nasty. I don't... I think she'd probably believe me but um, yeah, no... .

I, I feel very sad (that there is a possibility that it might be happening to someone else), and am just hoping that its not happening, but it could be... But. I want to prevent it but I don't want - maybe its selfish - but I don't want to have to deal with it with my family. (Its too much of a risk) Yeah. I don't want myself to be that vulnerable... I don't want to be vulnerable again, so. That's what I feel like I'd be making myself very vulnerable."

Desertion by her mother left Michelle with feelings of confusion and disbelief. No explanation was forthcoming even after they were reunited. She felt anger towards her mother as well as towards those who kept the secret. She felt extremely vulnerable because she felt alone and unloved:

"She had disappeared off the face of the earth. I didn't see her for a period of about two years. After she took me back to dad's to live with for good, she came around a few times and then it slowly dwindled off the amount that she came over until eventually she didn't come any more. Yeah, and it was about two years went by, then I decided that I wanted to see her regardless of whatever. So I contacted a few people (Mum's relatives) and tried to track her down. I was told that I wasn't allowed to know where she was or anything like that and basically said "I don't care I want to know".

And eventually someone told me where she worked... so I grabbed a couple of friends with me and said "will you come for a cruise up on the train with me". And went up and just sprung in on her, poor thing.

(When these people told me that I didn't have the right and I wanted to know where she was) I guess I was hurt and I was really.... I was confused, because I really didn't know what was going on. I didn't think that my mum would just back out of my life. And I really didn't know what had been happening. And I guess, it was also too, I didn't care. I wanted my mum. It was like, it didn't matter. And as much as they were gonna say that, you know, that "No you're not to know!" it was like, I didn't care. I was gonna see her anyway and I was gonna find out and it was no big deal and even if she slammed the door in my face and told me that she never wanted to see me again that was okay. But I had to know what was going on. I felt... I guess I thought that there's gotta be something going on, there's gotta be some reason, so I just gotta find out what it is:

> *I was (angry) at first. I guess initially I was. But then it was like, the whole thing of wanting to see my mother again became more important than anything, and that just took over. Yeah. I guess I just had to see her and it was like it was no big deal about - well it was a big deal how it turned out, but I guess it was like I didn't think that far, I just had to see her and find out what was going on."*

Lack of information proved to be a primary catalyst for confusion for these women. Things happened around them, as children, without explanation or warning. Two participants found themselves uprooted from their family home together with their mother and siblings, without explanation. Bloom (1995) discusses the damage this lack of information can cause for already "traumatized children (who have a need to)... understand something about what has happened to them..." (Bloom, 1995, p. 410-411) in order to understand themselves.

3.2.3.1 Self Worth

All participants reported growing up with a limited sense of self worth. They identified themselves as worthless, and insignificant. Introverted and introspective behaviour supported this. According to Jenkins (1997), "repeated trauma may lead to anger, despair, profound psychic numbing, and dissociation" (p. 16). Other people were important, but they were not. Those who were emotionally abused believed the negative things they were told about themselves. Participants who were sexually abused accepted their lack of worth. Joy, specifically, believed that she had no right to expect to be treated well by men – this she did not deserve. She had always been treated badly by her father, as had her mother. Prior to developing a relationship with her step father, Joy's experience did not include a gentle or loving relationship with a man. She felt deserted by her grandparents and was aware that her paternal grand-father was aggressive and physically violent towards her mother. Joy's negative self-image confirmed that she was to blame for the abuse and deserved what she

got. She was unable to cope when men of her own age showed an interest in her and demonstrated respect towards her. There was a sense of unreality about this as a situation that she had previously not encountered and one that caused Joy extreme discomfort. She did not know how to behave. She had, at least at one level, developed an understanding about her life that included an "(e)xtreme distrust of all men and negative attitudes towards marriage (or relationships which sat)... alongside acceptance of violence as an inevitable reality of women's lives" Allbrook (1992, p. 17). This sense of hopelessness about forming relationships and the difficulty associated with doing so is discussed by Jenkins (1997):

> *"It's really affected my relationships with men. I don't feel comfortable around them. Particularly older men. But then I, yeah and I think I've never been able to hold a relationship with a guy. I've come across some really nice ones, but I'd just think "I don't deserve this" and the other one is I just can't get too close because I just get scared."*
>
> *"... he's taken something that I can't actually get back. I'm now scared or apprehensive towards men that I really don't know very well. And I don't think I can, I've never been able to overcome that fear of being abused again."*
>
> *"You stop trusting anybody. It's very hard to trust people."*

Part of the developmental process of childhood is learning ways of coping with the environment in which the individual child finds themselves. If that environment is abusive or emotionally dysfunctional they may adopt patterns of behaviour which are inappropriate or *maladaptive* (Jenkins, 1997; Bloom, 1995). Participants reported developing specific coping mechanism to deal with individual situations, which sometimes worked but often, didn't.

> Tragically, these same coping skills when used for too long or when they are no longer necessary (potentially) end up being diagnosed as psychiatric symptoms, largely because they have had such a negative impact on normal development. The reactions to trauma are based on biological changes in the mind and body over which children have no control. It is only logical that children will do anything to

> reestablish self-control, even if the choices that they make lead to further complicating problems. (Bloom, 1995, p. 406).

Resistant behaviour patterns have "very often (been) observed in situations of abuse or neglect" (Sims & Hutchins, 1999, p. 4). In an environment which is unsafe protective behaviours are developed and sometimes these prove to be maladaptive. "(I)n coping with traumatic events, the child is forced into patterns of behaviour, thought, and feelings that are themselves "abnormal" when contrasted with that of the untraumatized, healthy child" (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1997, p. 36). Those participants who were abused by men have learned to expect that men will behave towards them in a specific manner, and that in order to protect themselves, or remain in control of the situation, they must, in turn, respond according to that previous experience. If, therefore, a participant experienced men behaving in a way inconsistent with learnt expectations her normal behaviour responses proved to be inappropriate. In this new situation, appropriate behaviours have not been learnt by the individual and are not present in the repertoire of available behavioural responses. So Joy's response to being treated well by a man is in fact reflective of what Bloom (1995) describes as a normal response to what is considered abnormal behaviour. She, like others in this study, has drawn what is described by Garbarino and Kostelny (1997) as the "social and/or psychologically pathogenic conclusion..." (p. 37) - *men cannot be trusted.*

3.2.3.2 Vulnerability & Guilt

All participants described feelings of vulnerability. Not just the vulnerability of continuing to be a victim or becoming one again; but the vulnerability experienced when it is necessary to expose one's intimate self to others and to not be in total control of the situation. Jenkins

(1997) discusses this in the context of victims' fear of "reoccurence of the event and guilt over their behaviour during the incident" (p.16). Guilt was experienced, both as a result of how each participant perceived her own behaviour during the period the abuse was happening, and the perception she also had of the effect of this on other occurrences within her family. Only one participant did not discuss experiencing feelings of guilt. Another participant believed herself responsible for her parents breaking up. Their loud and aggressive arguments began after her abuse was discovered. Not only did she feel responsible for the arguments, but she also felt guilt because she wanted them to split up so badly just to stop the fighting. She would lie in bed night after night listening to their raised voices and the threats of physical violence. She felt fear and confusion and she just wanted it all to stop:

> *"And I remember at the time, I prayed that if they couldn't sort things out that they would break up and.... Yeah..... And they did not long after that so that was kinda like.... a lot of guilt went with that."*

Allbrook (1992), discusses the influence of ongoing parental conflict on children who may grow up to believe that it is "their failure to be 'better' children" (p. 16) that is responsible for the ongoing violence:

> *"... it's still not good enough, I've got be better. (That comes from) I had to be when I was growing up. Dad would always say, "you don't do this right" and I always thought they were right, you know. "I'm not doing this right, I'm no good at this, I don't know how to do this". (Basically I wasn't good enough otherwise I would be doing much better)... . That's pretty much how it was."*

Another source of 'guilt' for several of the participants was a feeling of needing to get away from their family. Feelings of *suffocation* were expressed. Participants were aware of being *'controlled'* by family members, of not having their own space. So, even for those who experienced a loving and supportive relationship at home with a non-abusive parent there

was still a sense of lack of freedom. Participants claimed to need their own space and to be able to express themselves openly. Along with this need for freedom and self-expression was a sense of *guilt*. Participants felt guilty because they were now the ones doing the deserting - letting the family down. Various members of the family were seen to be reliant on them for support. Where the participant's mother's sense of self was seen to be wrapped up in her need for her daughter, the participant's sense of guilt appeared stronger. This sense of responsibility is supported by Allbrook's (1992, p. 16) claim that children who witness the victimisation of a parent frequently adopt a sense of responsibility for abuse in the family and the subsequent protection of the victimised parent:

> *"I want to go (interstate) to study next year.*
>
> *I don't know (why I want to go), maybe to get away from all the memories from here, but I guess there's some from (over East) as well but I don't think there's a lot. I mean I think that only happened once with that fellow next door and as soon as mum found out she...*
>
> *It will be good to get away from my family as well, I think. I know that sounds nasty. (It sounds nasty) Cos I want to get away from my family whose sort of supported me all my life, but I think its time that I sort of broke away from that."*
>
> *"I was 15, 14 1/2 - 15 (when I first left home). I was getting beaten very severely by my dad at that time. There were stages when I couldn't even walk properly I used to limp a lot. My parents (mother and stepfather) were also going through a really rough time; they had just lost the mortgage of the house. So, because of that and having no income coming in whatsoever, there was just a lot of fights at the time (stepfather) also began drinking. So that was really hard, because that just added more. I began to isolate myself from my friends. I also had a friend too who committed suicide at that time as well. I was very close to him. He was just a good support network... So the loss of him too that was a huge contributor. And I just packed my bags and I just ran... And Mum couldn't understand... she thought I was just being a horrible child by just running away, but I wasn't telling her that my dad was flogging the SHIT OUT OF ME. But I did come back. I mean I was running out of money for starters. I just, yeah, I really did just wanna be back with mum and my stepfather and my brother. And at first it was really hard because there was a lot of resentment from them towards me why I did this and stuff like that. And she said I was selfish. But when I told them*

that life seemed too much I'd just had enough, I just couldn't take any more from dad... ."

3.2.4 Normal to be Abused

Confusion surrounded the idea of being able to trust significant adults through childhood. Even though there is a cognitive understanding that most children are not abused by those trusted to care for them, this happened so many times and so regularly to those young women involved in this study that it appeared to them to be quite normal to be abused. If the perpetrator wasn't actually abusing them, then there was an expectation that the abuse would start again soon. Abuse, therefore, was 'normal' to the experience of these participants:

"It wasn't normal stuff. And if it was a slap across the backside with a hand it wasn't like - it didn't feel normal, but it. I don't know it was kind of normal for me by the time..."

"It was kind of normal to us. You kind of just like "here we go again".... And if you ever said anything oh boy you'd cop it."

"But I still just took it as normal and still wasn't well enough but then after that I just got myself together."

Specifically for one participant, the fact of being sexually abused by three different perpetrators under totally different circumstances enabled her to view the experience as normal for her:

"... it just seems that... we've been a target for sexual abuse."

This acceptance of the normality of varying forms of abuse to the life of the participant does not exclude the understanding that these things do not happen to most children or young people. But still, for them, it is *normal*. This acceptance of *normality* means almost a

feeling of safety in the known experience, and a feeling of discomfort and anticipation when they are not being abused. According to Cairns (1975) there is less stress associated with interactions with new people "when the newcomer behaved in a manner familiar" (1975, p. 18) to the individual:

> *"Just like I don't know, just sometimes I just come across guys and they're just too good to be real. Its just.... And the relationships that I have had, that have been longer lasting... they're the ones that have treated me like shit. It's typical Freudian stuff. Its just unbelievable. But its easier for me, its always been easier for me to deal with that than someone whose nice because I just don't know how to behave."*

3.2.5 Feelings towards perpetrator

The response of each participant in relation to how they felt about the person or people responsible for abusing them is mixed. The intensity of their feelings seems to be closely linked to their relationship with the perpetrator. Generally, these young women were either abused by more than one individual, or were witness to abuse by more than one person. Indirectly, people other than the perpetrator were responsible for the abuse they experienced or witnessed. Each participant expressed feelings similar to those expressed by the others, but they also each expressed feelings peculiar to themselves.

Among the more common feelings expressed generally about the perpetrator was an extreme negative emotion encompassing a profound sense of pain and hurt at the abuse of trust demonstrated by someone who could reasonably be expected to protect the participant. Participants were, however, able to remove themselves as individuals from the actions of the perpetrator. Michele recognised that the acts of abuse perpetrated against her were not acts of retribution against her specifically; rather they were acts of retribution against all females

as a response to a controlled and violent childhood experienced by her abuser. This was not stated so clearly by other participants, but this sentiment was suggested by Joy and by Phoebe as well. According to Joy, her dad:

> *"... was a real control freak – everything had to be done perfectly – his way!"*

When her mother finally left her father Joy's mother was:

> *"... not only beaten by my dad but by his father as well!"*

Phoebe, on the other hand proclaimed that:

> *"... our whole family is so weird! Like my great-grandparents kidnapped my sister when she was a baby. The whole family is psycho!"*

Although not seen as a reason or *excuse* for the actions of the perpetrator, these statements demonstrate an acknowledgment of why s/he might have a need to behave in the manner in which they did. Michelle also expressed a sense of sadness and compassion for her abuser. He had suffered a horrific childhood at the hands of controlling and aggressive aunts, and had suffered again before death through a painful illness. Although she did not forgive her abuser, Michelle understood him and felt that their close connection through blood was built on love and could not be severed even through his acts of betrayal. For her, love is unconditional and forgiving:

> *"And I guess I got to a point to where I felt sorry for him..... I had to justify why it had happened, and so, in that period when he was dying I found out as much as I could about him and about his life and about who he was – to try and put meaning to it. And he had been through quite a horrific childhood. He had been brought up by women – very dominating women – and basically had no, I guess, life of his own. And wasn't able to come out from under that control of women. That doesn't make it right, but it gave me a reason I guess."*

The sentiments expressed by participants in this study are reflective of what Draper (1991) refers to as "orthodox explanations" of child abuse in which the "offenders progress towards... assault is generally a response to an idiosyncratic childhood history... and rage at

the "mother"" (Draper et al., 1991, p. 224). Michelle's response to her grandfather is reflected by Bowlby's (1988, p. 79) claim that "(w)hilst horror at their acts is inevitable, greater understanding of how they have come to behave in these violent ways evokes compassion rather than blame".

Caroline spoke to me of acts of abuse against her by three separate individuals. The actions of one of these has not been reported to her family; and it is this abuse which she feels is most responsible for her position as *outcast* within the family. She expressed a sense of being injured emotionally and displaced in the family by another family member who, through manipulation has abused her and taken advantage of the good nature of other family members. There is a great deal of anger towards this person as well as towards those other family members who refuse to see him as she does:

> *"Whenever he rings up on the phone I'm very rude to him... and sometimes I hang up on him... which isn't very nice of me but I don't like him at all. And mum doesn't understand. She just says its because I'm nasty... .*
>
> *I get quite cross with them because as far as (stepbrother's) concerned the sun shines out of his bottom.*
>
> *He (stepbrother) only rings up when he wants something. And that really annoys me. I tell mum that and she says "Oh no he's not". But he is. He's so revolting, he's one of the most revoltingest people I have ever met. And the thing that frightens me is that he's living with a girl and she's she's got young children as well. And, cos the little girls behaviour she's quite reserved and she doesn't like physical contact and that just makes you think that maybe that's happening, but maybe I should say something to just sort of... "*

Both Caroline and Joy clearly state that they are frightened of their respective fathers, even now:

> *"I am really scared of this man... I feel resentment towards my stepbrother... .But I actually feel scared of (my) father. (Stepbrother) was*

never violent, he's just a sneak and sly. Whereas this man was violent; he was outrightly violent."

"I'm still very frightened of my dad, even though he hasn't laid a finger on me for three years."

Phoebe is angry with her father, but understanding that he is trying desperately to keep his family together:

"... they always play each other off against one another. Like, they always try and make each other look bad. And usually dad ends up being the worse one. But its not dad. Its mum. If you sit there and you analyse the situation you can see that dad's just trying to stop his family from falling apart – that's his only problem."

She remains terrified of and hurt by her mother, however:

"I didn't want to lose my parents, you know. So I rang them up and every time they didn't want to talk to me. Mum would say "Piss off" you know. Five times that happened and in the end I thought well.... I felt really hurt. They wouldn't talk to me. It wasn't my fault. I didn't know, I didn't know how to deal with it... "

3.2.6 Anger

3.2.6.1 Anger towards Father

Where the abuser was also the participant's natural father the feelings of anger, hurt, pain and betrayal were stronger. Generally, thought of the perpetrator aroused strong feelings of dislike and repulsion and a sense of wanting to avoid them because of the feelings of vulnerability that are aroused. As they grew older, where participants felt there was choice, they chose to have nothing to do with a father who had been abusive. Joy, however, continued to see her father infrequently, but only when he instigated the meeting and only somewhere where she felt safe and could be protected from him.

The strength of these feelings of anger were dependent on the level and nature of the abuse experienced by the participant. Stephanie did not experience sexual or physical abuse. Her claim is that she was emotionally abused and neglected by her parents and most of her many siblings. She has anger towards her father for his actions and failure to protect her as she grew up, but it is not as strong an emotion as displayed by those participants who were severely abused by their natural fathers.

3.2.6.2 Anger towards Mother

Two participant's described their mothers as perpetrator. These participants, Phoebe and Stephanie, both displayed extreme hurt and anger at the lack of maternal support and nurturing that they received. Even though the experiences were different, the sense of pain and rejection was similar. Other participants did not claim that their mothers were abusive or violent towards them but described acts of emotional abuse, neglect and desertion. For these participants there was a sense of being hurt by and anger towards their mothers not dissimilar to that of those who perceived their mothers' behaviour as violent:

> *"For as long as I can remember, she never held us as babies. She never, ever held us. We were always in somebody else's arms... "*
>
> *"I felt really lonely. Even with so many people in your house you feel alone because you don't think you're good enough and people are telling you you're not."*
>
> *"Then I found out that my mum had been (abused by him) as well when she was a child which made it worse because it was... . Yeah! "You knew and you did nothing." I guess I was continually being put in a situation of danger and not have any chance to get out of it."*
>
> *"I guess I was hurt and I was really confused, because I really didn't know what was going on. I didn't think that my mum would just back out of my life! I really didn't know what was happening!"*

"But my sister's always had a close relationship with mum – always. She seems to be, maybe more attentive to my brother and sister than me. I think that's how I've always felt. That she's more attentive to my sister and brother than me because I was sort of the child with all the problems."

"My mum's actually a very angry person... .she just gets so angry and flies off the handle and throws things and its really hard... . I've always found it very hard to deal with other people's anger... .I grew up with very angry people and, I mean, with mum its very different because she always has shown us kids a lot of love and she's never directed her anger as such at us... .It used to frighten me because it meant that she also used to get suicidal, so I was scared and I was hurt and I felt very lonely and isolated and I just didn't know what to do."

3.2.6.3 Anger towards mother as non-offending parent

Although two participants' mothers were aware of at least some of the abuse their daughters experienced, they demonstrated a lack of ability to understand the extent of the effect of this experience. Both Joy and Caroline expressed anger at their mothers' inability to understand how these events had effected them. Even though they were able to rationalise their mothers' attitudes, both Joy and Caroline felt a great deal of anger towards them. Joy felt that her mother was supportive of her, but both she and Caroline expected their mothers to be more sensitive to their needs and consequently more responsive and understanding.

3.2.6.4 Anger towards people generally

Participants talked of the anger they felt toward many of the people to whom they had attempted to disclose. They described feeling a further sense of rejection when people they told of the abuse responded to their own needs rather than to those of the participant. All young women involved in this part of the study identified an emotional need for acknowledgment of the hurt and pain caused to them as a result of the abuse and by the perpetrator. One thing they were not able to cope with, and didn't want to deal with, is the

needs of other people. The story is, after all, about them and their experience, not that of the person to whom they disclose.

The anger felt by participants towards other people generally was quite intense. It is not so much that they held other people responsible for the abuse they had suffered, or the actions of the perpetrator, it is rather that they want other people to acknowledge the pain and suffering that they have experienced. Feelings of anger are heightened when the other person is their own mother. Anger was manifest in different ways for each participant and was aroused by different things for each of them.

Generally, however, participants expressed an extreme sense of anger towards any adult who dared to try to find out what had happened in their lives without their express permission. There is an underlying acceptance that all adults, other than those who have proven otherwise, are concerned only for themselves and cannot be trusted. The expectation is that they ultimately will cause pain to the participant or, at the very least, fail to help them. The only safe course of action, therefore, is to attack before being attacked, as this will ultimately be the end result:

> *"And I'd do anything to hurt back, you know. Because I was ready to get back at anybody that hurt me.... I just thought that nobody can do anything, they're all liars. You couldn't trust anybody they're all gonna hurt you in the end and they all had motives for themselves."*

From Phoebe's perspective, therefore, everyone is to blame – everyone owns at least some of the guilt for the abuse and should, therefore, be punished. In the end "(w)e all suffer because these poorly treated children retaliate consciously or unconsciously and make life more stressful, more costly and more dangerous for everyone" (Alvy, 1994, p. 12).

Caroline's sister talks of wanting to meet her natural father – a father whom she does not remember. Caroline feels betrayed by her sister and talked about the anger that her sister's actions have aroused in her. She is unable to understand how her sister can think about meeting him after all he has done to the family. She feels that her sister does not believe her story of abuse; and that her sister is deliberately setting out to cause more pain and to further abuse her. Their father, after all, is the enemy; enemies cannot be trusted and should not be consorted with, no matter how misguided the reasons. Caroline's anger towards her sister goes much deeper. She holds the non-abusive members of her family of origin in high esteem. Through these people she has developed her own identity. At various times she has been able to communicate well with all of them and has developed strong bonds with her brother. When he was away for an extended period she developed a similar relationship with her sister. On the brother's return, however, the sister withdrew to a position of non-communication once more. Caroline has ambivalent feelings towards her brother. On the one hand, she blamed him for their sister's withdrawal; whilst on the other, she enjoyed his company and the intimacy they shared:

> *"... it was just me and (step) Dad and (brother) at home. It was on a Sunday afternoon and we all just sort of sat down and it was really sort of, and we were really just talking about anything. I just thought that this is the way its meant to be... .it had a really positive feeling... .When (brother) was away (sister) and I were actually quite close, but since he's come back from (overseas) she just doesn't talk to me any more. Maybe that's something that I feel resentment a bit towards (brother) about."*

3.2.7 Men cannot be trusted

As discussed earlier, those participants who reported being physically, emotionally or sexually abused by one or more males older than themselves (adolescent to elderly adult) indicated that they believed that these individuals had abused the trust placed in them. In

most instances, the individual concerned (father, grandfather, stepbrother, baby-sitter) held a role that could reasonably be expected to ensure the safety of the participant as a vulnerable child. If, as a child, therefore, the participant suffered deliberate harm from someone, a man, who held responsibility for their safety and protection, then it is not unreasonable to assume that there is danger in associating with adult males unknown to them. There is an unspoken and unthought expectation that close proximity to any adult male will result in a repeat of the abuse previously experienced. Research has indicated that children who have experienced violence have "fears of the reoccurrence of the event and guilt over their behaviour during the incident" (Jenkins & Bell, 1997, p. 16). Interestingly, the two young women whose mothers were violent towards them do not respond to women in this same way. Although all participants indicated that they are wary of any strangers, it would appear that those whose experience of childhood trauma was as a result of the actions of a man were more inclined to be overly concerned when in close proximity to a man unknown to them:

> *"I'm not a trusting person towards men or anything"*
>
> *"I don't trust men at all... .I feel really ill at ease with them"*
>
> *"I don't feel comfortable around them. Particularly older men"*
>
> *"... its always been easier for me to deal with (guys who treat me like shit) than with someone whose nice cos I just don't know how to behave. Just didn't seem real."*
>
> *"I'm now scared or apprehensive towards men that I really don't know very well. And I don't think I can, I've never been able to overcome that fear of being abused again."*

There is an understanding among these women that all men are potentially abusive towards women; part of the nature of being male is to be misogynous. Joy and Caroline have

accepted that all men are capable of deliberately causing pain to women. Men who demonstrate care and respect, therefore, are hiding their true selves. This is just another aspect of the manipulative process of the perpetrator (Jenkins, 1997). Joy claimed that as all men can be expected to eventually revert to type and behave badly towards women, it is only safe to develop relationships with men who show their true nature from the start. Her anticipation of being treated in a particular way is described by Miller (1990) as:

> (a)... self-fullfilling prophecy [which] indicates that the expectation that something will occur actually increases the chances that it will occur (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968).
>
> If children, therefore, grow up expecting to be treated with respect and fairness, they may actually behave in a way that evokes that treatment. If children grow up expecting to be treated harshly and unfairly, their behaviour may trigger that response from others. The self-fulfilling prophecy may also occur because we are attracted to people and situations that match those of our childhoods. An abused child may feel familiar and comfortable with the idea that someone who says he loves you can also beat and hurt you "for your own good." That child may consequently grow up and marry an abusing spouse. People tend to be drawn toward that which is familiar and repelled from that which seems strange and unfamiliar. (Miller, 1990, p. 33).

Gonzalez-Mena (1994) however claims that

> Children with unresolved trust issues often reach adulthood still seeking the early caregiver who left their needs unmet. Because it is never too late to resolve trust issues, some adults continually choose to connect to people who treat them much as their early caregiver(s) did. They put themselves back into their infant situations, to give themselves another chance to relive the situation and manage a different outcome. (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994, p. 7).

Joy, Michelle and Caroline reported an innate inability to trust adult males within a particular age group. Those closer to their own age were considered safe – almost like *normal people.* These participants associated the potential for abuse with an adult male older than themselves rather than an adult male of the same age or younger. Feelings of vulnerability are associated with the proximity of men who are older than themselves. This, according to

Cairns (1975), is due to "repeated interchanges become(ing) consolidated over persons and settings, in that fewer events are required to call forth the previously integrated social patterns. Recurrence and consolidation suggest how interactional patterns become generalized across settings and relationships" (Cairns, 1975, p. 19). The young women, therefore, are experiencing *feelings of vulnerability* more closely associated with past experiences than with current events:

> *"Some men I found are okay. I look at my stepfather's mates as I've been growing up and because they are so much like he is I do feel really comfortable with them. But there have been others where I just don't.... Oh, I don't know its just something that I pick up on. I just seem to avoid them I have a very quick perception of people and if I like them I like them if I don't then there's definitely something there. And it does come true... .I don't know, there's some stuff I've more than likely repressed. Its just people you're uncomfortable with."*

3.2.8 Effect of abuse

3.2.8.1 Behaviour of participant

Caroline remembers her mother being told by her grandmother that she was *"the cross she (her mother) had to bear"*. As a small child, Caroline was told that she was *'difficult'*. She also remembers behaving in a manner that was difficult to control. Her behaviour was seen to be *'uncontrollable'*:

> *"when I was in Sydney there was a lot of behavioural changes in me so its like I was - sort of like what the equivalent of ADD is today, that's what I had when I was younger."*

She also remembers feelings of anger, unhappiness and an inability to trust adults. Caroline is angry that her sister, whose behaviour she considers much more *'difficult'* than her own, receives more attention and affection from their mother than she does:

> *"But my sister's always had a close relationship and mum's always... she seems to.... I think it actually hurt me a lot when my mum actually said to me that Grandma had once said that I was her 'cross", that everyone had a cross to bear in life and I was mum's. And that really upset me. Cos it was such a negative thing to say.. it upset me a lot, so. I don't tell my mum it does, so. I wouldn't say I have an overly close relationship with her.*
>
> *I always thought that I was the problem child but then my sister she speaks to my mother rudely and everything, but my mother just ignores it."*

Participants generally spoke about the way they behaved as children in contrast to how they saw others behaving. These young women identified a range of behaviours that gave some of them a *chameleon identity*. They were both antisocial and withdrawn, whilst being the class clown. They were careful and calculating whilst doing things on the spur of the moment without any thought to the consequences. Self-identity appears to have been difficult for this group of young women to grasp.

Although the word itself was seldom used, I was left with an impression of *'anger'* after each participant had talked about experiences in their family of origin. Anger is not something that was displayed much by these young women, rather it was something underlying their existence that frightened them. The sense of anger was described by the word *'hate'* more frequently than by the use of the term *'anger'*. Another association that crept into their descriptions was the guilt felt in relation to this sense of being angry. I was left with the feeling that participants were not permitted to be angry. This includes them not giving

themselves permission. Nor did they believe they would be permitted by others to display anger.

Participants used their behaviour to protect themselves from a variety of dangers and in a multitude of ways. By inventing a particular character type they protected their true selves and their feelings from being discovered. In some instances it was considered safest to be loud and outgoing. A loud and adventurous individual is not normally considered to have problems at home. Joy says that she would pretend to be happy, or when she did have the opportunity to have fun she would live it to the full. Her rationale is that when one is happy and loud, any bruises likely will be assumed to have been gained through misadventure. For other participants, loud and jovial behaviour hides any sadness or insecurity they might actually feel. Introversion, conversely ensures that the participant is not noticed, or if they are then they are strange anyway, so this is purely acting in character and not noteworthy. Introversion or withdrawal also gives one the opportunity to take stock and to see how safe or otherwise the environment is at the time:

> *"... when I had my friends and that I was always very happy. I was very good at hiding. They never, ever knew. I think I eventually told a couple of them when I was 18 before I left (town). So, yeah, I used to just clown around all the time and just make the most of what I had when I was with my friends. And I was always very super responsible. High achiever. Yeah, just a perfectionist."*

Withdrawal was a common coping mechanism adopted by participants and it took many forms. Some refused to be part of family life by withdrawing to their bedroom; they became introverted; or even anti-social.

> *"... you kinda like, you close yourself off. Which is what I did. I used to lock myself in my room a lot, so I'd be alone. And I'd turn the music up so I couldn't hear people knocking on the door. I couldn't know - I couldn't*

listen to anybody... .There's always somebody interrupting. Dad's shuffling backwards and forwards all the time to see what every one's doing. You can't really, you know, do what you want to do, you know and I had people interfere with that. So I tried, um... So, basically, when things got too hard, you know, I'd, I'd lock myself off by literally locking myself into my room. Even if I put my head phones on or something, just so I couldn't hear anything else cos I felt alone so that's what I've gota be. And I didn't want anything interfering with that. So, I was pretty unhappy most of the time, yeah."

One participant developed such a level of distrust of adults that she refused to communicate with them unless forced to do so. The form withdrawal took for this participant was binge drinking and smoking regularly each weekend:

"... you don't trust.... you become an extremist. Like you either... you either, like become hyperactive or you just get out of it - depressed, you know. And you just think you can't do that. You're either like just really really depressed or happy. And you turn to things like I went through this stage where I was like drinking every weekend. I was off my face all the time, you know. And my parents never knew."

This same participant talked of the *withdrawal* of her siblings who became introverted and shy:

"... she'd (mum) just shut the door, turn off the light 'go to sleep'. That was it and we was all too scared to come out. So my two little sisters they started pulling their hair out. They used to sit there and just twist it round. Because they were so bored and so scared, but they couldn't go out, you know. So they'd just sit there and twist their finger round their hair. You know and they'd just sit there and twist it out. And they used to suck their thumbs, you know. And (one sister) sucked her thumb until she was thirteen. And she wet her bed until she was 11 or 12."

Withdrawal was not haphazard but appears to be something that participants did from time to time in particular situations. Lack of trust and discomfort with themselves or around people, for a variety of reasons, frequently resulted in introversion on the part of most of these young women.

Joy described leaving home as *'withdrawing'*. She withdrew only from the family and family stress, however, ensuring that she was still able to attend school. At 14, Joy left home, taking off without thought of where she would stay or how she would cope with long term accommodation. She took with her only the barest of possessions. She knew only that she had to escape an intolerable situation and gave no thought to her safety, or sustenance:

> *"And I just packed my bags and I just ran. I actually, because I was working too I had money there and I actually just - I actually only stayed in a caravan park up the road from mum and my stepfather. But still, they didn't know where I was. It was so I could still have access to the school bus and still go to school. I ended up being away for 2 weeks. My mum had actually come a few days after I had left wanting to know why and she was yelling at me and stuff like that but I just said "I'm confused at the moment with everything and I just feel so lonely and I need to go and I can't handle anything anymore its too much. And I just I need to find my own identity. I just don't even know who I am anymore.""*

Those young women who physically left home did so on the spur of the moment. Running away was not planned – it happened. Thought might have been given to leaving prior to the event, but seldom did much planning go into the actual event. The participants and/or siblings who *ran away* reached a point where they could not bear remaining in the family home. The only other option they could see was death, and for most this was not a viable option. Among the issues faced by homeless young people, cited in the National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies report (1989), are sexual assault, family conflict and suicidal ideation.

Michelle did not formally leave home, rather she chose to *stay away* from home. She did not physically take her possessions and leave, but kept herself out of the family home as long as possible. The adults she lived with had no idea of what she did or when, so it was easy for her to just stay with friends:

> *"... I lived most of those years not really relating too much of having a family or being part of a family or anything like that. I went into, I guess, more of an independent thing, just living my own life and doing my own thing. Dad didn't care what time I came home, or where I was or what I was doing. Oh, I guess he did care but he was too drunk to know anyway, so... That didn't matter, so I pretty much just, yeah, went and did my own thing."*

At 17 she started house-sitting – anything not to have to spend time in the company of her family:

> *"... what I was doing was I started house sitting. So that I was out of home as much as what I could be I was house sitting for people in the church whenever they went on holiday or stuff like that. So that was my option out. It meant that I was hardly ever home, so that worked well."*

Although socially more respectable, leaving home at 17 to look after other people's houses is not dissimilar to running away. To leave home at 17 is an acceptable and legitimate way of keeping out of the family home. Michelle was able to remove herself from an unbearable situation without parental disapproval. Joy on the other hand felt tremendous guilt at the pain she had caused her mother when she *'ran away'*.

Stephanie used her lack of contribution to the household as a weapon against her parents. The more controlled and imprisoned she felt the less she contributed either financially or by doing tasks. Eventually she outright refused to pay board or do anything towards her keep. Stephanie's *'rebellion'* displays the level of power these young women – who feel extremely powerless – actually can have over their actions and their environment:

> *"Well they wanted me to move out. They told me, and my brothers, because I never used to pay rent. The boys paid board and at the time I was getting Austudy and um they wanted me to move out because I wouldn't do anything around the house. And I wouldn't pay rent or board so I finally saved up you know I just kept saving and saving.... But I finally... I looked around and I needed to find somewhere cheap and close to transport you know. And far enough away from where I was where I lived but not too far."*

Rebellion is referred to by most of the participants, but again takes many forms. For one, rebellion was a refusal to be involved in the family or any of their activities - which included excessive alcohol use. For another, removing herself from her family included herself becoming involved in an excessive use of alcohol. Another participant rebelled by doing well at school and going on to university to *'prove'* her father wrong; a further rebelled by refusing to do any work at school because nothing she did was appreciated anyway. Participants rebelled by adopting behaviour or characteristics that could be considered the opposite to the family norm or the perpetrators' expectations of them:

> *"At times he still gets, he's very patronising with me. I mean, I will never result in anything, I've always been worthless. I'm like my mother. That's how they (father and stepmother) look at me. And, so he's a bit funny about my studies. He doesn't believe that I should be studying he thinks that I should be married and a bloody farmers wife and rah rah. Um, but I knew I would never be that way anyway because even when all that stuff was going on I was always very determined to get my life to turn around and do what I wanted and part of that was to do a social work course. Because despite all of that I still love people. There's something in me that has a passion for them. When I was in year 11 I just become so committed to my studies no matter what was going on."*

> *"... looking back on it now, what I tended to do very much was play a lot on what was happening as well... . but it was really comforting to have a reason not to be involved in the same lifestyle as my dad and my brother were. And I think that is why I stayed in the church for so long because I was able to have that reason why I could be different. And why I didn't have to resort to the same things that they were doing."*

Stephanie spoke specifically of doing things just to get attention, just to know that her family realised that she still existed. She also tailored her behaviour to ensure she got a reaction: she raised the volume on her radio, spoke rudely to her parents, refused to do jobs, slammed her bedroom door, left mess in the living room - just to get some form of response from her parents. She wanted them to acknowledge that she existed and didn't care much what form that acknowledgment took:

> *"I just wanted a reaction. After a while, you know, I stopped caring what they thought, but I, I'd still do something to get a reaction, but I didn't care what sort it was. Even if it meant they had to bang on my door to tell me to "turn the music down", or "turn the light out and go to sleep", "clean up your room". Just as long I was remembered that I was still there - that I hadn't gone away yet. No matter how much they wanted me to I was still there."*

Although attention-seeking behaviour is not specifically mentioned by other participants, it appears that some of the behaviour exhibited was designed to ensure that they received a positive response from someone – in some instances anyone.

Michelle found safety through membership of a fundamentalist Christian church. Church meant to her a safe place to be with adults who had concern for her well-being and who ensured that she had somewhere to stay and food to eat. More than this, membership in the *'church'* meant to her a small group of people she could manipulate and use to her advantage. People who would not take advantage of her, but whom she could *'control'*:

> *"I guess I found an identity there cos they saw me very much as a novelty because the church that I got involved in was a very... oh... what do you call it.... like really mainstream, upper class people that hadn't.... like most of the people in the church, like, to see a young person that had come from a broken home or that had family at home that drunk or stuff like that was like such a novelty for them. I became like their little challenge and like they all took me under their wing and they were gonna do wonderful things for me, yeah. It didn't quite work that way, but anyway. I guess it made them feel good."*

Success at school for Michelle, Joy and Phoebe ensured that they received acknowledgment for work well done – not by the perpetrator necessarily. It also ensured that they had value, they had worth. How can you be worthless if you're top of the class? Achievement through education was also a way of escaping the violence and of demonstrating publicly that the perpetrator was wrong about the participant. For some, doing well at school meant that they

were able to go on to tertiary education and take up a profession that would enable them to help others like themselves.

This was not the case for Stephanie, however. Stephanie's parents expected more from her than she felt she could achieve. They did not seem to appreciate what she did, no matter what she achieved:

> *"I might not be the smartest person in school, but I did try as hard as I could. You know I did my best, but um it would have helped, I might have tried harder, if I'd been told, you know, that I was doing a good job. But then I wasn't told that and I was angry at them for not telling..."*

She felt that she could have been helped by her parents, or her teachers, more than she was; and that her parents really took no interest in her or her feelings. Stephanie thinks that her parents did not really expect her to succeed. Eventually she gave up and didn't bother to work at all:

> *"Putting pressure on me to do better is probably why I skipped classes. Not do my homework and didn't hand things in..."*

On the other hand, Joy paid particular attention to detail. She attempted to protect herself by ensuring that there was nothing for which she could legitimately be criticised or chastised. Unfortunately, Joy was regularly beaten as punishment for mistakes and accidents which are commonplace for children. Frequently she was punished for the actions of others:

> *"There's also step children there as well that he has; two boys and a girl. If they ever made any mistakes and the same with my brother, then I was held accountable for their mistakes and so I ended up being abused again."*

All participants spoke of a sense of dread and fear when another person displays anger. They described feeling as if they were being attacked or in danger of attack, even though the anger is not directed at them. The impression given is not dissimilar to that discussed by

Zeanah (1997) wherein "(a)ttachment disorder with vigilance/hypercompliance... in which the child is consistently overtly afraid of the attachment figure and immediately complies with the caregiver's dictates....and it is speculated that the infant's vigilance and hypercompliance serve to minimize the likelihood of abuse" (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997, p. 115). Participants, therefore, demonstrated hypervigilence, or acute awareness of situations, which were potentially dangerous. For some, this seemingly illogical response was overwhelming. Joy, in particular, spoke of still having difficulty dealing with this and other similar responses. Her way of confronting the sensation of being engulfed by feelings of hurt, loss and despair was to keep busy. She said that if she sat still and thought, she would just cry. Thinking about herself, or her family, or what was happening around her was an experience with which she was unable to cope. She described a sensation of deep depression – hurt, loss, despair, hopelessness and helplessness.

3.2.8.2 Behaviour of Siblings

The siblings of the young women involved in this part of the study were either also primary victims of violence or secondary victims through witnessing or being aware of the actions of perpetrators. In Phoebe's family, all the children were primary victims and experienced stress associated with this. In the previous section, Phoebe described how her younger sisters fiddled with their hair until it fell out. She was, however, unsure whether this was a response to the stress of being locked in their room or the boredom associated with inactivity. Besag (1994), on the other hand, discusses what she refers to as a style of "over-punitive" parenting, which conducted with the type of "hostility" that Phoebe talks about, might also "sap the young child's confidence so that he/she becomes anxious and fearful" (p. 62). Research has identified that the stress on children living in a violent or abusive

environment may result in "generalized emotional distress" (Osofsky, 1997, p. 279). The type of behaviour Phoebe describes can be linked to what Jenkins (1997) and Garbarino (1997), claim to be typical of children experiencing post traumatic stress disorder.

Older sisters either wet the bed into their teens or used food and body size as a cry for help. This is a not unusual response to Besag's (1994) "hostile and punitive" parenting (p. 62). Younger siblings behaved in ways associated with small children until they were quite old. Thumbs were sucked for comfort or as a calming tool during periods of stress or fear until these children were at least ten years of age. Another sister developed aggressive and argumentative behaviour into adolescence. This sister behaves rudely towards her mother and appears to look for excuses to argue with the participant and other family members; this is again behaviour described by Besag (1994, p. 62) of "children growing up in a coercive environment". She is not communicative but appears to want attention all the time:

> *"It just seems that (sister) likes to create problems and she likes to argue a lot with my mum and when (sister) is around it's really tense..."*

Phoebe's sister left home in her early teens and travelled interstate to find safety with other relatives. This sister now lives in a violent relationship. Although she is not happy, Phoebe's sister appears to believe that what she is experiencing is normal for two people living together:

> *"My sister ran away three times. She got away to Queensland once... . She's got no self confidence. no self esteem. She's a blubbering mess. She now lives with her boyfriend who's the biggest liar, conman I've ever met in my life. They've had 2 police raids in the last few months and she still thinks that he's the only boyfriend she can get."*

Two of the brothers of different participants involved in this study have also been adversely effected as secondary victims. Joy's brother displayed violence towards her but was quickly stopped by her mother:

"... at the same time I was actually being beaten by my brother. He began to start hitting me. That was actually harder to take than my own dad. I think because I had become so used to it from dad even though it still did hurt, but getting it from my brother who I was always so close to. And he's always been the one who tried to protect me from dad yelling at me, I mean.... My brother hit me and I just sort of... It came out in the open then because my brother said "Oh (Joy) hit me" and I just started swearing and carrying on and I said no look at this and (stepfather) just stormed out and said, "(Stepson) you little bastard" and my mum went absolutely ballistic as well. She said, she said, "You are not my son". And for my mum to say something like that was just so harsh and she meant it at the time because she said "I will not put up with any violence towards my daughter." She actually said, "She's copped enough from her dad."

Michelle's brother adopted regular and heavy drinking as a coping mechanism:

"I saw a lot of my brother's friends all the time and like they used to come over and drink and like I would see girls come over and like get totally off their face and just act like real idiots and things like that."

3.2.8.3 Feelings of participants

Participants each talked about themselves and their experiences with the understanding that they are survivors of abuse. They felt they were different to other people. They described feeling less worthy than others did and somehow responsible for what has happened to them. They set themselves aside from other people. Even when others do want to know them and be friends, these young women generally had difficulty in trusting the motives behind these approaches. They each talked about their families as being different to those of other people. Participant's families were talked of as dysfunctional whereas other people's families were assumed to be completely functional without any real problems. Michelle, Joy and Phoebe indicated that when other people showed an interest in them, they found difficulty in believing that what they had experienced was really understood. As Joy grew up she found it easier to make friends, although she hesitated to confide in them. Phoebe and Caroline neither confided in friends nor in supportive family members. Caroline, in

particular found that people saw her as different and teased her. According to Bowlby (1988, p. 90), children who have been abused are more likely to respond with *avoidance* behaviour to the friendly overtures of others therefore making it difficult for others to make friends with them. This is one way each of these young women was able to remain protected; if they were not part of the *'in-crowd'* they did not need to expose anything of themselves to others:

> *"I was very shy at the time, and I found it hard to make friends even though they wanted to be my friend I just couldn't do it. I just didn't have the skills."*

> *"Well I was invited to a couple of 18th birthday parties for my friends and I didn't know their friends very well, but I was one of their friends, and they invited me. And I get so stressed out that one time when I was invited to my friend's party, she's actually one of my best friends, but she'd invited all these people that I don't know... I was almost crying I just didn't wanna go, but, but I'd already said I was gonna go, but I just got so stressed out. But, I don't I don't know why. I have no idea why because I just... . Most of them are just people I know, but not very well. And I don't like people... people quite often judge me as well. I found that in high school and I didn't want to go through that again. Being judged all the time. So that's... I don't know... . I try not to let it bother me, but it does sometimes. I mean when I'm with my friends – my very close friends... like (***) or my brother or something, cos my brother and I are very actually close... . When I'm with them I don't really bother about it because I know that they are there to support me but, when I'm by myself somewhere I don't like to sort of stick out a lot. But I do sometimes."*

All participants reported that they just wanted *'normal lives'* with *'normal families'* and to be just like other people. They did not want to have to cope with feeling different, being fearful or scared, the violence, their parents or other family members. The just wanted to be like other people whose problems appear to dull into insignificance compared to the participants' perception of what they have dealt with:

> *"... all I wanted was just to lead a sort of semi-normal teenage life and have access to recreational stuff than mum, you know what's our there in the town, what other kids are out there."*

> *"... in school we used to talk about things like domestic violence or sexual abuse or abortion or whatever in classes for health studies and stuff. They just, just the way they talked about things they just had no idea and it was just 'well what's the point'. They're just immature, they've got no idea. I mean their lives were just absolutely wonderful in comparison."*

Participants built up a façade around themselves to give the impression of normality, to hide their *secret*. The abusive experiences that participants lived through were hidden from everyone else, including supportive parents, siblings and other close relationships outside the family. A special effort was made to ensure that their secret remained safe. Talking to others about the experience meant exposure, it meant laying open ones innermost secrets to be judged by others. The repercussions of such exposure were potentially devastating. Participants wanted to be able to just talk to someone without fear that they would be judged or blamed; without fear that their supporting parent would be judged or blamed; without fear that they would be pressured to do things with which they were not comfortable. Joy indicated that she was afraid that if she told anyone what was happening she would be forced to go to the police and take action against her father. The thought of having to face her father after accusing him was terrifying for her:

> *"But then my fear was that if I did that I would have to go to court... I mean, my belief was that if I did I would have to go to court, pictures to be taken. That I would have to face my dad and there was no way that I was going to do that because when I was younger mum had restraining orders on him to protect us. Mum did actually take him to court when I was very young and nothing ever came out of that."*

> *"I used to find that teacher's really used to try and pry into your life. They'd just have to know everything and I didn't think it was their place to know everything and I just wanted to protect my mum as well. I didn't want them looking at her differently or as not a, you know, a good mother."*

> *"And she (my friend) said you're mother's a bad mother for keeping that from you for so many years. I just went, you know, HOW DARE YOU. I said, you don't know my life you don't know what my mum and myself have*

been through. And um I said if ever there's a time us kids were happy I don't think she's going to say, "Well (Joy) don't be because"...."

"And I remember I hated going to this doctor, I didn't like going there at all because he made me feel - as a child - unclean."

"I just wanted someone to listen. I didn't want someone to tell me what I should and shouldn't do, or how I should deal with it or how I should feel or anything like that. I just wanted to be able to tell someone. And them to respond almost not at all. I didn't want them to respond, I just wanted them to listen."

3.2.8.4 Sense of Isolation

"... and that was what my life was like – just sort of lonely"

In differing ways, each participant felt isolated from the rest of society. They felt different, and therefore unable to show their real selves to anyone. For some, isolation from peers and family was through parental control, for others it was through geography or both:

"... the nearest neighbour would have been about 12km away."

"... if my friends wanted to come up and see me they weren't allowed to. Even at times he prevented me from seeing my mum."

As children, these young women were either unable to contact their family whilst staying with the abusive family member because they were not allowed to or they were unable to talk to other people because of perceived consequences. Phoebe's parents apparently controlled what others believed about her making it emotionally impossible for the participant to go to those people for help:

"Well we always thought that Nanna didn't want to see us any more, cos that's what our parents told us... . Dad always said it was because the rest of the family thought they were too good for us."

These young women grew up experiencing isolation due to the judgement and prejudice of others. They experienced isolation through lack of understanding or comprehension on the

part of their peers. People who participants felt should have known what was going on, appeared to be unaware, making them feel further isolated. They believed that no-one cared and none of the abuse really mattered to anyone other than themselves:

> *"The only thing that teachers ever picked up on were school grades going down at particular times. Or not having homework done in time."*
>
> *"I do regret saying some things because they didn't understand what it was like and this is why I've kept it for so long as well and never told friends."*
>
> *"I can't really talk to anyone in my family about it because, they think it's not there or I'm imagining it. And (my sister) doesn't think it's as bad as I think it is."*

For each participant, their own experience was something that had to be carried totally alone. They felt hopelessness and helplessness; total despair. They believed that there was no help or support for them anywhere. Partially, these feelings were due to not trusting that there was anyone with whom they could communicate openly and honestly. Each reported feeling that they were being constantly judged and expected to perform in a specific manner. They reported feeling unable to live up to that expectation. They expressed a sense of lack of worth and of others watching them in order to find fault. They also expressed an expectation that others would not like or approve of them. They grew up expecting to fail and to experience devastating embarrassment. As young women, they still had difficulty in trusting themselves enough not to be embarrassed by stupid behaviour or silly statements. These women were not prepared to open up too much with other people in case the other person became aware of just how unworthy they were. Participants continued to have difficulty in trusting that others would not humiliate or abuse them.

As children, Phoebe, Joy and Caroline reported being constantly scared. Being scared meant being constantly unsure of the reaction or response of the perpetrator. Because of lack of consistency in the behaviour of the abusive or violent other, these participants were in a constant state of apprehension – constantly expecting *something* to happen. They *'walked on eggshells'*, living in anticipation and in the certainty that immediately they let their guard down, they would be attacked. In her early to late teens, Michelle experienced this same sense of anticipation in response to the behaviour of her father rather than the initial perpetrator. Stephanie reported a sense of anticipation that could not be described as *'fear'*, rather she felt *uncomfortable* – not knowing when the next outburst would occur or what would provoke it. All participants felt unable to stop the abuse or to change any part of the situation:

> *"... like one time mum was throwing things around and us kids were just so scared and dad just grabbed us and took us to our Nan's but my mum grabbed (sister) and locked her in the house with her."*
>
> *"She hit me with a chair... and I just bawled my eyes out."*
>
> *"Every single time we'd go out somewhere or someone was coming over she kinda stressed about it and then she'd lose the plot, you know. She'd get really angry and fly..."*
>
> *"My mum always lost her temper really, really easily. She just lost the plot heaps, like sometimes she'd go to get something out of, the cupboard and it wasn't in the right place and she'd just go psycho. She'd kinda walk down the house, you know, she'd walk down and she'd find more things to get angry about. She'd just build up - like, she'd gather momentum. And she just keeps going, keeps going, whatever. She'd go into our rooms and throw stuff around - we was always cleaning our rooms."*
>
> *"It did used to frighten me because it meant that she also used to get suicidal, so I was scared and I was hurt and I felt very lonely and isolated and I just didn't know what to do."*
>
> *"... sometimes dad wasn't that predictable. But if I ever did anything wrong like, you know I fell of the motorbike and broke something, I knew I was gonna get it."*

"I just sort of wake up and I feel so scared, I think someone's watching me, I think someone's in my room, I think... I just get very sort of tense. I don't want to move in case something's there. So... Its just sort of very troubled."

"I get apprehensive and scared whereas other people are just sort of out there its just... This girl (I know) she's just this terrible flirt with all these men and I just think how can you do that it's so dangerous. And then I saw a movie with (a friend), I forget what it was called, it was called 'Black Rock' or something. It was an Australian film and it was about this girl who was gang raped and murdered. And that actually had a big effect on me. I was really upset for the next two or three days afterwards. And that movie really scared me. It brought something home that it does happen. So, it can happen anywhere. So maybe it was good that I was a reject at school and never got invited to parties so the situation never sort of arose. That's what I'm scared of."

"It gets to ya after a while. You know. You wanna calm, you know, quiet household. You don't want people constantly yelling at each other or talking loud... ."

No matter what the experience of the participant had been, or where on the continuum of violence this experience could be placed, they described a sense of extreme emotional pain. They felt that they had been betrayed by a significant other; someone they should be able to consider to be responsible for their safety. According to each participant, this betrayal was a reinforcement of her lack of worth. After all, if this person, who was really important in their life, did not value them sufficiently to protect them, they must be of no value. If this person does not love them, then they must be unworthy of anyone's love. This realisation invoked further feelings of devastation, despair and grief among this group of young women:

"And all us kids are like that, you know. Like we've got no beliefs. We have no beliefs. We've got nothing to believe in. So, that's really hard. That's, you know... not having any goals... not having any hopes... that's one of the hardest... "

"I'd sit there and say "I can't do this, I can't do this" and I knew I had to break that. I couldn't access things like all my feelings and that every time I sat down if I used to sit down and be still I would just cry. So like I always had to be physically doing something. I could not sit down and try and do

homework or whatever. I always had to be out and about doing something just to keep my mind occupied."

When Michelle's mother and Phoebe's extended family ceased contact without explanation, these young women felt anger and hurt. They felt discarded, rejected and an additional sense of betrayal to that discussed above. This, for these women, further reinforced their sense of lack of worth. Phoebe, in particular, expressed an overwhelming sense of anger and hurt, which she aimed indiscriminately against any adult. She adopted any means at her disposal to attack adults – including her own potentially self-harming behaviour. Phoebe felt the only way to protect herself from further hurt was to hurt others before they could hurt her:

"I'd do anything to hurt back, you know. Because I was ready to get back at anybody that hurt me."

"I felt sad, rejected!"

"I really felt that anger when I found my mum again. I was..... Yeah! I was really overwhelmed. It would have been better if she had bawled me out or something, or just said she didn't want to see me. It was like, "well if you feel this way where have you been for two years?" I immediately put a wall up. I wasn't gonna give her anything. It was, as far as I was concerned "You walked out on me and this obviously is an issue for you now - you still want to see me and everything else, so what's going on here?" And I just put up this huge wall, and it took a long time to break that down. I think we've just started probably only in the last year."

Phoebe, Joy, Michelle, Caroline and Stephanie all believed that other people had no comprehension of what was actually happening for them. When they needed assistance, others were either unavailable, unable or unwilling to help. Other people just don't understand. They claim to know, but when the participant expects support the response they want is not forthcoming. Eventually, these young women just gave up expecting anyone to help them:

"I disclosed some stuff to her (father's sister). And she said that I needed to tell dad and that I had to go that way, and me not knowing how to deal with it myself and not knowing what to do thought "Okay! That's what I've got to do" - trusting all these people just hoping that that was okay. So I told my dad and he was.... he was good. He didn't.... He believed me totally. But he didn't know how to deal with it! He immediately got extremely angry, and just didn't know what to do with it. He held me for a little while... . Tried to reassure me a little bit, but then his anger just took over and he basically shut off after that.

I felt really hurt. I just wanted... I wished he hadn't of let go. I wanted him to hold me forever. It was like, yeah..... And then when he got angry he... . it was just like "that's not what I need. I don't want you to get angry - I need you to be here for me!"

Michelle claimed to *need* others to respond in a way that would support her; instead she found that she felt further isolated because others reacted to her disclosure according to their need and not hers:

"People were responding with their own issues and not looking at what I needed. And that the whole of thing of like they didn't know what to do with it and it was such a shock for them. It's like..... It's almost part of you that like that..... its like "hey, you know its not that big a deal, but I need you right now" you know. It's like... because you get to a point where... well I know that I did... it was like "well this shits happened and there's nothing I can do about it, but I've gotta... " You know, you know you've gotta move on from it and you just want people to acknowledge and support you, not to tell you what you should or shouldn't do or to get angry at someone and go running off and wanna, you know, bash em up or do whatever... Like its just kinda not what you need. You just want people to say its okay, you know, and just be there for you. I dunno. Its really weird. And anyway, he basically didn't... after that time, when I told him... that was it.... It was never spoken of again. It was... It then became put in a little closet and we never speak about that...."

Phoebe in particular believes that other people will meet their own needs before trying to help her, or they will deliberately do something that they know will hurt her or at least will not be helpful for her:

"... they all had motives for themselves."

Participants believed that they were very alone, that no-one knew or cared about their situation or their well-being. They spoke of being isolated in an alien existence, of being alone in an angry and spiteful world and of having no-one to turn to for love, support or comfort. Participants talked of feelings of loss and pain and hopelessness; a sense of constant despair and despondency. They were constantly grieving for loss of childhood nurturing.

3.2.8.4.1 Emotional Extremes

Participants each described feeling extreme highs and extreme lows of emotion. They experienced periods of great happiness and devastating depression. When things were going well, or they were happy, the participant was ecstatically happy. This sense of euphoria never lasted long. Something always seemed to happen to destroy the feeling and a devastating sense of loss and unhappiness would replace it. Emotions somewhere between these two extremes appear to be rarely experienced by these women. Part of this, for Phoebe in particular, was a sense of having no focus to her life; no aims or goals around which to structure her life itself. She felt that for most of her life she had just been existing without having a core on which to build:

> *"It's either... either you don't trust.... you become an extremist. Like you either... you either, like become hyperactive or you just get out of it - depressed, you know. And you just think you can't do that. You're either like just really really depressed or happy. And you turn to things – like I went through this stage where I was like drinking every weekend."*

> *"People that know us say we are immature.... I mean (brother's fiancee's housemate) says in some ways that we're very immature and other ways I think I'm a mature person. But other ways I'm very immature I don't want to let go of my childhood or something. I think we are just extroverted, myself. Just ridiculous sort of... . I, I'd just thought I was having fun. But we also do other things, really immature things as well.."*

"... my mum was constantly suffering depression. I had to take over things so my schooling was just neglected. Friends wise. They did notice, you know, sometimes I could just change. One minute I'd be happy and the next minute I would be snappy... I was very moody. But because there was a lot of stuff going on within my home with my mum and my stepfather that was sort of public, I was allowed to stuff up because they did know about that."

"... I was never happy when I was at home - always depressed."

3.2.8.4.2 Memories Emerge

With the exception of Stephanie, all participants claimed to have left their abusive relationship behind by the time they reached their mid to late teens. It is at this point, however, that the real effect of the experiences of the child were felt. For those who had left behind their abusive relationship, even if not until their early twenties, memories were starting to emerge, or situations were being faced, that were affected by those childhood experiences. This situation caused further discomfort and in some instances affected participants' behaviour. A statement made by Caroline was echoed in the descriptions of the other participants. Caroline said that she felt that she was carrying a label that said *"I am vulnerable pick me"*. She blamed herself for her experiences and felt that she was in someway attracting her abuse. She also felt that she should take responsibility for the behavioural difficulties she displayed as a child and even into adult hood as a result of the abuse:

"I had vague memories of it but I wasn't sure until I asked my brother just this year when everything just sort of come up for my brother."

"... I just, you know, sort of, sort of close into yourself. I mean my brother has noticed when we are around people I'm not comfortable with or I've never met before, he says I actually revert to being quite conservative. And actually take on like how he sometimes is as well because he has actually got quite an English (public school) accent although he's not English. I don't know how he gets that but he says I actually take on that role of being very reserved."

"When I'm around people I don't really know or don't feel comfortable with I'm quite in my self."

"That (I get very tense) also happens in large groups of people as well. I still get very stressed out."

"I can remember my step sister saying, one time when we fell off the motorbike, I went 'Oh Shit!' and she just goes.... I just started laughing. Oh I had graze sores all over my hands, stones in them – my arms and knees and stuff. She screams you should be crying and 'dad's gonna absolutely kill you for what you've done'. I'd just be laughing and then I'd sort of as I was taking the motorbike or what ever I just prepared myself and... I knew what to prepare myself for, because I just knew that I was going to get hit or whatever, so... . It (laughter) is just such an easy way to cope with stress. I mean, sometimes my flat mate comes up and says what are you doing - I'm on the floor rolling in fits of laughter. Its just a way of dealing with it."

"When I get stressed out or upset I won't eat, and I never have. I've been like that anyway. But then other times I can pig out. But I just don't care, I'm really happy with the way I am now, I'm still an exercise freak and all the rest of it but its okay."

"You stop trusting anybody. It's very hard to trust people."

"I tried marijuana a few times. I never went heavier than that... .I was always afraid of hard drugs because you don't know what's in 'em. I got busted for shoplifting... .Because I didn't know how to do it... . You know I just.... Obviously the world hates me so I'm gonna hate it back.

3.2.8.4.3 A Positive Mark

All these young women had found a way of demonstrating, at least to themselves, that they were worthy. Through loud action, community involvement, educational achievement or ownership of material goods they exhibited to everyone else that they existed and were able to leave a positive mark on the world. For them, this was a statement that they do exist and are more than just a target for abuse or a body to be used to vent anger on or demonstrate control over:

"At the time we had to make choices about what we were gonna study I wanted to help young people. I wanted to help people that had been through

the same things that I had. That was my initial reasons. I guess that's changed a lot now. I still want to help people that have been in that situation, but I guess my reasoning and the way I would do that now is different from when I first selected to do Psychology. Then it was... At that point it was very much "I know all the answers - I'm gonna save everybody". It was like a save the world thing. And now its a lot different. Its um... I guess, like then I would have gone into a whole process of disclosing with anybody what I had been through thinking that that was gonna help everybody. And now its very much knowing that that's not the way that you do it and that's not gonna work. And, I guess, one of the reasons why I haven't gone further with my Psych studies is that a lot of what I've seen, the way that some Psychs work that I've seen, is not what I needed at the time and I know that now. I see a lot of... A lot of what happens now is that you make people sit in their problems. A lot of processes that professional people go through is allowing people to sit in their problems and rehash and rehash and rehash. And I know at the time that that's not what I wanted to do. I needed to get it out, but I needed to leave it behind. I didn't wanna have to keep going over it and rehashing it. So that's been a bit conflicting for me and I guess that's why I haven't gone any further with my Psych studies."

"I can understand what other people are going through. And I myself I want to try to prevent it so it doesn't sort of incriminate me in some ways I guess."

"I was always very determined to get my life to turn around and do what I wanted and part of that was to do a social work course."

"I want to go to university and do an Arts... a Fine Arts degree because I've always been interested in that sort of thing."

"I think I moved out because I couldn't handle it any more being year 12 - TEE and stuff I mean I'd better get out now or I'll never recover. I wouldn't get into uni, I couldn't concentrate - my concentration span is about three minutes."

"... I come in and I look around and I think "this is mine". Not just the place - the chairs are mine, the TV, video -everything is mine. I've paid for it. I saved and saved and I paid for it. That makes me feel good. Because I saved and I didn't go out, or I'd wait until it was half price Tuesday to get a video out. And I saved and I saved and I put things on lay-by and I paid them off."

3.2.8.5 Denial

Denial is an important aspect of dealing with violence. Denial can be to oneself or to others and is a form of protection.

With one exception, each participant reported experiencing a period during which they *'denied'* to themselves that the abuse had taken place. They chose not to allow themselves to acknowledge it. It became something that had happened, or sometimes still happened, but not something that there was any point in dwelling on. If it were not considered – then it would not be a consideration. Life would continue, for the most part, as normal as every one else. Along with this however was the knowledge that their life was not like everyone else's even if they tried to pretend that it was. For a short time, however, this attempt at denial worked as a coping mechanism for them. It enabled the outward appearance of normality. It protected them from the inquisitiveness and prying of others:

> *"But I didn't actually find out myself, I sort of blocked out my memory. I didn't actually find out that I had been sexually abused until I was about 16. And so that was quite traumatic for me."*
>
> *"I just think I've blocked it out of my memory and accepted it. I mean you have to accept that it happened, but I try not to dwell on it, but it has obviously affected me."*
>
> *"(When dad hit me)... mum said that I never used to cry. I never, never anything... it was just you never felt any pain. Used to just stare him in the eyes and just take it."*
>
> *"I guess I kind of... I switched off a lot from a lot of things. I went into a, um..... I guess a denial in a way."*
>
> *"... it was a part of the Welfare thing, like if (sister) came home we had to go to counselling and that was kind of the deal. ... so, like we went to counselling. But mum and dad always said "don't say anything" so the warrant was dropped and nothing happened... .I thought... I always thought that what they said was right you know, I never thought that it was wrong. So I just thought "this is stupid your wasting my time I don't want to talk to you anyway lets go home", you know, so...."*

Joy talked of her ability to withstand the beatings she received by choosing not to feel the pain. She was able to experience severe physical beatings without being aware of any pain. She learned how to close her mind to what was happening in order to survive the constant and regular severe beatings she received:

> *"... as I was getting older I developed ways of coping with dad's abuse. I just used to.... I mean, I knew it was going to happen I just got to the stage when "Oh no! I'm gonna get it! So, just prepare yourself." I don't know, I just found some way of shutting myself of and just take it and just feel the pain afterwards."*

Caroline was unaware that she had been sexually abused as a small child until she was told by her mother at 16 years of age. Her brother also raised the subject with her and gave her information that she lacked. Although she does not remember the actual events, she is aware that she was violated and recalls some of the subsequent consequences of the acts of two separate perpetrators:

> *"I had vague memories of it but I wasn't sure until I asked my brother just this year."*

> *"(Brother) knows in graphic detail and he's told me and I don't want.... And just things he tells me its just horrible. And you just think.... Well, I myself, I don't want children now I've heard stuff like that because I don't want to bring a child into the world knowing that I can't protect them from that. I mean my mum was living in the same house as our father and he would abuse us right whilst she was there but she didn't know. And I don't want to sort of be in that risk category of sort of having my child be abused and me not knowing about it so I I don't think that I would ever become a parent for that reason."*

> *"And, it's coming out now that my sister was actually abused by... This is awful isn't it? By someone when we were in a foster home because my mum was actually quite ill when she was, when we were young staying in Sydney. And grandma and pa weren't well enough to look after us. So we were actually put in a foster home... "*

> *"... there was a lot of behavioural changes in me so its like I was - sort of like, like what the equivalent of ADD is today."*

> *"I do have nightmares every now and again, I think everyone does. But when I was younger there wasn't a night when I didn't have nightmares."*

As well as coping with the violence by conscious and subconscious denial, each participant refused for a considerable period of time to admit to anyone that they were being, or had been, abused. This was predominantly due to a sense of shame about themselves, about the perpetrator, and about their family in general. Michelle, however, had so successfully denied to herself the impact of intra-familial sexual abuse that she had not considered the relevance of this to my study. She had agreed to talk with me because she identified other experiences in her family of origin to be within the continuum of violence but did not consciously include this part of her experience until she started to talk to me:

> *"I went through a period when I was about 17 - I think I was about 17 - 16 going on 17 I think it was - where I started to come to terms with what had happened because I hadn't recognised what had happened. I had very much switched off from it (the sexual abuse)."*

3.2.8.6 Education

As a result of their experiences, participants responded to education in a variety of ways. Joy was able to use school to prove to both herself and her father that she *was* valuable as an individual. School gave her contact with the outside world and with *normality*:

> *"My mum used to make the most fantastic lunches - you know, great big nice chocolate cake for morning tea and stuff for school. And my friends used to say "Oh can I have that?"... "*

It was a place where some of these young women could strive for success; a place where they could *'act the clown'* and be noticed without fear of violent reprisals:

> *"And then through high school I developed a very close friendship with my um with a friend."*

> *"I was allowed to cry and just to be an absolute mess and not be able to talk any sense and stuff like that. It was very accepted."*

> *"... there was a lot of stuff going on within my home with my mum and my stepfather that was sort of public, I was allowed to stuff up because they (teachers and friends) did know about that. That's the sort of stuff that I would be able to talk about was their fighting and mum's depression. It was so much easier. They used to just think it was that."*

School was a support mechanism - a place of safety. Similar findings were reported in a recently developed regional Youth Strategy (Kulisa, 1999) in which workshop participants discussed the role that school played in supporting young people at risk. Phoebe found formal support in the form of the School Chaplain:

> *"I didn't know, I didn't know how to deal with it, you know. But I went and saw the Chaplain at school and stuff and said, "I can't cope with this" and he said, "What's this all about". And he helped me out heaps. I had no money. I had nothing.... And so, like the Chaplain helped me get Austudy and all that sort of thing. I got the homeless rate."*

Both Phoebe and Joy, however, found the pressures of school at TEE level, combined with the pressures of home were impossible to cope with:

> *"I have been hospitalised... When I was 14... And then again when I was 17... That was at the time of my TEE.... I only ended up being in there for a couple of weeks. I actually put myself in there that time. My grandfather had only just died as well, and I also lost 2 other friends in a car accident at that time. And it was just really hard and I knew that I had to get better for my TEE, it was just a few weeks before it... But I still just took it (Bulimia) as normal and still wasn't well enough but then after that I just got myself together... "*

> *"I knew what I had to work towards. I did end up having to repeat as well. I just couldn't cope with the work load and I couldn't study because of all that stuff that was going on."*

Phoebe left home at this stage for a more settled environment in order to be able to concentrate on her study. Joy left home for the first time when she was around fourteen; she ensured, however, that she remained close to school in order to continue studying:

> *"I actually only stayed in a caravan park up the road from mum and my stepfather.... It was so I could still have access to the school bus and still go to school."*

Michelle, Caroline, and Joy found tertiary study offered the opportunity to finally get away. Going to a university a considerable distance from home gave them a legitimate reason to leave and to remove themselves from the controlling mechanisms of their abusive parent or their family. The *'family home'* for Joy and Michelle was either in the country or, although within the metropolitan area, still too far to comfortably travel daily:

"... that distance has made things better... for me, now living here."

Caroline had opted for an interstate university with a good reputation in the area she chose to study - unfortunately her application wasn't successful. So, although she gained entry into a course of her choice, university study did not prove to be the *escape route* for which she had hoped.

Stephanie reacted in a totally different way to education, however. She did not find school relevant to her life, she could see no connection between what she experienced at school and her experience of the outside world. Although her family claimed to want her to do well at school, she did not feel supported by them. Nor did they demonstrate any real interest in her achievement, so she didn't bother:

> *"I left school at year, about a term into year 12. Because it didn't quite sink in any more. You know, what they were teaching me. So it wasn't... I didn't feel like... you know, I needed it any more. 'Cos nobody helped me really with my studies and stuff. I suppose because they didn't think, and still don't think, I'm really that smart. As it comes, when it comes to learning and things... "*

This negative response to schooling, Miller (1990) claims, is likely to be due to the style of communication habitually used in the family:

> If early role models limit their verbal communication to clipped criticism and commands, children, who are in the most formative period of their lives for language development, may be discouraged in the development of a level of vocabulary, grammar, and expression that is necessary for school success later. (Miller, 1990, p. 36).

Stephanie claims that her father only *grunted* and that her mother's communication skills were only a little more developed.

3.2.9 Fear

All participants spoke of being frightened of and by the perpetrator. This sense of fear was, and in most instances, still is, far greater than that of threat of physical harm from other sources or even of death. Although equally real for each of them, the fear felt by participants was experienced in different ways. Joy, for example lived in a constant sense of *dread* and expectation that a severe aggressive reaction would take place. She was not ever quite sure, however, what might give rise to this type of response. She just expected it to happen:

> *"... I knew it was going to happen I just got to the stage when oh no I'm gonna get it so just prepare yourself... "*

Phoebe described her willingness as a child to accept any other consequences rather than go against specific instructions from her mother: she told of a specific incident where her fear of going against her mother's instructions almost resulted in a serious fire at her home:

> *"I was playing on the stove and there was a tea towel by the stove and it caught fire so the kitchen was burning... My Nanna said to me afterwards "Why didn't you go and wake your mother?" – my elder sister eventually woke her up but I wouldn't. I was too scared, and I said, "because Mum said if I did she'd kill me". And, alright, the house would burn down I didn't care – I wasn't gonna wake my mum up!"*

She allowed the kitchen to catch fire and watched as the lives of herself and her siblings were endangered rather than wake her mother – something she had specifically been told not to do under ***any*** circumstances. Within her frames of reference, Phoebe knew that she had reason to fear her mother's response to being woken, she had no knowledge of the potential result from a burning cloth. Phoebe was very sure of how her mother would respond to

being woken – this was something she had experienced many times and was fearful of. On the other hand, she had no experience of a kitchen fire. Fear of the known proved greater than fear of the unknown. As Bowlby says: "(t)here are, in fact, good reasons for thinking that some children learn early that it is possible to placate a disturbed and potentially violent mother by constant attention to her wishes" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 89).

The fear experienced by these young women was constant. Mostly they spoke of a constant state of being afraid. This *constant state* included fear of the perpetrator; fear of the abuse being found out; fear of the reaction of others; as well as fear of the actions of others. From this fear arose a sense of loneliness and aloneness; the sense of isolation discussed earlier:

> *"I get apprehensive and scared whereas other people are just sort of out sort of out there... "*
>
> *"I'm now scared or apprehensive towards men that I really don't know very well. And I don't think I can, I've never been able to overcome that fear of being abused again."*
>
> *"I was scared and I was hurt and I felt very lonely and isolated and I just didn't know what to do."*
>
> *"I was scared that they (teachers) would end up prying and I'd have to take further steps... "*
>
> *"... even when (stepfather) did find out this time he actually did tell mum and mum just broke down literally. She attempted suicide because she couldn't handle it. So that was another thing why I just couldn't say anything again."*
>
> *"... my belief was that if I did (tell anyone) I would have to go to court, pictures to be taken. That I would have to face my dad and there was no way that I was going to do that."*
>
> *"I guess the thing that is hard is that you get caught up in the fear of what will happen if I do tell someone. And as much as you do want to get it out you know what the consequences are gonna be as well."*
>
> *"I was never happy, never ever happy, I was always upset!"*
>
> *"You're either like just really, really depressed or happy."*

For some of these women the sense of fear was more acute at times than others. Michelle talked of lying in bed frozen with fear. She described just lying there listening to her parents arguing violently, but being incapable of doing anything:

> *"I just remember lying frozen in my bed not knowing what to do and wanting to scream, to scream out but not being able to!"*

Michelle's description of her reaction to the events she listened to demonstrated her feeling of extreme fear and dread. Not so much because she felt she was personally in danger, but rather that she did not know what was going to happen. It was the unknown and the previously unexperienced of which she was afraid. Her father, who was usually quite placid, was displaying an extreme violence Michelle had not previously seen. Michelle did not know what was happening; she could only hear violent noises accompanied by enraged shouting and threats of physical violence being made towards her mother.

Fear also took the form of concern that the supporting and non-abusive parent would not be able to cope with the situation emotionally. Joy's concern appeared justified. Her mother had previously attempted to take her own life and already suffered from a psychiatric disorder made worse by stress (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998; and Long, 1995). Joy believed that the next event could be enough to topple her mother *over the edge*. Together with this, is an overarching sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The events that were the cause of the fear appeared inevitable to participants. These young women expressed an understanding that for them at the time there was no way out of the situation. No one could help or prevent recurrence of the abuse. Joy was not alone in this feeling of hopelessness:

> *"I told the Pastor's wife in the church – she then insisted that she had to tell the Pastor which I wasn't too impressed about but, but that went that way.*

Nothing much happened... She basically sat and prayed with me. And that was it I never heard... . she never came back to me on it."

"She (aunt) was probably the only one that had an inkling. She asked me. She did ask me and I bluffed my way around it. She knew. But again, I don't think she knew what to do with it."

"... no body can do anything... "

"'Cos I'd look in the mirror and say why bother. Whose gonna, whose gonna care?"

3.2.9.1 Dreamtime fears

Research discussed by Jenkins (1997) and Garbarino (1997) refers to the effect of post traumatic stress disorder on sleep and dream patterns. According to Jenkins (1997, p. 16), "... children reexperienced the event in play, dreams, or intrusive images and sounds associated with the event". Three women (Caroline, Phoebe and Joy), spoke of vivid and frightening dreams. Caroline and Phoebe were less clear about the content of their dreams but described prolonged periods of regular dreaming experiences that they found terrifying. They spoke of dreams that were clear and vivid and extremely frightening. Neither of them were aware of who or what the dreams were about; but they were left with a strong feeling of trepidation and terror. Caroline was aware of being watched, however, by someone unknown and unseen:

"I just sort of wake up and I feel so scared, I think someone's watching me, I think someone's in my room, I think... I just get very sort of tense. I don't want to move in case something's there."

Joy, on the other hand, found that the encounters of her dreams were night time re-enactments of specific incidences experienced through the process of abuse. In her dreams, Joy was physically hurt by being hit, kicked or burnt with cigarettes:

> *"I had... been suffering nightmares and my dad was actually in them hitting me and kicking me. There was even one where (all these where when I was very little, about 2) where I was actually being burnt with a cigarette across my backside. I used to wake up screaming and crying. Most of the time I'd lay on my back... I've suffered nightmares all my life!"*

Later she discovered that her dreams had been subconscious recollections of actual events:

> *"I couldn't understand why my dad was in them all the time. I did actually ask mum why, I mean, it always has been dad. And its always him, either killing someone or just really hurting me. And then there's his family laughing as I'm in severe pain and on the ground. There's blood sometimes, and stuff like that. And in this last one that I told mum about the cigarette burns mum just broke down and she said, "All these dreams that you've had, Joy, they're true"."*

For these three participants, the effect of their dreams was so terrifying that they chose, where possible, not to sleep rather than endure the sense of dread engendered by them. As Joy says:

> *"I began not being able to sleep properly and I was too frightened to – I would go to school very tired. I couldn't do anything. I was very snappy."*

3.2.9.2 Fear of being judged by others

Judgement by others was a concern of all participants. For some there was an almost phobic response to being in a group of people. Caroline, in particular, spoke of exhibiting extreme physical reactions such as panic and emotional outbursts:

> *"I still get very stressed out. I was invited to a couple of 18th birthday parties... I was almost crying I just didn't wanna go, but, but I'd already said I was gonna go, but I just got so stressed out."*

She claims to experience an anticipation that others will negatively judge her and reject her. She is also terrified that she will be exposed once more to the abuse she was previously subjected to. At school, she found that people in the same peer group formed opinions about her that had no basis in fact. Her peer group used superficial information to make

assumptions about her and, based on this limited knowledge, she was subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Her refusal to go out with a particular boy, together with a close friendship with another girl, resulted in her peers assuming Caroline was gay:

> *"And then through high school I developed a very close friendship with (another girl) and so these rumours were going around that I was a lesbian... ."*

Although Caroline's experience was extreme, her fear of being judged and rejected, and of trusting others only to have that trust violated, was echoed by other participants. All these young women talked of their fear of exposure and of feeling vulnerable. Specifically, when Joy's mother got angry, she was afraid for her mother's health:

> *"It did used to frighten me because it meant that she also used to get suicidal, so I was scared and I was hurt and I felt very lonely and isolated and I just didn't know what to do."*

Phoebe felt unable to trust anyone *"they're all gonna hurt you in the end"* she said. She became hypersensitive and reacted emotionally to a simple request from the aunt she lived with; when her aunt:

> *"... said, "I'd like you to do a few chores"... a little tear ran down my face because I don't get told off any more so just her saying that I thought I was being told off."*

3.3 Survival – a learnt behaviour!

These young women all learnt how to survive either the everyday experience or the memory of their trauma. They each learnt how to deal with everyday situations which for them were difficult. They developed coping mechanisms, which enabled them to survive the pain that frequently engulfed them. The next chapter will deal with this element of their experience; it will explore the phenomenon of ***Survival*** from their perspective.

Chapter 4: Survival

The previous chapter discussed the Women's Experience from their perspective. It explored various aspects of that experience including significant others affected by the actions of the perpetrator. It also explored the various feelings and assumptions these women encountered as they grew up either during the violence or after it had ceased. Further the chapter explored specific areas of the participants' lives which were effected as a result of growing up with violence.

In discussing the experience of the women, the phenomenon of living with violence and its effects has been explored. This chapter will now explore the coping strategies developed by these women to survive. This chapter will explore the phenomenon of survival from their perspective.

4.1 Aspects of Protection

4.1.1 Use of second person as a coping strategy

Throughout the interviews it was noted that, particularly during recounting of information that was stressful to the participant, especially those young women who identified as experiencing violence within their family of origin, participants frequently spoke in the second person. In doing so, they effectively removed themselves from the situation; they spoke of the situation as if it were happening to someone else. For example, when talking of herself, Caroline said, *"I think you feel frightened"*. She also said:

> *"As a child you wonder why its happening to your family and why can't your family be normal."*

"I just... you know sort of, sort of close into ***yourself.*** *"*

"I mean ***you*** *have to accept that it happened, but I try not to dwell on it, but it has obviously affected me."*

On describing her father's abuse, Joy also distanced herself:

"He used to use a piece of wire, fencing wire, across ***the*** *backside and um – uh just throwing rocks and things like that when* ***you'd*** *done something wrong, so... "*

"I never, never felt anything it was just ***you*** *never felt any pain."*

"... I don't know, there's some stuff I've more than likely repressed. Its just people ***you're*** *uncomfortable with."*

"I mean, I knew it was going to happen I just got to the stage when "Oh no! I'm gonna get it! So just prepare ***yourself!".*** *"*

Much of the information given by these young women came in snippets, in parts of sentences. For example, as Michelle spoke of her sensation of extreme fear when listening to her parents fight she said *"****you*** *just had to just... "*. The sentence was not completed. Michelle distanced herself from her brother's and father's behaviour when she claimed that:

"... when ***people*** *drink,* ***you*** *can't, once* ***they*** *get past a certain point,* ***you*** *can't socialise or talk to* ***them*** *or anything like that. And they were always at that point, so, like I was an outsider all the time and I could never really relate to them... "*

"... ***you*** *get to a point where...* ***you've*** *gotta move on from it and* ***you*** *just want people to acknowledge and support* ***you...*** *"*

Phoebe's descriptions were similar:

*"****You're*** *kind of just like "here we go again"... . And if* ***you*** *ever said anything, Oh boy!* ***You'd*** *cop it."*

"But ***you*** *can understand him, but* ***you*** *still can't understand mum."*

" If ***you*** *sit there and* ***you*** *analyse the situation* ***you*** *can see."*

*"****You*** *don't...* ***You*** *stop trusting anybody."*

"... either ***you*** *don't trust... .* ***you*** *become an extremist. Like* ***you*** *either...* ***you*** *either, like become hyperactive or* ***you*** *just get out of it – depressed, you*

*know. And **you** just think **you** can't do that. **You're** either like just really, really depressed or happy. And **you** turn to things like... "*

*"**You** couldn't trust anybody they're all gonna hurt **you** in the end... "*

*"... **you** need people who are there for **you**. **You** don't need people who just say "Well this is right and this is what you should do", or "You shouldn't do that". **You** just need people who are there to listen."*

Stephanie also used the second person to distance herself from the attitude and behaviour of her family:

*"... **your** brother's... and parents... tell **you** that you know "**You're** not doing good enough". And um, you know, "If you studied **you'd** be better"."*

*"... **you're** not sure what to believe. So **you** get confused... **you** know who **you** want to be but there's people telling **you** what **you** should be and what **you** shouldn't be. So **you** don't know to where to go. So **you're** kinda in the middle and being pulled in two directions."*

*"Its a lot of yelling over stupid little things, and after a while the pressure kind of builds up on **you** and it feels like the house is kinda pushing down on **you**. All the bad feelings and the hate and the anger – its kinda like squashing **you** in. And its kinda feeling like living in that house for too much longer is just gonna kill ya. Or **you** just... I was just gonna snap."*

*"Even though, you know, with so many people, you know, in **your** house **you** feel lonely but **you** feel alone because **you** don't think you're good enough and people are telling **you** **you're** not. And um **you** start... **you** kinda like, **you** close yourself off."*

4.1.2 Strategy: Participant as protector

With the exception of Stephanie, this group of young women spoke of an overwhelming sense of responsibility to protect those around them. They talked as though they alone should be affected by the abuse, and that they were expendable because what happened to them mattered less than what happened to other people. They spoke of themselves as having little value, but described the strength that endurance of abuse had given them. They each believed it was their responsibility to protect others who are weaker than themselves.

Through this role, these young women were able to demonstrate a purpose for their existence. Among those seen to be weaker and therefore more vulnerable than the participant herself were Joy's younger brother, her mother and her stepsiblings; Phoebe's sisters – older and younger; Caroline's mother; and Michelle's grandmother. Joy believed that whilst she was available as the target of her father's abuse, her brother and stepsiblings would be safe. Joy's sense of responsibility for others and their actions was reinforced each time her father beat her for the mistakes of one of his other children:

> *"... the only reason why I continued going out there was to protect my brother because otherwise if I wasn't there he would get hit and I didn't want that."*
>
> *"If they (stepsiblings) ever made any mistakes, and the same with my brother, then I was held accountable for their mistakes. And so, I ended up being abused again."*
>
> *"... I've always had to look after the other three. My sister's three years older than me, but I always had to look after her because she's... she's not strong."*
>
> *"The school I went to was very small and I used to find that teacher's really used to try and pry into your life. They'd just have to know everything and I didn't think it was their place to know everything and I just wanted to protect my mum as well. I didn't want them looking at her differently or as not a, you know, a good mother or rah rah, because at one time we did have a social worker come into the school to talk about to teacher's about looking at children's behaviour, and things like that."*
>
> *"... when (stepfather) did find out this time he actually did tell mum and mum just broke down literally. She attempted suicide because she couldn't handle it. So that was another thing why I just couldn't say anything again."*
>
> *"I don't want to tell her because, because last time it happened she blamed herself and it was really kind of awful for her."*
>
> *"Doing that to my grandmother (making her aware that her husband had sexually abused her grand-daughter) at her age would have been.... Like, at the time, was just, like, not appropriate."*

Joy felt also responsibility for her mother. She was aware of her mother's vulnerability and inability to cope with additional stress, and feared that her mother would self-harm should

she become aware of all that was happening. Caroline also felt sure her mother would not cope with the knowledge of everything she had experienced:

> *"... she doesn't deal with her problems very well, like my sister. She blames herself a lot and I don't want her to blame herself more, because its really not her fault."*

Both these young women kept knowledge from their mothers to protect them. Joy felt the need to also protect her mother from the suspicion of teachers, as she felt sure that her mother would be the one to be blamed for her father's actions. On one occasion, when she had been stung by bees, a nurse did see bruises on her body:

> *"(I was bruised)... from the stomach down. The nurse actually said "Oh, how did you get these". And I just wouldn't say anything. Told her it was none of her business. She actually blamed my mum. She started ranting and raving at my mum."*

Two of the women interviewed felt that they had had these specific experiences in order to prepare them to help others professionally. They wanted to help and support other girls and young women, to work with them in order to protect them from family violence and abuse. For Caroline, also the ability to protect others (although she had not chosen this as a career path) was a way of exonerating herself from any guilt or blame associated with the abuse. It was also a way of demonstrating her righteousness in order not to be responsible for the pain of others:

> *"... I can understand what other people are going through. And, I myself, I want to try to prevent it so it doesn't sort of incriminate me in some ways I guess."*

Caroline, Phoebe, Michelle and Joy all claimed that first hand knowledge enabled them to have a clearer understanding of the issues faced by others who have been abused. They expressed a desire to make something positive out of their experience of violation and to use the knowledge gained to help someone else overcome such an experience:

"... we had to make choices about what we were gonna study – I wanted to help young people. I wanted to help people that had been through the same things that I had. That was my initial reasons (for studying psychology). I guess that's changed a lot now. I still want to help people that have been in that situation, but I guess my reasoning and the way I would do that now is different from when I first selected to do Psychology. Then it was... At that point it was very much "I know all the answers - I'm gonna save everybody". It was like 'a save the world' thing. And now its a lot different. Its um... I guess like then I would have gone into a whole process of disclosing with anybody what I had been through thinking that that was gonna help everybody. And now its very much knowing that that's not the way that you do it and that's not gonna work. And I guess one of the reasons why I haven't gone further with my Psych studies is that a lot of what I've seen, the way that some Psychs work that I've seen is not what I needed at the time and I know that now. I see a lot of... A lot of what happens now is that you make people sit in their problems. A lot of processes that professional people go through is allowing people to sit in their problems and rehash and rehash and rehash. And I know at the time that that's not what I wanted to do. I needed to get it out, but I needed to leave it behind. I didn't wanna have to keep going over it and rehashing it. So that's been a bit conflicting for me and I guess that's why I haven't gone any further with my Psych studies I'm not sure whether that's gonna help."

"... part of that (knowing what I wanted to do) was to do a social work course because despite all of that I still love people."

A strong sentiment expressed by all these young women was their fear of being unable to protect any children they might have. They all claimed to have no desire to become mothers. They were afraid that even close relatives could not be trusted and that there was no way of knowing who to trust. Even though they accepted that the violation was the responsibility of the violator, they also acknowledge the inability of someone with their awareness to prevent the situation occurring. None of them discussed the power relationship between themselves and their abusers, but they each expressed a sense of dread of the responsibility of having a child who is abused:

"I then found out that my mum had been (abused by perpetrator) as well when she was a child, which made it worse because it was... Yeah... "You knew and you did nothing!"."

"I don't want to sort of be in that risk category of sort of having my child be abused and me not knowing about it so I, I don't think that I would ever become a parent for that reason."

"I don't want to have children."

4.1.3 Strategy: Protection of Body

Separately, three young women unconsciously protected their bodies as I spoke to them. The other two put barriers between us – the first a dining room table and the second a very large and solid arm of a chair.

The effect of profound emotional violence and neglect was reflected by one participant curling up at one end of the couch in the foetal position. This I took to demonstrate a need for protection, and the childlike vulnerability of the participant. This position was accompanied by a softness of voice, which further demonstrated her fear of exposure.

Both young women who disclosed sexual abuse protected their stomach and womb areas. Neither of them was aware that they were protecting their bodies in this manner until it was pointed out to them. On discussion, it became apparent that they were protecting themselves both externally and internally. Externally, the stomach was protected, and internally, the womb; these areas specifically were protected so that others would not be able to see the violation of innocence they experienced. Further, this protective stance was used to protect them from the awareness of others to the violation of self they have experienced. By protecting the external area of the stomach, the participant is also ensuring that they will not be violated again. By protecting this area, they are stopping others from getting close, from getting inside. If people are unable to see the participant's area of vulnerability they

will not know she is weak and vulnerable. Michelle was aware of her habit of protecting herself and is consciously attempting to change this:

> *"Initially I started focussing on my stomach because everything that I did all my actions were to protect my stomach that's immediately what I do and its what I've always done."*

4.1.4 Strategy: Protection for participant

The non-offending parent of four of the participants at some stage displayed an over developed sense of responsibility; accepting that whatever happens to their child (the participant) is the sole responsibility of that supporting parent. In this situation, the parent overcompensated by shielding the participant from harm; not letting them know about, see or do things that they might be permitted to in another situation:

> *"I mean my mum sort of never allowed me to do things and my stepfather there's all that protective stuff."*

Where the other parent is the perpetrator, the offending parent is accomplished at manipulating situations to make the other look and feel as though they are responsible for the situation:

> *"Like they always try and make each other look bad. And usually dad ends up being the worse one."*

The parent who had responsibility for the support of the participant as a child, developed their own coping mechanisms to stop their world from falling in:

> *"My mum's actually a very angry person. She always has been particularly since being with dad , I mean my stepfather said before she married dad she was very controlled with her anger, she was she went through stages of depression or whatever she was always able to move on but now she just, even still, she just gets so angry and flies off the handle and throws things and its really hard. But she finds it hard to go get help because she just doesn't know what to do or say."*

However, research indicates "that exposure to chronic violence...(may lead) to an avoidance of the aggressive assertive behaviour necessary for problem solving" (Jenkins & Bell, 1997, p. 20). The primary carer for these young women, therefore, had difficulty in dealing with situations requiring *problem solving*. Furthermore,

> (e)motionally disabled or immobilized adults are unlikely to offer children what they need. Such adults are inclined to engage in denial, to be emotionally inaccessible, and are prone to misinterpret children's signals. Messages of safety are particularly important in establishing adults as sources of protection and authority for children living in conditions of threat and violence. (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1997, p. 37).

None of these women had confidence in the ability of either of their parents to support them as they would have liked. Both Jenkins (1997) and Bloom (1995) discuss the use of adaptive behaviours which eventually become maladaptive as they no longer provide the effect the individual is seeking. The parent, as primary carer to these young women, adopted mechanisms that became maladaptive as they failed to protect themselves and their children. Effectively, the supporting parent failed in their protective role and became guilty of enabling the offending parent to manipulate them, the victim and the situation. It is a co-dependent relationship in which both parents must fail in their parenting duties. One parent isn't even trying; the other is trying too hard. In Phoebe's case, the non-offending parent, her father, also became perpetrator. In trying hard to keep his family together, he became guilty of emotional and physical abuse of his children. According to Garbarino (1997), Seth-Purdie (1996), Gonzalez-Mena (1994), Bowlby (1988) and others, the stress experienced by a parent will greatly affect their ability to maintain stability. Many deeply stressed parents, and those angry at the abuse they have received from their spouse, will redirect violence towards their children in response (Bowlby, 1988, p. 88).

Joy's mother just gave up periodically; hiding from the world behind a psychological disorder; and in the process deserting her daughter:

> *"... mum has always been very suicidal she's also suffered bipolar disorder from when I was 6 until I was 8. And after that she has just suffered constant depression."*

Michelle's mother, who had been Michelle's primary source of support initially, just walked away and her father found refuge in drunkenness – she was deserted by both parents. Caroline's mother coped with life by ensuring she maintained control of her children and their actions. When this failed, she was totally unable to cope and became physically ill – again, deserting her children:

> *"... we were in a foster home because my mum was actually quite ill when she was, when we were young staying in Sydney."*

Stephanie felt deserted by her parents and by most of her family. Continual bickering was the method adopted by her parents to cope with daily life. She received little emotional support from them and felt that she was unable to do anything of which they would approve.

4.2 What constitutes 'Real' Family

With the exception of Michelle (whose mother left her and her brother and father), those young women whose parents had separated (Joy and Caroline), demonstrated a disassociation from their natural father. These participants considered the existing partnership between their mother and stepfather as their *'natural'* parental relationship. Where the father was considered at all, it was as an outsider and not part of the family in any way. *Real family*, therefore, consisted of siblings, mother and stepfather. The biological father, and any stepsiblings living with him, were not included in the description given of

family by these young women. Whilst Michelle was in her teens, her family consisted of her father and her brother.

4.2.1 Surviving through defining step-father as father

Although there was an initial reluctance to trust the mother's new partner and accept him as part of the family, both young women in this position did eventually do so:

> *"Dad, my dad - he adopted me, so in every way I think he's my father."*

> *"My step father I didn't get along with very well at first; a lot of that was due to my parent's separation. And I just found it very confusing and I just didn't accept anything that was going on."*

Through their experiences with their natural father they came to believe that men should not, and could not, be trusted. They were initially unable to accept that the man their mother had now chosen as a partner would behave any differently to their natural father. Each participant demonstrated this lack of trust and made life extremely difficult for both the new partner and for their mother. They each built a barrier around themselves behind which they were able to hide and which they used as protection. If this new man in their lives was to be accepted by them, then it was his responsibility to prove himself worthy of their trust. These young women did not believe that the *'bonding'* process seen to take place between natural fathers and daughters could be reproduced in the step-father/stepdaughter relationship. They had lost the innocence of childhood they believed to be an integral component of that bonding process. Eventually, they recognised that their stepfather was able to display *'unconditional love'* for both themselves and their mothers - another concept deemed to be central to the father/daughter bonding process. At this point, he was accepted:

> *"Mum and (stepfather), they also had their problems. They used to fight a lot, just verbal stuff. So, I just found it really difficult to get along with him but. Yeah. Dad's abuse didn't help, but then living at home with mum and (stepfather) was a lot more supportive and that's how it developed... . But as I got older he actually, well I accepted him because gave my brother and I the attention the love and support that we deserved. He took an interest in everything that we did."*

Another barrier to development of a true father/daughter relationship is the difficulty faced by these young women in accepting that they would not be rejected or abused by this new father figure. Bonding naturally takes place in an environment where each is able to get to know the other intimately without fear of rejection. Children who have been abused often find it difficult to develop relationships based on this, the most basic of trusts (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1997; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; and Bowlby, 1988 #139). Over time a strong bond, however, has developed between these young women and their stepfathers:

> *"I didn't really develop that trust until I was about 13. It just took a while to get to know him... ."*

> *"I get on with him (my stepfather) very well actually. We... I wouldn't say its over the top close because we grew up with him from a later age, so we didn't have that sort of bonding when we were young. But otherwise I would say that my dad and I were - I, I feel closer to my dad than my mum sometimes."*

In both instances, the stepfather has demonstrated that the well-being of the participant, as well as the rest of the family, is his main motivator. The two stepfathers in question have taken their role as surrogate father seriously. They have taken responsibility for ensuring that the participant, as well as the rest of the family, is safe and cared for:

> *"But my dad always seems to care for me. ... my dad - he adopted me so in every way I think he's my father."*

> *"I've actually told my dad that my stepfather was my dad."*

In these instances the role of father has been adopted by the stepfather and includes the unconditional love participants expect of a father figure. These men express love and affection in a non-threatening manner. The participants concerned both expressed a sense of safety and of being protected around their new fathers:

> *"I didn't say anything to my mum, but I went home when she was at work and told (stepfather) what had been going on. From that time on he actually began to protect me more."*

The sense of completeness and naturalness of this *'real'* family is enhanced by the respect and concern demonstrated by these men for the participants' mothers:

> *"Then when I was 7 we moved over here with my father now. So I've got - and he's, he's a good person. He treats my mum well. And so that's, that's added stability to my life."*

The concern for the mothers' physical and emotional well being is clearly shown through action. Caroline was concerned, however, that her mother was abusing the caring nature of her current partner. Rather than argue with her mother, her stepfather continually acquiesces, allowing Caroline's mother to take control of the situation:

> *"But mum sort of hen pecks him a lot, so... I feel sorry for him as well because he doesn't stand up to mum at all.. I think... (Brother) says it's cos mum likes to control in that sort of way so that it doesn't happen again to her."*

There is a sense of love and strength in this (rather than acquiescence due to weakness). It might also be due to the fact, cited by Mugford (1989), that:

> Men tend to be more sympathetic towards victims than do other women, though this is more because of a felt need to give women chivalrous protection than it is because of a realistic understanding of the victim's circumstances. (Mugford, 1989, p. 5).

4.2.3 Survival despite different roles of mother

For almost all these women, their mother took on several roles at one time. Frequently these roles were conflicting. Mother, in most cases, was the principal carer of the participant and her siblings. This role was confused with a variety of others, all of which were acted out at the same time. These roles included enabling the perpetrator, being the perpetrator, the victim and the one to be cared for. The mothers of these young women can be closely identified with Bowlby's (1988) description of abusing mothers:

> Socially they are isolated. Having no one else to turn to, many of them seek care and comfort from one of their own children whom they treat as though they were much older than they are (Bowlby, 1988, p. 84).

> *"Very isolated and that's how it always was with dad. Mum never really had any friends. I never went to things like playgroup or anything."*

Phoebe's mother did not adopt the role of carer at all – never giving affection to her children; and Michelle's mother opted out of the caring role when it all became too difficult for her. Michelle was in her early teens when her mother withdrew affection. The role of carer, therefore, was not adopted when the mother was a primary source of neglect or violence. The needs of these women's mothers took precedence over those of participants or their siblings:

> *"She had disappeared off the face of the earth. I didn't see her for a period of about two years. After she took me back to dad's to live with for good, she came around a few times and then it slowly dwindled off the amount that she came over until eventually she didn't come any more."*

> *"Mum just always, you know, she just wanted us to grow up really quickly and leave... "*

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that in each instance the natural mother is the main target sought for affection and support by participants. Where this was not forthcoming

from their natural mother, the women appeared more greatly affected than where this was lacking in some other *significant other* in her life. When there is danger that the mother will be unable to meet the participant's needs, there is an exerted effort on the part of the participant to support her mother so as not to lose this potential primary source of support and affection:

> *"My Nan was telling me that my mum has always had problems with depression, but not to the state that this was in I mean. I can imagine what my mum went through. I do I think of it. Shit. She was bold for a time and I think the sort of person that she is she's not very... She's very passive, she's not one to just leave, to have her say. She holds back a lot... ..*
>
> *It did used to frighten me because it meant that she also used to get suicidal... ..*
>
> *And other times she just she's said, "I just wanna kill myself". And I always take it very seriously because I just never know if its going to be another attempt or not."*

Where mother chooses not to adopt this role and opts out without a display of violence, the participant accepts blame. Michelle felt guilt about her mother leaving because she had prayed that it would happen:

> *"I prayed that if they couldn't sort things out that they would break up and um.... Yeah... .. And they did, not long after that. So that was kinda like.... a lot of guilt went with that."*

When Caroline's mother re-married, and she and her mother and siblings went to live with her new father and his children, she was reluctant to allow her mother to be shared by these other children. She could accept the need to share her with another man, but did not like this either. This, after all was, *her* mother – they already had their own:

> *"And then we had to move in with all our stepbrothers and stepsisters so that was a bit over the top as well so. 'Cos we had never had to share our mother before, so.... And then we had to share her, which was quite difficult actually. Sorting of fitting in with everything, cos we had been used to having Mum all to ourself and now we had to it with another girl and 2 other boys."*

Phoebe's mother, on the other hand, opted out of her parental responsibility and placed that responsibility onto the children to parent themselves. For Phoebe, the feeling of hurt and pain and rejection is almost unbearable. Tears welled up in her eyes as she talked about her mother:

> *"For as long as I can remember she never held us as babies. She never, ever held us. We were always in somebody else's arms or she was like going out of the room or just sitting there. She never picked us up or anything like that... .I was never happy, never ever happy, I was always upset. I guess it was hard. I had to grow up really quickly. I don't know its just like mum wanted us to grow up. It was just like she didn't want the responsibility for bringing up the kids. Like if the kids in the street had a fight then their parents would sort it out – my parents would just say "fight your own battle" – so that's what we did and we grew up really tough. I was never happy when I was at home – always depressed."*

4.2.4 Surviving Family Dysfunction

The family unit described by each of these young women as their *real* family, was also identified by them as dysfunctional. They spoke of individual family members vying for attention, failing to communicate with each other and failing to acknowledge the needs of others. For each of them, the family home is an uncomfortable and stressful place to be:

> *"I really don't know what it (the word 'love') means. 'Cos, um, my parents they could fight and then like an hour later they'd be all 'love' and 'darling' and this.... It's really weird. 'Cos I asked my Nan once, you know, where she (mother) got it from, 'cos I know my aunty... My mum. The yelling and stuff. 'Cos Nanna and Da never used to yell. And Aunty (...) doesn't yell at her kids – that's mum's sister – but I just don't know where she got it from."*

Phoebe's older sister is described by her as not strong and unable to cope with the stress of her family:

> *"She's got no self confidence. No self esteem. She's a blubbering mess."*

and Caroline claims that her sister is also unable to cope and has sought support from within the family as well as from the medical profession:

> *But then the next day it was sort of like and I think (sister) was back and this is the time that she was trying to get mum and dad to let her see her biological father who'd actually agreed to it. So that's another stress for us. For (brother) and myself anyway because she expects us to be totally supportive of her. But I'm not. I can't. I told her straight out that I can't be supportive of her and "I think its wrong what you're doing". And now he's said that he (natural father) wants to see her and he's making out that he's over the moon to see his long lost daughter. That's what aunty (...) said cos she spoke to him on the phone. But I just, I just don't know. It just seems that (sister) likes to create problems and she likes to argue a lot with my mum and when (sister is) around it's really tense sometimes. But, but, the doctor actually said that was crying out for help or something. Because, being anorexic, she had it for 2 years but no-one actually knew about it.".*

Caroline also sees the way in which her stepfather allows her mother to control the family as being dysfunctional. For each of these young women, the role of their mother in the (dys)functioning of the family was paramount.

Phoebe described a mother who was physically and verbally abusive and blamed everyone else, including Phoebe, for anything that went wrong. Both Caroline and Joy also felt that their mothers blamed them, but in a different context. The mothers of both these young women failed to understand what was happening for them primarily because they chose not reveal the situation, or specific elements of it, to their mothers. This decision was based on their wish to protect either themselves or their mothers from further stress. In doing so, they accepted criticism and blame for events which were either misrepresented or misunderstood. Caroline felt that her mother would not accept the knowledge that she had been further abused by yet another family member who demonstrated an ability to manipulate situations to his advantage and was considered by the Caroline's mother to be a

'really nice' person. Her mother now believes that she is unreasonable and unkind in her treatment of him:

> *"I haven't told anyone apart from my brother and (a close friend). I just think I've blocked it out of my memory and accepted it. I mean you have to accept that it happened, but I try not to dwell on it, but it has obviously affected me. No I haven't actually told anyone and now my relat... .. I hate him. Whenever he rings up I'm very rude to him on the phone and sometimes I hang up on him if he rings, which isn't very nice of me but I don't like him at all. And mum doesn't understand – she just says its because I'm nasty."*

Also, through ignorance of the complete situation, Joy's mother has no understanding of the level of stress she coped with. She chose not to make her mother aware of aspects of the situation. In doing so, she chose to take criticism from her mother for running away from home without explanation:

> *"I began to isolate myself from my friends. I also had a friend too who committed suicide at that time as well. I was very close to him.... So the loss of him too that was a huge contributor. And I just packed my bags and I just ran. I actually, because I was working too I had money there and I actually just – I actually only stayed in a caravan park up the road from mum and my stepfather. But still, they didn't know where I was. It was so I could still have access to the school bus and still go to school. I ended up being away for 2 weeks. My mum had actually come to school a few days after I had left wanting to know why and she was yelling at me and stuff like that but I just said, "I'm confused at the moment with everything and I just feel so lonely and I need to go and I can't handle anything any more its too much. And I just I need to find my own identity. I just don't even know who I am any more." And Mum couldn't understand – she thought I was just being a horrible child by just running away, but I wasn't telling her that my dad was flogging the SHIT OUT OF ME."*

Joy chose to accept her mother's anger and displeasure rather than place any more pressure on her mother than she was already experiencing.

4.3 Loss

4.3.1 Surviving the Loss of father

For a variety of reasons, each of the participants felt that they had *lost* something very special in not developing a loving and trusting relationship with their fathers. They each felt

that the *special relationship* between father and daughter had been denied to them. Each participants' natural father had taken this opportunity from her through his actions. For most, it was through his violation of her - whether physical, emotional or sexual. For one participant, it was her father's inability to accept the situation and support her, as well as the rest of the family, through the trauma of her abuse. This father escaped from reality through the use of alcohol. He deserted her emotionally, although not physically:

> *"My brother and my dad just went into.... they were just drinking day in and day out. They just went on this total binge for - it went on for years...."*

The young women taking part in this study all expressed a sense of grief at the loss of this special father/daughter relationship, which they believed could never be formed between themselves and anyone else; nor would it be formed between themselves and their natural father. For two participants, development of such a relationship with their father was not an option:

> *"But I actually feel scared of, of (my natural) father, because I'm... (Other abuser) was never violent, he's just a sneak and sly. Whereas this man was violent; he was outrightly violent. He used to drink a lot and..."*

> *"I'm still very frightened of my dad."*

For others, it has happened or there is hope. Michelle has succeeded in developing a close relationship with her father; another two are still grieving and hoping that things will change. The two young women whose mothers' remarried whilst they were young, however, have actively denied their respective fathers and accepted their stepfather in this role. As Caroline says: *"... my dad (her stepfather) always seems to care for me..."* and Joy has *"actually told my dad that my step-father is my dad".*

4.3.2 Surviving the loss of childhood

These young women believed that childhood was supposed to be a time where one could relax and do whatever came to mind without any thought of what other people might think or do – until later. They saw childhood to be a time of light-heartedness and freedom from responsibility. According to (Miller, 1990, p. 26), in general, "(c)hildren today are not only valued but are usually expected to have a fairly carefree existence, in contrast to the earlier use of child labour". However, childhood for most participants was characterised by fear, periods of physical and emotional trauma, and the threat of reprisals. It was also a time for taking responsibility for her own safety and for that of others – including often, a parent:

> *"I'm very, very protective of my mum."*
>
> *"... the only reason why I continued going out there was to protect my brother because otherwise if I wasn't there he would get hit and I didn't want that... . There's also step children there as well that he has; two boys and a girl. If they ever made any mistakes and the same with my brother them I was held accountable for their mistakes and so I ended up being abused again.*
>
> *I just, I just didn't know what else to do. It was easy for me just to cop it and keep that a secret and just keep going on in life rather than have him (brother) go through that too... "*
>
> *"The school I went to was very small and I used to find that teacher's really used to try and pry into your life. They'd just have to know everything and I didn't think it was their place to know everything and I just wanted to protect my mum as well. I didn't want them looking at her differently or as not a, you know, a good mother... because at one time we did have a social worker come into the school to talk about, to teacher's, about looking at children's behaviour, and things like that."*
>
> *"I feel the main reason why dad did begin to hit me was because I used to intervene, protecting my mum."*
>
> *"... my brother – who I was always so close to. And he's always been the one who tried to protect me from dad yelling at me."*
>
> *"Because I always feel like I have to be the one to make peace between everyone. I do that quite a lot actually."*

"I was continually being put in a situation of danger and not having any chance to get out of it. I used to try and give a lot of hints to my brother, but he never picked up on those."

"I've always had to look after the other three. My sister's three years older than me, but I always had to look after her because she's... she's not strong. She's just a dribbling mess. She's trapped, you know. She's not gonna get anywhere. She's got no aims no goals."

"I don't want, I don't want to tell her (mother) because, because last time it (abuse) happened she blamed herself and it was really kind of awful for her."

Even though the nature and degree of violence experienced by these young women differed, they all expressed a sense of wanting to enjoy some of that childlike freedom and irresponsibility now, as young adults. By not wanting to *let go* of childhood, the participants are actually claiming their desire to experience the innocence they believe that time should have marked. They each expressed a belief that, by their behaviour, the perpetrator has stolen from the participant the opportunity to experience childhood as they perceive other children to do:

"I think I'm a mature person. But other ways I'm very immature I don't want to let go of my childhood or something."

"Well in some ways I am mature but in other ways I'm quite immature just like... My brother and I do really immature things like prank calls sometimes and everything and we just do really weird things. We actually, actually quite, actually quite immature sometimes like we do really silly things like we play on the play equipment like the children's play equipment with this little guy (***), that's mums godson. And then we went, we went to a concert the other day, oh last Friday, and we were just being ridiculous and dancing all over the place and (***), that's (brother's) fiance was actually quite embarrassed by our behaviour. But otherwise we were really enjoying ourselves. But it was quite an immature way to act. I didn't mind..."

"... all I wanted was just to lead a sort of semi-normal teenage life and have access to recreational stuff than mum... you know, what's out there in the town, what other kids are out there."

"I didn't even have a social life even though going in my adolescent years because I had to work for him."

"... there's a couple of specific incidences that I remember – one where he (father) tried to get in fight with one of our friends, our family friends... "

"I was never happy, never ever happy, I was always upset.... I guess it was hard. I had to grow up really quickly. I don't know its just like mum wanted us to grow up. It was just like she didn't want the responsibility for bringing up the kids."

"I don't know if it is its just a feeling I used to have when I used to live at home.... because... there isn't... not really a feeling of that much happiness in our house, except maybe sometimes you know on birthdays – not even all day – just at the beginnings of days and stuff. There was a lot of yelling and fighting in my family in my house. Its a lot of yelling over stupid little things... "

Due to their early experiences, none of these young women developed secure attachment with their caregivers and according to Sims and Hutchins (1999):

> (c)hildren with secure attachments to their caregivers are found to explore the environment more freely and to have more positive play and interactive experiences (both with adults and peers). Children who do not form secure attachments are likely to be lonely and socially isolated, nonresponsive and developmentally disadvantaged. (1999, p. 6).

Further, the women expressed an understanding that it is the right of every child to enjoy this time in their life, and that once it has passed it cannot be regained – no matter how hard one tries or how silly one's behaviour.

4.4 Control

4.4.1 Surviving Father as controller

Joy, Stephanie and Caroline spoke of the *control* their natural fathers continue to have over their lives. The fathers' of both Joy and Caroline ensured control by taking from them the ability to behave as other children do and the freedom to communicate with their families of

origin. Both these young women expressed a belief that their father had taken from them the years in which they might have learnt and experienced many exciting things. Fear has replaced love, and it is this fear of their fathers' actions which now controls much of what these young women do:

> *"And even though he is not here I still feel he has some sort of control over my life... . He's taken something that I can't actually get back. I'm now scared or apprehensive towards men that I really don't know very well. And I don't think I can, I've never been able to overcome that fear of being abused again... . And I feel cross about that because I don't feel like I'm normal."*

The *control* that their fathers continue to exsert over them is not dissimilar to that used by a violent man to *control* his anxious and terrified wife (Draper et al., 1991, p. 79). Their ability to develop secure relationship and to communicate with others is dominated by the fear instilled in them by their fathers' actions. An ability to develop

> ... emotional bonds with other individuals, sometimes in the careseeking role and sometimes in the caregiving one is regarded as a principal feature of effective personality function and mental health. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 121).

According to attachment theory, most individuals develop what is known as *secure attachment* to, initially, their parents. Children who are abused or neglected are more likely, however, to develop what has been identified as *disorganised attachment* (Bowlby, 1988, p.125). It is this *disorganised attachment* that hinders the individuals' ability to develop secure relationships in adolescence and adulthood. Generally, according to Bowlby (1988) it is negative or unsatisfactory interaction principally with their primary caregiver (usually the child's mother) which predisposes a child to develop *disorganised attachment*. The role played by them predisposes a child to develop *disorganised attachment*. The role played by the mothers of these young women is therefore an important one in the development of their ability to function as *normal* young women. That is not to say that the claim they make

that their father, by his actions during their childhood, does not continue to have a negative impact on their lives now. Rather, had their mothers been able to provide a stable environment *despite the abuse*, it is more likely that these women would be emotionally and socially more stable adults:

> *"I didn't want to lose my parents, you know... I felt really hurt. They wouldn't talk to me. It wasn't my fault. I didn't know, I didn't know how to deal with it... "*

Control by her natural father of Joy's family and step-family was complete. His rules and consequences dominated all their actions. Any deviation from his expectations resulted in severe physical reprisals. Everything Joy did had to be done not only perfectly but perfectly according to her father. *"My dad was a real control freak. Everything had to be done perfectly – His way!"* Physical neglect and emotional abuse were realised, at least partially, through Joy's father and stepmother withholding food from her. Insufficient food was used as another form of control. Joy's actions were dominated to an extent where she was physically only capable of undertaking the work imposed by her father. Lack of food meant that she was physically weak at the end of a day filled with chores and unable to do more than eat the food she was permitted and to sleep:

> *"He never used to feed me properly because he used to think I was fat. So, I never used to get breakfast and I used to get a small lunch and sometimes he would give me a bigger one and then at dinner time I'd get a normal one like everyone else, but I didn't get sweets or anything like that and I used to be absolutely starving. I used to work such long hours on the farm for him. I used to get up at five and finish, particularly in the summer, at seven or half past seven. So it was a very long day and very exhausting."*

Stephanie described her father's *'prying'* and *'interfering'* behaviour as his attempts to control herself and the rest of the family. She found him irritating and annoying and frequently stopped what she was doing and left the room. Although her father's behaviour

was not overtly controlling, Stephanie found it to be antagonistic and countered her sense of freedom within the family home:

> *"Dad's shuffling backwards and forwards all the time to see what every one's doing! You can't really, you know, do what you want to do, you know and I had people interfere with that."*

Stephanie found that she maintained an element of control over her situation by purposely being antagonistic in return. Others either found themselves to be unable to counteract the level of control displayed by their fathers or developed their own strategies which are discussed a little later under in this chapter.

4.4.2 Surviving Mother as controller

Control was exerted by the mothers' of these young women in a variety of ways. Joy's mother controlled the situation through her display of vulnerability and need for protection.

> *"... my mum was constantly suffering depression. I had to take over things so my schooling was just neglected."*

> *"she also used to get suicidal, so I was scared and I was hurt and I felt very lonely and isolated and I just didn't know what to do."*

Michelle's mother walked away, refusing contact between herself and her daughter:

> *"She had disappeared off the face of the earth... ., and it was about two years went by, then I decided that I wanted to see her regardless of whatever. So I contacted a few people and tried to track her down. I was told that I wasn't allowed to know where she was or anything like that... ."*

Phoebe's mother displayed uncontrolled and unstable anger, flying into temper tantrums at the slightest provocation; she would indiscriminately throw whatever came to hand:

> *"She'd just build up – like, she'd gather momentum. And she just keeps going, keeps going, whatever. She'd go into our rooms and throw stuff around."*

Phoebe's mother controlled her family through fear; her anger was used to ensure that she was given primary consideration and that people did as she wanted:

> *"... my elder sister eventually woke her (mother) up but I wouldn't I was too scared.... And, all right, the house would burn down. I didn't care - I wasn't gonna wake my mum up."*

Caroline spoke of her mother's emotional need to ensure that she has control over those close to her. Control for Caroline's mother is a coping mechanism developed whilst living in an abusive and controlling situation. By having knowledge of what is happening for and with others around her Caroline's mother can protect herself from a repetition of that experience. This form of control is also used to keep those she cares most about close to her and dependent upon her. When something happens to challenge Caroline's mother's control and she loses the ability to manipulate her family, Caroline's mother becomes totally lost and withdrawn:

> *"... she likes to be in control of the situation and she gets kind of lost if she's not in control... She sort of goes, goes into herself.. she goes very quiet. Sometimes it might be a good thing, but um... You know she does she does sort of... get lost in herself when she doesn't have control any more. I mean when (brother) was away she got quite depressed because he wasn't there in her life..."*

Caroline described a co-dependent relationship between her mother and her family reminiscent of Bowlby's (1988, p. 86-87) description of a young mother playing out her need for nurturing in a violent replay of her own childhood experiences.

4.4.3 Strategies for survival: Participant as controller

There appears to have been only one area in which participants felt that they had some control. These young women were controlled in every aspect of their life, including, for Joy,

the amount of food made available. The one remaining area, which they felt they could control, was how that food was used. All participants talked about *food* and *eating* in one context or another. When food was amply available it could be given to others and not eaten, thereby exercising control over its intake:

> *"... it was also another form of control, it was the only thing I had control over was my eating. My mum used to make the most fantastic lunches – you know, great big nice chocolate cake for morning tea and stuff for school. And my friends used to say. "Oh can I have that?" you know and it was just so easy for me to do as well. Just to control."*

Food could also be consumed in large amounts and then vomited out, thereby giving participants control over its consumption. Both Joy and Michelle talked of personally experiencing bulimia or anorexia:

> *"I went through a period of where I was bulimic for a while."*
>
> *"I actually ended up developing anorexia three times throughout my teenage years, until I was 18."*

Caroline claims that her sister suffered from anorexia:

> *"... the doctor actually said that was crying out for help or something. Because being anorexic she had it for 2 years but no-one actually knew about it... "*

These three participants claim that food was, or in Caroline's sister's case, is used as a means of maintaining or obtaining some form of control over their lives. The Royal College of Psychiatrists (1998) suggest that anorexia-nervosa and bulimia are closely linked and may be "triggered by an upsetting event" (np.) and frequently is the "only part of their lives over which they (teenage girls) have control" (The Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1998, np.).

4.5 Coping

4.5.1 *Coping for participants*

All of these young women developed ways of coping that was peculiar to themselves. Predominantly, they coped by adopting a role (character or personality) that fitted the moment and using it to its full potential. They ensured the façade thus developed fitted so snugly that no one was able to see through. In this manner they exercised protection of themselves as well as protection from themselves:

> *"I think I've developed my own unique style but I... . And I like, I like everything. In high school it was quite a difficult thing for me because I actually preferred classical music and I enjoyed making things and I enjoyed I always enjoyed doing art things and art ways. And that was always and I was always sort of teased because of that and because I liked classical music and I wasn't like into the, you know, all the popular trendy music."*

> *"When I had my friends and that I was always very happy. I was very good at hiding. They never, ever knew."*

> *"... you become an extremist. Like you either... you either, like become hyperactive or you just get out of it – depressed, you know. And, you just think "You can't do that". You're either like just really, really depressed or happy. And you turn to things like I went through this stage where I was like drinking every weekend. I was off my face all the time, you know."*

They found that accepting the situation helped them to cope. They acknowledged that the experience was real, but did not necessarily understand why these things had happened to them. Further, they accepted the reality of the experience but were aware of their own lack of control over the situation. They were also aware that they had no conscious control over how the experience effected their emotions or their behaviour. This understanding enabled them to avoid a sense of guilt associated with their own experience of violence. Also, this information was needed to develop survival skills that would enable them to continue life without constantly living in the abuse and the misery of the event.

It is also important to each of these young women to know that someone has unconditional love for them and will support them without question and without pressure to do something they do not feel ready to do:

> *"My boyfriend got me out of that cos he's just a straight good person. You know. He'd never done any drugs or anything; he doesn't drink or anything like that. Like he never pressured me. It's not like that. I just saw how he was and I thought this is how it should be. You know. I had an example, a good example."*
>
> *"But he (boyfriend) was always there when I came over crying, you know.."*

In contradiction to this they mostly also accepted that no one else can help; the situation must remain unknown and its effects must remain hidden from the outside world:

> *"... people who did question I just gave them a load of bullshit. I mean that's the way I was, then. I just... you know I just thought that no body can do anything, their all liars."*

4.5.2 Using Alcohol and other drugs to cope

Phoebe found sanctuary from the pain in alcohol and cigarettes. *"I tried marijuana a few times"*, she said. Michelle, on the other hand, believes that the excessive use of alcohol or other substances as a coping mechanism is a waste of life and a waste of time. Both Michelle's father and brother responded to their family trauma by developing a pattern of constant binge drinking and consequently did not help themselves and were no use to her:

> *"I just couldn't handle that.... I was like never home. I stayed out as much as I could, I didn't wanna be there. The father, that I thought could do nothing wrong and was just saint and everything, had just crumbled before my eyes. And I was watching my brother not even having a life because he was just... he was totally blind drunk from the minute he got up to the time he went to bed. And I was very much in that process because they were always drinking and they were always involved in that. I could never be a part of their lives, because I wasn't. You know, when people drink, you can't, once they get past a certain point, you can't socialise or talk to them or anything*

like that. And they were always at that point, so, like I was an outsider all the time and I could never, really relate to them, so...."

Phoebe, on the other hand, found that whilst she drank she did not worry about her problems. For Phoebe, the use of alcohol and drugs was a way of escaping reality, a way of being part of the group and of not being different. She also claimed that it was a way of getting get back at her parents; she could do as she pleased and they did not even know:

"... I was, like, drinking every weekend. I was off my face all the time, you know. And my parents never knew. I smoked for four years, since I was in year six till I was in year 10."

Overall, those who spoke of the use of alcohol demonstrated a concern that people who used alcohol were *weak*, and that alcohol itself is *bad* and *addictive*. This is identified by Bell (1996) as one of the popular myths associated with alcohol and other drugs and the culture of addiction.

4.6 Disclosing

4.6.1 Reasons for not disclosing

Disclosure for participants was not easy. Throughout the interviews I was offered many varied and legitimate reasons why these young women had individually decided not talk to others about what was happening in their lives.

Superficially, fear of the response of others was the most prominent reason given by participants for not disclosing sooner than they did. Their fear was based on previous experience and was different for each of them. The fear that participants spoke of included: fear of reprisals, fear of what might happen, fear of rejection, fear of being forced to face the perpetrator, as well as fear of the negative repercussions on the family as a whole. This basic

sense of fear makes talking to someone outside the immediate environment extremely difficult, on the one hand. On the other, they desperately want the abuse to stop, they want someone else to know, someone who can then take responsibility for making it stop. After the abuse has stopped, but before complete or formal disclosure, each of these women talked about a need to share the information with someone in order to take their pain away. The fear of greater pain, however, because of an inappropriate response on the part of the confidant, impeded initial attempts at disclosure. The overwhelming desire to tell someone else who will help them deal with their emotions is overridden by the fear of an anticipated negative response.

Joy saw first hand the negative repercussions her mother experienced when she attempted to disclose experience of violence:

> *"She did try to tell, you know, friends but even her own mother but no-one believed her. She'd actually even pulled out us kids as evidence to say, "This is what he's doing to your grandchildren"."*

The little bit of information people had of the family's situation had already invited accusations that Joy's mother was a *'bad'* or ineffectual parent, and Joy was afraid that her mother would be further blamed and held accountable for the violence of her father should she disclose to anyone. When Joy was a small child, her mother had asked family and friends to help her escape an abusive spouse. They refused to believe the situation was as she described and suggested that if her husband was abusive, it was her own fault. This response by Joy's mother's family is not unusual. According to Draper et al. (1991), "(m)any women who finally escape from violent relationships tell stories of indifference to their plight by other members of their families" (p. 82). Why now should people accept that Joy's mother was not also responsible for the violent treatment meted out to her daughter?

Even though she was given the opportunity to disclose to a family counsellor appointed by the then Department of Community Services, Phoebe did not because her parents had said not. Phoebe believed that her parents must be right because they were, after all, her parents:

> *"I always thought that what they said was right you know, I never thought that it was wrong. So I just thought, "This is stupid. You're wasting my time. I don't want to talk to you anyway. Lets go home." You know, so...."*

No matter how wrong or hurtful the actions of her parents appeared to her, they were her parents and what they said and did was, therefore, right or justified. There was nothing to disclose, it was, after all, just parents chastising naughty children:

> *"It was kind of normal to us. You kind of just like "Here we go again!".... And if you ever said anything, oh boy! you'd cop it. (Older sister) always got her going... "*

At this point Phoebe believed that she and her siblings were actually to blame, and that if they behaved more reasonably there would be no problem:

> *"(I used to think that) it's still not good enough, I've got be better. (That comes from) I had to be when I was growing up. Dad would always say, "You don't do this right" and I always thought they were right, you know. "I'm not doing this right, I'm no good at this, I don't know how to do this. (Basically I'm not good enough, I'm a bad person or else I would be doing much better). Yeah, yeah. That's pretty much how it was."*

However, Phoebe is unaware that her mother's behaviour is "(a)mong features reported as especially frequent among abusive mothers" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 83). According to this intelligence, abusing mothers are "prone to periods of intense anxiety punctuated by outbursts of violent anger, they are said to be impulsive and immature" (Bowlby, p. 83-84). Not only are the experiences of these women typical of *family violence*, it becomes obvious that many of the thoughts and feelings experienced by these women are supported in the literature specifically discussing women experiencing spousal abuse. For example, Rowan

(1985) talks of the social construction of blame which is placed on the victim - by the community and by the victim themselves.

Phoebe accepted the myth that children are parental property. This myth was also accepted by others. This is not surprising as, according to a number of writers on domestic violence (among them Draper et al (1991), Seth-Purdie (1996), Yeatman (1980) and Roy (1977)), in law and within British and Australian social structures "the father had total control over the children of a marriage who were considered the property of the husband-father" (Draper et al., 1991, p. 7). Joy, for example, firmly believed that the family is private and outsiders are either unwilling or powerless to intervene. Even if outsiders did step in, they would not have the power to stop the abuse. The offending parent would not take any notice; parents have the moral and legal right to chastise their children as they see fit and it is no-one else's business (Draper et al., 1991; Roy, 1977).

Joy, Phoebe, Michelle and Caroline, as victims, had no trust in the motives of other people. As Phoebe put it *"Excuse the language but this world is fucked! You know."* They each displayed a degree of hostility and lack of trust towards anyone outside of their immediate environment. According to Besag (1994) and Olweus (1995), a negative emotional attitude on the part of the primary care-giver, over-punitive discipline, or lack of opportunity to explore and demonstrate feelings of anger and hurt as part of the developmental process, are likely to result in "these negative emotions... then be(ing) turned inward, or unleashed on others, in the form of aggressive behaviour" (Besag, 1994, p. 61). These participants believed that, in most instances, intervention would probably only cause more problems in the long run. Phoebe, in particular, did not trust that other people were really interested in

what was happening to her or were willing to help. She felt a great deal of hostility towards everyone with the exception of her immediate friends; and claims that other people told lies to protect themselves:

> *"You couldn't trust anybody their all gonna hurt you in the end and they all had motives for themselves. That's just the way it* was."

She believed that in order to avert negativity or violence towards themselves other people were prepared to deliberately hurt her. Other people would protect themselves before they would consider the needs of people like herself. Through their own actions and interactions with herself, her siblings and others, this is the message that Phoebe's parents gave to her. Parents model behaviour patterns to their children (Richie, 1981; Alvy, 1994; and Besag, 1994) which because of the insular nature of the family is not challenged by behaviour modelled by others (Besag, 1994). Further Richie and Richie (1981) claim that "children who are physically hit are more likely to be angry, anxious, afraid, devious, uncommunicative and aggressive towards others" (p. 54) and that:

> it is not only physical violence that produces aggressive delinquency but aggressive orientations in word and attitude as well as in the deed on the part of parents... Bandura explicitly points out that most criminally aggressive youngsters come from families where the parents may have no criminal background but used physical punishment... (Richie & Richie, 1981, p. 55).

According to Osofsky (1997), research has indicated that "(s)tressful life events were significant predictors of higher concurrent levels of aggression and predicted increases in aggressive behaviours" (Osofsky, 1997, p. 279).

Although both Joy and Michelle echoed the sentiment that telling someone else will not help them in anyway, they were less cynical of the world. These young women maintained that to tell someone else would not only not help them but would inflict their pain onto someone

else. They claim that other people already have enough pain of their own to deal with they do not need to have to deal with the pain of others as well:

> *I shut off from it a lot again. I just decided that I was gonna just push it aside and um not acknowledge it in any way. Which I was able to do for a little while, but.... Because I didn't want to hurt anybody. I could see that I had hurt my dad a lot and he... his response in being angry and wanting to go.... Like, he wanted to go straight to my grandfather and have it out with him. Doing that to my grandmother at her age would have been.... Like, at the time, was just like not appropriate. Yeah. It was like anybody that I talked to their response was such a .... It was like you were hurting them. It was like I was hurting them. And it was like, I just couldn't deal with that..."*

According to Phoebe:

> *"I don't feel that nobody else needs my pain and that's just the way I was brought up to feel."*

This was also discussed by Draper (1991) who asserts that "... pressure can be placed on women to dissuade them from seeing themselves as autonomous individuals with a right to self protection and to encourage them to view the assertion of their needs as destructive to others" (Draper et al., 1991, p. 82). Neither Joy, Michelle nor Stephanie believed that other people could do anything to help them, they could only empathise. So, by keeping the problem to themselves, the women were not only protecting themselves and their families they were also protecting other people from unnecessary pain. Neither Joy nor Michelle were prepared to deal with the pain of others by disclosing their abuse. They each claimed that it is less difficult for them to continuing dealing with or encountering the violence alone than to share the knowledge with others and then to have to deal with their hurt, anger and confusion as well. Protection of others includes keeping information from them. The reality of this myth of protecting others was confirmed for Michelle when she was forced to deal with the pain of her father and her mother when they became aware of her abuse. They did not handle the situation well making the situation even more difficult for her.

4.6.2 Consequences of disclosing

When Michelle's father was told that another family member had been abusing her, he was unable to focus on her needs. Although it was obvious to Michelle that he tried, his own personal anger took precedence. She felt further isolated and confused at his response:

> *"So I told my dad and he was....he was good. He believed me totally. But he didn't know how to deal with it. He immediately got extremely angry and just didn't know what to do with it. He held me for a little while and tried to reassure me a little bit, but then his anger just took over and he basically shut off after that.*
>
> *That made me feel really hurt. I just wanted... I wished he hadn't of let go. I wanted him to hold me forever. And then when he got angry he... It was just like "That's not what I need. I don't want you to get angry – I need you to be here for me".*
>
> *You just want people to say its okay, you know, and just be there for you. I dunno. Its really weird. And anyway, he basically didn't... After that time when I told him.. that was it.... it was never spoken of again. It was... It then became put in a little closet and we never speak about that...."*

The experience for Joy was totally different. Although she made attempts to disclose on a number of occasions, when she finally told her stepfather she felt freed of a burden. She no longer had the responsibility of maintaining the secret which by implication confirmed her own guilt; her own collusion in the actions of the perpetrator. She no longer had the responsibility of maintaining the secret that protected her mother from accusations of collusion in her abuse. She no longer had the responsibility of protecting the perpetrator. She was freed from responsibility for her own actions and those of all her family. She was freed from the responsibility of protecting herself (in which she considered herself to have failed miserably) and freed from the responsibility of protecting the rest of her family, in which she also failed. For Joy, this was the final act of relief and release. At last, she was

permitted to drop all the barriers she had placed around her and to be weak. She was permitted to just let go and let out all those feelings of sadness and grief; those feelings that had been pent up for so long. For Joy, this was the ultimate act of letting go and acknowledging the grief itself:

> *"When I was 14, I was actually stung by a swarm of bees and being allergic to them I ended up in hospital. At that time too it was only a couple of days after I had been, basically, flogged by my dad. (There were lots of visible signs). From the stomach down. The nurse said "Oh, how did you get these". And I just wouldn't say anything. Told her it was none of her business. She blamed my mum. She started ranting and raving at my mum. That's when I broke down. I didn't say anything to my mum, but I went home when she was at work and told my stepfather what had been going on. From that time on he began to protect me more. I think he went out and saw my dad. I don't actually know what happened. But knowing him he would have ..... He was angry, and he was in disbelief that of what dad had actually done. Because I showed my stepfather my bruises.*
>
> *I mean I felt good about saying it to someone because then after a while it stopped. But then 6 months later it started again and my stepfather did notice that happening because of changes in my behaviour. I left home because I couldn't, just couldn't deal with anything. Because even when my stepfather did find out this time he actually did tell mum and mum just broke down literally. She attempted suicide because she couldn't handle it. So that was another thing why I just couldn't say anything again.*
>
> *The reason why my friends ended up, I ended up telling them was because I had broken down at school one day and I wouldn't say why at first. And then I think I had sport or something and a friend noticed like, I don't know, bruises on my arm or something. I didn't say anything about that. Then it just got to the stage when I thought I might as well tell them, a couple of them, because they were close. They were in disbelief and couldn't believe it because my dad does come across as a person who was really nice. I do accept that. I've always appreciated him treating my friends nicely, though not the way he has treated me. So that was very hard for them. They just couldn't understand why I just didn't say anything for all those years to anyone. I just wanted to keep it a secret.*
>
> *It helped a little bit, talking to my friends. It was just good to get stuff off my chest that had been built up for so long. And I was allowed to cry and just to be an absolute mess and not be able to talk any sense and stuff like that. It was very accepted. I do regret saying some things because they didn't understand what it was like and this is why I've kept it for so long as well and never told friends."*

This act of disclosure on Joy's behalf meant much more than the relief of sharing her awful secret. It also meant the cessation of abuse, at least for a time. The perpetrator became aware that others were suspicious about was happening and for a period of time was careful regarding his actions towards her. Joy suspected that her father was also fearful of retribution by others as well as by herself. She also suspected that he was fearful that the true nature of his relationship with her would become publicly known. Joy thinks that her stepfather directly approached her father and accused him of being physically and or emotionally abusive towards her. She suspects that he also uttered warning threats against her father if he continued his behaviour.

When Joy had previously attempted to tell a primary school teacher what was happening, the teacher did not comprehend the extent of the truth as perceived by Joy. The teacher minimised what she was told and suggested that Joy's father's beatings were within a normal range of discipline:

> *"It wasn't normal stuff. And if it was a slap across the backside with a hand it wasn't like – it didn't feel normal, but it... I don't know it was kind of normal for me by the time....it was just really hard slaps across the backside. He used to use a piece of wire, fencing wire, across the backside and um - uh just throwing rocks and things like that when you'd done something wrong.... (When Joy was little) dad would grab me and basically just throw me, but I always used to come back and then eventually he just started hitting me across the face and the head. Even across the legs, backside. A lot of the time it was just huge slaps or punches in the stomach. But, mum said that I never used to cry. I never, never anything it was just you never felt any pain. I used to just stare him in the eyes and just take it... ."*

Joy's friends were incredulous at what she told them. They found it hard to understand why she had maintained her silence. They did not understand how she had borne the abuse for

so long and survived. They were unable to comprehend what her father's actions actually meant to Joy and why she just didn't walk away. Joy's friends had no terms of reference on which to base an understanding of her experience.

Previous attempts to tell one of her friends what was happening resulted in the family as individuals, particularly Joy's mother, or as a unit being *blamed* for the abuse. The people to whom she disclosed did not understand the full implications of the disclosure. Joy did not receive the support she needed to survive the exposure that came with the information being open knowledge:

> *"I did actually tell someone about that, I told a friend about that. And she actually said, "Your mother's a bad mother for keeping that from you for so many years". "*

For these reasons, as well as her experience when her father was told, Michelle chose to disclose a little at a time, to see how safe it was to expose the reality of her past and current life:

> *"... my first talk with someone was - I said exactly what had happened. I said I had been abused by my grandfather. I allowed them to ask a couple of questions, but I only gave.... I didn't give full detailed stuff and I waited for their response. I guess if they had of responded in a way that I wanted then I might have gone on and told them more, but no-one actually responded the way I wanted them to. So I never got to that point where I really talked about it. I talked around it a lot."*

Just sufficient information was given to gauge the reaction she would receive. If someone was prepared to listen to her without judgement without sermons and without advice being thrown at her, Michelle felt it was then safe to tell the whole story. If they were not, she would retreat to a safe and private position. On disclosing to a member of the church to which the she belonged, Michelle was prayed for:

"... she basically sat and prayed with me. And that was it I never heard.... she never came back to me on it. She just said to me "Look you know where I am if you want to talk some more about it" and that was it. I think they just didn't know what to do with it. They just didn't know how to handle it."

Michelle did not receive the physical or emotional support she craved. She felt believed; the abuse was not minimised and she was not attacked, but she did not receive the support she required. She wanted to be listened to. Michelle claims that this person was unable to deal with the implications of the disclosure herself, so she moved the responsibility on to her *'God'*:

"... And that the whole of thing of like they didn't know what to do with it and it was such a shock for them. It's like..... and it was like..... It's almost part of you that like that..... its like "Hey, you know, its not that big a deal, but I need you right now" you know. It's like... because you get to a point where... well I know that I did... It was like "well this shits happened and there's nothing I can do about it, but I've got to... " You know, you know, you've gotta move on from it and you just want people to acknowledge and support you, not to tell you what you should or shouldn't do or to get angry at someone and go running off and wanna, you know, bash em up or do whatever... Like its just kinda not what you need. You just want people to say its okay, you know, and just be there for you."

Other responses received by participants included the need to deal with their other parent's inability to cope. For Caroline, this meant not telling her mother everything that she had experienced. Caroline said that her mother is still unable to cope with anything she cannot control. To discover yet another incidence of abuse within her family home would demonstrate that she couldn't control everything:

"... it would absolutely hurt mum – she would be so upset about it. But um!... Um! I don't, I don't want to tell her. I don't want her to go through that again because that obviously hurt her a lot and she doesn't deal with it very well at all. So, I just, I don't think its worth... "

Joy's mother experienced ongoing and extreme stress in dealing with her own issues and experiences. This young woman's mother had demonstrated that she was not sufficiently emotionally stable to support Joy in the way she would have liked. Survival was Joy's mother's focus, and that could not be achieved if she must also take on board the issues faced by her daughter:

> *"... when (stepfather) did find out this time he actually did tell mum and mum just broke down literally. She attempted suicide because she couldn't handle it. So that was another thing why I just couldn't say anything again."*

The situation for Caroline's mother was not dissimilar. Caroline's mother, however, retreated into physical illness rather than mental illness.

Only one participant who had been sexually abused spoke of undergoing a medical examination. For this participant, the experience evoked a feeling of being *'undean'*. She sensed that there was a lack of understanding of her *'feelings'* as a young child needing to be examined in this way. She said that this particular doctor, and those associated with the incident, demonstrated a lack of sensitivity to the needs of the child undergoing a medical examination after sexual abuse:

> *"I can actually remember going to the psychologist and I can remember going to a doctor. And I remember I hated going to this doctor, I didn't like going there at all because he made me feel – as a child – unclean."*

4.6.3 Talking takes courage

Michelle spoke of the courage it takes for someone who is, or has been living, in a violent situation to share that information. She claims that it is more difficult for a person experiencing family violence to talk to someone who is not already aware of the occurrence and nature of the violence than it is for them to remain in the violent situation. To take the

step of talking to someone outside this environment about the abuse, with all its inherent and potential dangers, is the single bravest act that the victim of family violence or child abuse can enact. Further she claims that a lot of individual personal growth must take place for this to happen:

> *"I guess the thing that is hard is that you get caught up in the, um, fear of what will happen if I do tell someone. And as much as you do want to get it out you know what the consequences are gonna be as well. And often, I don't know, I found it hard initially to overcome that barrier before I eventually did talk to someone. So I guess if someone gets to the stage of where they actually are gonna talk to someone they've come a long way, just in that."*

4.7 Support

Participants sought and found support from a variety of sources. They ranged from other family members, extended family, friends (both male and female) of similar ages and older, boyfriends and the school chaplain. The main characteristic looked for when seeking support was that the person disclosed to would *listen* without offering judgement of advice:

> *"So you need people who are there for you. You don't need people who just say "Well this is right and this is what you should do", or "You shouldn't do that'. You just need people who are there to listen."*

> *"(Someone who) just floated around a bit to assess the situation. Like you need someone who doesn't question, I think. You need someone who can get to know you and you can get to know. Instead of every body else just thinking "Oh yeah! You're cool!". You know, when they know really that you're not. And they just, they just, you know, pretend that everything's okay. You need somebody.... Not to say "Oh I think you've got a problem". Like you have to be discrete, but not so discrete that they don't know what you are doing. Its easier to talk when they're open and you can't see shock on their face or you can't get an opinion from them just by looking at them, or whatever. You talk to them and you don't have to discuss it with them. And 'cos they don't know who you are..."*

> *"I did have a close friend... she actually helped me a lot. She just let me talk to her and she listened, she didn't offer any advice and I found that quite therapeutic whereas other people sort of offering their advice saying "Maybe you should tell your parents", but no, um... I just sort of told her and she*

just said "well I can't offer you any advice, but I'm always here for you if you need me."

"I needed to get it out, but I needed to leave it behind. I didn't wanna have to keep going over it and rehashing it."

Where support was available within the family of origin, it was generally another family member who understood the situation for the participant – possibly because they were also a victim, or because they were close enough to observe what was happening within the family. From the participants' perspective, this other family member asked for nothing in return and was able to demonstrate *unconditional love* for them. Because of her sister's previous experience with a particular aunt, Phoebe felt comfortable enough to go to this aunt to ask for help when, in desperation, she finally left home:

"I arrived here and I said to my aunty "Look, can I stay here?". And she said to my dad "(Phoebe's) here". "You get her home right now". And she said, "Now look, I am not going to drag her back home because she has just told me that she'd rather go and stay in the streets" I said, "If you drag me back I'll leave again". So she said that to my dad."

For some, support was found in close relationships with young men of around their own age, and in one instance an older man, with whom the participant was involved in a non-threatening, non-intimate relationship. For some, this relationship was purely platonic; for others it was of a more intimate nature:

"I also had a friend too who committed suicide at that time as well. I was very close to him. He was just a good support network, I mean he never knew what happened to me what was going on. But it was just someone that I could talk to and we used to actually go out to Denmark a lot because we both liked it and I used to go out and do a lot of drawings. I've always been into art. He just used to sit there and watch and stuff and yeah."

"It takes me a while to trust, to trust men I mean I did, last year I did have a very close male friend and he actually left to go and get married - everyone seems to be getting married - but he was actually a close friend of mine.... He was a lot older than me so.... But he was someone I felt comfortable talking to.... ... he was, he was friendly but he didn't sort of look at me in

the way that meant something sexual he was just sort of... like very friendly. Sort of like, more like a brother. And I think I looked at him in that way."

"But he (my boyfriend) was always there when I came over crying, you know. He's just, he's just there... Like he never forced me, ever."

Some participants admitted seeking out people who would offer pity. Others were less open, but it was suggested that they found solace in the pity of others – enabling them to wallow in self-pity without moving on – at least for a short period of time. This was found to be a limited form of support, but it served a purpose at the time it was used. On other occasions, the participant would disclose to someone that they did not fully trust, but who was willing to listen to whatever was said. Someone from whom the participant could receive attention and possibly pity; maybe even physical and emotional support, albeit short lived or inappropriate for long term healing. For Joy, in particular, this was not satisfactory as a form of support. Generally, these were the people who would jump to condemn her mother for her situation:

"... she actually said "You're mother's a bad mother for keeping that from you for so many years"."

Any attack on Joy's mother made her extremely angry:

""HOW DARE YOU?", I said. "You don't know my life you don't know what my mum and myself have been through"."

In Michelle's case, however, she found this to be a very useful support, at least for a period of time:

"... .so, in going to the church I knew that if I sat in what was going on at home and if I played on everything and kept on going on and on it was like I got back everything that I needed at the time."

4.7.1 What would have helped at the time

Each participant spoke of wanting to be assured that she was not to blame for what was or had been happening to her. They each craved reassurance that they were not responsible for the actions of the perpetrator or other significant adults in their lives. Experience had shown each of them that most people do not understand and cannot be trusted to take the appropriate steps to ensure that the abuse is stopped. On the occasions that a participant found the courage to disclose, it was painful to see others, with the power to do something to help them, ignorant of what to do, or for them to question the reality of the participant's statement:

> *"... I did tell a teacher when I was younger and nothing was ever done about it... . I would have been very young then. She didn't do anything! She, she just said 'Oh' type thing. And she sort of she just sort of said "Are you sure of what is happening? It's not just, you know, your dad giving you a smack for being naughty or something like that?". So that was it. It was just left at that. I don't think she really knew how to deal with it either. But I never liked her as a teacher. I don't know why I went to her I think that at that stage I had only just swapped schools and she was my grade teacher so. But she never had a heart, you know, like other teachers, either, that I've come across. She was very hard."*

Each of these women needed to be assured that the person they told would only use the information to ensure their safety. They wanted to know that this information would not be used to bring action against the perpetrator or to put the participant into a situation where she had to publicly lay claim of abuse against the perpetrator, without her permission. It was important also that participants could have confidence that the person disclosed to would not use the information to gossip to others in the community or to lay blame against the family in any way.

In retrospect, Joy, Michelle and Phoebe all spoke of wanting to have available to them a professional who would take control and ensure that they were safe. Someone they could hand over to and who would assure them that it would not be necessary to see the perpetrator, even in a legal situation, unless she chose otherwise. A professional person who would ensure that there would be no need to challenge the perpetrator or to stand as an accuser to be discredited or demeaned by them. Stephanie spoke of wanting to have someone available to her with the skills to assist her to unravel the confusion of her feelings and to come to terms with the reality of the situation:

> *"She let me just tell her what I thought and what my feelings were towards my family and stuff, because you know, for a while she just listened. So I can just tell all that I had to. And then she'd ask questions and stuff."*

4.7.2 Available formal support

What was available to these young women as they grew up, however, was not so helpful. Joy was offered the opportunity to disclose what was happening for her through open classroom discussion. She chose not to take this opportunity. The level of understanding displayed by her classmates as well as the teacher did not instil confidence in their ability to support her appropriately if she were to disclose. The manner in which the teacher dealt with the response of the class or its individual members did not promote confidence that this was a safe adult to whom she could disclose. Class discussion, therefore, was not a safe forum for disclosure and neither was the teacher sufficiently sensitive to the issues or extent of domestic violence or child abuse to be a safe individual with whom the participant could share her secret. For Joy, therefore, safety remained only if the secret was kept from her teacher and her classmates:

> *"I do regret saying some things because they didn't understand what it was like and this is why I've kept it for so long as well and never told friends. Because I mean in school we used to talk about things like domestic violence or sexual abuse or abortion or whatever in classes um for health studies and stuff. They just, just the way they talked about things they just had no idea and it was just "Well! What's the point?"."*

Neither Joy's teacher nor any of friends responded to the distress that she displayed during class discussion. A physical display of extreme stress and emotional tension was ignored, demonstrating to Joy that both the teacher and her classmates were insensitive to her feelings. Discussion around domestic violence and child abuse in the class was not helpful, it demonstrated to her that none of these people had any idea of or even the ability to conceptualise her situation. They were unable to see her stress. When finally she walked out of the class – her pain was still ignored!:

> *"It used to send my nerves on edge. My hands used to shake a lot. I used to even get tears coming into my eyes, but I used to be able to hold that back a bit. Sometimes - there was one time I actually walked out. Because I just couldn't take it. It was just too much..."*

It is in retrospect that participants have identified what would have helped them at the time, were it available and known to them. Joy has since studied Social Work and through this has had the opportunity to look at the power imbalance inherent not only in society but also in the patriarchal family. Her experience of teachers was that they reinforced many of the structural and social power imbalances in the course of their work in an educational setting. Sociology is not a consideration in their training and therefore it is unlikely to be included in their understanding of the social realities of their charges. Consequently, Joy considers that teachers should not be expected to address issues of domestic violence or child abuse with their students.

> *"I always thought the social worker has the skills to be able to deal with these things. Teachers don't have that. And I just thought their profession is totally different anyway."*

During the time of crisis, those participants who were aware of the existence of youth workers had no knowledge of what they did or how they could be contacted. Information about, and access to, youth services is limited. The one exception to this is the support that Phoebe received through the Chaplain at her school. Her boyfriend had heard others talking about what he could do and suggested that Phoebe should go to see him:

> *"... he helped me out heaps. I had no money. I had nothing.... Like the chaplain helped me get Austudy and all that sort of thing. I got the homeless rate. I had to go and have a horrible interview. Like they had a psychiatrist and she made me bawl my eyes out for hours. I just sat there crying for so long. Because she asked the most horrible questions. And so I felt really lost and I didn't know what to do. I knew I had moved out, but I didn't know if it was right, I didn't know if I'd done the right thing... .."*

4.8 Conclusion

In this, and the previous chapter, I have explored the experiences and the feelings of the women who took part in this study. Using their words, I have attempted an analysis of their *lived experience* as they described it. In doing so, I have included the effect, as they saw it, on themselves and on their family - the term *family* is used here to identify those whom participants identified as *family*, rather than those identified through biological connection.

The following chapter will provide discussion of these findings and will attempt to provide meaning to the experience so described.

Chapter 5: Literature Review

Acknowledging that there is a plethora of literature which explores various aspects of family violence, I have attempted to focus on literature which either reinforces or provides some form of explanation for the findings of this study as they relate to the experiences of the young women involved.

This literature has been divided into four main areas for discussion. These are *Violence in the Family*, *Nurture or Nature*, *Community and family violence and childhood development*, and *Youth Work and school*.

5.1 Violence in the Family

As stated, there is an abundance of literature that discusses family violence. Much of this literature uses a feminist perspective to discuss the influences of patriarchy on the family and on hegemonic acceptance of the misuse of power, particularly within the family. Using *myth* as the focus, the work of a number of these writers will be explored in the next section. The following section will explore research undertaken in Australia (Perth and Melbourne) together with British research. The final section under this heading will look at papers presented at two separate National Domestic Violence Conferences.

5.1.1 Family Violence and Patriarchy

A number of writers (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Mugford, 1989; Coleman, 1980; Hopkins, 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996; Draper, 1991), have sought to explore the various myths associated with *domestic* or *family violence*. Among those myths is that domestic violence is a private matter - a common public perception according to Mugford (1989). Violence in the home is something that most people neither want to talk nor to think about (Coleman, 1980; Mugford, 1989). "The domestic sphere has tended to be regarded as a private area - not only outside public concern, but also outside the concerns of sociologists" (Abbott & Wallace, 1990, p. 74). The Australian public, however, pays highly on an annual basis for the financial and social costs associated with domestic violence. Vast sums are being spent in an attempt to address the effects of this violence (Mugford, 1989; Seth-Purdie, 1996).

Hopkins and McGregor (1991) identified a connection between the rise of the feminist movement and development of awareness of the issue of domestic violence. They link *second wave* feminism, which began during the late 1960's and early 1970's, to the *new left* political movement of the same period. The *new left* gave political emphasis to *oppression*, and it is at this time that the women associated with this movement began to recognise the connection between the roles they had *naturally* assumed to the oppressive situations which were being fought against in places like Vietnam and Czechoslovakia. "(N)ew left men who had been so concerned about the fate of the Vietnamese had been happily dominating, denigrating, and exploiting new left women and those women had finally had enough" (Curthoys, 1984 cited in Hopkins & McGregor, p. 2).

Increased opportunities for women to gain education and therefore employment in the professions or technical positions meant that more and more women were continuing to maintain paid employment after marriage. A greater number of middle class women were identifying their disadvantage as being "associated with gender and not with class" (Hopkins & McGregor, 1991, p. 3). From an initial analogy to *racism*, the women's movement took *sexism* to broader conceptual frameworks through *consciousness raising*. Women, initially, were encouraged to examine "personal experience...and [to] raise...awareness of the collective nature of privately experienced pain" (Sawer and Simms, 1984 cited in Hopkins & McGregor, p. 8). It is at this point that domestic violence began to be recognised and accepted as another form of patriarchal oppression of women. The discrimination against and oppression of women was acknowledged as being within the private sphere as well as public. Perhaps, for women, private oppression was more controlling than the previously acknowledged institutional form that was originally confronted by feminism. Community attitudes are changing, according to Seth-Purdie (1996), and there is greater awareness of violence in the home. Hopkins and McGregor identify public discussion during the late 1970s around the question of rape within marriage as the catalyst for domestic violence becoming visible as an issue for both men and women.

Family violence remains a considerable social concern. Seth-Purdie (1996) suggests that, although there are no formal figures available in Australia, the problem here is comparable to Canada and the USA where it is indicated that "5% of men and 22% of women may experience spouse abuse each year" (p. 138). Seth-Purdie further proposes that "[o]fficially recorded rates, which rely on victim reports, will almost certainly be underestimates... " (p. 145). The cost to the community of such abuse is huge (Mugford, 1989; Blanchard 1992)

with the monetary costs in NSW alone, estimated at $1.5 billion annually. The social costs, "... the costs of disturbed child and adolescent behaviour, and the ultimate production of a new generation of victims and abusers" (Seth-Purdie, p. 138), are even greater.

According to Draper, Kirkby, Nolan, Orr, Poole, Roxburg and Shalit (1991)

> The notion of the nuclear family once espoused by some sociologists as the normative family form operates as a powerful ideology of family life, but is historically and class specific. The model of the male breadwinner and dependent wife no longer describes Australian family life.
>
> The idea of the family as private operates to deny women full access to citizenship, and sanctions violence towards women within its walls. As a "haven in a heartless world", it is inhabited by men, and provided by women's labour.
>
> Family violence occurs in a context of unequal power relationships within the family, ideas about male authority over the family, women's unequal access to economic security, and the treatment of family violence as a private concern rather than a public, political issue. (Draper et al, 1991, p. 30).

Mugford (1989) also discusses the nature of the role that *family* plays in our society; claiming that "the family has a multi-faceted nature. It is an agency of social control as well as an agency of social support, and has negative as well as positive features" (Mugford, p. 1). Abbott and Wallace (1990) point out that relationships within the family have not been included in traditional sociological analysis of the family. Rather, this sociological analysis has tended to focus on the "relationships between family and society" (p. 74). What feminist theory has attempted to do is to examine how relationships within the family "both structure and are structured by external social, economic, and power relationships" (Abbott & Wallace, p. 74). Relationships within the family, according to Mugford, are likely to be intense and, according to western culture, private. Draper et al., (1991) give an historical and class specific overview of the construction of the concept of *family* as it is traditionally

accepted in Australia, and in most other western societies. The concept of the *nudear family*, seen to be "the norm of family life (and) from which other family forms are seen to deviate" (Draper et al., 1991, p 31) was originally introduced by Talcott Parson (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Draper et al., 1991). Parsons described this family structure as comprising "the husband-father as the financial support of the family, and the wife-mother engaged in household activity" (Draper et al, 1991, p. 31). Within this patriarchal arrangement the family is seen to be "a refuge from the public world of capitalism, but (according to Draper et al) this 'haven in a heartless world' is inhabited by men, and provided by women's unpaid labour" (p. 31). Gittins (1993) also identifies that women's labour and *sexual favours* in the home are both free, and often coercively obtained. Based on this assumption of "male authority over family life, coupled with women's unequal access to economic security" (Draper et al., p. 31) the nuclear family provides an ideal environment for some men to demonstrate their masculinity in private (Draper et al., 1991; Hopkins & McGregor, 1991) – and so domestic violence occurs. Explanations of family violence are varied, but Seth-Purdie (1996) suggests that:

> In particular, aggressive, non-caring models of masculinity combined with highly submissive models of femineity, may be implicated in producing family violence in our society. Childhood exposure to family violence, as a victim of abuse or a witness of violence between parents, has emerged as one of the most important predictors of adult involvement in family violence, as victim or perpetrator. (p. 138).

The myth of the nuclear family is based in an historical context, which was fleeting and brief and based upon the aspirations of middle-class American society (Draper et al., 1991), or on "the bourgeois family of nineteenth-century Europe" (Gittins, 1993, p. 56). The nuclear family is accepted as being the norm for Australian society across social strata; it is promoted

as a demonstration of the ability of the male to successfully provide for his family and maintain patriarchal control (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Draper et al., 1991; Gittins, 1993). This concept allows for the separation of the private and public spheres in capitalist production. However, "... in reality the home is not a refuge for women but rather a gendered space subject to the inequalities in power which that implies" (Draper et al., p. 33). The myth of the nuclear family was even less realistic for working class families in which, even after the Harvester Judgement of 1907, women and children were required to continue to contribute towards the household income (Draper et al, 1991; Gittins, 1993). For the working class, then as today, "family income often came from several sources" (Draper et al., p. 32) and "(t)ry as they might... the middle classes could not escape the fact that the vast majority of working-class children and women had to work in order to survive" (Gittins, 1993, p. 50).

What the ideology that surrounds the construction of the concept of the *nuclear family* does, however, is to provide an environment in which the unequal relationships within the family are able to be cultivated. The private nature of the home also provides protection for its patriarchal ruler to control his wife and children as seen fit:

> Men for centuries were legally entitled to use violence on both wives and children; this was seen as an essential support to their patriarchal authority. Despite recent legislation to protect women and children from family violence, the agencies of the law remain highly reluctant to 'interfere' or to prosecute cases of family violence or rape of wives or children. To do so is seen as an infringement of 'privacy', but is better understood as a challenge to the patriarchal authority invested in the notion of fatherhood enshrined in the ideology of the family. Relations of power and authority between the sexes aand (sic) between adults and children permeate, and permeated, society at all levels from the simplest household to more complex social and political institutions. (Gittins, 1993, p. 37).

The family, as it is acknowledged today, developed at the same time as did the capitalist economy:

> Commentators on the early days of industrial capitalism chronicled the misery, poverty and degradation which ensued for many. Max Weber wrote despairingly of the impersonality of modern organisation. Kafka in his novel *The Trial* described a world of impersonal alienation... .In the midst of this world of impersonality, disenchantment and change, the family is supposed to be its antithesis: a place of personal relationships, emotion, comfort and security... (Draper et al., 1991, p. 35).

The difference between what home means to women and what it means to men is quite dramatic. For men it is seen to be a haven or refuge in an alienating world. For women, home is a place of work and, for some women:

> ... a place of terror. The assumption of household privacy creates a space for some men to use violence to intimidate their wives systematically in what is regarded as a purely private affair. Scutt in her research finds support for the proposition that violence towards women is associated with traditional expectations held of women. Much of the violence she researched revolved around house-keeping, cooking meals and child care.[23] Segal sees violence towards women occurring in a culture which constructs masculinity around ideas of dominance, social power and control over others, and then denies to some men any access to such prerogatives - except in the refuge of home.[24]" (Draper et al., 1991, p. 39. Footnote references from original removed).

A number of feminist writers (Millet, 1970; French, 1985; Walby, 1990; Abbott, 1990; Draper et al., 1991; and Gittins, 1993) discuss the concept of patriarchy and its associated unequal possession of power. Draper et al., claim that "feminist writers have argued that the family is a patriarchal institution" (p. 39). Further, feminist writers have argued that:

> A central theme running through all ideologies of gender, age groups and families in western society, and imbued in the concept of patriarchy, is the notion of dependence. The *paterfamilias* in the feudal world, the lord of the manor, was head of an economic, political, social and religious unit which was also a form of extended household. (Gittins, p. 37).

Millet supports this claim stating that:

> The Confucian prescription that the relationship between ruler and subject is parallel to that of father and children points to the essentially feudal character of the patriarchal family (and conversely, the familial character of feudalism) even in modern democracies.
>
> Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property. (p. 33).

These writers claim that the concept of patriarchal power is based on the notion of *authority* as a metaphor for *power* (Draper et al., 1991, p. 39). *Patriarchy* is defined by Walby (1990, p. 20) "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". On the other hand, French maintains that men are in reality powerless against the whims of government, business and industry, but are expected to be *in control* of their own lives. Gittins, claims that:

> Implicit in the concept of the western family, then, is the notion of male - specifically, paternal - dominance over others. Thus by definition the family has been an unequal institution premised on paternal authority and power. Inherent in this definition is the notion of the husband/father as a patriarch, literally 'the father and ruler of a family or tribe'.[1] Patriarchy is thus both a gender and an age relationship, based on power, and is essential in understanding families. (p. 35. Footnote references removed from original).

The construction of family as an institution wherein it is legitimate for the husband/father to maintain his authority and control through the use of power and physical violence has come about through an interplay of feudalism and the development of the capitalist economy. Further, the legitimacy of this arrangement has found a place in law, which, although no longer sanctioned, is used to legitimise violence against women and children in the home. "While ostensibly condemning rape, child sexual abuse and wife beating, the practice of the state is to condone such violence except in exceptional and extreme circumstances" (Walby, 1990, p. 142).

According to Draper et al (1991), modern patriarchy is defined through liberal democratic ideology. The marriage contract, the free contract being the basis for society defined through this ideology, does not "ensure the economic autonomy of its parties" (Draper et al., p. 40). Come to that, the marriage contract ensures only the slavery of women within it. Apparently "Mary Astill at the beginning of the period of liberal democracy asked why, 'if all men were born free, all women were slaves'" (Draper et al., p. 40):

> Whatever the individual circumstances of a woman or family 'women, children and servants were always a separate category. They never had the same legal, educational, religious, political or property rights as men. They were always expected to provide services for men' (Lown, 1983a, p. 35). (Gittins, 1993, p. 38).

Draper et al (1991) discuss the issue of economic dependence of women within the family and the impact this has on the ability of women to leave violent relationships, claiming that:

> This economic dependence in marriage is contributed to by the treatment of women's domestic work as unproductive, and limitations on women's workforce participation by such factors as lack of childcare, lower wages for women's occupations and restricted training opportunities. (p. 41).

Draper et al (1991) further claim that the effect of changes in economic functions has had a greater impact on the construction of the modern family than has kinship. The description of the modern nuclear family has been based on what effectually is a middle class ideal. "The ideology of the family, as we have come to know it, was both historically specific and class specific" (Gittins, 1993, p. 32). Not only was this ideal not relevant to the emerging working class of the late 19th century, nor was it relevant to the majority of the middle class at that time. The same continues to be true (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Draper et al., 1991). But, as Draper identifies, it is argued:

> ... that this particular ideal of family life, which she (Reiger) typifies as the bourgeois family, has become the dominant family ideal, imposed by the bourgeoisie on both the working class and the old landed aristocracy... .this argument draws on the ideas... that the modern family represents a particular patterning of family relationships espoused by the bourgeoisie and connected to their developing economic and social dominance over the 19th and 20th century, linked to the rise of industrial and finance capitalism. (p. 44).

A large proportion of women with children are now employed in the public sphere, and increasingly it is becoming necessary for women to work outside the home in order to maintain the household income. Women continue to be the main contributors of work within the household, as well. Unlike today, at the turn of the twentieth century the contribution of women to the home through household duties as well as paid work was officially recognised. "It was Coghlan in 1890 who first introduced a new classification which divided the population into breadwinners and dependants[58]" (Draper, 1991, p. 46. Footnote references removed from original). From this newly introduced concept of *dependents* together with the emergence of the bourgeois family "the 'housewife' as we know it was... socially constructed" (p. 47). Draper et al., argue that *family* as it is known in Australia constitutes a number of forms and the *traditional* nuclear family identified by Parsons and headed by a male *breadwinner* is no longer representative. "(I)ndeed, it has been argued that the family is little more than an ideology that influences and informs the ways in which people interact and co-reside with one another" (Gittins, 1993, p. 155).

Arguing that the concept of the nuclear family is a social construct based on the idea of patriarchal power, Draper et al (1991), also assert that this power is in reality not available to all men – save in the home (French, 1985; Draper et al, 1991). Therefore, for these men, violence can become:

> ... a means of gaining control in situations where they are losing control, especially when the external world cannot be controlled. In a painful irony, perpetrators mimic a masculine stereotype of control and authority, precisely in circumstances where they don't experience their masculinity as power. (Draper, p. 52).

According to Mugford (1989), at a government and policy level domestic violence has become an issue of major concern with a great deal of money from the public purse being spent to support victims and punish or rehabilitate perpetrators. In 1986, a public education campaign was launched. At the same time, identifying some fairly large gaps in knowledge associated with various aspects of violence in the family (e.g. police perceptions), research was undertaken to fill these gaps.

The results of these studies proved interesting, with community attitudes markedly not endorsing such things as "denial of money and... verbal abuse as forms of domestic violence" (Mugford, 1989, p. 2). It appears therefore that, at that time, the community generally believed that violence in the home must be of a physical nature in order to be classified as *domestic violence*. Although Draper et al (1996) claims that there have been advances in community attitudes towards domestic violence, they do not indicate the extent to which awareness of what constitutes *family violence* has been raised. Seth-Purdie (1996) examines the definitions of *domestic violence* used throughout Australia and claims that the "different definitions and interpretations in use depend on the background and perspective of the user" (p. 142). Here she highlights the deleteriousness of meaning associated with the term in various studies, health and and legal environments. This is reflected in a further study reviewed by Mugford. Community attitudes identified in the Australian study are, according to Mugford, of concern if the aim is to prevent family violence. Studies cited by

Mugford suggest that a large proportion of the community condone violence in some context and under some situations. It is claimed that, predominantly, neighbours would not intervene if they believed that the woman next door was being beaten. Women frequently find that:

> The community at large (often including the professionals in helping agencies) do not understand or sympathise with victims. For example, women who are victims often feel that women who are should leave violent situations, and they cannot understand why victims continue to 'put up with it'. Men tend to be more sympathetic towards victims than do other women, though this is more because of a felt need to give women chivalrous protection than it is because of a realistic understanding of the victim's circumstances. (Mugford, p. 5).

The second study attempted to identify "the views of victims and of professionals working with victims on what they considered Domestic Violence to be" (Mugford, 1989, p. 2). It was found that although *physical violence* was initially identified, this group also identified "other less obvious but equally damaging forms of violence" (Mugford, p. 2). On the one hand, she asserts that these two studies highlight the difference in perception between those with first hand knowledge (including service providers) of domestic violence and the general community. On the other hand, she maintains that service providers tend to adopt typical community attitudes towards domestic violence resulting in an unsympathetic response to requests for assistance. The victims themselves are likely to be blamed for the violence by some professionals. She calls for training for service providers, as well as the police, judges and court officials, in order to respond appropriately to the needs of the victim. The only services which women can confidently approach for support have been refuges. These however, do not necessarily meet the needs presented by the cultural diversity of Australian women (Mugford, p. 7).

Although domestic violence research and literature generally is in agreement that violence in the home is most frequently carried out by men, there are also American studies which claim that women are equally as violent in the home. Mugford (1989) raises concern here that this information may be taken out of context and:

> ... used to justify violence by men. Nonetheless, these two studies and the similar results of ten other studies cited by the authors [Straus and Gelles] indicate that this aspect of violence within the home cannot be ignored. More research is needed on the dynamics of violence within spousal and other family relationships. (p. 2).

Mugford (1989) describes some of the theoretical explanations as to why domestic violence occurs and also lists the causes provided by respondents to the Australian community perspective study. She claims that "[w]hatever the level of analysis, what emerges is distressing evidence that Domestic Violence is neither haphazard nor a deviant activity, but one which is supported if not positively sanctioned through our culture" (Mugford, p. 3):

> Thus patriarchal values arise in, and are inculcated in, families yet they are not specific to families. They permeate and influence society at all levels: political, economic, ideological and familial. Defined earlier in religious terms, then in scientific and medical terms, the form they have taken has been variable, but the essence lies in a concept of a social order premised on a male, but particularly paternal, authority which by definition presupposes the dependence and service of women, children and other 'inferiors'. At the root of the concept are notions of inequality, subordination and dependence. (Gittins, 1993, p. 58).

In the interpretations used to define violence in the home there is an attempt, on occasions, to "distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of force" and the suggestion, therefore, that domestic violence can be determined by intent (Seth-Purdie, 1996, p. 143). Other uses of the term have attempted to take into consideration "the overall impact of violent behaviour in the family" (Seth-Purdie, p. 143).

In offering a framework with which to look at the issue, Seth-Purdie (1996) suggests that it is necessary to take into consideration not only the cultural acceptance of patriarchal relations right across Australia, but to also look at the changing power relations within Australian families. It is these "(p)ower relationships between men and women [that] cut across every aspect of social existence, and, being located historically, are subject to change" (Gittins, 1993, p. 36). She offers, as clarification between the terms *violence* and *abuse*, these simple definitions:

> ... unless otherwise indicated, 'violence' will be used to refer to the actual or threatened use of physical force, including simple assault, aggravated assault, sexual assault and rape. 'Abuse' will be used to refer to maltreatment which may include violence. (Seth-Purdie, p. 145).

Critiques of the feminist approach to domestic violence claim that research has approached the topic with an anti-male bias. Seth-Purdie (1996), maintains that we need to "approach both research and criticisms with a healthy degree of scepticism" (p. 145). In an attempt to look at some of the explanations of *family violence*, she outlines some of the more popular approaches. These include:

- epidemiology, in which *risk factors* are identified and strategies developed to prevent or treat the situation;
- individual pathology which "focuses on abnormal traits of the violent offender or abuse, and often of the victim" (Seth-Purdie, p. 158);
- neurological/biochemical disorders, "which may increase the individual's susceptibility to antisocial influences" (Seth-Purdie, p. 159); and
- gender, power and family violence which is the political model adopted by feminists and which "relates abuse of women and children by men to a social

find difficulties in "intimate relationships, where they may experience a conflict between the need for intimacy and the need for control" (Seth-Purdie, p. 163). Violence between men

and women, therefore, is different with women using violence as an expression of "pent up anger" (Seth-Purdie, p. 163) and men using it for control and domination. The problem is further exacerbated as socialisation leaves neither gender appropriately equipped to negotiate the "stress and conflict of intimate relationships" (Seth-Purdie, p. 164).

> Patriarchal ideology is embedded in our socio-economic and political institutions, indeed, in the very language we use, and as such encourages, cajoles and pressurises people to follow certain paths. Most of these are presented and defined in terms of 'the family', and the family is in turn seen as the bulwark of our culture. The pressures of patriarchal ideology are acted out – and reacted against – in our inter-personal relationships, in marriage and non-marriage, in love and hate, having children and not having children. In short, much of our social behaviour occurs in, and is judged on the basis of, the ideology of 'the family'. (Gittins, 1993, p. 72).

It is a lack of social and emotional resources in dealing with the power relationships in the family which, according to Seth-Purdie, precipitate the use of violence.

Children in this society are socialised into an acceptance of violence – it is culturally legitimised. Australian society is based on the premise that "(c)hildren had to be taught to accept authority unquestioningly, and to do so it was believed that physical punishment was essential" (Gittins, 1993, p. 43). In societies, such as "Sweden, where physical punishment is prohibited, child abuse is relatively uncommon. Legal norms both express and reinforce social values. Role modelling of violent exchanges between parents is a further important influence" (Seth-Purdie, 1996, p. 166). American studies, which look at both legitimate forms of violence, or authority, and criminal violence, have identified a correlation between the two. Where violence is legitimated in the home by physical punishment of children and where less legitimate forms of violence such as police brutality are accepted it is more likely that violent crime will be commonplace (Baron & Straus, cited in Seth-Purdie, 1996). This includes violence in the home.

In a study which looked at "90 small scale peasant societies" (Seth-Purdie, 1996, p. 165), it was discovered that those in which there was immediate community support for victims were the ones in which there were least incidence of *family violence*. The veil of privacy of the family, therefore, is seen to be one of the major contributing factors to family violence within Australian culture. English Common Law, which gave men the right to *chastise* their wife and children, is seen primarily as the problem. Both Seth-Purdie (p. 141) and Mugford (1989, p. 7), refer to Blackstone's codification of common law 'according to the rule of thumb', in 1768. Mugford (p. 7) also claims that in "the Middle Ages women were burned at the stake for 'scolding and nagging'". The persecution of *'witches'*, involved in such practices as midwifery and medicine, is discussed by Gittins (1993). Seth-Purdie, however, adds that

> In an 1884 decision the Supreme Court of Carolina rejected the notion that a husband had a right to chastise his wife under any circumstances, but then added:
>
> > If no permanent injury has been inflicted, nor malice nor cruelty, nor dangerous violence shown by the husband, it is better to draw the curtain, shut out the public gaze, and leave the parties to forgive and forget."
>
> (p. 141).

Over time, laws associated with the rights of women in particular and the individual in general have changed offering greater protection of the individual. Gittens, however, suggests that "(c)lose examination of the[se] laws reveals that they have basically not been to protect the woman, but to protect her as the *property* of her father husband" (Gittins, p. 52). On the other hand, Seth-Purdie maintains that the:

> ... strengthening commitment to individual rights which has arisen along with the women's movement over the last generation has significant implications for the

> domestic/public distinction. Some behaviour previously considered private or domestic is no longer so. (p. 142).

These authors agree (Mugford, 1989; Draper et al, 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996) that the extent of the problem is neither clear nor conclusive; nor is the identification of domestic violence as a criminal act universally accepted. According to Mugford, the evidence of a number of studies (including the 1988 Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force 'phone-in') suggests that "the behaviour [violence in the home] is widespread, almost to the point of being normal" (p. 3). Further, Mugford refers to police reporting figures for NSW between 1968 and 1987 which indicate that a large percentage of crimes of violence against the person take place within the home. What is not measured in any way is the occurrence of psychological or sexual abuse. Mugford, claims that although research indicates that domestic violence is found across social and cultural boundaries and strata, there is no indication of how it is distributed. She discusses a 1980 study conducted by Straus et al identifying some now commonly accepted social and economic stressors that may impinge on the propensity to violence together with identification that "the uneducated were not the most violent" (Mugford, p.3).

For the most part, women in a violent relationship don't fight back, but they do frequently stay in the relationship (Mugford, 1989). According to Seth-Purdie (1996), the Duluth Model of Intervention approaches violence in the home as a deliberate and controlled act. She describes the various forms that family violence may take and claims that women remain in an abusive environment for a variety of reasons. Among these are fear of the perpetrator, fear for children and limited financial and physical supports if she leaves (Seth-Purdie,

Mugford). Seth-Purdie also discusses the more recently highlighted and accepted incidence of "partner homicides committed by women... (following) long periods of abuse" (p. 169). Following the work of American feminists on the *battered woman syndrome*:

> Campbell's work on the different paths to aggression typically taken by men and women..., and the abundant evidence that acts of 'domestic violence' against women offenders by their victims, have been trivialised or ignored by the legal system, support the basic premise behind the battered woman syndrome... .Moreover, the much higher rate of spousal homicide by men, in many cases notwithstanding attempts by their wives to obtain legal protection, indicates that many women would be realistic to assess the death of an abusive partner as the only hope of survival for themselves or their children. (Seth-Purdie, p. 169-170).

Mugford (1989) asserts that little is known about the perpetrator of violence. What is known, however, suggests that men who are violent "attempt to control others in the only place where they have the full confidence to do so - in the family home - and in the only way that they can rely on - through superior physical strength" (Mugford, p. 5). Although acknowledging that violence is wrong, perpetrators tend to justify or to rationalise their behaviour, placing the blame elsewhere - frequently on the victim (Hopkins & McGregor, 1991; Mugford, 1989). "The wife is blamed, or a hard day at work, or alcohol, or the fact that their father was the same" (Mugford, p. 5).

Involvement in the legal system for many women who are victims of family violence, according to Seth-Purdie (1996), necessitates re-victimisation "by engaging the criminal process" (p. 170). Initially, the practice of arresting offenders which was adopted in America in the 1980's, was highly successful. It was discovered later, however, that this practice was not a suitable deterrent for all offenders. For this group "roughly characterised as an unemployed underclass, arrest can promote defiance rather than shame, and result in

increased, not decreased, violence" (Seth-Purdie, p. 171). The proposed alternative to arrest and imprisonment is a form of community control with prison as the last resort.

Seth-Purdie (1996), asserts that family violence is an inherent and pervasive part of Australian culture; claiming that acceptance of violence as legitimate within Australian legal and social systems ensures that children are exposed to violence in the home, in school, in the media and often within the legal system. She summarises:

> Some of the common themes which emerge from the empirical research and the theoretical analysis... as follows:
>
> - violence between family members results from an interplay of personal, family and socio-cultural factors
> - in societies similar to ours, there are measurable risk factors associated with particular forms of family violence; as the number of risk factors present in a family increases, so does the likelihood of violence
> - one of the most important risk factors is the child's experience of violence, as parental punishment or abuse, or as a characteristic of the relationship between parents
> - the socio-cultural identification of masculinity with competitiveness and aggression and of femininity with submissiveness, is positively associated with family violence
> - traditions of cooperative dispute resolution and equality between the sexes are associated with low levels of family violence
> - the social isolation of the nuclear family removes an important restraint on the development of highly abusive relationships
> - social institutions, including hospitals and the legal system, provide important and as yet under-utilised mechanisms for detection of abuse and the initiation of intervention strategies.
>
> (p. 171-172).

Mugford (1989), Draper (1991) and Seth-Purdie (1996), agree that family violence is an insidious part of Australian society which could be prevented through legal, cultural and societal changes.

5.1.2 Exploration of causes and experience

In an attempt to explore what various researchers have identified as possible *causes,* as well as the *experience* of violence, this section will examine the works of researchers in Britain, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1995); in Melbourne, Goddard and Hiller (1993); and in Perth, Allbrook (1992), Blanchard, Molloy and Brown (1992), and Walshe (1995).

Over the last decade, Britain, as in Australia, has undergone heightened media interest and "apparent public concern" (Calouste-Gulbenkian, 1995, p.1) around violence involving children. An interest has also emerged as to why young people are demonstrating greater levels of violence. The Commission on Children and Violence was 'conceived' during this time by the Gulbenkian Foundation. Public outrage and concern aroused by the death of 2 year old James Bulger at the hands of two 10 year old boys evoked public fears around violence to and by children; these fears, generally, are not necessarily realistic. The aims of the Commission have been to gather sufficient information from existing knowledge to "make recommendations for reducing all forms of interpersonal violence involving children" (Calouste-Gulbenkian, p. 1).

This study covers a vast range of areas from possible causes of violence by children to different forms of violence to children and their possible effects on the child. It also looks

at current policies (national - UK, and international) which go a long way towards supporting violence prevention. The topics are dealt with, in accordance with the Commission's aim, from a perspective that addresses possible solutions to the problem of inter-generational violence. The issue of children and violence is covered comprehensively identifying the following factors as contributing in some way to children being violent:

- genetics;
- biology;
- environment or acquired biological factors;
- familial/parental influence;
- societal norms;
- inequality and discrimination;
- school and peers;
- violence as a result of mental illness;
- substance abuse;
- and violent images.

Myths regarding these factors and the danger of lack of understanding and partial knowledge are also explored. Genetics as a contributor to violent behaviour and the dangers inherent in an unquestioned acceptance of this proposition are discussed. Although the argument is raised that the acceptance of genetics as a factor in violent behaviour could lead to the introduction of eugenic policies, it is also highlighted, that such eugenic policies are not necessarily dependent:

> ... on a belief in genetic causes. Official discouragement of poor people from having children is a policy that has been pursued regardless of beliefs about the cause of poverty. So called 'ethnic cleansing' currently undertaken in Central Europe does not pretend to have a genetic rationale. (Calouste-Gulbenkian, 1995, p. 38).

The Nazis, in mid-twentieth century Germany, for example, used "(m)any of the nineteenth-century scientific and philosophical debates... to justify their policies... .[and to]... frantic[ally] attempt to drive out disorder and pollution and to embrace hierarchical authority based on patriarchal values" (Gittins, 1993, p. 58). The Foundation points out that "discrimination, social deprivation and access to firearms" (Calouste-Gulbenkian, p. 39) have greater influence on the high preponderance to violence among black males aged 15 to 24 in north America than racially determined genetic differences.

The possibility of genetics contributing to violent behaviour is not totally dismissed, however. Neither is biology totally dismissed as a causative factor. What is argued here is that social and familial factors are more likely to be influential, a notion which is supported by much of the literature (Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Blanchard et al, 1992; Allbrook, 1992; Bowlby, 1988; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; Sims & Hutchins, 1999; Shore, 1997; Zeanah, 1997; Osofsky, 1997; Garbarino, 1985; Perry, 1997; Jenkins & Bell, 1997). In support of this submission, the study quotes the Australian National Committee on Violence:

> Although it appears that a disproportionate number of violent offenders may suffer some sort of brain dysfunction...such an association is likely to be indirect rather than direct: for example, brain dysfunction may adversely affect a person's intelligence, learning ability, impulse control, one's perception of the world, or ability to cope with frustrating events. It seems aggressive behaviour is mediated by psychological processes and environmental factors. These provide the link between neurological and social explanations. (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 43).

It is suggested, therefore, that the difference in aggression between male and female children correlates more closely to environment and learnt social role behaviour than to biological determination (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 41-42). The connections between

genetics, biology and social environment are acknowledged; as is the claim of the American Psychological Association's Commission "that a model stressing the interaction of these factors will most accurately describe the development and continuity of aggressive and violent behaviour patterns" (quoted in Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 44). This is supported by evidence provided by Shore (1997).

The study raises a particular problem that it is important to be aware of and address when dealing with any issue that has a commonly held, but undeveloped definition. The definition of *violence* used for this study is not clear or complete. Nor are its causes; although these are frequently linked in common mythology to the diagnosis of mental illness and mental disorder (Bloom, 1995; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995). The working definition of violence used by the Commission is "behaviour by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 4). This does not adequately define violence in terms of abuse of power; nor does it highlight the different forms of violence commonly accepted as societal norms. It does not identify institutional violence, nor the subtle forms of violence which occur on a daily basis. Moreover, the report focuses discussion on physical violence and abuse, which could, in itself, be misleading. If other, more covert, aspects of violence (such as negative reinforcers likely to cause psychological harm) are included in the discussion, the report covers constructively possible causes of the transmission of violence over generations. As a basis for dealing with the problems associated with children and violence, the "[c]hecklist [provided] for working towards a non-violent society" (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, p. 241) is a useful tool.

Working with social workers on research carried out at the Child Protection Unit at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, Goddard and Hiller (1993) attempted to:

> ... place child sexual abuse clearly within the context of family violence in general. It does so by investigating certain characteristics of child abuse and victims' families from the point of view of both the type of abuse suffered and the presence or absence of domestic violence. In particular, we focus on the question of whether cases of sexual abuse are markedly different from those of physical abuse in terms of this context of violence. (p. 21).

Acknowledging that sexual assault is recognised as being widespread but not often disclosed, especially whilst it is occurring, Goddard and Hiller, examined 206 cases of sexual and physical abuse in a ten month period. They asked social workers to respond to a variety of questions relating to children presenting with cases of sexual or physical abuse. Findings of this study strongly suggest that physical and sexual abuse are linked to other forms of family violence and that abusing parents are more likely to have experienced abuse themselves as children (this is supported throughout the literature reviewed).

Many of the victims were under three years of age (25% and 75% of sexual abuse and physical abuse respectively). In approximately half of the cases of both types of abuse violence between adult family members was also an issue. Three-quarters of abusing parents reported that they had themselves been abused as children and as many as nine out of ten parents living in a violent relationship claimed to have been abused as children. Abuse of siblings offered similar findings. Previous instances of physical or sexual abuse for the child attending hospital or for their siblings were more likely to be recorded for those coming from what Goddard and Hiller refer to as "homes characterised by violence" (Goddard & Hiller, 1993, p. 26).

> Where domestic violence and child physical abuse are commonly linked, and it is asserted by some (eg, Moore 1985) that marital violence is a type of child abuse in

> itself, child sexual abuse and its relationship to other violence in the family has been less commonly studied. The question of the place of violence in the situational context of child sexual abuse is crucial to many debates on the subject.
>
> In the results presented above we have taken the presence of domestic violence in victims' homes as the most overt expression of domination or the unequal distribution of power; it is also indicative of an atmosphere of coercion within which abuse of children has taken place. The point crudely stated, is this: children having witnessed the beating of their mothers need no further reminder of the possible consequences of their resistance to the wishes of their fathers (or, indeed, of older males in general). It is recognised, of course, that any lack of overt aggression between the parents does not mean that verbal or other forms of overt or covert coercion were not also present in the abuse of children. The fact that five of the cases of sexual abuse accompanied by bruising, lacerations and burns occurred within families not classified as characterised by domestic violence, is testimony to this. Our measures are, thus, conservative, and are likely to underestimate the true level of coercion involved. (Goddard & Hiller, p. 26-27).

The question of the amount of force and aggression typically used in cases of sexual abuse is discussed. Goddard and Hiller (1993) maintain that the adoption of a *family dysfunction* perspective to child physical and sexual abuse is likely to result in "the atmosphere of violence that surrounds so much child sexual abuse... (being) ignored" by both welfare and legal practitioners (p. 29). In an argument to dispel the myth of the mother's collusion in the sexual assault of her child they claim that:

> A deeper understanding of child sexual abuse can only be achieved through a more careful consideration of the nature of the social situation in which it occurs. Theoretical approaches that abstract the sexual abuse of a child from other violence and abuse within the family can only risk further abusing the victims. Ten years ago Dietz and Craft suggested that there might be parallels between families in which child sexual abuse occurs and families where women are violently abused and rightly drew the conclusion that if domestic violence was occurring in families where the children were being sexually abused this would throw 'an entirely different light' on the mother's behaviour. (Goddard & Hiller, p. 30).

Taking a family dysfunction approach to child sexual abuse, therefore provides the opportunity for practitioners to ignore the violence associated with this form of abuse, to

revictimise the child and their mother, and to effectively condone the perpetrator and their actions. This is reflected in the work of Draper et al (1991), Gittins (1993) and Seth-Purdie (1996). Goddard and Hiller (1993) demonstrate a correlation between situational violence, a history of family violence for parents and siblings, and child sexual or physical abuse.

In 1992 the WA Government Office of the Family separately funded two studies (Curtin University and the Youth Affairs Council of WA) both of which explored either children or young people effected by family violence. Curtin University, School of Social Work (Blanchard, Molloy & Brown 1992) took as their focus children effected by domestic violence and the provision of services to help alleviate the effects of trauma as a result of living in a violent situation. The study discusses the known incidences of violence and the 361 women and children housed in Western Australia's 30 women's refuges in an average twelve month period (Blanchard et al, 1992, p. 4).

Among the indicators of difficulties in adulthood as a result of living in a violent family offered by Blanchard et al (1992) is the importance of self-esteem. Blanchard et al. claim, as do attachment theorists, that maintenance of self-esteem can be linked to the strength and supportive nature of the relationship between the child and their primary carer. Also discussed is the impact of family violence on the classroom environment. With "[c]urrent estimates suggest[ing] that from three to five children in every classroom may be witnessing violence at home" (Blanchard et al., p. 10), it is implied that classroom dynamics could be difficult. WA is one of the last remaining states and territories to introduce mandatory reporting of child abuse; consequently, it is suggested that teachers are not equipped to deal effectively with their suspicions. Blanchard et al., propose that educationalists, therefore,

consider exploring their role in intervening to support children experiencing domestic violence. Further, the study claims that children will continue to replicate their own childhood and family experiences (Bowlby, 1988; Draper et al., 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996) unless, or until, "children do not grow up believing that violence is an inescapable or justifiable part of family life." (Blanchard et al., p. 11).

The study aimed to gain an understanding of:

> ... children's perceptions of living in a family where violence and abuse occurred between their parents, and also to gain information about their coping mechanisms: what, if anything, they found helpful while they were living with the abuse and afterwards. (Blanchard et al, 1992, p. 14).

The subjects used for the study included eighteen 6 - 12 year olds. Interestingly, it is claimed that the majority of the children interviewed "enjoyed the experience" (Blanchard et al., p. 17), presumably of being interviewed, and that seven of the group were referred on for counselling.

If violence is to be considered on a continuum (Omelzcuk, 1992, p. 51), then it is the top most extreme range of this continuum that has been used here. All of the children involved in the study discuss their involvement in a violent family dynamic, trying to protect their mothers from physically violent partners (generally the fathers of the children). The study does not include more subtle forms of violent behaviour, which also need to be understood from the perspective of the *victim*. It does discuss the children's feelings and perceptions "during a violent incident" (Blanchard et al, 1992, p.26), but does not report their feelings and perceptions at other times.

Through questionnaires, people working with children from domestic violence situations were asked to give their perception of the appropriateness and effectiveness of existing services available to these young people. Overwhelmingly, it was considered that there are insufficient services which are appropriate for children who have or who are experiencing family violence. This is also supported in the research of Allbrook (1992), Kulisa (1992), Omelzcuk (1992) and Walshe (1995). All of these studies were carried out in Perth. Workers were also asked to offer suggestions for more effective intervention to support the child (Blanchard et al, 1992, p. 30-42).

Also in 1992 the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) received funding from the Office of the Family to investigate "the effects and the extent to which young people (aged 12 to 25 years) come from homes in which domestic violence is occurring" (Allbrook, 1992, p. 1). It is evident from this study that many workers in the field believe that violence within the family is a:

> ... contributory factor in youth homelessness and poverty, the acquisition of poor life-skills such as the effective communication of feelings and needs, in truancy rates from school, lowered school performance, alcohol and drug use, suicidal tendencies, lowered self-confidence and cynicism about human relationships. (Allbrook, p. 41).

Although the focus of the YACWA study is quite broad, its original aims were to identify how many young people in Western Australia are "the victims of secondary domestic violence... (and) to examine the effect" (Allbrook, p. 2) on these same young people. The difficulties inherent in these aims were identified quite early on and the research process was modified accordingly. Using a feminist framework, the researchers consulted with a number of youth service providers through interviews and questionnaires; they also undertook an extensive literature review covering the extent of the problem, definitions of domestic

violence and structural barriers to change. Discussion is offered around definitions of domestic violence and family violence, but what has not been covered is the difference between *'abuse'* and *'violence'*; the terms have been used interchangeably.

Allbrook (1992) explores the difficulty of separating out behaviour and claiming that it is dependent on the young person having experienced a violent family environment rather than other influences. As she points out:

> It would seem logical that by the time a child reaches adolescence there are an interwoven complex of influences on behavioural adaptation which make it virtually impossible to tease out and measure the precise role of domestic or family violence in a young person's conception of the world. (p. 15).

What is evident from this study is that, although many youth workers are aware of the nature and extent of the problem, relatively few either feel comfortable with or have resources which enable them to raise issues relating to family violence with the young people they work with. This is also reflected in the work of Blanchard (1992), Kulisa (1992), Omelzcuk (1992) and Walshe (1995). The importance of seeking the views and opinions of young people, in order to empower them in dealing with issues of violence as well as everyday life, is highlighted. Allbrook (1992) maintains that further research should be based on the following principles:

* that the project has potential to improve knowledge and awareness that can be used by both agencies and young people;
* that it considers gender issues;
* that it empowers young people through appropriate involvement in the research; and
* that is has the potential to provide better knowledge of the issues and promotes the skill of workers. (p. 58).

She successfully articulates the need for further study that incorporates the perceptions of young people. Further, study conclusions call for government and community acceptance of the need for "changes to social and economic structures" (Allbrook, p. 59) in order to avoid the perpetuation of violence and to support those who have been *victims*.

The issue of lack of *victim* support and denial of the experience of violence is explored in a further study (Walshe, 1995), this time specifically investigating the experience of disclosure for a small group of young women who had been sexually abused. It appears that this particular area of interest developed for the author as a result of a number of events in her life. She talks about several young people discussing with her the additional trauma that was caused when the family, friends or professionals to whom they disclosed their experiences of sexual assault or abuse had minimised or denied these experiences.

According to Walshe "prevalence rates" for sexual abuse, like that of family violence (Mugford, 1989; Draper et al, 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996) are inconclusive, but studies suggest that for 25% of women, sexual assault or abuse of some kind will happen during childhood or adolescence; and that the figures for men range between 10% to 25% (Walshe, 1995, p. 4). She maintains that this level of violence is systematically being denied or minimised, and suggests that similar denial and minimisation is being afforded to the many cases of "suppressed or recovered memories" of childhood abuse (Walshe, p. 4). Her proposition is that our social and political structures would be unable to deal with acknowledgment of the reality for all those who have been victimised (Walshe, p. 4-5). Yeatman (1980) supports this proposition, claiming that child and spousal abuse have been constructed in a manner which fits society's ability to accept their concepts.

Walshe (1995) seeks to discover what it is like for young women to receive messages of minimisation and denial whilst at the same time being aware that the perpetrator is being supported. The study focuses on their *feelings* and their *experience*. The women interviewed claim that "their needs were being ignored and the effects they suffered from the sexual violation minimised or denied" (Walshe, p. 5). Strong links are made throughout the study to suicidal ideation as well as the use of alcohol and other drugs as forms of escape. As well as dealing with these issues, some of the young women involved are also dealing with the added complication of treatment (and, for some, hospitalisation) for emotional, psychological or psychiatric disturbances. This group of young women was, therefore, also labelled *mentally ill*. According to Walshe, these young women felt an even greater sense of not being believed and of having their experience minimised or completely dismissed.

Walshe (1995) talks of "three distinct realms of betrayal; family, systems and friends" (p. 64). These *realms of betrayal* relate to the difficulty that family and friends, as non-professionals, have in accepting what has happened and in understanding the full implications for the individual as victim; they also relate to the inability of professionals to respond to the needs of these young women. Walshe claims that the inclusion of *betrayal by family* frequently incorporates the acts of the perpetrator. Certainly, *betrayal by family* includes parents or siblings who refuse to accept the reality of the abuse or its impact on the victim. More than this, *betrayal by family* includes those parents who either refuse to believe their child or who blame the child for the abuse. These young women felt betrayed by those who would neither accept the situation nor deal with it appropriately. The experience of many young

women is that professionals, who are supposedly equipped to help people who have been abused, frequently fail to do so. They are frequently treated as victims when, as Walshe maintains they need to be treated as *survivors*.

What this study clearly shows is that there is an inability or unwillingness among many service providers to accept the level of violation (or violence) prevalent in society, and particularly that within families. Similar findings were discussed by Allbrook (1992), Blanchard et al, (1992), Bloom (1995), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1995), Draper et al (1991), Goddard (1993) and Kulisa (1992).

The young women involved in this study, spoke not only of the violence of the original incident, but also of the continuing violence they endured as a result of the inability of others to deal with the trauma they had experienced. Dealing with any form of sexual violation as a youth worker is difficult, but it needs to also take into account the other forms of violence the young person is likely to have encountered as a result of being sexually violated in the first instance. Although it is impossible to separate out different forms of violence (Allbrook, 1992; Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Seth-Purdie, 1996), it is important to remember that each can be independent of any other, although frequently many different forms go together or are built upon by other forms. Irrespective of the form it takes, violence has the potential to affect the victim (or survivor) in similar dramatic and traumatic ways. It is not the violence per se that workers with young people are daily working with, but the effects of that violence on the young person's ability to cope.

5.1.3 National Domestic Violence Conferences

Under the auspices of improving understanding of "family functioning" (Coleman, 1980, p. 5), the Australian Institute of Criminology became host to a National Conference on domestic violence in 1980 and again in 1985. Two papers from each conference will be reviewed here. These particular papers have been selected because they relate most closely to the phenomenon under investigation – the experience of family violence for a particular group of young women – together with the conceptual framework adopted for this study. The first two papers look at such issues as "Coercive Parental Authority" (Yeatman, 1980) and approaches to child abuse (Hamory, 1980). Whilst Yeatman explores the relationship between coercive parenting and the social construction of child abuse, Hamory discusses how Australia has attempted to deal with child abuse as it is recognised. The second two papers focus on the position of women in Australian society (Lee, 1985) and 'battered women' (Rowan, 1985).

According to Yeatman (1980), spousal and child abuse has been socially constructed as a *problem* in line with society's ability to accept the connections between coercive parenting and abuse. The term *battered baby syndrome* was first introduced by Kemp, an American paediatrician, in 1962. This syndrome was first acknowledged "in Australia in the late 1960's and in 1969 South Australia introduced mandatory reporting" (Yeatman, p. 16) to deal with some of the issues raised. As Yeatman asserts, the claim to discovery of child abuse in the 1960's is "peculiarly naive" (p. 17) when the controversial nature of the writings of Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens in the late nineteenth century are taken into consideration.

Acceptance of the problem of child abuse as it has been constructed continues, according to Yeatman (1980), to remove a large proportion of children at risk of abuse from the equation. Focus on children under the age of three was:

> ... very restrictively defined in terms of medically constituted evidence of physical abuse: since clean-cut abuse of this kind was inevitably fairly serious the construction tended to bracket out less serious expressions. Second, the focus on young children, principally infants, tended to bracket out both abuse with regard to older children and, since infants are essentially domestically-bound, instances of public institutional abuse of children. Third, the medical contribution to the construction of the problem legitimated both the moral entrepreneurship of the medical profession in this area, and a psycho-pathological model of explanation for abuse. Apart from the vested medical interest in drug or psycho-therapy for 'abusers'..., there was necessarily the idea arising out of the medical model of deviance that what caused the abuser to do what they did was some pathological disturbance. This focused the problem as arising out of either individual psychological problems or the collective pathology of those 'socially distressed', that is the poor, the alcoholic and the socially 'deviant' generally. (p. 17).

Yeatman asserts that adoption of the medical model in this way failed to acknowledge the role of "generally condoned patterns of child rearing" (p. 18). Further it served "as one more additional support for the way in which social control of the poor and marginal is disguised as their expert-provided welfare" (Yeatman, p. 18).

Yeatman (1980) agrees with Gittins (1993) that state recognition of the problem along with its claim to the right of intervention can be construed as a challenge to:

> ... the patriarchal conception of children as chattels of the family. Indeed, the logic of such intervention is to reconstitute the status of these children to become that of members of the whole society. In so doing, the State is assuming authority over children as over all its members, and, in effect, then delegates this authority to the social parents of children, that is to those who actually undertake, and are recognised as undertaking, the primary socialisation of children. (Yeatman, p. 20).

Yeatman argues for an acknowledgment of the *will* of the child but recognises that such acceptance will take considerable time. Although children are supposedly held in high esteem in Australian culture (presumably in the same manner as Lee (1985) claims women

are), the "physical integrity" (Yeatman, p. 20) of the child has not as yet been conferred on them. In closing she maintains that:

> ... if the emergence of 'child abuse' as a social issue, not to say the United Nations International Year of the Child itself, testify to the breakdown of patriarchal power over children, it is clear that both are couched in the terms of paternalist, protective tutelage of children. To this extent both legitimise, even while they question, patriarchal authority. (Yeatman, p. 23).

Accepting that *patriarchal authority* remains the norm for Australian families the potential for child abuse continues.

Acknowledging the detrimental effects on the victims of child abuse, along with Australian legislative moves to address the problem, Hamory (1980), explores explanations of child abuse and the models used to identify appropriate intervention. She suggests that if, as has been the case, child abuse is accepted as a crime then "interest begins to focus not on the victim but on the offender. The main issue becomes the descriptive characteristics of the offender as a person deviant from the remainder of society" (Hamory, p. 28). In contrast, support for the child may occur in an approach which:

> ... utilises situational morality - that is, the morality of compassion for the abused and the abuser, rather than an appeal to justice. This approach signifies the first time that the needs of the child have been considered. It seeks to modify, even circumvent, formal legal codes in favour of rehabilitation. Such a model emphasises the value of the family and its worth for preservation. (Hamory, p. 28).

Out of this approach has evolved more cooperative model in which multi-disciplinary teams will approach individual cases from a therapeutic perspective. This:

> ... model developed with the increasing realisation that abusing parents were in very few instances psychiatrically ill but were revealing themselves to be psychologically deprived, isolated persons, low in self-esteem and with little confidence that they were capable of controlling their environment or their own lives. These feelings often coincided with high expectations of their child's behaviour or with minimal resources or skills in child management. They either had no child care available to them or they frequently resorted to unreasonable physical punishment to control

> the behaviour of their children. Often they appeared to live in relative poverty with little or no family support. Some, no matter what their financial position, were socially isolated or geographically separated from relatives, or too independent or fearful to seek out assistance from helping services. (Hamory, p. 29).

According to Hamory (1980) Western Australia has been a leader in addressing child abuse in this country. It was one of the first States to set up a special unit for child protection. Working on the "premise that most parents do not wish to hurt their children" (Hamory, p. 30) child protection units took responsibility for the development of support programs to assist parents to deal with the difficulties they were encountering. Hamory (1980) identifies four separate characteristics of abusing parents. She suggests that they are affected either by "extreme external pressures... early learning experiences... (and therefore) regard violence as normal... poor impulse control" (Hamory, p. 31) or are mentally ill. She explores the nature of families in Australia and discusses the social acceptance of what she describes as *aggression* rather than *violence.*

Claiming that recording of the incidence of child abuse continues to be problematic, Hamory (1980) suggests that this is due to the lack of one single comprehensive definition of child abuse together with limited awareness of the frequency of abuse. If a case does not appear at hospital or come to the attention of the child protection agency from some other avenue, it goes unrecorded. Culture plays an important role in parenting behaviour; and acceptance of behaviour, which, from other cultural perspectives, may be considered to be abusive, does little to reduce the incidence of child abuse in Australia. As Hamory points out:

> Child abuse is what a society thinks it is – too often it is what a professional person thinks it is. No one really knows what the child thinks. Probably he or she would just like it to stop. (p. 38).

Battered women also just want it to stop; they believe, as do many abused children that they are to blame. Describing her experiences over many years working in women's refuges with women escaping family violence, Rowan (1985) claims that these women are frequently *brain washed* by the perpetrator:

> ... like any brain-washing situation the woman believes... [what she is told]. She quite wrongly blames herself and believes that she has provoked her husband by her incompetence as a woman and if she was a better woman she would not be abused. (p. 27).

These women frequently experience, what Rowan describes as a 'package' of abuse – which may include forms of *physical*, *sexual*, *psychological*, *social* and *financial abuse*. Rowan asserts, that the situation for the woman is made worse by the behaviour of the offender outside the home, where he is "charming to everyone else" (p. 28). Further, the socially accepted double standard of judging women for their performance in the home and men for their's outside the home continues to place the blame for family violence squarely on the woman's shoulders. When she leaves, usually, according to Rowan (1985), at considerable emotional and financial cost to herself – she is blamed. When she returns – because ***he*** can't manage without her – this time at emotional and physical cost, because the abuse is likely to re-occur – the woman is again blamed. Women, themselves, take responsibility for the abuse:

> In the Western World 97 per cent of criminal assault in the home is perpetrated by men on women, and these victims syndromatically blame themselves and hide their shame and injuries. (Rowan, p. 30).

The responsibility for family violence, however, remains both social and political. "This is not a 'women's issue'" (Rowan, p. 30). Rather, it relates to the social position of women, which, according to Lee (1985) and Draper (1991), within marriage has been that of slave.

Women did not achieve legal status as citizens in Britain until 1929 and, in America not until 1971 - for some reason Lee (1985) does not provide the date in which women were acknowledge as *people* in Australia. She claims, however, that women possess an *outgroup status* - even today - and bases this claim on "Allport's (1979) classic work, The Nature of Prejudice" (Lee, 1985, p. 69) noting the four headings which she has borrowed to direct discussion. Simply, these can be described as *condition*, *treatment*, *attitude* and *effect*. Women, she claims, make up a social *outgroup*, whilst white males are the *ingroup*.

The segregation of women has become institutionalised with the effect that it is then "perpetuate(d), and no doubt aggravate(d)... " (Lee, 1985, p. 69). Further she asserts that women have been subjected to "[i]nsulting statements originating from ingroup moral authorities" (p. 69). The following are examples cited to demonstrate the institutionalisation of women's subordinate position in Western culture:

> When woman thinks ... she thinks evil. - Seneca
>
> the five worst infirmities that afflict the female are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness ... Such is the stupidity of women's character, that it is incumbent upon her, in every particular, to distrust herself and to obey her husband. - Confucian Marriage Manual
>
> Most women have no characters at all. - Pope
>
> Regard the society of women as a necessary unpleasantness of social life, and avoid it as much as possible. - Leo Tolstoy.

> Women are usually more patient in working at un-exciting, repetitive tasks ... Women on the average have more passivity in the inborn core of their personality ... when women are encouraged to be competitive too many of them become disagreeable. – Benjamin Spock.
>
> (Lee, p. 70).

Through the introduction of *men only* clubs, women, according to Lee (1985), have been avoided – they have been discriminated against. "[T]he facts of legislation being passed against it [discrimination on the grounds of gender], of suits being led under it, and of affirmative action programs being set up, are proof enough of its reality" (Lee, p. 71) she claims. Women are subjected to "physical attack" (Lee, p. 71) – frequently in the form of spousal abuse or rape, neither of which are treated with sufficient severity in the judicial system. Lee, suggests that the physical attack of women has, historically, included attempts at extermination not dissimilar to genocide. She supports her argument with historical references to the killing of female babies in societies where children *belong* to the father and where the economy rests heavily on the ability to produce strong male children able to work to support economic and social structures. She cites the unequal allocation of food during the Biafran War and in India as well as in drought effected areas of the Third World. The slaughter of women during the Middle Ages and the "official book which gave the ideological justification for this mass destruction, Kramer and Sprenger's Malleus Maleficarum,... (Lee) see[s] as the exact equivalent of Hitler's Mein Kampf" (Lee, p. 72). In relation to *attitude*, Lee maintains that women are identified in language, developed by men, as being other than "ordinary human beings" (Lee, p. 73). She sees the result of all this on women, as on any other *outgroup* so exposed, to be acceptance of the position appointed

them. They conform to the *ingroups* expectations, resulting in the suppression of emotion to the extent that:

> women's suppression of their anger has led to their self-denigration, their reported higher incidence of neurosis, and their overcompensatory striving for symbolic power through possessions, so neatly described by Hill (1970, 238).
>
> > Hence also women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display; and all the evils that flow from it, in the way of mischievous luxury and social immorality.
>
> All the above are characteristics of outgroups during stable periods of conforming to ingroup expectations. (Lee, p. 75).

Specific examples of characteristics and behaviour ascribed women are used to compare their oppression with racial *outgroups* such as Jews and Blacks. Lee (1985), claims, however, that unlike all other *outgroups*, women do not have a *place* in the world (Jews have Israel, for example) wherein their *kind* are "seen as the norm, as setting the values and standards for... society" (Lee, p. 77). Women are, however, "told how greatly they are respected and held dear by the ingroup, while at the same time being treated with the most profound contempt" (Lee, p. 77). Lee provides numerous examples of situations where other *outgroups* have been provided the same privilege as white males - but where women have continued to be excluded. For example, she cites:

> ... in 1963 women were granted equal pay by accident, as the result of a joke: certain Congressmen, fighting Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, believed that adding an amendment prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sex would make the proposition so ridiculous as to ensure its defeat - but it was passed (Sculder, 1970, 142, 145). (Lee, p. 78).

She says that, whereas violence against Australian Blacks is seen as a political act and a social outrage, violence against women in the home is seen as an "individual problem" (Lee, p. 78). It is, she suggests, men's fear of being unable to control "their own sexual aggressive urges" (Lee, p. 79) which serves to legitimise the oppression of women. Whatever the basis of this

fear, it is clear that the violent treatment of women and children by men has been socially and legally legitimated and continues to be so in many areas:

> Cato the Elder who said that a woman is a wild animal, also said...
>
> > Suffer women once to arrive at an equality with you, and they will from that moment become your masters.
>
> Another politician said:
>
> > I do not mind having women in politics as long as there are more men than women. But once women get the upper hand, we will be in trouble (Des Frawley, National Party member for Caboolture, Queensland Parliament, speaking on matter of public importance, August 1982, The National Times, 24-30/10/1982).
>
> (Lee, p. 80).

5.2 Nurture or Nature

Much discussion has taken place as to whether or not human characteristics are genetic or whether they are developed as a response to the manner in which the individual is nurtured. In this section, I will discuss two separate theories, which provide explanations to support the *nurture* argument. One of these theories, based on neurological development, also gives credence to the understanding that, although not genetic in the true sense of the term, there is often little that can be done to change the programming of children severely damaged by their environment.

The importance of *Attachment Theory* to the development of the human child is discussed by a number of writers (Bowlby, 1988; Cairns, 1975; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; Sims & Hutchins, 1999). It is the work of these authors that will be discussed in the first part of this section. The second part will explore the findings of Shore (1997) in her discussion of the

outcome of a conference held in 1996 at the University of Chicago – "Brain Development in Young Children: New Frontiers for Research, Policy and Practice".

5.2.1 Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1988) worked, with others, over several years to identify the effects of the "deprivation of maternal care" (p. 23) on the developing human. What he discovered is that *maternal deprivation* is not necessarily the end result of a child being looked after by those other than the natural mother. Although *attachment* is developed generally between a child and their primary care giver, particularly when the natural mother *is* the primary care giver, other *attachments* may also be formed without detrimental affects. It is possible for a mother to leave her child in the care of others without there necessarily being any harm done to the child. Contrary to previous theories, *attachment theory* is not based on children being dependent on their mother for food. Rather, it is based on the behaviour of the individual and reciprocity between the developing infant and their caregiver. Gonzalez-Mena, (1994), introduces the concept of 'synchronous interaction', a situation which she describes as existing when "the care giver is sensitive to the baby's signals" (p. 5). Without *synchronous interactions* healthy attachment is unlikely to develop.

> Attachment behaviour is any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world. (Bowlby, p. 26-27).

The term *attachment* refers to behaviour patterns developed in childhood or infancy, but which continue throughout life. According to Cairns (1975), Bowlby, Gonzalez-Mena, and Sims and Hutchins (1999), healthy *attachment* provides children with a "strong and pervasive feeling of security" (Bolwby, 1988, p. 27). They suggest that lack of clearly delineated

attachment bonds might be indicative of emotional disturbance. Bowlby, likens attachment to physiological homeostasis, asserting that:

> The theory of attachment is an attempt to explain both attachment behaviour, with its episodic appearance and disappearance, and also the enduring attachments that children and other individuals make to particular others. In this theory the key concept is that of behavioural system. This is conceived on the analogy of a physiological system organized homeostatically to ensure that a certain physiological measure, such as body temperature or blood pressure, is held between appropriate limits. In proposing the concept of a behavioural system to account for the way a child or older person maintains his (sic) relation to his attachment figure between certain limits of distance or accessibility, no more is done than to use these well-understood principles to account for a different form of homeostasis, namely one in which the set limits concern the organism's relation to clearly identified persons in, or other features of, the environment and in which the limits are maintained by behavioural instead of physiological means. (p. 29).

Gonzalez-Mena (1994) reminds us that "parents rear their children to fit the world as they perceive it" (Gonzalez-Mena, p. 6) and children attempt to control their environment through attachment behaviour. As Gonzalez-Mena and Cairns (1975) agree, this is a two-way process with parents determining "which lanes are used, [and] how the traffic is controlled" (Cairns, p. 3). The interactions encouraged in this relationship may be different to the social norms. The child may need to adapt to different expectations from other children and adults outside of this initial attachment and, according to Cairns, as they "grow older, they become more, not less, adaptable to the multiple social and survival demands of the environment" (p. 14). Children and young adults are affected, he claims, by their immediate environment and respond accordingly. The response of the infant or child to new contacts depends on the new individual's sensitivity "to the reactions of the child" (Cairns, p. 16). The sensitivity and responsiveness of those around them is an important factor in the child learning to trust. According to Gonzalez-Mena, if a child:

> ... come[s] to see the world as an unfriendly place... [in which] they can't trust anyone to take care of them... they see themselves as powerless and the world as cold and hostile. When these children grow out of infancy they continue to view the world with distrust. (p. 7).

When maladaptive behaviour results, it is seen to be pathological.

Pathology, in terms of dysfunctional family relationships can be explained by using attachment theory. Bowlby (1988) looks at several of these potentially pathological behavioural responses - *separation anxiety; symbiotic relationships;* and *mourning.*. These are each discussed here. *Separaton anxiety* is, according to Bowlby, a conditioned response to the increased risk of pain or danger brought about by the departure or impending departure of what Bowlby describes as a significant attachment figure in the child's life. When a child is threatened with abandonment, intense anger may develop. "This anger, the function of which is to dissuade the attachment figure from carrying out the threat, can easily become dysfunctional" (Bowlby, p. 30). According to Gonzalex-Mena (1994), the potential responses of an anxiously attached child to separation is a huge range of emotions which she claims "come from the need for security as well as a sense of loss of control over the situaton" (p. 13). *Symbiotic* relationships between mother and child can be explained in terms of insecure attachment. Bowlby, asserts that:

> ... the trouble can be traced to the mother who, having grown up anxiously attached as a result of a difficult childhood, is now seeking to make her own child her attachment figure. So far from the child being over-indulged, as is sometimes asserted, he is being burdened with having to care for his own mother. Thus, in these cases, the normal relationship of attached child to caregiving parent is found to be inverted. (p. 31)

Some children "reach adulthood still seeking the early care giver who left their needs unmet" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994, p. 7). Gonzalez-Mena maintains that adults who seek out "people who treat them much as their early caregiver(s) did" (p. 7) are attempting to resolve that

which was left unresolved in childhood. Cairns (1975), on the other hand, focuses on development of new relationships and the attraction of people and situations that are similar to those the child is already used to. He claims that development of new relationships is much less stressful when the newcomer behaves in a familiar manner. Further he claims that some responses are learnt behaviour:

> ... the occurrence of a particular interchange pattern increases the likelihood of its recurrence... .specific relational patterns become characteristic of particular dyads and become predictable in the child and those with whom he (sic) interacts. Further, repeated interchanges become consolidated over persons and settings, in that fewer events are required to call forth the previously integrated social patterns. Recurrence and consolidation suggest how interactional patterns become generalized across settings and relationships. (Cairns, p. 19).

In this he is discussing the expectations that children develop of the behaviour of individuals with specific characteristics that they are able to liken to others with whom they have had significant contact or experience. These expectations "would reflect both the initial perceived similarity of the situations and the demands in the settings" (Cairns, p. 19). The individual, therefore, as they grow, expect certain people and certain settings to provide the stage for specific behaviours and interactions.

Many anxiously attached adults and children are, in fact, continuing to mourn their loss of nurturing in infancy and in childhood. Although, according to Bowlby (1988) some writers maintain that children lack the ability to mourn, he claims that this is most likely due to their limited understanding of the situation. Children, he claims, are frequently not given sufficient information about what is happening around them. He discusses this in conjunction with pathological responses to mourning and "conditions that promote healthy mourning" (Bowlby, p. 32). Many responses identified as normal for adults who are mourning become labelled as *pathology* when adolescents demonstrate this same behaviour.

When displayed by adolescents, this behaviour is often not recognised as part of the ongoing mourning process; nor is it recognised that the adolescents are in mourning. As Bowlby, claims:

> Not only does mourning in mentally healthy adults last far longer than the six months often suggested... but several component responses widely regarded as pathological were found to be common in healthy mourning. These include anger, directed at third parties, the self, and sometimes at the person lost, disbelief that the loss has occurred (misleadingly termed denial), and a tendency, often though not always unconscious, to search for the lost person in the hope of reunion. The clearer the picture of mourning responses in adults became, the clearer became their similarities to the responses observed in childhood. (p. 32).

In order for *healthy mourning* to take place, children need to have been:

> ... given adequate information about what had happened, or else to... [have someone] to sympathize with him and help him gradually come to terms with his loss, his yearning for his lost parent, his anger, and his sorrow. (Bowlby, p. 33).

This can also be claimed when it is lost nurturing that is being mourned. The pathological response of *detached behaviour* is seen by Bowlby, to be a defensive mechanism developed by a child who may have experienced lengthy periods of separation or even the loss of a significant attachment figure. It also applies to those who have received limited nurturing or failed to develop a secure attachment. In this situaiton, Gonzalez-Mena (1994), maintains that a child may "put up barriers so that no one can get close" (p.11).

> What this means is that a system controlling such crucial behaviour as attachment can in certain circumstances be rendered either temporarily or permanently incapable of being activated, and with it the whole range of feeling and desire that normally accompanies it is rendered incapable of being arouse... cognitive theory not only gives unconscious mental processes the central place in mental life that analysts have always claimed for them, but presents a picture of the mental apparatus as being well able to shut off information of certain specified types and of doing so selectively without the person being aware of what is happening.
>
> In... emotionally detached children... and also, I believe, in adults who have developed the kind of personality that Winnicot (1960) describes as 'false self' and Kohut (1977) as 'narcissistic", the information being blocked off is of a very special type... .what is being excluded in these pathological conditions are the signals, arising form both inside and outside the person, that would activate their

> attachment behaviour and that would enable them both to love and to experience being loved. In other words, the mental structures responsible for routine selective exclusion are being employed - one might say exploited - for a special and potentially pathological purpose. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 34-35).

This hypothesis is supported by Shore (1997), who has identified brain development differentials that appear to be dependent upon the experience and environment of the child and would certainly explain why some children (or adolescents) behave in particular ways. Shore (1997) specifically claims that the human brain operates on a 'use it or lose it' principle. The child's environment and experience will affect which areas of the brain will develop and how they will function.

According to Bowlby (1988), there were already correlations indicated between the life experiences of the individual and the number and content of "adverse experiences" (p. 36) they may encounter, particularly during the developmental phase of childhood. Cairns (1975) maintains that interactions and experiences which occur after infancy are likely to be even more important to the individual in their attempts at social adaptation than are the initial attempts at attachment to a care giver. In his exploration of interactional development, Cairns suggests that in some environments it is necessary to behave in ways which are markedly different to social norms in order to fit those norms:

> Not only is there this strongly interactive effect of adverse experiences but there is an increased likelihood for someone who has had one adverse experience to have another. For example, 'people brought up in unhappy or disrupted homes are more likely to have illegitimate children, to become teenage mothers, to make unhappy marriages, and to divorce' (Rutter 1979). Thus adverse childhood experiences have effects of at least two kinds. First they make the individual more vulnerable to later adverse experiences. Secondly they make it more likely that he or she will meet with further such experiences. Whereas the earlier adverse experiences are likely to be wholly independent of the agency of the individual concerned, the later ones are likely to be the consequences of his or her own actions, actions that spring from

> those disturbances of personality to which the earlier experiences have given rise. (Bowlby, p. 36-37).

Rutter, cited by Bowlby (1988), maintains that there is "continuing accumulation of evidence showing the importance of deprivation and disadvantage on children's psychological development" (p. 36). Anxious attachment developed as a reaction to adverse childhood experiences are likely, therefore, to effect the parenting style of a mother who may be:

> ... prone to seek care from her own child and thereby lead the child to become anxious, guilty, and perhaps phobic... .A mother who as a child suffered neglect and frequent severe threats of being abandoned or beaten is more prone than others to abuse her child physically (DeLozier 1982), resulting in the adverse effects on the child's developing personality recorded, amongst others, by George and Main (1979). (Bowlby, p. 37).

Exploring the effects of domestic violence and incest, Bowlby suggests that Freud should accept some responsibility for the attitude of many *analysts* who have concluded that how a patient may have been treated by their parents is irrelevant to the process of analysis. Moreover, "to focus attention on such possibilities, I have often been told, is to be seduced by our patients' prejudiced tales, to take sides, to make scapegoats of perfectly decent parents" (Bowlby, p. 78). It has more recently been accepted that childhood experiences are not only very important, but are crucial to understanding the behaviour and mental health of adolescents and adults. The reality is, therefore, for many of these people that, not only are they abused by their parents, but that many of their parents have themselves experienced horrific childhoods (Blanchard et al., 1992; Bowlby, 1988; Draper et al., 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996). In talking then of the abuse perpetrated on children and partners alike, Bowlby (1988) maintains that:

> ... our horror that parents can behave so is nowadays mitigated by our increasing knowledge of the kind of childhoods these parents have themselves had. Whilst horror at their acts is inevitable, greater understanding of how they have come to

> behave in these violent ways evokes compassion rather than blame. So far from wishing to scapegoat parents we wish to help them....Above all we seek ways of preventing violent patterns developing in new families. Let us hope that the policy of head-in-sand has had its day. (Bowlby, p. 79).

To ensure that acts of violence in the family are responded to in a manner appropriate for both victim and perpetrator (and to ensure that all Ostriches are in fact *dead* or *dying*), it is necessary for there to be an understanding of how this behaviour develops. Anger, claims Bowlby (1988), not only goes "hand in hand" (p. 79) with anxiety, but it can often be *functional*. Anger used to assert an individual's position in a relationship can be helpful, particularly if it is rightfully directed with an appropriate amount of force or assertion. "It serves to deter from dangerous behaviour, to drive off a rival, or to coerce a partner....the aim of the angry behaviour is... to protect a relationship which is of very special value to the angry person" (Bowlby, p. 80). Anger is generally aroused where relationships are, as Bowlby (1988), puts it, "shot through with strong emotion" (p. 80) as in the relationship between parent and child. Anger can become dangerous, however, when strong emotional relationships are mixed with patterns of *anxious attachment*. Attachment behaviour functions to enable the developing child to ensure a protective environment; it functions to enable parents to care for and support their children. When individuals become *anxiously attached* due to maltreatment in infancy and childhood, difficulties in adult relationships may arise. Therefore:

> ... the maladaptive violence met with in families can be understood as the distorted and exaggerated versions of behaviour that is potentially functional, especially attachment behaviour on the one hand and caregiving behaviour on the other. (Bowlby, p. 81).

The process through which this may develop relates to the response a child receives from their caregiver to attempts at attachment. The child who is responded to as if they were a

nuisance, is likely to become "unwillingly and anxiously obedient" (Bowlby, p. 82). The child who is actively rejected "is likely to develop a pattern of behaviour in which avoidance of them (the parent) competes with his desire for proximity and care, and in which angry behaviour is apt to become prominent" (Bowlby, p. 82).

In exploring characteristics of abusive mothers, Bowlby claims that they

> ... vary from being cold, rigid, obsessional, and censorious to being passive, unhappy, and disorganised. Yet emotionally they have much in common.... .(they may be) prone to periods of intense anxiety punctuated by outbursts of violent anger, they are said to be impulsive and 'immature'. Although their 'dependency needs' are described as exceptionally strong, they are extremely distrustful and consequently unable or unwilling to make close relationships. Socially they are isolated. Having no one else to turn to, many of them seek care and comfort from one of their own children whom they treat as though they were much older than they are (Morris and Gould 1963). (Bowlby, 1988, p. 83-84).

The women so described, may also "have had a miserable childhood and... been deprived of basic mothering" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 84). They are, he claims, *anxiously attached* themselves. Bowlby discusses research findings which indicate that "while these women yearned for care, all they expected was rejection" (Bowlby, p. 85). This same research also reported "a high incidence of responses indicating anxious concern for the welfare of parents" (Bowlby, p. 85). Many of the mothers taking part in the research cited by Bowlby, were identified as either having been abandoned as children or, more frequently, of being constantly threatened with abandonment. They also "had suffered repeated threats of being beaten, maimed, or even killed" (Bowlby, p. 85). Not only were they *anxiously attached* with horrific experiences in their own childhood, but they were not able to call on their own mothers for support in mothering their children. They could rely only on the learnt experiences and behaviours of childhood which, most frequently, proved to be maladaptive.

For many of them, their experience of being mothered was limited; for the most part "the relationship of daughter to mother had been reversed and it was they who had been expected to care for the parent" (Bowlby, p. 86).

The effects of non-responsive caregiving, Bowlby (1988) explains, can be long lasting and frequently perpetuate into the next generation:

> Threats to abandon a child make her (or him) intensely anxious about any separation, however routine it might appear to others, and also intensely angry with her parent for threatening her so. Moreover failures to respond helpfully when a child is in distress, combined with repeated and impatient rejections, lead her to be deeply suspicious of everyone else. Thus, whilst constantly yearning for the love and care she has never had, she has no confidence she will ever receive it; and she will mistrust any offer she may receive. Small wonder therefore, if when a women with this background becomes a mother, that there are times when, instead of being ready to mother her child, she looks to her child to mother her. Small wonder too if when her child fails to oblige and starts crying, demanding care and attention, that she gets impatient and angry with it. (p. 86).

Bowlby further maintains that much of the aggression and anger displayed towards children is actually redirected anger. Seth-Purdie (1996) maintains that women who display violence in the family are themselves responding to male violence, which supports Bowlby's claim that a wife "violently abused [by her husband]... and, violently angry in return, has redirected it against their child" (p. 88).

When talking of the effect of an abusive upbringing on personality development, Bowlby (1988) makes clear that:

> In very many cases indeed the physical assaults are but the tip of an iceberg – the manifest signs of what have been repeated episodes of angry rejection, verbal as well as physical. In most cases therefore the psychological effects can be regarded as the outcome of prolonged hostile rejection and neglect. (p. 88).

Shore (1997), would claim that such psychological effects were, in fact, neurological in nature. For each child the situation is different. For some, the abuse is ongoing with little space for recovery and with no-one else to turn to for the comfort sought. For others it is intermittent and only rarely do they suffer "outbursts of parental violence" (Bowlby, p. 88). These children have been described as "depressed, passive, and inhibited, as 'dependent' and anxious, and also angry and aggressive" (Bowlby, p. 88). Further, according to Bowlby, research has identified that they may:

> ... fail to participate in play and show little or no enjoyment. Expression of feeling is often so low key that it is easy to overlook, or else is ambiguous and contrary. Crying may be prolonged and unresponsive to comforting; anger is easily aroused, intense, and not readily resolved. Once established, these patterns tend to persist. (p. 88).

These persistent patterns of behaviour are possibly due to the nature of the neurological development that has taken place as a result of abusive parenting (Shore, 1997).

Bowlby (1988), variously describes the behaviour of abused toddlers as *anxiously attached*, *avoidant*, *aggressive*, *non-responsive*, and *hostile*. Children who have been abused are less likely to demonstrate concern for peers than those who have not. They are more likely to be mistrustful of others, especially adults and to treat care givers with a degree of hostility and watchfulness. Frequently they will display fear and distress and anger, in the shape of aggression towards their care giver. A difficulty Bowlby, sees for care givers is that of providing an environment in which *care* can be a constant part of the equation. He maintains that:

> it is not easy for an adult, whether parent, fosterparent, or professional, to give him the continuous affectionate care he needs... .The sudden unprovoked attacks, which in older children can easily be damaging, are especially hard to take. (Bowlby, p. 92).

Parents who abuse frequently come from abusive backgrounds and, according to Bowlby, violent men are more likely to have experienced a violent childhood. Both men and women who are abusive or violent in the home have lacked the opportunity to develop the social skills necessary to respond to feelings of threat, abandonment or anger in non-violent ways. As Bowlby claims:

> A significant proportion of rejected and abused children grow up to perpetuate the cycle of family violence by continuing to respond in social situations with the very same patterns of behaviour that they had developed during early childhood. (p. 92).

These parents are themselves seeking the nurturing they lacked in childhood, frequently, according to Bowlby, from their children in a similar way to which their parents sought to be cared for by them.

Bowlby (1988), explores what is known as *amnesia* and the process through which the child shuts off information. Bowlby gives three reasons why information is blocked from the child's conscious mind: that of which parents would prefer the child is not aware; that which the child finds to be too traumatic to remember; and that about which the child feels guilty. Although "shut off" (Bowlby, p. 101) from the conscious mind these *memories* continue "to be extremely influential in affecting thought, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 101). As well as witnessing the death, frequently by suicide, of a parent, Bowlby (1988) discusses incest as being a situation that the child is encouraged, by the perpetrator as well as frequently other relatives, to *shut off* from conscious memory. He says:

> Warned on no account to breathe a word to anyone, including her mother, the child looks to her father for some confirmation of those events and is naturally bewildered when there is no response... .Small wonder if, in later years, all men are distrusted, and the professional stance of a male therapist is seen as a mere façade that hides a predatory intent. Small wonder also that the injunction on no account to tell anyone remains operative, and the expectation that in any case no one would believe you ensures silence. How often, we may wonder, do ill-informed therapists

> discourage a patient from telling the truth and, should she do so nonetheless, confirm her expectation that no one will believe her story? (Bowlby, p. 106).

Children who are threatened with abandonment or some other equally frightening response will quickly "conform to his parents' wishes by excluding from further processing all that he knows they wish him to forget" (p. 109). Further, Bowlby expresses his belief:

> ... that threats of this sort are responsible for much acute and chronic anxiety (Bowlby 1973) and also for a person responding to bereavement in later life with chronic depression in which the dominant belief is one of having been deliberately abandoned, as a punishment, by the dead person... (p. 109).

Traumatic episodes experienced by a child will often result in those experiences being removed from conscious memory. This process, as Bowlby describes it, of "selective exclusion" (p. 112) happens without the individual being aware of it. It is not only recollection of the events themselves which are excluded, but also of:

> ... thoughts, feelings, and impulses to action that are the natural responses to such events. This results in major disorders of personality which in the commoner and less severe forms tend to be diagnosed as cases of narcissism or false self and in their more severe forms may be labelled as a fuge, a psychosis, or a case of multiple personality. The experiences which give rise to such disorders have probably continued or been repeated over several years of childhood, perhaps starting during the first two or three.... (p. 113).

Even without conscious memory of specific events, children continue to develop expectations of the behaviour of individuals with characteristics they are able to liken to others with whom they have had significant contact or experience. These expectations "would reflect both the initial perceived similarity of the situations and the demands in the settings" (Cairns, 1975, p 19). The individual, therefore, as they grow expects certain individuals and certain settings to provide the stage for specific behaviours and interactions. If the response of the child to these expectations proves to be maladaptive they are likely to be labelled pathological.

5.2.2 Neurobiological Development Theory

Neurological research over the last few years has identified the effect on brain development of the environment in which a child lives and the events that child experiences. Although greatest effects are seen in the development of the brain in infancy and early childhood, the brain is seen to continually change throughout life. Shore (1997) explores various aspects of brain development presented during the 1996 conference "Brain Development in Young Children: New Frontiers for Research, Policy and Practice" held at the University of Chicago. The question of *nature* or *nurture* and the interrelationship of these two ideological positions is discussed. Shore claims that the research presented at this conference, together with other research, demonstrates the connectedness of these perspectives. Brain development throughout life, but particularly during those crucial first years, is ongoing. The human brain, and therefore individuals, has a plasticity, which is demonstrated by the resilience of some children who have experienced trauma and the failure to cope of others. This malleability and the ability of individual children to survive in some cases inordinate levels of stress and trauma is reliant on the levels of support also experienced. The ability of the individual to overcome trauma is based on the development of secure attachment to at least one adult as they grow (Shore, 1997; Bowlby, 1988; Cairns, 1975; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997; Garbarino, 1992; Jenkins, 1997; Osofsky, 1997; and Perry, 1997).

According to neurological researchers, the human brain develops at a rapid rate prior to and in the first few years after birth. This development continues to around age 10 after which

its programming tends to become set and certain areas decline. Children of 18 months of age have far more complicated brains than do their parents. What happens to the brain as children grow is, according to these researchers, that synapses develop or are eliminated in certain areas according to the child's experience. Using this process of development and elimination the child ends up with a "complex, powerful system of neural pathways" (Shore, 1997, p. 20).

According to Shore (1997), whether or not a connection (or synapse) is maintained depends very much on the environment, and particularly the early experience, of the child:

> When some kind of stimulus activates a neural pathway, all the synapses that form that pathway receive and store a chemical signal. Repeated activation increases the strength of that signal. When the signal reaches a threshold level (which differs for different areas of the brain), something extraordinary happens to that synapse. It becomes exempt from elimination - and retains its protected status into adulthood....
>
> These findings confirm that brain development is a "use it or lose it" process. As pruning accelerates in the second decade of life, those synapses that have been reinforced by virtue of repeated experience tend to become permanent; the synapses that were not used often enough in the early years tend to be eliminated. In this way the experiences - positive or negative - that young children have in the first years of life influence how their brains will be wired as adults. (p. 20).

Shore focuses on the importance this research has for working effectively with young children and parents or expectant parents. She explores the policy and program implications that are indicated by the findings of these researchers. There is considerable concern regarding the effect on individuals of growing up experiencing violence, abuse or neglect on a daily basis.

According to the research cited:

> ... how humans develop and learn depends critically and continually on the interplay between nature (an individual's genetic endowment) and nurture (the nutrition, surroundings, care, stimulation, and teaching that are provided or withheld). The roles of nature and nurture in determining intelligence and emotional resilience should not be weighted quantitatively; genetic and environmental factors have more dynamic, qualitative interplay that cannot be reduced to a simple equation. Both factors are crucial. New knowledge about brain development should end the "nature or nurture" debate once and for all. (Shore, 1997, p. 26-27).

The level and nature of brain activity plays an important part in developing patterns for processing information. As the patterns, or neural pathways, within the brain are repeated so they eventually become entrenched. Learnt behaviour becomes the only way the individual is able to process and respond to information. Without intervention, preferably during the first 10 years of life, the cognitive ability of the individual inhibits alternative responses. The child who experiences secure attachment during the early part of life is better able to deal with stress than the child who does not. More than this, a child exposed, without support, to repeated or ongoing trauma is more likely to demonstrate developmental delays and less likely to deal effectively with stress. According to Shore (1997), physical and psychological trauma:

> ... can elevate an individual's cortisol level. In turn, cortisol affects metabolism, the immune system, and the brain. Cortisol alters the brain by making it vulnerable to processes that destroy neurons and, just as importantly, by reducing the number of synapses in certain parts of the brain. In this way, stressful or traumatic experiences can indeed undermine neurological development and impair brain function. And in fact, children who have chronically high levels of cortisol have been shown to experience more developmental delays - cognitive, motor and social - than other children. (p. 28).

Physical and cognitive development is further discussed by Shore (1997) in relation to studies carried out by Lieberman and Zeanah (cited in Shore) who claim that secure attachment is crucial for normal development. The ability of the brain to change and to

compensate for problems whether they are genetic, physical or in relation to trauma experience is documented by the research discussed in this report. The brain's ability to recover declines after the first ten years of life, it becomes more difficult to make changes through intervention, but it is not impossible. According to research, "an enriched environment may actually increase the number of neurons in the brains of young adults" (Shore, p. 37): the brain is therefore more efficient. For those who experience violence and aggression the effect is not dissimilar - instead of stabilising specific areas of the brain in response to positive stimuli, negative experiences will stabilise the brain for negative behaviour responses. Importantly Shore discusses the affect on development in th:

> ... subcortical and limbic areas of the brain, resulting in extreme anxiety, depression, and/or the inability to form healthy attachments to others. Adverse experiences throughout childhood can also impair cognitive abilities, resulting in processing and problem-solving styles that predispose an individual to respond with aggression or violence to stressful or frustrating situations. (p. 40).

Shore (1997) continues by discussing the difficulty many of these children may have in establishing the all-important secure attachments. Where the caregiver is unresponsive to the needs of the child these attachments are unlikely to be made. Furthermore, the

> ... quality of care and security of attachment affect children's later capacity for empathy, emotional regulations, and behavioural control... .emotional neglect, social deprivation, and a chronic lack of appropriate stimulation are among the other factors that may jeopardize early development. (p. 40).

The affect of this is likely to be an overdeveloped midbrain and brainstem which in turn can result in "anxiety, impulsivity, poor affect regulation, and hyperactivity" (p. 41). Children so affected are more likely to respond from a *flight or fight* perspective in order to ensure their immediate *survival*. Depending on various genetic factors, children will either respond to

traumatic experiences by "becoming more self-absorbed, withdrawn, passive and depressed... [or] more aggressive" (p. 41).

Shore (1997) explores the potential to exacerbate the detrimental effects of experience on the developing brain by introducing risk factors such as poverty, maternal depression and substance use. Being careful not to suggest that poor or ineffective parenting should become the *scapegoat* for the problem of violence, Shore develops the argument for support for families particularly those who are expectant or already have small children. Where adolescents are concerned, the research reviewed appears to suggest that it is possible with appropriate intervention to also make changes in the *mind-* or *brain-set* of these young adults. The most affective intervention is likely to take place, however, during the first few months or first ten years of life.

5.3 Community and family violence and childhood development

This section uses the work of Zeanah and Scheeringa (1997), Garbarino (1992), Jenkins (1997), Osofsky (1997), and Perry (1997) to explore the effect of violence on children using both attachment and, the more recent, neurological development theories.

Children and infants are genetically equipped (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997; and Sims & Hutchins, 1999) to ensure their attractiveness to adults who, in turn, are most often disposed to protect them from violent environments. This process of attachment, under normal circumstances will ensure the safety of the child. However, this is not always the case. Many infants and children find themselves in situations inherently violent and threatening to their

safety. The effects of community violence on children and infants has aroused a great deal of interest, particularly in America, as a result of increasing concern regarding community violence in the larger, more heavily populated cities of that country (see Osofsky, 1997; Garbarino, 1992). According to this literature, the effect on children may be both psychological and neurobiological. According to Zeanah & Scheeringa, infants exposed to family violence "are likely to experience violence directly through witnessing parental conflict and violence, and through experiencing physical abuse themselves" (p. 100). Further, Zeanah & Scheeringa cite an American national survey reporting relatively high proportions of children (5%) who:

> ... had witnessed a stabbing or shooting in their homes (Taylor et al., 1994). Since clinicians suspect significant underreporting by parents (Zuckerman, Augustin, Groves, & Parker, 1995), especially about violence witnessed by very young children, these data are even more alarming. Pynoos and Eth (1984) reported that in 1981 children witnessed 10% of the homicides in Los Angeles County - the majority of these homicides were parent murdering parent, and many of the child witnesses were 5 years old or younger. All of these indirect data converge to suggest that a major experience of violence for very young children is witnessing serious interparental violence... (p. 100-101).

Hardly surprising then that infants in their first year of life might demonstrate "defensive patterns of *avoidance, freezing,* and *fighting*" (Zeanah & Scheeringa, p. 103). In the second year such children may turn "*aggression against the self* and sadomasochistic[ally] *transform... pain into pleasure.* These defensive patterns... represent distortions in the development of healthy aggressive responses" (Zeanah & Scheeringa, p. 103). Perry (1997) asserts that those adolescents and adults currently responsible for what he describes as "community and predatory violence" (p. 126) most certainly acquired the necessary "emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and physiological characteristics that mediate these violent behaviours as a result of intrafamilial violence during childhood" (p. 126-127).

According to Jenkins and Bell (1997) children who have been exposed to repeated violence or to one or more traumatic experiences are likely to display symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder. This can manifest itself in *re-enactment* of the event:

> ... dreams, or intrusive images and sounds associated with the event; displayed avoidance behavior and psychic numbing, characterized by subdued behavior and inactivity, constricted affect, and diminished interest in previously enjoyed activities; and... symptoms of increased arousal such as startle reactions and sleep disturbances. (Jenkins & Bell, p. 16).

Posttraumatic stress disorder, according to Garbarino (1997), results from experiences the child may find "cognitively overwhelming... the child is forced into patterns of behaviour, thought, and feelings that are themselves 'abnormal' when contrasted with that of the untraumatized, healthy child" (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1997, p. 36). Children and young people who have been exposed repeatedly to traumatic events or violence may become pessimistic about the future demonstrating a sense of hopelessness for themselves, anger and personality changes (Jenkins & Bell). Among the behaviours identified as linked to this type of posttraumatic stress disorder are harm seeking and revictimisation behaviours; alcohol and other drug use; eating disorders; suicidal ideation and school impairment (Jenkins & Bell).

The development of these behavioural patterns have been linked to the development of disorganised or insecure attachment in early childhood (Bowlby, 1988; Perry, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997). Links are also made between maladaptive behaviour patterns and neurobiolgical changes which come about as a result of exposure to violence (Perry, 1997; Shore, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997). According to current neurological theory (Perry, 1997; Shore, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997), brain development is affected by two things. Firstly, it is dependent on specific experiences during limited periods of development most

of which usually occur during the first years of life. Secondly, it is dependent on the lack of exposure to traumatic events, neglect or violence. Often when a child is neglected or abused they also fail to receive the experiences necessary for positive or what is considered *normal* brain function. When brain development is disrupted at a sufficiently early age, and particularly when exposure to violence is repetitive, neurobiological patterns set in place may be permanent (Perry, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997) and devastating. Perry maintains that it "is not the finger pulling the trigger that kills; it is not the penis that rapes – it is the brain" (p. 127).

These profound neurobiological changes, which allow the child to survive ongoing violence (Perry, 1997) as well as predisposing them to violent behaviour, come about as the brain responds to physiological changes within the body. This response is in the form of neural activation, which, when frequently repeated, becomes set (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997) resulting in an increased tendency to be violent (Perry). As Zeanah & Scheeringa put it "[t]he activation of a neural network involves 'use-dependent' internalisation of new information... [which once activated] can be activated subsequently by lower threshold stimulus... [with the propensity to] result... in 'traits'" (p. 107).

Under normal circumstances, the brain of the developing child acquires the ability to control various emotional urges and to respond in more socially acceptable ways. The sequential development of the more complex *cortical* area of the brain will ensure that *normal* development includes:

> ... inhibitory capabilities... [to] modulate the more primitive, less mature, reactive impulses of the human brain... .Conversely, any deprivation of optimal developmental experiences (which leads to underdevelopment of cortical,

> subcortical and limbic areas) will necessarily result in persistence to violent behaviour... (Perry, 1997, p. 129).

Optimal brain development is dependent on "environmental and microenvironmental cues" (Perry, 1997, p. 130) in order to become appropriately organised to enable the individual to behave according to socially accepted norms. These *'cues'* are dependent on the environment in which the child exists. Therefore individual experiences will have a profound effect on the form neurobiological arrangement takes (Perry, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997). "Disruptions of experience-dependent neurochemical signals during these periods may lead to major abnormalities or deficits in neurodevelopment, some of which may not be reversible" (Perry, p. 131). The brain, itself, develops sequentially and, therefore "disruptions of normal developmental processes early in life... will necessarily alter the development of limbic and cortical areas" (Perry, p. 131). The later in life violent, abusive or traumatic experiences take place, the less dramatic will be the effect on the individual, especially once brain development has ceased.

The child who is neglected by their primary caregiver, lacks the critical experience described by Perry (1997) as necessary for the development of *empathy*. This child may become emotionally retarded. Due to the sequential nature of brain development

> narrow windows, critical periods, exist during which specific sensory experience is required for optimal organization and development of any brain area (eg., Singer, 1995; Thoenen, 1995). Absent such experience and development, dysfunction is inevitable... (Perry, p. 132).

Perry (1997); Bowlby (1988); Garbarino (1997); and Zeanah (1997) have identified the relationship between *insecure attachment* and the emotional emptiness or lack of empathy so frequently found in adults who were neglected, abandoned (or threatened with

abandonment), or abused in childhood. According to Perry, this is as a result of a decreased "strength... [in] the subcortical and cortical impulse-modulating capacity, and by decreasing the value of other humans due to an incapacity to empathize or sympathize with them" (p. 133). The development of *secure attachment* and nuerobiological development, therefore, go hand in hand. The experiences which effect attachment will also effect brain development promoting an impulsive response by someone whose attachment is *insecure* or *disorganised* to certain stimuli; thereby increasing the chances of anti-social behaviour.

According to Perry (1997), a child who failed to receive the necessary *cues* during development may be seen to have "cortical atrophy" (p. 133). That is not to say that the cortex has atrophied, rather it failed to develop in the same way as would that of a child in a non-violent and supportive environment. We have seen, therefore, that children, particularly very young children and infants, are severely affected developmentally by violence, abuse and neglect - particularly in the home. What is also identified by Garbarino (1997); Perry (1997); Bowlby (1988); Zeanah (1997); and Shore (1997) is that the level of damage caused is dependent on the level of support and nurturing these children receive from whatever the source. As Garbarino & Kostelny maintain, the future lives of these children can be turned around by "the balance of social supports from and for parents... .The quality of life for young children - and their reservoirs of resilience - thus becomes a *social* indicator as well as a measure of personal worth" (Garbarino & Kostelny, p. 36).

5.4 Youth Work and school

Having explored various sociological aspects of family violence together with ideas of neurological and emotional development, it seems appropriate to investigate how the practice of supporting young people from violent backgrounds, young women in particular, has evolved. With limited evaluation of available services which cover the aspects of practice required in this instance, three areas will be considered. These are: young people 'in care' (Moore, Moretti, & Holland, 1998), worker perceptions of youth work with young women who have been abused (Omelzcuk, 1992), and an early childhood setting for abused children (Caughey, 1991).

Youth Work training attempts to provide workers in the field with appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding to empower young people to affect change in their lives. It is based on a demand:

> ... by government, by employing agencies and by workers themselves... .to increase the... effectiveness of intervention of youth workers in a period in which greater and greater demands are being placed upon workers to deal with a multitude of social problems affecting young people. (Youth Work Studies, 1991, p. 5).

In many situations, funding is provided for intervention and control of young people behaving anti-socially; communities call for the amusement and control of these same young people. Accordingly, services have been provided which aim to *control* the behaviour of young people in an effort to bring the situation into line (Moore et al., 1998). According to Moore et al, programs which are designed to control must fail in doing so. Young people, they claim, respond more positively to approaches that do not take from them the opportunity to develop any sense of self-control and responsibility. As we have seen, many of the young people who find themselves in programs which have behaviour modification as

their aim are likely to have experienced rejection and victimisation throughout their life. Why do we consider, asks Moore et al., that subjecting these same young people to situations in which they experience further rejection, punishment and vulnerability could in any way make their behaviour more socially acceptable? Young people:

> ... attempt to engage others in ways that are consistent with their working models of self and others and consistent with their past experiences of care. Their past experiences often contain recurring themes of inconsistent or ambivalent care, neglect, abuse or abandonment. They often have learned that aggression and violence are integral elements of close relationships. In many cases they have developed aggressive patterns to force reluctant caregivers into responding (Crittenden, 1992). These youth typically provoke aggressive and rejecting responses to their attachment overtures. This dynamic of mutual aggression and violence is the "glue" of their relationships in general (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Bartholomew, 1990). From their perspective, youth care programs with a control-orientation offer little in the way of new experiences and serve to confirm their beliefs about self as "bad", unworthy, and unlovable and others as rejecting and coercive. (Moore et al., p. 9).

Moore et al. (1998) specifically discuss a particular setting in which they are involved. In any youth work setting, however, workers do come into contact with young people (and, specifically, young women) who have been abused (Omelzcuk, 1992). In a study of the perception of youth workers, Omelzcuk identified that how they respond to young women who have been abused is, however, dependent upon personal understanding and experiences, worker skill, workplace constraints (which must include funding structure and agency philosophy), personal philosophy and the confidence of the worker. Omelzcuk maintains that unless the service or program is specifically designed for young women, the majority of young people using any service are male. Those young women using these services tend to be marginalised and young women at risk of abuse remain invisible. Unless the youth worker has an understanding of issues of *power* and the effect on dynamics within their service, the needs of young women will not be met. Hegemonic acceptance of the

status quo by a number of youth workers together with the effect on their understanding of, and ability to work effectively with, young women who are victims of abuse was identified as an issue (Omelzcuk). "(M)any workers view... male dominance as normal" (Omelzcuk, p. 142) and one in particular felt that "(i)t's up to them [the young women] to help make it [the youth centre] become comfortable" (worker cited in Omelzcuk, p. 142) even though they were not empowered to do so. The anomaly here, according to Omelzcuk, is that many women who are the victims of family violence are intimidated by an imbalance of power and feelings of guilt in their culpability in the abuse. Of the agencies included in her study she found only three that identified "anti-sexist and anti-racist work as central concerns. With the majority of services focussing upon the needs of young men... " (p. 141).

According to Omelzcuk (1992), funding body guidelines are not necessarily the basis for agency focus on the needs of young men, suggesting that it is the agency's response to community demands to entertain and control *'street present'* boys together with a failure to consider gender inequities which lie at the foundation of this type of service design (White, 1990). Inadequate and insecure funding, however, is an important aspect of service development and design (Omelzcuk). Through forces outside their control, youth workers are in danger, therefore, of becoming involved in the perpetuation of structural inequalities that permit the abuse of women and children – further highlighting the ineffectiveness of many agencies and workers in combating these inequities. According to the analysis of Omelzcuk's study, only those workers who base their practice on feminist understanding will challenge, at an individual or structural level, the basis for women's oppression and, therefore, the continued abuse of children. Without this understanding, therefore, workers

will continue to operate in a manner that maintains their comfort zone, rather than acting as a catalyst for the empowerment of young women.

Discussing an early childhood setting for abused children, Caughey (1991) considers the feelings of discomfort that children have when attempting to accommodate experiences which don't fit "concepts that are in place" (Caughey, p. 24) - concepts that have been developed based on past events. When an abused child attempts to accommodate a new experience, Caughey claims, this "is accompanied by discomfort, an experience of disequilibrium" (p. 24). Frequently children in this setting maintain an alertness to the external environment to ensure that they retain an element of control over their own situation. Anticipating that danger is imminent, Caughey suggests that:

> If the child expects to be hit, she can maintain some sense of power over her world if she believes she can control the occasions when she is hit. She therefore seeks to maintain a view of herself as the cause of violent behaviour in the adults around her. A child then may attempt to provoke abuse to avoid resigning herself to the feelings of helplessness. (p. 25).

Children who have been abused grow up with a sense of isolation and an inability to trust adults (Bloom, 1995; Caughey, 1991). They develop their own "world view through chaotic situations, independently, and often in profound loneliness. This view has been developed to cope with the world as she has experienced it" (Caughey, p. 25-26). It is only when they begin to experience life differently that this world view may change. In order to recover from these abusive experiences children need to understand that there are adults who will listen and accept without judgement "because it is the adult's quality of feeling and witnessing that nourishes the child most deeply" (Caughey, p. 27).

In the classroom setting, Caughey (1991) claims that it is possible to provide an appropriate environment and opportunities for these children to experience the opposite of rejection. It

is possible for them to experience acceptance and nurturing that will enable them to also see themselves as worthy and lovable. In the main, however, school has "become just another part of the social system that failed to protect them as children" (Bloom, 1995, p 411).

The importance of *creating sanctuary in school* is discussed by (Bloom, 1995). The challenge to accepted assumptions about human nature and "definitions of normality and health" (Bloom, p. 405) are also discussed. She claims that western society is "trauma organized" (Bloom, p. 405);

> (T)he repeated experience of trauma becomes one of the central organizing experiences in the individual, in the family, and in larger social groups. Our development as a species has been so profoundly influenced by the intergenerational strain of trauma that we have no clear idea of what health looks like, how it feels to be in a healthy system or what the processes are that go into maintaining a healthy system. (p. 405).

In her discussion, Bloom identifies the accepted definitions of deviance, wherein people are said to be either *sick* and therefore not to blame for their actions, or *bad* and therefore in need of punishment, as a factor in maintaining *trauma organisation*. Using an approach which identifies "injury" (Bloom, p. 406) to the abused child, Bloom claims moves the focus from the *bad* or *sick* individual to "an interpersonal context....the injuries that children sustain are a direct result of the failure of the social group, one of whose fundamental purposes is to protect its young" (p. 406). The role of the school can be either to compound the damage already done or to respond to maladaptive behaviour in a way that does not further *victimise* the child. It is important, therefore, that "responses are designed to teach a lesson that the child needs to learn - responses that provide a corrective emotional experience. Punishment must never be violent or traumatic because if it is, we simply

deepen the problem instead of correcting it" (Bloom, p. 408).

Children "engaging in bad behaviour" (Bloom, 1995, p. 408) do so because this is how they have learnt to cope with their life. This is how they have learnt to maintain an element of control:

> The key in strategizing how to handle bad kids is figuring out how *not* to do what they are cuing us to do. These children are quite comfortable with rejection, abuse, harsh discipline, unrealistic expectations, hostility, and pain. This is normal for them; it is predictable, and in this predictability they feel some tenuous form of safety. (Bloom, p. 408).

Young people and children who have been abused respond better to attempts at intervention when they understand what has happened to them and when they feel as though they have control over their environment (Bowlby, 1988; Bloom, 1995). When they cannot gain control in a positive way, Bloom maintains that they will revert to maladaptive behaviour which is ultimately destructive although offering a sense of empowerment.

Culturally, "our problem solving paradigm is still individual and competitive... .we inevitably look for who is right and who is wrong" (Bloom, 1995, p. 412). We need to then take a different stance and ask the *troubled child* "'What's happening to you?' and 'How can we help?'... .[thereby extending] a hand of compassion, possibility, and opportunity. Relieving the person from the burden of shame leaves open the possibility for the realistic self-appraisal of responsibility and request for assistance" (Bloom, p. 415).

5.5 Conclusion

By looking at this diverse range of literature it has been possible to develop a picture of the complexity of family violence and its effects on the individual. Not only do social structures and individual feelings of powerlessness play a part in abusive parenting, so does the opportunity the individual was given as a child themselves to develop *secure attachment* to a significant caregiver together with healthy neurobiological development. What became evident through undertaking this review is that the response of both the young women in this study and their parents fit the examples cited in this literature.

The research question sought to discover, not only the lived experience for these young women of family violence, but also what is it that youth workers can do that would assist other young women with similar experiences. The existing literature explores various aspects of family violence. It does not, however, explore the situation from the perspective and experience of young women who have survived violence in their family of origin. This study adds to the existing body of literature, not by answering the subquestion, but by demonstrating why existing youth work practice does not provide the necessary support to this particular group of young women. It also lays the foundation for further research, which might more appropriately address the original question. The question which formed the basis of inquiry is:

> "What are young women's lived experiences of family violence?"

The subquestion:

> "How young women, who have experienced family violence, believe that youth workers can support other young women with similar experiences"

This chapter has, then, explored the existing literature, linking it to the themes identified from the women's words. The following chapter will draw together, the literature, the women's words and the themes that emerged from them.

CHAPTER 6: DRAWING IT TOGETHER

This study set out to discover how youth workers could support young women who are experiencing, or who may have experienced, violence in their family of origin. It discovered many things about the women involved in the study and their relationships with the perpetrator and other family members. One interesting finding is that none of these young women were aware, whilst they lived in a violent family situation, either of the existence of youth workers or how they might be helped by these, and other, professionals. They were all very clear, however, about what the experience meant for them, and what they consider would have helped them, had support been available to them at that time.

This chapter will discuss and explore the findings of this study in conjunction with the literature reviewed. As closely as possible it will follow the headings used for the Literature Review chapter.

6.1 Violence in the family

6.1.1 Patriarchy

Participants of this study are not typical of all young women who have experienced violence in their family of origin. What sets them apart from others is their acknowledgment that the violence is behaviour that is neither normal nor acceptable, and should not be *expected* under *normal*, or socially acceptable, circumstances. It is also accepted as *normal* to their experience. For at least one of them, however, the behaviour of the perpetrator was *understandable*. Writers such as Mugford (1989), Coleman(1980) and Abbott and Wallace

(1990), suggest that community attitudes to violence in the family perpetuate the myth of the *privacy* and of the *privateness* of events that occur within the family or within the home. For these young women this assumption was reinforced, in as much as they felt the need to maintain *secrecy* surrounding the events and their experience in order to protect themselves and other members of their family from the accusations and assumptions of others. Those to whom they might have gone for help did not demonstrate that the support required was likely to be forthcoming. People outside the immediate family, sometimes including grandparents and extended family, frequently adopted common community attitudes by judging the actions of those who might be *victims* of violence as deserving of that violence.

According to Draper et al. (1991), family violence is associated with "unequal power relationships within the family, ideas about male authority over the family... and the treatment of family violence as a private concern... rather than a public, political issue" (Draper et al, 1991, p. 30). Mugford (1989) maintains that the family "is an agency of social control as well as an agency of social support" (Mugford, 1989, p. 1) which "both structure[s] and is structured by external social, economic, and power relationships" (Abbott & Wallace, 1990, p. 74). For these young women the family offered little support. With the exception of one participant (Michelle), power relationships within their families remain unequal. Each participant has removed themselves, or been removed, from the source of violence in their lives. With the exception of Caroline, each of these young women now live independently of their families. However, even though the perpetrator may no longer be directly involved in their lives, the influence of this individual is still strong. The socially constructed notion of masculinity adopted by these particular men (that is for those

participants for whom a father or grandfather were the primary perpetrators) has been used to abuse the power made available to them within a family relationship.

These women, therefore, have been victims of behaviour which is resultant of the confusion and frustration consequential to an assumption of family, together with male and female positions within it, which are outmoded and out dated. Notions of masculinity and feminity have been based on the construction of *nuclear family* around patriarchal rights of ownership and authority, which more closely resemble pre-industrial society. These notions have been constructed in an environment in which men do not necessarily have legitimate access to such power or control and therefore appropriate and misuse the power available to them within their home (Draper et al., 1991). Women are expected by some men to be dependent on, and subservient, to them. Violence in the home, as violence elsewhere, is to do with power and control rather than sexuality (in the case of child sexual abuse and rape) or discipline. Phoebe's mother was the primary perpetrator of violence in her family and it is this need for control that was paramount here. The institutional acceptance of some forms of violence in our society makes it even more difficult for women and children to deal with violence in the home. Whereas violence associated with crime of property is treated seriously by the State[1], in many instances the crime of violence to the person is sanctioned by the State, especially when linked to the privacy of the family. This sanctioning takes an informal stance in as much as it may be difficult, if not impossible, for women and children to receive assistance in dealing with violence perpetrated against them at home. In the case

[1] "Outrage at Sentence of Boy's Hit 'n' Run Killer" Headline in the West Australian 19 April, 2000 leads the story of a man jailed for 3 years for the death of a toddler hit as the man was 'rolling a cigarette whilst driving'. The same man also received a 4 year sentence for two burglary offences committed after the hit and run occurred. (Darragh, West Australian, 19 April, 2000, p. 1).

of Phoebe's father, it was impossible because there is even less recognition of female violence against men in this setting.

Community perceptions of family violence, according to Mugford (1989), tend to identify only physical violence, thus ignoring the more subtle forms of violence perpetrated against women and children by husbands and fathers (and also babysitters, grandfathers, mothers and stepbrothers for the women involved in this study). Physical and emotional neglect by either parent is not commonly included in definitions and understanding of family violence. The experience of these young women, therefore, is unlikely to have been understood by those around them who were not personally involved in the violence or the situation. Further, Mugford (1989) has identified that service providers even, will not necessarily demonstrate understanding either of the situation or of the experience of women, or children, in a violent relationship. The young women in this study, as already stated, were unaware, for the most part, of support services that might be available. Also, they demonstrated a lack of confidence in the ability of various professionals or associates outside of the situation to support them in a way that would be helpful as opposed to detrimental to themselves and to other family members involved through the violence or the actions of the perpetrator.

According to Seth-Purdie (1996), established methods of socialisation leave both men and women unprepared to cope effectively with intimate relationships. There are no set processes that enable people to negotiate these relationships. There are, however, historical assumptions that say that a man has the right to maintain control over his property - including the right to chastise both his wife and children. With this understanding, which

Gittens (1993) claims is a hegemonic understanding, it becomes *natural* to also assume that a wife or child does not have the right to complain if the process of discipline takes a violent form. Neither then, can those who might reasonably be expected to protect or support these women and children (that is family, friends or professionals) be expected to acknowledge that in reality the situation is anything more than normal discipline.

From the perspective of the women in this study, and supported by Seth-Purdie's (1996) description of the Duluth Model of Intervention, violence in the home comprises deliberate and controlled acts designed to control and intimidate. It is, again according to Seth-Purdie (1996), fear and concern for the well-being of others that maintain these women in a violent environment. This is reflected in Joy's concern for her mother and for her brother as well as Phoebe's concern for her siblings and, to a certain degree, her concern for her father. All but one participant demonstrated concern for the feelings of those to whom they might disclose, as well as concern for themselves.

6.1.2 Exploration of Causes and Experience

According to the literature reviewed (Allbrook, 1992; Blanchard et al., 1992; Bowlby, 1988; Calouste-Gulbenkian, 1995; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1997; Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; Osofsky, 1997; Perry, 1997; Shore, 1997; Sims & Hutchins, 1999; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997), and (Jenkins & Bell, 1997), social and familial factors are more likely to contribute to the predisposition to violence than are genetics or biology. Also according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the various levels of the environment contribute significantly to coping strategies adopted by the individual. This

then suggests that the perpetration of violence itself is a coping strategy. Each of the women in this study themselves developed strategies with which to cope with their own experience. Their own development and coping abilities and strategies will, of course, have been moulded by their own particular experiences. However, it is the interaction between genetics, biology and social environment which, according to Shore (1997) and to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1995), more fully explain the decisions people make and the actions they take.

Goddard and Hiller (1993) identified the likelihood that abusing parents, and those living in an abusive environment, may have experienced abuse themselves as children. There is little direct evidence from the young women in this study to either support or negate this hypothesis. The indirect evidence, however, strongly suggests this might also be the case for the abusers of these women. Michelle took the time to investigate the life of her abusive grandfather and discovered the secret of his abusive childhood. As a child, Michelle's mother had been sexually abused by this man, Michelle's grandfather; later Michelle's mother deserted her. Phoebe claims that her family *"are weird"* and discusses the *kidnapping* of her sister, as a baby, by her grandparents. She also discusses her parent's previous marriages in which she discloses that her mother had been married to *"an alcoholic"*. Caroline's maternal grandmother is quite harsh and judgemental of Caroline as a child and her own mother is *controlling*. Joy's maternal grandparents failed to support Joy's mother when she finally left a violent marriage; and Joy's paternal grandfather has been physically violent towards her mother. Stephanie's maternal grandmother, according to Stephanie, is unable to display emotion to her own children.

Although none of this evidence is sufficient to categorically claim that the parents of the women involved in this study were abused as children, the information provided, together with available literature, would suggest that it is likely. Goddard and Hiller (1993), in separating out domestic violence from child abuse, further claim that

> domestic violence... [is] the most overt expression of domination or the unequal distribution of power; it is also indicative of an atmosphere of coercion within which abuse of children has taken place. (Goddard & Hiller, 1993, p. 27).

There is a danger, they claim, that this *atmosphere of coercion* is often ignored; a consequence of which is that mothers are often blamed for the violence whether physical, sexual or emotional (Draper et al., 1991; Gittins, 1993; Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Seth-Purdie, 1996). The women in this study corroborated this claim. The fear for Joy in particular is that her mother, who demonstrated psychological and emotional instability, would be further blamed by professionals, friends and acquaintances alike. On the two separate occasions when professionals were made aware of Joy's father's abuse, neither she, nor her mother, were supported. In the first instance, when Joy told a primary school teacher, the teacher effectively condoned her father's behaviour by suggesting that his treatment of Joy might be *normal*. On the second occasion, Joy was examined in hospital as the result of a severe reaction to bee stings, the nurse concerned rightly assumed family violence but held Joy's mother responsible. Both Joy and her mother were victimised: firstly by the teacher suggesting to Joy that she was to blame for her father hitting her, it was her fault; and secondly by the nurse who blamed Joy's mother for the violence. The situation for Caroline was a little different – her grandmother maintained that she was *naturally* a difficult child, making no links between her behaviour and her experience of sexual abuse and violence.

According to Joy, teachers are ill equipped to support children living in violent situations. She also suggests that it is not an appropriate role for them to attempt to deal with issues of family violence and child abuse. Blanchard et al. (1992) disagree, suggesting that although teachers are currently ill equipped to do so, they are best placed to intervene, being the most likely to pick up issues of family violence and child abuse. Teachers, they claim, are more likely than others to see the first hand effect on the child of such an environment. Training in dealing with these issues is therefore suggested.

All participants suggest that there is either a lack of services available to them or a lack of information about existing services - and possibly, both conclusions are accurate. Research undertaken in Perth (Allbrook, 1992; Blanchard et al., 1992; Kulisa, 1992; Omelzcuk, 1992) and (Walshe, 1995), suggest that there are too few services and those that are available are under resourced and, in many instances, ill equipped to deal with the situation. Youth workers themselves (Allbrook, 1992; Omelzcuk, 1992) maintain that they are ill equipped to effectively intervene where violence in the home is an issue.

The literature suggests (Blanchard et al., 1992; Bowlby, 1988; Draper et al., 1991; Seth-Purdie, 1996) that many young people experiencing violence in the home respond with aggression and anti-social behaviour which serves to further victimise them. Among the participants in this study, Phoebe claims to have become anti-social in her outlook. She was involved in regular *binge drinking* with her peers. She further claims that she would have done anything to ensure that she could hurt others **before** they had the opportunity to hurt her. Stephanie was antagonistic at home, ignoring the wishes of others and using whatever tools were at her disposal (*loud music, 15 earrings, a tattoo*) to ensure she was noticed by

her family. Caroline displayed anti-social tendencies as a small child with *difficult behaviour* and later at school refusing to mix with her peer group who, she claims, thought she was *strange*. Only Joy and Michelle did not report behaviour that could be classified as overtly *anti-social*. Michelle did, on the other hand, display little concern for her father and her brother, keeping herself as much away from them as possible. She also used the kindness of church members to meet her own needs; she claims that she *manipulated* the situation to get want she wanted from them. Joy demonstrated an acceptance of violence as *nomal* for her; anticipating it and expecting it. For a long time she believed that any relationship she had would only be meaningful if the boy treated her badly. When attempts were made at intervention as a result of her abuse she became resistant. Where the attempt was overt she was overtly resistant – telling the nurse to *mind her own business*; and where the attempt was covert she responded covertly – becoming withdrawn and on one occasion walking out of the classroom.

Both Walshe (1995) and Yeatman (1980) claim that socially and politically we deal with violence by denial and minimisation. If the true nature of violence, both at home and in the community, were recognised, they claim, our political and social structures would be unable to deal with the reality. Therefore, at a personal level, as well as at the various structural levels violence is effectively denied and minimised. The story told by each of the women in this study supports this claim. Joy could not discuss with her mother, her step-father, her brother, her friends, her teachers or the nurse in the hospital what was happening for her. The nature and level of the violence she continued to experience had to be denied in order for her to feel certain that she would remain supported – at least by her mother. Attempts made to disclose resulted in accusations and misrepresentation of the truth, for Joy.

Caroline's mother told her that what had happened was *in the past* and should remain there. Apart from her brother, Caroline had no-one to talk to and was seen as a *freak* (or at least very strange) by her peer group at school. When Caroline was small, she received counselling, but does not state whether this was as a result of being sexually and physically abused by her father, or due to her *difficult behaviour*.

As a child, Phoebe was given the opportunity to disclose, but was not supported in doing so. Her parents maintained their control of her and she was readily persuaded to keep information about her family to herself. In this instance, *welfare* were aware of family violence and neglect but, for whatever reason, chose not to ensure the emotional and physical safety of all the children in this particular family. Michelle, from 14 years of age, came and went as she pleased with no intervention from anyone – structural or otherwise. Had she not brought attention to her situation at the church, no-one would have been aware that she had experienced any form of family violence or parental neglect. Those members of the church who were aware, appeared helpless and inadequate as far as any meaningful intervention was concerned. Stephanie's story is different to most of the young women in as much as her experience was not of overt violence or deliberate neglect. For this reason she did not come to the attention of anyone outside her family – she was just a normal, although difficult, child.

Certainly, the literature (Allbrook, 1992; Blanchard et al., 1992; Bloom, 1995; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995; Draper et al., 1991; Goddard & Hiller, 1993; Kulisa, 1992) reinforces the inability or unwillingness of service providers to accept the prevalence and nature of violence in society. The experience of participants in this study is that it is not only

service providers who do not identify the nature and prevalence of violence. However, it is probably even more difficult for friends, relatives, community workers and teachers – all untrained in this area – to really grasp the meaning and reality of the experience for the individual.

6.1.2 Conference findings

It is not hard to understand why so much difficulty and incongruity surrounds the understanding and acceptance of violence in the home, when one takes into consideration that the notion of violence in relation to family was not formally discussed until the 1960s. In 1980, Yeatman (1980) identified that the construction of the problem of *child abuse* focused on children under three years of age, thereby denying the problem for older children. Further, the then accepted definition of child abuse failed to acknowledge the existence of anything which was not medically provable – that is abuse or violence that did not leave evidence that could be medically examined and determined. If this definition had been used to seek participants for this study, only two of those included could have been accepted. Caroline was medically examined as a result of the sexual abuse of her father – she has, however, no recollection of the events at this time. The other qualifying participant, Joy, was uncertain of any violent attacks before the age of four years and certainly was not medically examined until much older – and then not as a result of the violence. The other four participants would not have been included because their experience does not fit the criteria of that particular definition of *child abuse*. For the women in this study, their experience in their family of origin included emotional violence and neglect as well as physical and sexual abuse (at least for some of them). From an uninformed perspective,

however, their experience could be explained as *normal* if an unquestioned acceptance of *patriarchal authority* is assumed (Yeatman, 1980).

Another popular approach to child abuse at that time, according to Hamory (1980) is the acknowledgment that child abuse is in fact a crime. Although not all participants in this study would want the perpetrators of violence against them to be convicted and punished as criminals, all would agree that their actions were in fact criminal. However, as Hamory (1980) points out, this approach places the focus of attention on the perpetrator rather than on the needs of the *victim*. Prior to 1980 WA was the first state to set up *child protection units* the main purpose of which was to support parents in effective, non-abusive parenting. As far as the young women in this study are concerned, even though they are amongst the first generation of children for whom this family support model was available, these units have failed to either protect them or support their families. Primarily this is due to the *problematic* nature of recording child abuse; it is also due to what Hamory (1980) describes as the social acceptance of *aggression* and *violence*.

For the most part, abused and violated children *just want the violence to stop*. The young women in this study are no different. Not only did they want the violence to stop, they wanted to amend their behaviour in order to ensure that it stopped. In this, like others who have been abused, they were unsuccessful. Not surprisingly, even though they considered the violence to be their fault they were helpless to avert it. Rowan (1985) refers to the *syndrome* of family violence in which victims "syndromatically blame themselves and hide their shame and injuries" (Rowan, 1985, p. 30). Lee (1985) and Draper (1991) suggest that within marriage, women have been little more than *slaves*, and that it is the social position of

women that perpetuates violence. Joy described herself during my interview with her as her father's *little slave*. She considered his treatment of her as that of master to slave. She probably felt as much (or little) respect, and dread, for her father as did slaves of their masters.

6.2 Nurture or Nature

The development of personality traits and individual behaviour has been argued by some from the ideological perspective of *NATURE* suggesting that these individuals are genetically programmed to be they way they are. Others have argued that individual characteristics are not necessarily pre-programmed in this manner and that it is the way in which an individual is *NURTURED* that will affect their behaviour and personality. This part of the discussion will explore theories of *Attachment* and *Neurobiological development* in relation to the experiences of these young women. The fact that the Theoretical Framework for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory would strongly suggest that the perspective taken already rests heavily on the side of *NURTURE* as opposed to *NATURE*.

The term *attachment* refers to behaviour patterns developed in early childhood; the mode of *attachment* and the level of reciprocity experienced will determine how these behaviour patterns are invoked. Bolwby (1988) likened *attachment* to the homeostasis of physiological systems

> ... in which the set limits concern the organism's relation to clearly identified persons in, or other features of, the environment and in which the limits are maintained by behavioural instead of physiological means. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 29).

Attachment is no less an issue for young women experiencing violence at home. Maintenance of homeostasis for the young women in this study was frequently more problematic and more confusing than for the person brought up in a supportive environment. Firstly, it is difficult to develop a *secure attachment* when attachment figures are themselves *insecurely attached*. Parents rear their children, Gonzalez-Mena (1994) maintains, according to their perception of the world and children attempt to control their environment through attachment behaviour. Generally, this is a reciprocal arrangement (Cairns, 1975; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994); one through which the child learns whether or not the world and the people in it can be *trusted* (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994).

The behaviour of the young women in this study as they grew up can be directly related to the *homeostatic* patterns developed during the formation of *attachment* to their caregiver(s). Phoebe's description of her behaviour in her early teens, as well as that described by Stephanie during her later teens, is symptomatic of the maladaptive behaviour that Bowlby (1988) describes as *pathological*. Gonzalez-Mena (1994) maintains that an *anxiously attached* child is likely to respond in a maladaptive way due to "the need for security as well as a sense of loss of control over the situation" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994, p. 13). Both Stephanie and Phoebe claim that their behaviour was based on a need to control their own environment. Stephanie wanted to be noticed by her family and Phoebe wanted to *get back at* her parents. Joy and Michelle talked about maintaining control over their consumption and absorption of food when they discussed bulimic and anorexic behaviour. Joy quickly learnt that if her mother was distressed she would become suicidal and that if her father was annoyed he would become violent. Her behaviour with these two attachment figures in her life needed to be different. With her father she needed to close herself off and

avoid feeling pain or emotion; whereas with her mother Joy needed to display extreme sensitivity, compassion and concern. As a teenager, Joy's behaviour was maladaptive when she continued to avoid attempts by teachers and medical personal to intervene in her situation; further it became maladaptive when she withdrew from her mother by running away from home. It also became maladaptive when she used laughter to deal with impending violence and stress.

Mothers who sought to make an attachment figure of at least one of their children parented both Joy and Caroline; thus displaying a symptom of insecure attachment as children (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby claims that mothers who "seek care and comfort from one of their children whom they treat as though they were much older than they are" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 84) are *anxiously attached* and attempting to gain the parenting they lacked themselves as children from their own child/ren. Bowlby also identified "anxious concern for the welfare of parents" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 85) to be linked to abandonment or the threat of abandonment and also frequent threats of being "beaten, maimed, or even killed" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 85). It is not surprising then, that Joy is so concerned for the wellbeing of her mother. Joy also claims that as a teenager she sought out *boyfriends* who were abusive towards her. She felt uncomfortable, she claimed, if a boy treated her with respect. Gonzalez-Mena (1994) maintains that adults who seek out "people who treat them much as their early caregiver(s) did" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994, p. 7) are attempting to resolve unresolved childhood issues. More than this, Cairns (1975) claims that it is less stressful to develop new relationships when the behaviour of the new person is familiar. Little wonder then, that Joy sought out boys who were themselves abusive. Little wonder too, that Phoebe drank in a local park with other angry teenagers; or Stephanie and Caroline had few friends;

or even that Michelle sought solace in members of the church who provided her with the nurturing she failed to receive at home during her teenage years.

Caroline claims that she and her brother are *just the sort of people who get abused*; she is fearful of being sexually violated once more. Phoebe will attack before she is attacked; and Joy sought out young men who were abusive as potential partners. The responses of these women fit with the *learnt behaviour* described by Cairns (1975), who claims that children develop expectations of others with certain characteristics and within certain situations. It is the response to these expectations that he describes as *learnt behaviour*. This behaviour also fits the sense of *mourning* described by Bowlby (1988), in which children will present "anger, directed at third parties, the self, and sometimes the person lost, disbelief that the loss has occurred... and a tendency, often though not always unconscious, to search for the lost person in the hope of reunion" (Bowlby, 1988). All of these women, in different ways, "put up barriers so that no one (could)... get close" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1994). Phoebe was potentially aggressive towards all other adults; Joy only allowed friends to get so close, but not close enough to know what was actually happening; Caroline ensured that she was never in large groups of people or in a situation in which she could not be protected by a close friend; Michelle kept away from her brother and father and only provided sufficient information to members of the church to gain what she needed at the time; and Stephanie closed herself off from most of her family refusing to communicate with them.

Separate to the violence these women experienced is the importance of attachment patterns developed during their childhood. According to much of the literature (Shore, 1997; Bowlby, 1988; Cairns, 1975; Gonzalez-Mena, 1994; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997; Garbarino,

1992; Jenkins, 1997; Osofsky, 1997; and Perry, 1997), the ability of the individual to overcome trauma is based on the development of secure attachment to at least one adult as they grow. This is demonstrated by the *resilience* of some children over others who cope less well with the trauma they experience and, according to neurobiological theory, relates to the malleability of the brain when appropriate levels of support are also experienced. Michelle and Joy were able to develop reasonably secure attachment patterns with their primary caregiver(s) even though they experienced violence at the hands of a third party. The type of attachment patterns developed by Joy to her mother are described earlier, in as much as she was parented by a mother still seeking her own parenting. For the other participants in this study it is not so clear that their attachment to their primary caregiver was in any way secure. Certainly Phoebe's attachment to her mother was *anxious*, she claimed to have been terrified of the outcome had she disobeyed her mother. Caroline said little about her relationship with her mother other than she did not feel cared for to the same degree as her brother and sister. She also indicated that her mother was controlling and that it was easier to do as she was asked than to argue with her. According to Bowlby (1988), children who are treated as if they are a nuisance are likely to become "unwillingly and anxiously obedient" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 82) and the child who is rejected "is likely to develop a pattern of behaviour in which avoidance... competes with... [a] desire for proximity and care" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 82). Stephanie avoided her family, but she claimed that her aim was to seek their attention – she no longer felt there was any possibility of gaining their approval. Phoebe's anger and distrust of others is, suggests Bowlby (1988) a result of her mother's "failure to respond helpfully when a child in distress, combined with repeated and impatient rejections" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 86) of Phoebe as a child. Bowlby (1988) claims that children who have been subject to "prolonged hostile rejection and neglect....(may be described as)

depressed, passive and inhibited, as 'dependent' and anxious, and also angry and aggressive" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 88) - a description which describes not only Phoebe, but also Stephanie and Caroline. According to Shore (1997), physical and psychological trauma:

> ... can elevate an individual's cortisol level. In turn [this] affects metabolism, the immune system and the brain... .In this way, stressful or traumatic experiences can indeed undermine neurological development and impair brain function. And in fact, children who have chronically high levels of cortisol have been shown to experience more developmental delays.... (Shore, 1997, p. 28).

Phoebe and Joy are both small statured women; and, although they both claim to have worked hard at school, Joy and Caroline repeated year 12 in order to attend university. Joy also claimed *not to have the skills* to make friends when she started school; whilst Caroline kept herself aloof from the majority of her peer group throughout her school life. It is those children, according to Shore (1997) who are exposed to trauma without support who are most likely to demonstrate developmental delays and to deal less effectively with stress. Phoebe claims that, when her aunt spoke a little more harshly to her than previously, *a little tear ran down* her face because she could not believe that she was being told off again - even though her aunt was not displeased at all, but just wanted a certain task undertaken.

According to neurobiological research the brain works on a *use it or lose it* principle. Where positive influences are prevalent the brain will stabilise accordingly, increasing "the number of neurons in the brains of young adults" (Shore, 1997, p. 37) making available to the owner a more efficient brain. Conversely violence and aggression will stabilise the brain for negative behaviour responses. An unresponsive caregiver will predispose the child to an inability to develop *empathy* as well as "anxiety, impulsivity, poor affect regulation, and hyperactivity" (Shore, 1997, p. 41) resulting from an overdeveloped midbrain and brainstem. All participants demonstrated a level of *anxiety.* Although controlled in most of their

actions, they also all demonstrated *impulsivity.* Both Phoebe and Joy left home without consideration of where they would go or how they would support themselves. Michelle *jumped* on the train to go to see her mother without any consideration of how she would deal with the response she received. Caroline and her brother *acted the fool* in public; and once away from home Stephanie bought things on impulse. Phoebe, as discussed above, cried for no apparent reason. She was aggressive towards anyone who attempted to intervene in her life and both she and Joy were unable to sit still otherwise they would become unbearably depressed.

Anxiously attached and neurologically damaged, it is not surprising that these women, for the most part, did as they were told. Parents, and other violators of children, are well practiced at encouraging children to *keep secret* information of which they do not want others to be aware. This was certainly the case for most of the participants in this study. Phoebe was *encouraged* not to tell the counsellor any information about her family; Michelle's grandfather ensured she kept their *secret* for several years; and Joy was told by both her father and her mother not to say anything to anyone outside the family. Caroline claims not to remember what happened to her, but was told by her mother when she was 16; at that stage Caroline was also told that it was something that should remain in the past. Why then should any of these women consider that it would be easy to tell anyone, at any stage of their childhood and early adult hood, what was happening for them? As Bowlby (1988) claims:

> Small wonder if, in later years, all men are distrusted, and the professional stance of a male therapist is seen as a mere façade that hides a predatory intent. Small wonder also that the injunction on no account to tell anyone remains operative, and the expectation that in any case no one would believe you ensures silence. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 106).

Considering the potential for intervention through youth work practice, it is reassuring to know that, although brain development is at its most active during the first ten years of life, appropriate intervention can make a difference even later in life.

6.3 Community and Family Violence and Child Development

According to the literature (Sims & Hutchins, 1999; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997), children and babies are genetically equipped to ensure their safety by being attractive to adults who, in turn are likely to be predisposed to protect them from harm. The genetically programmed physical characteristics of Phoebe and her siblings failed to ensure that their parents would protect them. Phoebe's mother, according to Phoebe, failed to demonstrate any maternal instincts whatsoever, never holding or cuddling them as do most mothers. Her father, on the other hand, initially provided the physical care and protection from violence that was required to ensure their safety. As has been previously discussed, the results of such neglect, although mediated by her father's attention, is likely to be psychological and neurobiological in nature. Joy, Michelle and Caroline were also left unprotected from the violent actions of one family member. All these women were, however, provided as children with at least one other adult whom could be considered a reasonably secure *attachment figure*, again mediating the potential damage from the experience of violence.

As a baby Stephanie indicated that she was well loved, not just by her parents but also by her numerous older siblings. It is only as she grew older that she became aware of the subtle level of violence that pervaded her family home. All participants, on the other hand, witnessed "parental conflict and violence" (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997) for some (Phoebe,

Joy and Caroline) physical violence between parents was not only extreme but perpetrated in front of them. Perry (1997) maintains that it is witnessing this type and level of violence that predisposes adolescents and adults to "community and predatory violence" (Perry, 1997, p. 126). Of the participants in this study, only Phoebe claims to have gotten near to committing this type of behaviour, during her *drinking* phase. The experience for Joy and Caroline, however, has not left them unscathed. Both Caroline and Joy discussed the inability to sleep without dreaming - dreams which were both frightening and traumatic. Caroline, although unsure of the exact dreams she had, claimed to *experience being watched.* Joy, on the other hand, was very clear about her dreams and was able to associate them to actual experiences as a very young child, which had been suppressed. Joy was so traumatised by these dreams that she was afraid of going to sleep. This, according to Zeanah and Scheeringa (1997), is representative of *posttraumatic stress disorder.* Among the behaviours typical of posttraumatic stress disorder, according to Jenkins and Bell (1997) are the *pessimism* and *sense of hopelessness* claimed by Phoebe, the *harm seeking behaviour* and *alcohol* use she also discussed together with the *anger* she felt for anyone and everyone. Caroline and Joy demonstrated *revictimisation* behaviour - Joy in her choice of male friends, and Caroline, who had already been sexually abused by three different perpetrators, was terrified it might happen again. Joy and Phoebe discussed fleeting moments of *suicidal* thoughts; Joy and Michelle suffered from *eating disorders* and Joy and Stephanie were affected by *school impairment.* All of these are identified by Jenkins and Bell (1997) as typical of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Phoebe suffered extreme emotional neglect as well as exposure to physical violence as a child. This exposure was mediated, to a degree, by the protection she received from her

father (none of which she actively remembers). Joy also experienced ongoing physical violence from her father, this time mediated by the support she received from her mother. Both Caroline and Michelle experienced sexual violence and Caroline's father physically assaulted her as well. For these two young women the neurobiological effects of this violence have been mediated by the attachment they developed with their primary caregiver. According to neurobiological development theory literature, all these women are in danger of developing negative neurobiological patterns which may be permanent (Perry, 1997; Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997) and devastating. This neurobiological adaptation initially enabled these women, as children, to survive ongoing violence. Without the necessary levels of mediation through secure attachment figures, it does, however, predispose the individual to an increased tendency to violence themselves (Perry, 1997). Repeated exposure to violence serves to activate "a neural network [and] involves 'use-dependent' internalisation of new information... [which] can be activated subsequently by lower threshold stimulus... result[ing] in 'traits'" (Zeanah & Scheeringa, 1997, p. 107).

As already mentioned the danger of developing *violent traits* is mediated by development of effective attachment to at least one adult during infancy or childhood; thereby enabling the necessary inhibitory capabilities required to control various emotional urges and to respond in socially acceptable ways. Of the participants in this study, only Phoebe was not offered a satisfactory level of attachment opportunity as a child. She did, however, acquire a secure attachment in her teens when she developed a caring relationship with her *boyfriend* who she saw to be more than a close friend but also a positive role model. That these women were all able to overcome such negative life experiences to achieve, in early adult hood, the appearance of normality is reassuring. This is not meant to suggest that all their problems

have been overcome, far from it. What I am attempting to suggest is that there is hope that even women who have experienced the most devastating violence during childhood, with the appropriate supports, even past childhood, can be expected to regain much of what passes for normality in Australian society. Garbarino (1997), Perry (1997), Bowlby (1988), Zeanah and Scheeringa (1997), and Shore (1997) maintain that the level of damage caused is dependent on the level of support and nurturing these children receive from whatever source and whatever period in their development.

6.4 Youth Work and School

The literature reviewed in relation to existing youth work practice highlighted the need for workers and agencies to conform to funding body guidelines. It also highlighted the need for workers themselves to be aware of the dynamics of power inequities both in society and within their agencies - especially where the client group are concerned. Although not consciously discussed, the young women in this study were very aware of power dynamics and the resultant effect on their ability to talk about their experiences with others.

Historically, youth work practice has been related to social control. Young people affected by family violence have experienced extreme attempts to control their behaviour. Moore (1998) rightly asserts that these young people are more likely to respond to approaches which enable them to develop a sense of control over their own environment and responsibility - empowerment. Omelzcuk (1992) identified that to successfully engage with young women who have experienced family violence or sexual abuse, workers must themselves have a level of awareness based on personal understanding, skill and personal

philosophy which will enable these young women to feel confident with the workers ability to help. The worker, according to Omelzcuk (1992) needs also to have an understanding of power dynamics within and between various groups and individuals using the service. In her study, Omelzcuk (1992) found that many workers did not have this understanding nor were they aware of power issues either in the broader social context or within their own agency. "[M]any workers view... male dominance as normal" (Omelzcuk, 1992, p. 142) and fail to empower young women to make changes in the youth service, let alone in their lives. Predominantly, although ostensibly generic in their approach, services provide for the needs of young men. Frequently, this is in response to community demands for entertainment designed to contain the actions of *'street present'* boys. White (1990) maintains that this type of service provision frequently fails to also acknowledge gender inequalities and thereby workers are in danger of perpetuating structural inequalities that permit the abuse of women and children (Omelzcuk, 1992).

The young women in this study all claimed that they would have liked to have known that people really did understand what was happening for them and that neither they nor their families would be judged by people to whom they might disclose. They wanted to know that there was someone who would understand and support them in what they chose to do. The repercussions of mandatory reporting were something that these young women would have found difficult to deal with. They reported being most afraid of the idea that they would be forced to press charges or face the perpetrator with accusations. If they could have spoken to someone that they knew had the power to stop the problem, without being made to face the perpetrator, they would have done so without any question. Although, from the young woman's perspective this is quite reasonable, it is obviously a tall task to fill. However, the

empowerment model discussed by Moore (1998)and Omelzcuk (1992) would enable these women to develop their own models for dealing with the problem.

According to Caughey (1991), it is not unreasonable, in order to recover, for an abused child, or young adult, to require adults around them who are willing to listen and accept without judgement. It is, Caughey (1991) explains "the adult's quality of feeling and witnessing that nourishes the child most deeply" (Caughey, 1991, p. 27). It is this role that Bloom (1995) maintains can be adopted at school, but only through a total revaluation by educators of the meaning of disruptive behaviour on the part of the child. She claims that the "key in strategizing how to handle bad kids is figuring out how *not* do what they are cuing us to do" (Bloom, 1995, p. 408). Further, she claims that "Relieving the person from the burden of shame leaves open the possibility for the realistic self-appraisal of responsibility and request for assistance" (Bloom, 1995, p. 415).

6.5 Conclusion

The women in this study have greater awareness of the issues involved in family violence than do many youth workers and other professionals to whom they might realistically go for help. What this study has shown is that there is need for further research based on the needs and experience of women, such as those involved in this study, to effectively answer the original research subquestion.

The research also highlights that young women who have experienced violence, no matter what form that violence might have taken or where it is placed on the continuum of

violence, have a need to discuss their experience with an individual they feel confident will support them according to their needs. Moreover, this study reveals that these particular young women were not aware of anyone who might fill this role, neither are youth workers generally equipped to take on this role (Omelzcuk, 1992; Allbrook, 1992; Kulisa, 1992). Certainly schoolteachers, who are more likely the first point of contact for young people and children living in violence, are not currently equipped to deal with the problem, as exemplified by Joy's experience in this study. The literature also shows the importance of identifying at least one attachment figure as early as possible in life, with whom a secure attachment may be developed.

For these reasons, it is proposed that further research be undertaken in conjunction with young women, possibly participants in this research, and existing youth services. In this research, a model of practice will be developed and amended as appropriate to meet the needs of young women experiencing violence in their homes. This study, *"Killing Ostriches"*, has at least offered the opportunity for workers with young people (that is teachers, youth workers and other professionals) to ask questions relating to why the young person might be behaving in a particular way. Currently, those who are especially quiet in school or the youth centre are easy to ignore, and those who demand a lot of attention get attention - not necessarily of the kind they actually require, however. The *death* of professional *Ostriches* may ensure that those who remain are sufficiently enlightened to offer appropriate support for these young people.

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Appendices

Informed Letter of Consent

Dear.....,

As a youth worker I am concerned that young women in contact with other youth workers are not receiving help in dealing with violence at home. For this reason I am asking young women, aged 18 to 25 years, who are survivors of a violent family situation to talk to me about what it was like for them growing up in that environment. What I would like to know is how they felt, and what help they either did receive or would have like to have received from someone like myself.

I am currently studying as a post graduate student (Master of Social Science) at Edith Cowan University, and would be pleased of your assistance in doing this research. I hope to be able to find things that could be done to help young women find ways of coping with violent home situations as well as to help them to avoid these situations in future relationships. I believe that it is important to find out what young women who have experienced violence at home think about this and what their ideas are for meaningful intervention by youth workers or other professionals.

As a result of what I have found so far I have decided to also talk to young women in this age group who do not identify as having experience violence as they grew up.

I have been given your name as someone who might be interested, and am writing to ask for your help by taking part in a study of young women's perceptions of violence at home. If you agree to take part in the study, we would need to meet two or three times for forty to fifty minutes on each

occasion. The total time commitment would be about two hours. I would arrange to come to you for the interview at a time and place that is convenient to you. I would be asking for your permission to tape record the interview. I will then transcribe the interview and at out final meeting discuss with you my summary of the transcripts, so that you can tell me if there is anything that I have gotten wrong. If there is anything in the summary which you would like me to take out I will do so if you ask me to. All tapes will be destroyed after the examination of the thesis and all information on computer disk will be destroyed after a period of five years.

If you have any questions that you would like me to answer about the research please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 9247 1690. I am usually available in the evenings or weekends.

Yours faithfully,

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, ..., (the participant) have read the information about the study and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that any information I share with the researcher will be dealt with in a confidential manner, and that my anonymity will be maintained. I agree to participate in this study, realising I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

Signed: ..... Date: .....

(Investigator): ..... Date: .....