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Stephanie Jackiewicz
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**The lived experience of a group of mothers, geographically isolated from
their extended families, in establishing their social support networks.**

By

Stephanie Jackiewicz B.Soc.Sci.(C.S.)

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Award of**

Master of Social Science (Human Services)

at the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

Edith Cowan University

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experience of a group of women, geographically isolated from their extended family, as they establish their new support networks. It is based on the assumption that the shape and structure of families are constantly changing and evolving and this change in family structure impacts on both the parents and the children. One of the significant changes families are experiencing is the increasing isolation of the nuclear family from traditional family networks. It is the purpose of this study to explore the experience of this group of women to identify how the members establish their support networks. It determines the process they used in developing these networks and discovers the essential elements which contributed to the formation of new networks.

The women participating in the study have all moved to Western Australia and as a result are isolated from their extended family. They all have at least one pre school aged child, speak English and have been involved in a self-help group for families separated from their extended family.

A phenomenological approach was adopted to explore how this specific group of women in this situation has established their new support networks. The aim is to explore this phenomenon from the participant's perspective. A small sample of participants was selected from the self-help group with the help of a key informant. The data were collected over an extended period using in depth interviews. Each interview was transcribed and analysed for themes and concepts. These were taken back to the participants for verification. The findings have been reported using the narrative style as this is a style that fits comfortably with women. The narratives were verified by the individual participants as a true account of their experience. The themes extracted from

all the participants are also reported and verified by the individual participants. These themes answer the questions of how these women establish their networks and what influences and affects the formation of these new networks.

This study has implications for both policy and practice. It identifies areas where policy needs to be reviewed in order for additional funding to be provided to current health services so that they can continue with current services and expand these. Other services need to provide alternate models in order to meet the needs of various clientele. Services need to become more responsive to the community in order to meet their current needs. Additionally, some new and alternate services could be explored in order to meet the needs of this particular group.

The need for further research has been highlighted by this study in the area of NESB migrants and their establishment of new networks, mothers of older school age children and those in full time employment trying to establish networks. In general the role of women in establishing networks within families still needs further researching. This study has identified some important factors in the establishment of networks by mothers of pre-school children, who are geographically isolated from their extended family.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in text.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background to the research

Australia is a multicultural society where people from many countries around the world come to make their new home. Immigration has been a major contributing factor to population growth in Australia (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1996) for many years. As a result of migration new migrants often find themselves operating within a foreign social structure. The reasons for migration are varied and the migrant family structure is dependent upon their time of arrival in Australia and the immigration policy of the government of the day. These policies have varied over the years with changing governments and the changing needs of Australia.

The current migration programme allows people to enter the country under the categories of skilled, humanitarian or family reunion entrants (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1996). Despite family reunion being one of the entry criteria, this often takes many years and may not be financially or politically viable (D'Mello & Bugueno, 1989). In addition, family reunion entry is usually restricted to a small number of close relatives (Storer, 1987). Consequently, there are many migrant families in Australia who have no extended family living in the country and have few or no support networks upon arrival. This can lead to social isolation amongst migrant families and over dependence on immediate family members for support (Storer, 1987, Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989). This social isolation adds to the general strains associated with settling into a new social structure. Women are often responsible for establishing the family network, particularly the mothers.

In addition to those migrating from overseas there is also a number of people migrating from interstate to Western Australia. These people may not face many of the same settlement issues such as language barriers, currency difference, cultural contrast and variation to the social system. However, due to the isolation of Western Australia to other parts of Australia, their issues of social isolation would be similar to those of the overseas migrants. A lack of support during the settlement process would affect all migrants be they from overseas or interstate.

There are certain times in life when the need for support from personal networks increases. Gottlieb (1980) suggests during encounters that demand an adjustment to or change of the social network, social support is particularly important. He cites first time parent hood, college entrance, and divorce as examples of these passages (Mc Cannel, 1988). Another is migration. This is also a time in life when people must reorient and rearrange their social networks. Additionally, it can be a time when families experience loss of family networks.

The loss of the family network causes many problems. A study conducted in Australia by Krupinski & Stoller (1974) identified three major issues; separation from relatives of the same gender, social isolation and loss of a social control mechanism (Storer, 1987). These issues are all essential to the maintenance of healthy families. In order to maintain healthy family relationships it is important for migrant families to establish new personal networks. Cochran, Larner, Riley, Gunnarsson & Henderson (1990) identified several factors that influence the development of networks: human capacity, time and energy, individual personalities, discrete life events, self esteem, education, personal identity, social and cognitive skills and stage of development. These factors impacted in various ways on a person's ability to build and maintain networks.

Having established the importance of social support networks and identified factors which influence the establishment of networks the question that was left unanswered was the process and experience of establishing these networks. What was the process like for the individual? What was this experience? How did this experience effect them emotionally, socially and financially? What are the characteristics of the new networks? How were previously existing relationships affected? How did they re-establish their networks during this period of settlement?

There are many ways to deal with this settlement process. One way of dealing with the problem of social isolation is through the formation of a self-help group. Over the years, women have formed self-help groups to provide support (Marieskind, 1984) and experiential knowledge to one another (Borkman, 1984) over a variety of issues. The women in this study used a self-help group to assist them with the settlement process. They were all members of a self-help group for those without extended family. It was decided to choose members from this group because they had all identified with this issue of social isolation in the settlement process. At the time of the study some were still accessing the group and others had left the group for various reasons.

Research in this area is necessary if the community is to provide support to families in this situation. The Taskforce on Families in Western Australia (1995) is committed to supporting families and this is an area where support is needed. Maintaining healthy families is crucial to the community and research in this area can assist in this process by providing both practical and theoretical insight into the issues.

Personal Reasoning

It would only be fair to say that my interest in this area was generated by my undergraduate studies in the areas of children and intercultural studies. However, it was through my work with families in the children's services field that my interest in this particular topic became focused. I noted that many families using these services were new to Western Australia and isolated from their extended family. The degree to which these families relied on the services became evident when it was proposed that a particular service was to cease operating for an extended period of time. When the parents were questioned in regard to the service continuing or ceasing it was those families who were isolated from their extended family who were most keen for the service to continue operating. It was not possible at the time for the service to operate in the same manner as before, however, this did not concern the families. Their concern was that they could continue attending with the same group with people they had begun to form relationships with. These people may form part of their new support network. It was at this point that I became interested in the concept of settlement processes for new families. Soon after, I met a woman attending the children's service, who had started up a self-help group for families isolated from their extended family. It became obvious that this was an issue for many families.

The decision to research the women's perspective came from the fact that it was generally the mothers who attended children's services. It was most often the women who stayed at home to care for the young children and hence often did not have the work place to begin networks. It was the mothers who appeared to be most isolated.

Research Question

How did a group of mothers, geographically isolated from their extended family, establish their support networks?

Essentially in this thesis I argue that mothers are key players in the formation of support networks for families who are geographically isolated from their extended family. Using an ecological perspective it is possible to see the importance and the impact this has on the remainder of the family. Exploration of the importance of both formal and informal support networks on families is detailed. The role played by formal and informal networks is highlighted.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how a group of mothers of young children established their personal networks when they were geographically isolated from their extended family. In answering this question it is necessary to:

1. Ascertain what it was like for a group of mothers of young children in establishing networks, without extended family.
2. Determine the processes they use to develop networks.
3. Discover the essential elements which contribute to the formation of new networks.

Justification for Research

Due to Western Australia's large migrant population and the general isolation the nuclear family is currently facing, many families are living without extended family close by. It is important to understand the experience of these people in order to assist them to build new networks and maintain healthy relationships. The results of this study will assist those working with families to provide appropriate services. Many human services may not recognise their role as directly relating to network formation for families, however, this may be an important role they have overlooked. The knowledge

gained from this study will enable them to better plan their services to meet the needs of the community. Studies have shown that healthy networks are important for the development of healthy adults and children. Therefore, it is important to understand how these networks are established in order to be able to ensure members of the population develop strong and healthy networks. This will ensure that members of our society are growing and developing in a healthy manner.

There are varying definitions of networks, mostly relating to how these are demographically structured. In this study networks are identified as a series of relationships that work together. Networks are formed by many relationships that work together to provide for the needs of the individual. It is not possible to have all ones needs fulfilled by just one person, therefore, it is the various relationships within a network that work to fulfil these needs.

This study provides new insight into the social network research that focuses heavily on structure of networks but does not look at how the participants view the network formation process. Structure of networks provides us with limited information to use when making decisions regarding policies and programs. It is important to understand the process from the participant's perspective when developing policies and services for this population. Participants often hold a great deal of valid information about processes that can be utilised to develop programs that meet their needs appropriately.

There has been an abundance of research conducted into migration in the Australian context, however, this is usually described in terms of pre war and post war migration, meaning prior to and after World War II. Of course current research could come under the category of post war. However, a great deal of time has passed since

World War II and much has changed about our society and about the migrants arriving today. Very little research has been conducted into the current wave of migration. Another area that appears to be lacking is research into English speaking migrants. Much of the research focuses on non-English speaking migrants. Although many of the issues would be similar, non-English speaking migrants may have more pressing issues in regard to language than English speaking migrants. This could lead to a shadowing of many issues faced by migrant populations. With the current political climate in Australia it is time to begin a new era of migration research so that informed discussion and policies can be developed, policies that are not based upon out of date research.

Most of the research relating to migrant women has focused on their changed roles outside of the home; with little focus on the important role they continue to play within the home. Again there is little research conducted into those moving interstate and how they establish themselves. Australia is a large country and the settlement problems faced here may differ from those in smaller countries where distances are less. In particular, Western Australia is isolated from the remainder of the country and it is important to explore the issue arising here.

As shown, Australia, and in particular Western Australia, is a multicultural society consisting of migrants from around the world. The structure of these families varies depending upon their arrival in Australia. Irrespective of where or when they arrived what is common and important to them all is the establishment of support networks to alleviate the isolation experienced by these families. My interest in the topic is generated by both my previous studies and work with families. In the course of this work it has become evident that it is mostly women who are involved in the stay at home rearing of the children and therefore have limited opportunities to meet people,

hence the decision to study women in this situation. It is the aim of this research to answer some of the unanswered questions regarding how a group of mothers, geographically isolated from their extended family, establish their support networks and in the process fill some of the gaps in the current research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In the first chapter the research topic has been introduced by exploring the background and justification for researching this area. In this chapter the literature pertaining to this area will be explored in order to establish a need for this research. This study is a phenomenological study and as such I must be careful not to pre-empt the findings of the study. Phenomenology aims to gather information from the participant's perspective without interference from other's viewpoints. However, the following review of literature in the area of social networks is aimed at demonstrating the need for this particular study and acts as the "scaffolding" (Massey, 1996) for this study. It also acts as a "lens" allowing the researcher to "focus on the problem" and identify any methodological issues (Massey, 1996). It is important to look at the three key areas of literature in relation to this study, social networks, migration and women and their families.

Social Support Networks

In the area of social network research a great number of studies have been conducted over the last four decades. Those studies conducted in the 1950's appear to now be identified as pioneers in this area and some have become classic studies in this field. Perhaps the most classic of these, is the study conducted by Bott (1957). This study is cited in most literature in the area of social networks. It is of particular interest to this proposal as it looked specifically at families and social networks. However, Bott's (1957) main aim was to measure the density and interconnectedness of family and social networks, not the process of how these networks were established. An earlier study was carried out by Barnes (1954), who looked at the social networks of the

population of a fishing village. Barnes (1954) showed that social networks are inherited in part, but also largely built by the individual. This is particularly relevant to this study as the subjects are leaving behind their inherited network and focusing on building a new network. Mitchell (1969) took up Bott's idea of interconnectedness and further explored the linkages within social networks. It was these three social anthropologists who set the scene for the study of social network analysis.

Throughout the many studies conducted in this area one issue that arises regularly is the lack of a clear definition for social support networks. Most definitions appear to be in agreement that social networks involve interaction between an individual and others persons (Cramer, Riley & Kiger, 1991). Walsh and Connelly (1996) agreed but used four examples to highlight the variations in this concept. Vaux (1988) includes support appraisal, behaviours and social networks, whereas, Sarason, Sarason and Pierce (1990) use a psychological characteristic in their definition. Veil and Baumann (1992) define social support using four parts, everyday support, potential support, crisis support and subjective beliefs. Finally, Richman, Rosenfeld and Hardy (1993) list emotional support and challenge, task appreciation and challenge, listening, tangible and personal assistance and reality confirmation in their definition of social support. Walsh and Connelly (1996) see that one of the issues in defining clearly this concept is the lack of research with specific populations. Different populations will receive, perceive and structure social supports differently, therefore research with the general population restricts a clear definition of this concept. In their study of people with serious mental illness they defined support categories as material, emotional and instrumental. These categories were also used by Veiel and Willis (cited in Walsh and Connelly, 1996, p.300) in their studies. The results revealed eight significant network clusters, friends,

family of origin, community, work, family of procreation, extended family, neighbours and church. All were involved in providing support within the three categories, although friends and family featured significantly. Vernon and Roberts (cited in Schaffer and Wagner, 1996, p.83) see this issue of lack of a clear definition for social support networks as a methodological one.

Although a clear definition of social support networks may be lacking, one issue that is rarely questioned is that the health and well being of a person is related to one's social support network (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Bloom, 1990). This has been attested to by the results of numerous studies that identify networks as supportive and acting as a cushion to stress (Caplan, 1974, Cassel, 1974, Cobb, 1976, Wellman, 1981, Procidano & Heller, 1983, Gottlieb, 1983). However, research is now identifying that social support networks can also have some negative outcomes (Cohler&Liebman, 1980, Lein & Sussman, 1983, Swann & Predmore , 1985). Cramer, Riley and Kiger, (1991) researched support and antagonism in social networks and discovered that these networks often supply instrumental and emotional support and at the same time can provide a degree of discord. It is this combination of support and conflict that complicates the relationship. Despite these complications it is generally accepted that networks are an important source of support for both individuals and families.

There are times in a person's life when support from one's network appears to be of major importance. Gottlieb (1980) suggests social support plays a significant role during events requiring a change or alteration to the social network. First time parent hood, college entrance, and divorce are examples of such events (Mc Cannel, 1988). Migration is another passage that requires reorientation or rearrangement of the social network.

Migration

Migration appears to be one of these times when social support networks are important. The loss of the family network at this time causes many problems. A study conducted in Australia by Krupinski and Stoller (1974) identified three major issues; separation from relatives of the same gender, social isolation and loss of a social control mechanism. Social networks can provide positive outcomes by providing both emotional and financial support to newly arrived migrants (Boyd, 1989, Mines, 1984, Mitchell, 1969). It is the nature of these relationships that allows them to be called on in this manner (Litwak, 1960, Choldin, 1973, Massey, 1989). Vega, Kollody and Vale (1987) studied Mexican women and identified this settlement period as a time of change to their social support networks. This has the effect of reducing the emotional support available at a time of high need. A sense of loss is felt by many as they lose the connections with friends and family from their homeland. Mexican women identified contact with their family of origin as important for emotional support particularly in the early settlement period. This was an important factor to the success of their migration (Vega, Kolody, Valle and Weir, 1991).

In Australia there are many migrants who have no extended family living close by and have few or no support networks upon arrival. Richardson, Barbour and Bubenser (1991) stated that despite technological advances in travel and communication, distance is still a contributing factor in limiting social support. This can lead to social isolation amongst migrant families and dependence on immediate family members for support (Storer, 1987, Graycar & Jamrozik, 1989). Studies by Bottomley (1975), Mackie (1975) and Martin (1975) have all identified how important the extended family remains to Greek and Italian migrant families despite geographical isolation.

There have been a number of studies conducted with Non English Speaking Background (NESB) migrant families in Australia. However, there have been few studies into the settlement of English Speaking Background (ESB) migrants. It would appear that an assumption is made that because the language barrier and physical appearance are less prominent amongst ESB migrants that they do not experience settlement problems. The same assumptions would appear to have been made about internal migrants. Little account has been taken of the fact that many migrants whether NESB, ESB or internal, suffer the same isolation from their social support network. It is important to study these other populations in order to identify the issues.

Women and their families

Much of the research into social support networks in the 70's, 80's and 90's has began to show the connection between various family members and how their networks affect the whole family, particularly in relation to children. Cochran and Brassard (1979), investigated the concept of social networks and how they relate to child development. Their study was unique in the fact that they did not include family members in the networks but looked outside the family. This research indicates a relationship between parental social networks and children's social and emotional development. Brassard (cited in Cochran et al., 1990, p.253) furthered this research to investigate mother and child interactions and personal social networks. Tietjen (1985) studied the social networks of mothers and those of their children to identify a connection between the two. In this Swedish study the results show that the mothers' networks may affect the children's networks. Cotterell (1986) conducted a study in a rural Australian mining town. This study investigated the effects of the father's work place on the mother's social network. It also examined the role of the community in

relation to child rearing recognising that community appears to play a significant role with those isolated from extended family. Jones (1980) studied newcomer couples to Canberra. This study identified access to ready made communities and informal friendships and the presence of friends and family in the new city as factors impinging on the formation of new contacts. These studies all identify the importance of social support networks to the healthy functioning of families and the role individuals play in this, particularly mothers.

There has been a great deal of research conducted in the area of mother's social support networks. In various studies women have been named as the "kinkeepers" because they have been seen to maintain stronger ties with extended kin (Fischer, 1982). One area that has generated much interest is that of social support networks and adolescent mothers. In their studies of adolescent mothers Barth & Schinke (1984), deAnda & Becerra (1984) and Stevens (1988), all identified the family as the primary source of support. This was backed up with the findings of Colletta (1981) in his study of rejection of adolescent mothers, and Richardson, Barbour and Bubenser (1991) in their study of informal supports and adolescent mothers. Wandersman & Wandersman, (1980) and Voight, Hans and Bernstein (1996) saw social support networks as playing a crucial role in the mother's adaptation to stress in her new parenting role. In a study of mothers of pre school children and parenting skills, network satisfaction and support rated higher than network structure (Weinraub & Wolf, 1987). However in both the latter study and the one conducted by deAnda & Becerra (1984) families were also seen as a source of antagonism for these young mothers. The research has identified both positive and negative issues regarding social support networks.

Summary

This review of the literature has identified some gaps in the research area. Historically research into social support networks is a fairly new concept beginning in the 1950's. There appears to be a lack of clear definition as to what is meant by social support networks and this has been shown to relate to both a methodological issue and a lack of research in the areas of specific populations. It is this methodological issue that has led to a qualitative research design for this study. The lack of research into specific populations has encouraged me to define clearly the specific population to be researched. Both of these decisions were made in an attempt to gain a definition of social support networks that is meaningful to the participants of the study. This can only be achieved by allowing the participants to define the boundaries as they see them.

The research to date has covered a range of areas looking at the role social support plays with NESB migrants, families and mothers, in particular the effect mother's social support networks can have on children's development. This literature review has identified a methodological gap as well as a gap in the subject area of ESB migrant populations. Traditionally social support has been seen in positive terms, however, now research is beginning to show that there is often a negative side. Even so, social support networks are believed to be of importance to women and their families. Therefore, a study describing how mothers, geographically isolated from their extended families, establish their social support networks is an important and valid study to complete. It will ascertain what it was like for a group of mothers of young children in establishing networks, without extended family. The study will determine the processes they use to develop networks and discover the essential elements which contribute to the formation of new networks.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter two has established the need for research in this area by exploring the literature concerned with this field. In chapter three the methodology adopted for this study is described. This will be achieved by describing the background of phenomenology, method and design, data collection, sample, data analysis, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical issues and limitations.

In order to describe how a group of mothers, geographically isolated from their extended family, establish their support networks it is necessary to discover the “lived experience” of these women. In order to discover the “lived experience” it is vital to adopt a method which will allow the participants to put forward their experience and have the researcher perceive the experience from the participant’s view. It is not possible to achieve this through quantitative methods. People’s lived experience cannot be revealed through structured questionnaires and interviews or statistical analysis. Therefore, it is important to find a method which will allow me¹ to disclose this lived experience. The method identified to best meet the needs of this research is the phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology

Researchers come to their study with prior interests. In this case my interest stems from previous studies and work with families and the various issues they face. It is my work with families that led me to the phenomenological perspective. When working with families it is vitally important to understand the issues from the

¹ First person has been used throughout this thesis, in keeping with the phenomenological approach.

perspective of those involved in them. For example often the media report fathers killing their young children in a domestic dispute. To the general public this horrific act makes no sense and people on the outside can always see solutions to the problems the father faced. However, what matters is that he could not see the other solutions. Therefore, it is important to understand the issues from his perspective in order to be able to assist him constructively. Phenomenology gives us a way to do this by enabling us to study “the lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p.9). It allows the researcher to explore the experience from the perspective of the players.

Phenomenology is a way to study human life through examining everyday experiences. This can be achieved in two ways, as a focus on human experience and the interpretation of that experience or actually experiencing the phenomenon for oneself (Patton, 1990). Using the phenomenological perspective the experience of the women in this study will be described and interpreted with degree of depth and richness (van Manen, 1990).

It is impossible to separate the results from the process of obtaining them in phenomenology. The two fit closely together. Van Manen (1990) describes this as “a poetising project”(p.13). Just as it is not possible to summarise a poem without destroying it, neither is it possible to simply present the results from a phenomenological study without stripping them of meaning (van Manen, 1990).

Practitioners of the phenomenological approach believe in shared meaning. Systematically phenomenology attempts to discover the structure and meanings of the lived experience or the “essence” of the experience (van Manen, 1990). When various participants “are bracketed, analysed and compared” “the essence” of the phenomenon is displayed (Patton, 1990, p.70). By exploring the experience of these women and

discovering the shared meaning of the experience the “essence” of the phenomenon is exposed.

The subject matter of phenomenology is always the “meaning of the lived human world” (van Manen, 1990, p.12). It is about understanding in a deep way what it is to be human and researching in detail the experiences of human life in order to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology “is systematic, explicit, self critical and intersubjective of its subject matter”. Therefore it can be described as “the human scientific study of phenomena” (van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

Method and Design

The research design of this study is phenomenological because it will explore the issue from the perspective of the participants. The participants have all been associated with a self-help group for those isolated from extended family. Data have been collected using semi - structured interviews in an attempt to gather rich and meaningful information from the participants. Each interview was taped and later transcribed. I acted as a facilitator in each of the interviews, providing impetus for the interview to commence and continue, while ensuring the participant stayed on the topic of research.

The research is presented in a narrative form. The story of each woman is told and then comparisons between these are drawn. This presentation has been chosen specifically because of its relevance to the participant and its ease of understanding. Research such as this may be of use in human service organisations. These organisations are staffed by people from various levels of education and as such, it is important that the information be presented in a manner that is easily accessible at all levels. In phenomenological research the participants are considered an important part of the audience, as such, the findings must be presented in a manner that fits with them.

Narrative is a form consistent with women's expression (Belenky, 1986, Carter, 1993) it allows their voices to be heard and not drowned out by that of the researcher (Carter, 1993). This study is about the experience of a particular group of women. Therefore, it is appropriate to present it in the form that is understood by and is comfortable for women.

Collection

A series of three informal, semi structured, interviews were conducted with the key informant and the other four participants. The interviews were conducted in a place and time chosen by the participants and therefore varied. An interview schedule (Appendix 1) was utilised to ensure I covered all the relevant areas. It was important to spend varying amounts of time prior to and upon completion of the formal phase of the interview with each participant establishing and maintaining rapport, usually over tea or coffee. Even though previous contact had been made with each participant either via telephone or in person, I introduced myself at the beginning of each interview and explained what the purpose of the interview was. This was usually achieved by walking each participant through the informed consent form (Appendix 2) and obtaining a signature on the form. A copy of this was given to each of the participants and one was kept by myself. The first round of interviews began with a set of opening questions, "When did you move to W.A.?" followed by "How old are your children?" These questions were used to break the ice and put the participant at ease. Most of the first interviews were spent in establishing rapport with the participants. I felt it was necessary to establish a comfortable relationship with the participants in order for them to feel comfortable in disclosing personal information to a virtual stranger. After this I moved into the research question "Can you tell me about the experience of establishing your

social support networks in W.A.?" This is a very open question which allowed each participant to answer from their individual perspectives.

During the formal part of the interviews I spoke little but actively listened to the participants by maintaining eye contact, nodding appropriately and making facial expressions. On the occasions where participants drifted off the topic I would bring them back on track by asking them a question relating to the issues on the interview schedule. It is important to note that all these women had young children under 5 years of age, therefore, I took a box of toys to the interview if the children were present. At some interviews there were young children present while at others the children were either asleep or not at home. The toys aided in reducing interruptions throughout the interviews. However, it is unrealistic to expect interviews where children are present to run without interruption. In some cases there were several interruptions throughout the interview from young children. In these cases I had to be diligent in remembering the last point made, in order to bring the interviewee back on track after the interruption.

The first in this series of interviews was carried out in January 1997, they lasted approximately 45 minutes and were completed over a two week period. The subsequent interviews were conducted some months later and were longer, lasting approximately 1 hour each. This second round of interviews were completed over a three week period. Each of the interviews was conducted at the participant's homes. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed at a later point.

In depth interviews were selected in order to maintain the freedom necessary to gain rich data. It was important to allow the participants to tell the story from their perspective. However, in order to ensure that pertinent information was collected and that the same areas were covered with each participant an interview guide was

formulated. This was used only as guide and leads from the participants were also followed. At each subsequent interview the data collected in the previous interview was verified and the key concepts utilised as the impetus for the subsequent interviews. This gave the participants the opportunity to rectify any misunderstandings and to follow up issues they may have thought further about since the last interview. The key concepts and themes elicited from all the data collected were verified at the final interviews. The first and second interviews were used to collect and explore information about how these women established their support networks. The final interview was used to unfold the meaning of the women's experiences. In phenomenology the interview "....may be used[for] exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon [or]as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of the experience" (van Manen, 1990, p.66).

As soon as possible after leaving each interview I made a set of field notes describing the interview. These included details about the setting, non verbal cues, others present, impressions gained during the interview and any relevant off-tape comments. These were to assist when familiarising myself with the data at a later point.

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability

Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that the terms validity and reliability used in the positivist paradigm are inappropriate for the qualitative approach. They suggest alternative concepts of, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility is concerned with ensuring the subject was accurately described and identified. One technique suggested for enhancing credibility is peer briefing. This involves continuously presenting the analysis and conclusions to a peer. Another way of

improving credibility is to conduct member checks which entail checking with the participants of the study that the material presented is credible (Robson, 1993).

Transferability refers to the “statistical generalisation to a population” (Robson, 1993, p.405). Guba and Lincoln (1985) do not see the responsibility of this as lying with the researcher but rather with those wanting to make the generalisation. The responsibility of the researcher is to provide the database that allows others to make the decision about transferability. This is achieved through thick description, which was described by Denzin (1978) as “information about the context of an act, the intentions and meanings that organise action and it’s subsequent evolution” (Dey, 1993, p.31).

Guba and Lincoln (1985) state that a study that is confirmable must also be dependable just as in the positivist paradigm a study that is valid must also be reliable (Robson, 1993, p.405). However, dependability and confirmability must show that the data and the results are analogous, this can be tested by an audit. As cited in van Manen (1990) it is not possible, in a phenomenological study, to separate the results from the data collection process. If the process is “clear, systematic, well documented, safeguards against bias” (Robson, 1993, p.405) and can be followed by a fellow researcher then it is said to be dependable and confirmable

Sample

The purpose of the study is to understand from the perspective of the participants how they establish their social support networks when they are geographically isolated from their extended family. Given this purpose, it is important to purposively select the sample in order to obtain cases that will be information rich. Information rich cases are those from which a considerable amount can be learnt about the issues of central importance to the purpose (Patton, 1987). A small homogeneous sample was selected,

five in total. The number of cases was small for two reasons. Firstly, to allow the researcher to gain information rich data from each participant and secondly, that given the time constraints it was not possible to include a larger number and still conduct an in depth study of this phenomenon. The criteria for the population were carefully selected to ensure that each case would represent the group to be studied and that communication between the researcher and the participant would be possible. Each participant was selected in co-operation with the key informant who was able to identify people who met the criteria and who they thought would provide the researcher with information rich data. "The validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information - richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size" (Patton, 1990, p.185).

The small homogeneous sample for this study was drawn from a self-help group for families isolated from their extended family. The participants of the study were all selected on the basis of meeting the following criteria:

- being a mother of at least one child under the age of six years,
- having good command of the English language and
- being geographically isolated from their extended family.

It was decided to have a key informant who assisted me to gain an understanding of what was transpiring within the group and assist in selection of the other participants. In this case the key informant was one of the founding members of the informal support group to which all belonged. Therefore, they had inside information on the workings of the group as well as a sound knowledge of all the members. Key informants are especially conversant with the situation and their perceptions can assist the researcher to

comprehend what is occurring (Patton, 1987). The key informant was able to assist in the selection of participants for the study as she had inside information regarding all the members of the group. Therefore, she was able to assist by selecting members who met the criteria and who she thought would provide information rich data.

A great deal of discussion took place between the key informant and myself as to whom would be useful to include in the study. The key informant would make a suggestion and the researcher would check to ascertain whether or not they met the criteria. Each potential participant was approached by the key informant to ascertain that it was all right for me to contact them in relation to this study. If the answer was affirmative I contacted the potential participant on the telephone or in person. I then checked with each potential participant to ensure they did meet the criteria prior to commencement of data collection.

Data Analysis

In the style of phenomenological research it is important for researchers to immerse themselves in the data in order to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. The researcher is central to phenomenological research and can not be considered separate. Any presumption or perceptions held by the researcher will be acknowledged (Froyland, 1991). The data from each interview have been analysed in terms of key concepts and themes that are emerging. In a phenomenological study it is important to validate the text with each participant for the purpose of external evidence (Packer & Addison, 1989). Each of the tapes and transcripts has been analysed several times in order for me to gain a familiarity with the data. At the commencement of the second interview the themes and concepts evolving from the previous interview were discussed with each participant for

verification. In this way the information arising from the early interviews was used as an impetus for the next interview. The data from the second interviews were treated in the same manner. The data collected from the first two interviews were then utilised to formulate the participant's stories. After this, all data were analysed to identify key concepts and themes that were common to all participants. The final interview was used to verify the concluding themes and concepts that arose from the data collected with from participants. At this point the stories were also checked by the participants for accuracy. This allowed them the opportunity to comment on the themes and concepts and make any necessary changes to their stories.

The data were analysed using 8 interrelated steps according to Colaizzi's (1978) technique.

1. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant and the audiotapes of each interview were transcribed verbatim.

2. The researcher listened to the audiotapes several times to familiarise herself with the contents and to become familiar with each one. Particular attention was paid to the language used and the intonations. This was done in conjunction with the field notes that the researcher wrote up after each interview. This enabled the researcher to become familiar with each participant. Notes were made by the researcher alongside the transcripts regarding impressions the researcher had when listening to the tapes.

3. The transcripts were read several times. The researcher allowed time to reflect on each script separately. This enabled the researcher to become familiar with the uniqueness of each transcript. It also allowed the researcher to discover areas that needed elaboration and these were noted for coverage in the subsequent interview.

4. Each transcript was individually perused to identify emerging themes and concepts. Quotations were extracted and text highlighted as they related to themes and concepts.

5. At the second interviews the summary of emerging themes and concepts from the first interviews were validated with each participant. Then the data collected from the second interview were treated in the same manner as the first interviews had been (Steps 1-4).

6. The researcher then collated each participant's story from the transcripts and field notes. Then the themes and concepts from each participant's transcripts were collated. The stories were presented for peer briefing to ensure that the main themes and concepts identified by the researcher from the transcripts were the same as those presented in the stories. The transcripts were also presented to an academic peer who has experience in social research, for co coding.

7. All the transcripts were then looked at to find the common themes across all the data. This was then collated and written up as a description of the phenomena. Researching the literature on social support networks, families and women was also completed.

8. At the final interview the stories were verified by the participants. Summaries of the themes and concepts were also made and they were able to make comments on the both the summary and their story. This allowed them to make any changes to the stories that were necessary. These changes were then made in the final story.

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability in this study

In order to ensure credibility, the analysis and conclusions were presented to principal supervisor for peer briefing. In addition the data collected in the first two

interviews was analysed and the main themes and concepts summarised. This summary was presented at the beginning of each subsequent interview for verification by the participants. Each participant was also given a copy of their story for final verification. Only minor changes needed to be made to one story. These checks ensure credibility in this study.

In regard to transferability this study contains thick description of the lived experience which was collected throughout a series of three in depth interviews. I take no responsibility for the generalisation, but leave that for others to make the decision regarding transferability.

The dependability and confirmability of this study can be demonstrated through the audit trail. The following are available to form an audit trail.

- examples of transcripts from interviews and field notes (raw data)
- summaries of interviews (processed data)
- theme and concept clusters (process notes)
- interview schedule and informed consent form (instruments)
- proposal (material relating to intention)
- chapter on method

At all times throughout the study I collected materials for this audit trail, keeping in mind it would have to be followed by an outside researcher.

Ethics

As with all research in the human science area, there are ethical considerations to be taken into account. This study dealt with sensitive information about the lives of these women. As such, it was important that the data were dealt with in an ethically correct manner. Prior approval was gained from the Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan

University and the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants Sieber (cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 293) was maintained as far as possible in a phenomenological study. Participants were advised at the onset of the study that should they wish to withdraw from the study at any point in time they could do so without reprisal. In studies such as this the researcher is privy to a great deal of personal information. In order to gain the participant's confidence it was important for me to create a positive rapport with each of them. This could have lead to the participants divulging information they may later regret. Therefore, it was important that the participants were aware of their right to withdraw information from the data gathered at a later point should they feel uncomfortable about its disclosure. This was made clear at the onset of the data collection with each participant. Throughout the data collection participants reviewed the data as it was collected, thus giving them the opportunity to change things if they felt it was necessary or if they felt misunderstood at any point. All major participants have sighted a copy of their story as presented in this thesis.

Anonymity is always a difficult issue when dealing with interviews as the interviewer is familiar with the participants and their responses (Polit & Hungler, 1989). In a phenomenological case study it is rarely possible to guarantee anonymity and each participant was advised of this. The very fact of the small sample size and the affiliation to the organisation could lead to identifications of participants. Therefore, it was not possible to guarantee anonymity in this study.

In an attempt to address the issue of confidentiality an agreement was entered between myself and the participant concerning how the data would be used. Confidentiality was guaranteed by myself. Although I am aware of the identity of each participant and their responses, this information will not be divulged (Polit and Hungler,

1989). In an attempt to assist this situation the name of the support group has not be included in the study and pseudonyms have been ascribed to each participant.

Informed consent (Appendix 2) regarding all the aforementioned ethical issues involved with the study was obtained prior to interviews commencing. Polit & Hungler (1989) state that where possible written consent should be obtained from the participant prior to the commencement of data collection. This should include an explanation of the nature of the study and the participant's role.

The data are stored in a safe place and has only been available to the researcher and the peer involved in co-coding, both of who are aware of the importance of professional confidentiality. After a period of five years all the original data, including tapes, transcriptions and field notes, will be incinerated by myself.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to women from English speaking backgrounds as a result of my only language being English. This study is a small interpretative study and as such it seeks new information from the perspective of the participants. The information gained from this study will be about a small group and their experiences. It does not aim to generalise the findings to the wider population. It will provide rich data of this particular phenomenon as experienced by these participants.

The study is also restricted to those who are geographically isolated from their extended family. It does not consider those who are isolated from their families for other reasons. Research taking into account this extended population is beyond the scope of this study, due to the time constraints I am working within.

The participants in this study all reside in the northern corridor of Perth, Western Australia, also known as the mortgage belt. This particular area is newly developed and

as such there are few services available. The results may have been different if the participants came from a more well developed community.

Summary

This chapter has described phenomenology and its place in the interpretive paradigm. An examination of phenomenological methodology has been conducted and this has been related to the my background and to this particular study. The method and design of the study have been described in detail justifying the methodological approach utilised. The importance of gaining information rich data have been deliberated and used as the justification for purposively selecting the sample and the use of in depth interviews. Data analysis outlines the adaptation of Colaizzi's 8 step process as utilised in this study. The issues of validity and reliability are discussed in depth using Guba and Lincoln's (1985) vernacular of confirmability, transferability, dependability and credibility. These terms are closely aligned to the qualitative research approach and therefore more appropriate to use than validity and reliability. Ethics is important in any study that is conducted with human life and the ethical considerations in this study have been examined in detail. Every study has its limitations and those applying to this study are clearly described. This chapter has detailed the methodological approach that has been taken in his study.

Chapter Four

The Story's of the Women

Introduction

The previous chapter described the methodology utilised in this study. It described the use of the narrative to present the data and the significance of this approach to this particular study. This chapter contains the stories of the five women participants. These stories have been told to the researcher over a period of 18 months. After analysis the researcher has retold the stories highlighting the major issues identified by these women in relation to establishing their new networks when geographically isolated from their extended families. The stories were taken back to the individual participant to verify their accuracy and any change the participant felt necessary was made. Each story is preceded by a brief introduction to the participant from the researcher's perspective. The purpose of this is to place the participant in context as seen by the researcher. These stories are only a snippet of the participant's life at a particular point in time. They have a beginning because the topic focuses on a particular life event that has lead to the stories. However, unlike traditional stories they have no end because network building is an ongoing process that will continue throughout the lives of these women. At the end of each story the women are about to embark on another facet of their lives.

Sally

Sally is the founder of the support group all the participants attend. She is a vibrant chatty person who makes things happen. She lives with her 3 year old son (Ben) and her husband (David) who works in the mining industry and is home 1 week out of

five. She considers herself a single parent without any of the supports a single parent can access. Her house is brand new in a very new northern suburb. The houses are slowly popping up in the surrounding streets.

When I arrive for the first time I get the guided tour of the new home. One room in the house Sally calls the “Tassie Room”. It is full of momentos of Tasmania where Sally hails from and family photos. She likes to retire to this room in the evenings for relaxation. The main part of the house is full, and I mean full, of neatly stacked toys. The backyard also has a child focus. Sally has these amazing picture frames in her home. She has made them from recycled timber. I love them! This is my first glimpse at Sally’s creative side.

Ben is at his friends on each of my visits so it is a quiet time. Sally and I share a coffee as we chat. The only interruptions are short phone calls. Sally is a great talker, she and I have a lot in common, so the interview flows easily. She has a lot to say about the issues.

Sally’s Story

David and I were running a farm in Tassie where we both lived. He lost this job and unemployment in Tassie was phenomenal, so he got a job in WA. We spent the 3 months before our wedding apart, he was in WA and I was at home in Tassie. A week after the wedding we were both in WA. We had planned to go to Queensland because it is not so isolated, but WA was the place to earn enough money and make the necessary contact to set up in Queensland later. Not long after we got here David went to work for a younger company. Then he was promoted and his income was tripled. We were financially secure and so there was no reason to leave. I still planned to move before Ben started school but now we have bought a house here, we will stay. As soon as we

built the house I started looking around at schools for Ben. Now we have the house, we have plans. It is a sandpit out the back and it's not finished, but we've got so many plans. Both sets of parents have come over to see the house and have been part of it. I feel more settled now. It was a big transition to get used to the idea of having to stay here. It still feels very isolated and it is so expensive to travel home. Hobart is still home to me. But now we have a mortgage I can't afford to fly home every 6 months like we've been doing.

My parents are coming back this year so it doesn't really matter if I don't go home as much. Although I'd love to show Ben to all the grandparents and do the family bit. In June he turns 3, so then I'll have to buy 2 adult price tickets. We know we won't get home every year from now on, so Mum and Dad are planning trips every other year to coincide with when we go home. I'm actually a bit nervous about going away now, because especially since I've had Ben I've got some really good friends and now I'm thinking am I going to lose the friends I've got? It's a bit scary to think that you would have to make a new group of friends again after having just done it. But I know they're still going to be there. In the back of your mind it's "Oh God, I'll be away for 3 months this year!" Now I've got the caravan, I'm trying to con them into coming with me. "I won't lose you if you come with me". Even though they are mates and they'd be there in an instant if I needed them, I still have a sense of insecurity. I'm much closer to some of these people than I ever was to my old friends in Hobart. Because of the children you have a different relationship, but at the end of the day it seems fragile, it's only been two years and these people might disappear. I'm sure once Ben is at school and he's got his friends and hopefully some friends come out of that for us, I'll feel more settled.

When I fell pregnant, Mum and Dad were taking a trip around Australia. When they got to Perth they stayed for the birth and left when Ben was 8 weeks old. I am very close to my parents now. I cried when they left, it was devastating. It was awful! But it was great to have them here for the birth. Mum complimented me all the time, she never criticised. When they left it was awful because they drove back and I had no contact for all that time. We would ring each other everyday if we could. It's very expensive. My phone bills were \$500 for 3 months. I feel guilty because I am depriving them of a grandchild and Ben of grandparents. "What right do I have to do this?" I feel this with the whole family really.

My parents travel every winter to warmer areas. Mum was here last year for a holiday. Two months before she arrived I got really really depressed. I just had to hang on and when she arrived in August I breathed this great sigh of relief. I just sat down and told her all about it. She had guessed things were not quite right with me, but I didn't want to worry her on her holiday. She was very helpful and I gave her hell. This time they have left their car and caravan here so they will fly back and then take both Ben and me to Broome for the winter. They want to do this for Ben's health and to help me cope. David is always away and I'm stuck at home with a sick child. Last winter I had 24 weeks of isolation when Ben had RSV, pneumonia and asthma. That's when I need the support, when Ben or I are sick. I remember when Ben was a baby and I had a problem with a wisdom tooth. I was in pain and had to have all these drugs, so I was really spaced out. I thought "I cannot stay in this house by myself tonight, completely doped out with this baby. What if he needs something through the night?" I didn't trust myself to wake up. I went down to the clinic, Denise took one look at me and followed me home. She sat there till I got someone to spend the night. The first person I rang was

Irene; she dropped everything, left her baby with her husband and spent the night with me. Joy came up for a few hours until Irene got there. Later Toni told me she was disappointed I hadn't rung her.

When Ben was sick with RSV and pneumonia last year I just couldn't get help. I couldn't take him anywhere and I couldn't have anyone over. I needed them but I couldn't risk them carrying back RSV. They were as supportive as they could be over the phone, but I also needed physical support, in a practical sense and I couldn't get it. That was really hard. I would talk to Mum 3 or 4 times a day on the phone, but she still couldn't physically help me with this child. He couldn't sleep, I had the flu on top of being unhappy. It was just awful and in the end David came home, but he can't always do that. There are times you wish you could just click your fingers and your network was twice the size so that you don't feel like you were relying on everyone all the time. You want to combine 3 decades worth of friendships into 3 years; that all you want. All I needed last year was to have someone I could rely on or ask for help that didn't have a little baby in the house that was going to get sick as well. You wish your network had lots of different people in it. When you live away you haven't got all those different people to rely on.

I blame David for us being here. The first year was ok, our relationship got a lot stronger. David was my rock. I had no one else, we were very close. I remember writing to him and saying you're my only friend. I relied on him a lot. Poor bugger, he'd ring me once a week just to have an hour of listening to tears. Then Ben was born and the relationship changed. Baby jealousy, homesick, sleep deprived and a sick baby all resulted in the relationship weakening. But that would have happened whether I was here or with my family; so everyone tells me. I have learnt to live without my family

and husband but I don't like it much. I love David but if I had a choice I would choose to live with my family not my husband. We need to work on our relationship. Life has changed dramatically for me and less so for David. He is a loner and only needs Ben and me.

Like at Christmas the three of us went down to the caravan and we had turkey drumsticks, that's all we could get from the shop. Christmas was always a big thing at home. I don't know if it's a girl thing or a mother thing but Christmas was special to me and it's not to David, so that doesn't help. My friends invite us every Christmas but I don't want to encroach on the family so I don't go. To me Christmas is too special, too family oriented to go to someone else's. So this year we had Christmas at the beach and the phone rang all day. That's Christmas for us now, the phone rings all day. It's just not the same, Christmas is just not the same. I found with Christmas and Birthdays, if ever I was going to feel depressed or worse that's when it's going to happen I'd build myself up to it. Christmas Sucks. Birthdays aren't so bad because you've got their little mates. Ben's first birthday we had sixteen people here. When he was two I only had 4 people and I had a party at Friends of the Family instead of having them here. One friend has gone to the bush, Jackie's eldest started high school so that's different, June has gone back home and another two friends went back to work so we lost touch. The others are still there. So it changes in a year, now Irene will be gone. Now I can look forward to his third birthday and it will be different again.

Irene's a very close friend, we swap babysitting while she works. She just told me she's moving to Geraldton in three weeks. I thought, who's going to cry first, you or me? I looked at her and thought, how can I congratulate you? I felt awful, I felt awful for her as well as for me. I felt awful for me because we have contact twice a week minimum,

because of the babysitting swaps. I feel awful for her as well thinking "You have to start all over again". I just feel like I'm starting to settle with the house and everything. I still feel things are a little bit fragile but I'm starting to feel better about it and to have to do it all over again" - I just feel sorry for her.

Irene will still be my friend but I won't have that contact, and your friendships here are based on contact. It's not based on like my friends at home, I'd give them a call sort of thing, here you need to see them. So it's a different friendship, you need to see these people, and there's one big hole now that's sort of been cut into. It's actually quite sad. It'll make a difference for Ben too; he will miss Jacob. I look at the friends I've made since I've been here and they've all been since I've had Ben. It's easier to start when you've got kids.

It will make a big difference to me, not only is contact with one of my close friends going to be less, that is also my break. Because of my situation with David being away, once a fortnight, I was having my day off while Irene had Ben. It meant that on our babysitting swap days we had contact every morning and afternoon. You didn't have to book, you know your home this afternoon for a cup of tea, we know we're all coming. Before I went away last weekend Irene came over and gave me a kiss, and said "have a nice holiday, drive safely, ring when you get there", all that sort of stuff. I thought "Oh wow, this is what it used to be like before, with my old friends". Now she is going. She will have to join the old network sort of thing. There's two different networks, those here and those living elsewhere. But there still friends; it's just different.

It's disappointing when you lose a person out of your network. You feel guilty. I haven't tried hard enough or whatever. You think what could I have done to help? It's different from those friendships that you've had at home for three decades. The main

thing you've got in common with these friends is a child. I wouldn't know these people if I didn't have child. I don't know who I would know if I didn't have a child. The friends you have at home are built up from your own childhood and your own families and friends. Last year was a rough year, so I had friends disappear. I suppose I'll have to start up another Sally's friendship group. It sounds sad but that's really what I did before, with Friends of the Family.

It started when Ben was born, I went to the Clinic sister, she started a Mothers group and I joined to meet people. I didn't know anyone before I went to the clinic. I went to my first mother's group meeting knowing nobody. I new everyone there would be in the same boat and within 10 minutes we were swapping birth stories, within half an hour you've got the family history down, and everyone knows who you are and where you're from. You haven't got three decades to build a friendship, you've got to sort it out then and there. Toni's baby was refluxing on the floor over there, mine's reflux, I'll go around there with them, we'll chuck together sort of thing. We met once a week and I couldn't wait to go each week. Denise was brilliant, fresh, enthusiastic and knew about kids. It was brilliant. These women were my only contacts for 3 or 4 months. It was nerve racking, it was exciting, but it was bloody nerve racking. The first time I went to mothers group I was ready three hours before it started. What should I take, have I dressed the baby right, should I take a blanket for us to sit on. You don't want anyone to see you might be doing something the wrong way, you're exposing yourself I guess. One week I just kept crying and I asked the clinic sister to have someone speak to the group on Post Natal Depression. Some of the other women felt they were suffering too. After the talk was over we had a group discussion, I held my breath, my stomach was churning and I thought, well, if they laugh I won't come back.

Then I asked if any of the others were isolated from their families. 8 out 12 women were in the same boat. That's when I got the idea for the picnics. I made the posters, set a date and the first picnic started on 7th October. Ben was 4 months old and it grew from there. It sounded like it was easy. It wasn't easy; I was nervous as hell. You see you're exposing yourself as someone who is really very lonely and you've got no family or friends here. You don't want every one to think "Oh poor thing". You don't want sympathy, you want to gather people together who felt the same without saying it. I didn't want people to think I was doing this for a selfish reason, although at the time I was.

So I met people through the picnics, playgroup and the clinic group. I know them well enough to stop and talk to in the shops but have only been to a few homes. I used to get quite a lot of invitations because it didn't take long for everyone to realise I was more by myself than most. I was invited down for tea and that was really nice but the first time you go there, you're a bit nervous, and then you've got to meet the husband. I wouldn't go and visit people on the weekends because I thought it was such a precious time for those adults to have with their baby, as a family. Just because I didn't have it didn't mean that I should encroach on other people's time. My weekends were the worse, which is one of the reasons why I've looked after Irene's kids for the last couple of years on the weekends. Weekends are nothing to me. If I was ever going to feel really down, weekends would be it.

I suppose I have a network of about six from Friends of the Family whom I would see once a week and do babysit swaps with. Most of the are in a similar situation to me. One of my friends is lucky she has a family here and knows so many people. I can't remember the last time I was invited to a BBQ. Most of my network revolves

around kids. Lots of picking up and dropping off. Whatever you do is for the kids. I talk on the phone to Toni every day. We go to the pictures or a concert together whenever we can. It's taken five years to get friends to do stuff with, without the kids. We've booked a date when David is home when the four of us, and Megan and her husband if she wants to come, we are going to get some takeaway, some beer, some fold up chairs and go to the drive in. This is a big deal for us. We are just starting to make friends for ourselves; without the children.

Themes emerging from Sally's data

After analysing the first two interviews, the following themes emerged:

- **Feelings establishing networks** - Sally refers frequently and passionately to the feelings she had whilst establishing her new networks. These included feelings of depression, loneliness and determination.
- **Change in relationship with partner** - Changes occurred in the relationship with Sally's partner since moving to Western Australia and since the birth of their child. She is unclear as to whether this can be attributed to the move or the birth or the child.
- **Impact of children on new network** - Sally acknowledges that her child had a large impact on the venues she accessed and the people she met. She found her child expanded her networks significantly.
- **Establishing new networks** - Sally was aware of the need to work at establishing new networks and used various children's services and family support groups to establish her new networks.
- **Cost** - This was an ongoing factor for Sally in order for her to maintain contact with her extended family through phone calls and visits.

- **Family visits** - These times when Sally's family visited were very important to her personally and for her son. Despite the stresses that they brought it was seen as worthwhile because of the additional support they provided.
- **Guilt** - This was something Sally felt in relation to her parents, grandparents and her child. She felt she was depriving these family members of each other and had a great sense of guilt over this.
- **Settled since purchasing home** - Since purchasing her new home Sally felt more settled in Perth than ever before.
- **Fear of losing friends** - Sally was very aware of the people in her network and worked to maintain them as part of her network. She was concerned with losing people from the network.
- **Loss of people from new network** - At the second interview one of Sally's good friends was leaving the network and Sally was concerned about this and the impact it would have upon her. This subject consumed a large component of the second interview.
- **Difficult Times** - Sally found there were certain times that were more difficult than others to cope with and these were usually times of celebration and illness. It was these times when extra support or family was needed yet unavailable.
- **Change in relationships at home** - Sally realised that over time her relationships with her family had changed since moving to Western Australia.
- **Developing new family friends** - Sally was conscious that many of those in her network were simply her friends and that it took much longer to form friendships that involved the entire family. This was a goal Sally was working upon.

- Old friends versus new friends - Sally identified a difference in the relationship between her new friends and old friends. The old friends knew her history whereas the others knew little about her and did not have the same kind of permanency about the relationship.
- New friendship qualities - Sally has formed a solid group of new friendships. The qualities of the individuals forming this group varies.

When the stories and themes were taken back to Sally for verification, Sally was able to identify with both the story and the themes. She felt the story accurately reflected her life at that point in time. Sally was asked which of the themes were most important to her and she identified these as being, the change in relationship with her partner, the impact the child had on her new network, guilt, difficult times, developing new family friends, old friends vs. new friends and the loss of people from her new network.

Toni

Toni is located in a new northern suburb. The garden looks manicured and the interior of the house is perfectly decorated with high quality furniture. It features many American Indian artefacts, family photos and wall plaques of the children's names. Toni is married to her teenage sweetheart (Jim) and has 3 boys, Kirby, and twins Christopher and Cameron. At the beginning of this study Christopher and Cameron are 7 months old and Kirby is three years old. This age span means there is always at least one child going to or waking up from sleep. Despite these three little men living in the house it is always immaculate. They have a separate room for their toys. I wonder how Toni can be

so organised with so many young children to care for with only her husband to help. Often interviews take place during feeding or settling of the twins.

I had met Toni at the University playgroups previously, before the twins were born. I knew she was a friendly person and she knew I was well aware of what it was like to have children around, so our relationship was fairly comfortable from the beginning. Toni completed her Masters using a qualitative methodology and so is always interested in what I am doing. She always wants to know “when the next interview will be and how is it coming along”. It is nice to have someone who understands how important the project is to you, I feel very encouraged and supported by Toni.

Toni's Story

Well, ... I actually lived in Australia with my parents for two years as a teenager. I did 4th and 5th year high school here, then we returned to the States. I had a boyfriend (Jim) here. I stayed in contact with my boyfriend and he came to the States and we got married. We stayed in the States for 6 months before coming back to Perth. I had a degree and my qualifications were transferable. Jim had a business here and the prospects were better for him in Australia than in the States. So we came back in 1989. I still had a few contacts from high school and my husband's family, although in the beginning this wasn't good. When I first arrived there was the initial honeymoon period where everything was ok. After that the first few years in Australia were difficult. I still had the teenage memories, but it was different now. Then, I had family support but in reality it was not like the memories. In retrospect I would not have done it.

I got a job for 6 months answering phones for an introduction agency. The money was good. Then I was offered another job and took that. I went back to study at

Uni and did a Post Grad Diploma in Social Research and Evaluation and a Masters of Education at Murdoch. Then I had Kirby and I didn't return to work. It was easy to make contacts at work and Uni. When I first arrived I had Jim's friends but now we only keep in touch at Christmas. Before the kids we used to get together for BBQ's but they are all single so we can't do that now. Jim still meets with them and sometimes he will take a Friday or Saturday night with his mates. They call him a lot. He's flexible and goes along with what I organise.

Before I came to Australia I had already left home to work. But it was only a 12 hour drive home and it was easy and cheap to call only \$1 and a half for like one hour. Now we have phone bills of \$600 - \$700 dollars. You start to feel the isolation. It's too far to go home. Your relationship with your family has to change because you have to let go. Like if I had a crisis in the past I would have been on the phone to them immediately. I don't do that now and they don't do it either. They call after the smoke has cleared. They know there is nothing I can do. So, ...like there is no point to call and say "Oh your Gran is really sick" because there is nothing I can do. Now they ring after and say "We had some trouble with Gran but its ok now". They have let go and so have I.

Mum and Dad visited for 3 months when Kirby was born. Then just my Mum came last year when the twins were born. It was nice having Mum here. People who have family are lucky. It gives you peace of mind having someone you can leave the kids with that you really trust. When they left I cried all the way home. I took Kirby to Mac Donalds because I couldn't bear coming home to an empty house. Part of me was happy to have my home and routine back to myself. Some of the things Mum did with

Kirby I didn't really agree with but I didn't interfere with it because Mum and Kirby have such little time together. They only have a few days here and there in his life.

When Mum left I was terrified of being alone with the babies and all. Jim had half a week off. After that I got a student nanny in to help out. Jim was going to take more time off afterwards but I decided "No I had to start doing this on my own sometime". It was actually easier on my own than with Jim or Mum.

I was on the phone to my brother this morning telling him how many jars of baby food I had bought and how many I had made up. He lives in Las Vegas and can't understand why I go through the rigours of having three kids. He's having too much fun to get married. I guess he will understand someday. My other brother is in Las Vegas too, he is married and has a 4 month old baby. It's expensive to call, but one woman in the American Women's Club told me about Passport. It's a phone system where you can call a number to get a line in the States. It's a lot cheaper. It means I can call once a week for half an hour. It compares with the cost of going to a movie, which I never do because I have no time. I joined the American Women's Club to meet people and I have a few American friends but mostly Australian. Most of the women in the club are on short-term contracts so they will be leaving in a year or so and I will still be here. Then I have to start making friends all over again. But it's nice to meet and talk about home. I have decided not to re enrol this year, they have like once a month a women's get together, so you have to find a babysitter. You have to pay somebody \$5.00 an hour and spend another \$20 on the lunch, that's just not my sort of thing at the moment. I will keep in touch with some of the club women, now they're more personal friendships.

My closest friend is Sally, she's Australian, but we have lots in common. She doesn't have her family here either. Most of my friend I made through Kirby's

playgroup. The worst part was having to make the effort to go to playgroup. Walking through the door those first few times. Not knowing anyone. Denise (clinic sister) set this group going. It's really large now and may need to split up this year. It nice to have others to discuss issues with like how to settle babies and stuff. Things you would get from your family. It's reassuring to see others coming in looking haggard and screaming through lack of sleep. You think "Oh, I'm not the only one".

I met Sally at the Joondalup playgroup and most of the others. Sally is great. She takes Kirby a lot. Then Sally started up Friends of the Family. It gave us all a common place to meet and chat. You relax more in a mutual place. You are not worried about the kids escaping or someone's precious things being broken. We have had a couple of nights out as a group. Sometimes Sally has a Mum's night and once I had a lingerie party. I think it's chance too, that you come across a group of people that you click with.

Thinking back, it was scary, going out and doing things. You know trying not to embarrass yourself by doing something really stupid. When I first came here I felt very vulnerable and I didn't feel I could rely on people. It was really scary for me until I sort of settled down and got used to the environment and the people and the way people did things. I always felt vulnerable. It's different when you go to playgroup it's not like you go into a group where it's just ladies, you've got the kids, that's something to occupy you. You can always look busy with the baby and if your in a conversation that you want out of, it's like" oh the baby is wet, I'd better change him". And you always have your kids to talk about, so you have a start right there. The kids make it a lot easier.

Jim and I don't go out often. Two or three times Jim's family have stayed the night so we can go out. They're not daunted by the twins because they had two sets of twins. It gives Jim and I a break. Its good too because its free. A movie, dinner and a

babysitter is expensive. Sally takes Kirby once a week just to give me a break. It has been hard with the twins being so sick. I want to join the ECU playgroup again but it will depend on the twins. I already knew lots of people at the ECU playgroups when I took Kirby last year. Most of them I knew from the Joondalup playgroup, like Irene. I met Irene's friend Jo at ECU playgroup.

I have friends now I can just call up and feel really comfortable with. There are times though when there is not enough support, especially when the boys are sick. We felt like we were constantly pulled trying to find a place for Kirby to stay so that I could go to hospital. Jim was trying to hold down his job, the twins were in hospital and Kirby had problems with his ears. It would have been so nice to have my family here to take Kirby. Over there and drop him everyday so he would have had that consistency. Just looking own the tunnel to next winter, if they get sick its going to be day after day in this house alone. My friends have kids, they can't come over, they don't want their kids sick. Whereas if I were around my family, my Mum would be over, my Gran would be over or I could even go to them.

It's also difficult when Jim and I have an argument. In the beginning we had a difficult patch. I didn't feel secure in the relationship and I didn't get support anywhere else. After Christian was born it was like "where am I going to go with this baby?" Those were the times I would have loved to have my Mum. I really felt at a loss, I just had to fake it for a long time. Now things are fine. I remember one Mother's Day driving around the whole day because I was not going to his Mum's house or his Gran's house. It was the most miserable day. It was horrible. I fell we need a break from his family, like every Christmas we are expected to go there. They're not my family.

Christmas and birthday's you like to be with people you love, to celebrate and then for the crisis to have someone to talk to.

I guess living here has changed my relationship with Jim, because its made me more independent. I just have to take care of these things myself. Like having the babies, I told Jim not to worry about it I'd just go and so I drove myself to the hospital. Jim's said more that once "Toni you're tough as nails" Well I have to be. I certainly don't have my Mum and Dad to call on. I've become more independent and I've become a little harder. I think it scares him!

I wanted a trip home for next year but three is expensive. It's hard enough with one child, with three you need an extra adult; so that's another airfare. So far I've had three trips about every two years and my family have visited in between. We had been discussing it but now the cold is coming I am concerned about Christopher and Cameron's health. I am going back in June. Jim said it's not worth the boys getting sick so we are all flying over. I will stay with the boys until September.

Themes emerging from Toni's data

Upon completion of the first two interviews the data were analysed. The following themes were extracted:

- **Cost** - There is a financial cost for Toni to maintain contact with her extended family, however, it is a priority for the family to ensure they can continue contact with Toni's extended family.
- **Different from teenage years in Western Australia** - Toni found her life in Australia as a wife and mother different to her previous life in Australia as a teenager with her family.

- Feelings establishing networks - Various feelings were discussed by Toni as she ventured out to establish new networks.
- Difficult times - Celebrations such as Christmas, Birthdays and Mothers Day are difficult times for Toni. She also finds it difficult when either she or the children are unwell and this is when she could do with the extra support provided by the extended family.
- Change in Family Relationships - The relationships with Toni and her family has changed since her move to Western Australia.
- Family visits - These are stressful yet wonderful times for Toni. They are looked forward to with great anticipation.
- Establishing new networks - Various forums and ways were utilised in establishing new networks.
- Impact of children on new network - Toni found that the children offered her opportunities to meet other people. They were a good conversation opener and similarly an ideal way out of a conversation you wanted to end.
- Ill children - When the children are ill Toni finds it particularly difficult without her family.
- Guilt - Toni feels guilty about the limited relationship her children have with their grandparents and visa versa.
- Comfortable with people from hometown - Although many of Toni's friends are from various countries she finds herself comfortable with people from her hometown. She is able to relate to them easily because they have had similar experiences to her.
- New friendships qualities - Toni has formed a circle of solid friendships. She receives and provides various forms of support within this group.

- Loss of contact with friends from home - Over the time Toni has lost contact with most of her friends at home. Her contact is now restricted to her family and one close friend.
- Homesick - At times Toni has feelings of homesickness. It is usually then she realises it is time for a visit home.
- Change in relationship with partner - Toni and Jim's relationship has changed since their move to Western Australia. She believes this is because she has had to become harder in order to cope without the support of her extended family.
- Loss of people from new network - Although Toni has had a loss from her new network she found the impact depended upon the closeness of the relationship with that person.

At the third meeting the story was returned to Toni for verification. She was able to verify the story as being a correct account of her experience. At this meeting Toni also identified those themes which were most vital to her. These included the cost of keeping in touch with her extended family, the visits to and from her family, the impact her children had upon her new network, the qualities of these new friendships and the times her children were ill.

Jenny

My first contact with Jenny was over the telephone, so her cultured English accent was what I noticed first. Jenny lives in one of the more established northern suburbs. On my first visit Perth is experiencing a heat wave and the gardens and park

across the road are looking parched. Jenny answers the door and silently whisks me into the kitchen. She explains this is necessary as her daughter's bedroom is next to the front door and at present she is asleep, as is her younger brother. The house is brightly decorated and throughout the interview the cutlery wind chimes on the back patio tinkle in what little breeze there is. There are signs of children's play in the house. Toys are stacked in the room off the kitchen and cups and plates are stacked in the drainer from lunch.

When I visit Jenny it is usually the children's nap time. Sometimes I see them on the way to bed or when they are waking up from their nap. One time Elizabeth is just finishing off her activity before her nap as I arrive. Jenny cleans away as Elizabeth and I tape her voice on my tape recorder. She is very friendly and doesn't look like she is ready for a nap, however, when Jenny puts her to bed she doesn't come out again. On this same occasion the baby wakes early and spends half of the interview on Mum's lap. He looks at me with his dark eyes, not really sure who I am or why I am there. You can not help but interact with him and soon he is happy to hand over his precious dummy to me before venturing out into the backyard to play. As I leave Elizabeth is playing in her room by the window and waves to me as I get into my car.

I feel very relaxed with Jenny. On the first visit Jenny chats as she paints her toenails for a special night out with her old work friends. Her anticipation of this night is infectious as she explains that her husband will be home at six to look after the children so she must be ready to leave. The next time I visit Jenny tells me how much she enjoys our chats and when her husband comes home she tells him what we discussed.

Jenny's Story

I was travelling around Australia when I met my husband in Darwin. He had been travelling too. We decided to come to Perth because we had both lived in every other Australian city except Perth. Stefan's mate told him it was a nice place, so we came to Perth together. We thought about going to Brisbane where my husband grew up, but there were some difficulties between myself and Stefan's family. So we came to Perth and we have bought a business so that means we are committed to be here at least five years. We have decided to stay because in five years time Elizabeth will be in school and the friends we have will be like family. We will be used to not having family around and will have adapted by then.

I have a very good relationship with my family and it's strange to be away from them, I long to see them, but I'm really quite fortunate because I get to return about every 18 months to 2 years. I go alone, we can't afford for Stefan to go as well. Also my Mum and brother have been out. Mum came when Elizabeth was born and then again when Thomas was born. When Mum is here my emotions are heightened. I wanted her to see my life here and my friends to see an extension of me, not just me, the children and my husband. It was great, although by the end of the three weeks I kind of wished she was living up the street. I telephone home every 2 to 3 weeks and more often when it is Christmas or there is an illness. We always have big phone bills, but that's the price you pay. The letter writing has become less frequent since having two children. My family seem more aware of the change than I am. It's my life so I get on with it. It's always harder being the one left than being the one leaving. Although when I first arrived I cried every three weeks. I feel much more secure since we have been married. There are times when I feel really sad, it's like I almost hurt all over. This is usually

when I have a trip home booked. I am probably more reliant on Stefan because we are in a new place with no family. We have become closer as a result of this.

Before settling in Perth we had travelled a lot. When I came to Perth I got a job as a legal secretary but it was hard to integrate. We met people through friends. These people have no children and are very career oriented. They are not the "babysit" who have become our friends now. After Elizabeth was born it was difficult, we stopped socialising because we had no one to baby sit and could not afford to pay for one. Also I was not comfortable with a stranger sitting my first child. Now I have two ladies I trust to baby sit the children and in the last 6 months we have started to go out again. None of our baby friends go out because they have no family to baby sit for them.

When Elizabeth was born we were renting a house in Claremont. The child health nurse became like a surrogate mother to me. She organised a tea party with some other new Mums because I had no one and a new baby. This baby club met fortnightly and we often helped each other with problem solving and sharing. When the children were on two sleeps we met for lunch. They were all great cooks and we enjoyed the food. When the children went to one sleep we switched to afternoon tea, which was boring compared to the lunches. But it was fun. I still meet with this group, monthly. I have to go to Claremont, they feel it is too far to come up here.

Then we moved to the Northern Suburbs. I felt very gung ho about the move because I had already done it once. It was not so daunting to re establish again, although I was semi dreading it. I started aerobics and Elizabeth went to the crèche there. I had seen this women at aerobics and knew her child went to the crèche. We began chatting one day as we left the crèche. I asked if she knew many people up here and she said "no". So I said "Lets get together then". Now we are great friends. Toni (the friend from

the crèche)introduced me to Friends of the Family. I met one other girl through Friends of the Family. This group goes in phases. It becomes too hard with the boys 2 plus years and new babies together, so many people stopped going. I did start going again later and took my neighbour with me.

I am a regular at the health clinic because I don't have my Mum here to discuss things with. I usually go there if I have no experience of the issue in the past or no friend to talk to about it. The services for children in WA are great, like Ngala, they are so calm. I use the services more here than I would in the UK because there I would ring my Mum first. The UK is not really organised with services like these. Sometimes I discuss children problems with friends and neighbours. Although the network and contact with neighbours is limited. Sometimes I have a coffee with my neighbour, her child is five and Elizabeth worships her. I did meet one good friend when I was walking to the shops one day and she asked me in for a cuppa. Now she's like a best friend. I think your friendships form triple time than they would in a different situation.

These new friendships are still different to the ones from home. With my friends in England there's a history there that just isn't here. They've seen it, they've been there and they know my family. As opposed to you know where we went to school but you don't really know what it was like. Friendships back home, that's different.

I have three good friends and two I am pally with here. Three arrangements a week are enough they keep me very busy. We have a strong friendship. There's a real comfiness there. You could pretty much ask anything you needed to. My two good friends are in the same situation as me, both from overseas and don't have any family here. I think I open up a lot more to someone in the same boat as me. Last Christmas was my first Christmas away from home and I had this bodily yearning to be with my

family. But we had a big party! Stefan met some of the baby friends. We have done some things with Toni and Jim. Now we will be doing more of these family things with the friends from the “babysat”.

Themes emerging from Jenny’s data

After the first two interviews with Jenny the data were analysed and the following themes emerged:

- **Family visits** - Jenny has regular visits to and from her family. She sees these as very important in maintaining contact with her extended family. She believes she is still very close to her extended family in spite of the geographical distance between them.
- **Homesick** - There are times when Jenny becomes homesick and feels miserable but then she thinks she just has to get on with life. It is usually about the time they have booked a visit or someone is coming to visit.
- **Cost** - The cost of maintaining contact with extended family is high but it is part of Jenny’s lifestyle and something they budget for. Jenny would rather go without something else in order to be able to maintain the contact with her extended family. She has regular telephone contact and visits.
- **Change in relationship with partner** - Jenny feels her relationship with her partner is strengthened by the fact that they are away from their extended family. She believes the fact that they must rely on one another for everything has brought them closer together.
- **Establishing networks** - There have been a variety of settings and strategies Jenny has employed to establish her networks.

- Feelings establishing networks - Jenny is very positive about establishing new networks and although there are feelings of apprehension at first, she is very determined to make the new relationships.
- Change in friends - Something Jenny identified was the change in the types of friends she has since the birth of her children. Previously her friends were single now most of them are mothers in similar circumstances to Jenny herself.
- Improve social life - Now that Jenny has found regular and reliable child care she is hoping her social life will improve. This is also happening as the friendships change from her friendships into family friendships.
- Child Care - This was difficult without extended family at first, however, Jenny has now found regular and reliable babysitters.
- Impact of children on network - The children have impacted upon Jenny's new network as most of her friendships revolve around the children's activities.
- New friendships qualities - Jenny has a sound set of friends that she sees regularly. Most of the friends in this group have had similar experiences to Jenny.
- Family Friends - Many of the people in Jenny's network have been her friends to date and not family friends. They are now beginning to form into family friendships where the whole family can enjoy time together.
- Old friends versus new Friends - Jenny feels there is a difference between her old friends and new ones. The old ones have a sense of history they know about her background and experienced that with her. The new friends can be told about it but they have never experienced it.

- Difficult times - Celebration times are difficult times for Jenny. Other times she finds difficult are when she needs practical assistance in the form of respite care or domestic chores.
- Western Australian children's services - Jenny is very impressed with the children's services in Western Australia and feels that at home she would not have received the same type of support from the services. Mainly because they do not exist. Jenny uses the children's services for support as needed.

At the third meeting the story and themes were taken back to Jenny. She was able to identify strongly with the story and felt it captured everything perfectly. The themes were an accurate reflection of what was important and relevant to Jenny's situation. When asked to identify the most important themes for her Jenny listed these as, the change in relationship with her partner, the process of establishing new networks and the role that children's services played in providing support to her.

Danielle

Danielle lives in a very new northern suburb with her husband and two young daughters, Caroline and Rochelle. Danielle appears to be friendly and outgoing. She welcomes me into her home. With Danielle everything is up front; she doesn't put on a face. "Take me as I am " she says. The home is new and they are still putting together the yard. Danielle calls it the "sandpit". It is obviously a family home with a focus on children. This is evident from the array of their possessions adorning the living area. During my visits the children are always present. They are either playing happily around the house and yard, in the car, sleeping or waking up from an afternoon nap.

The first time I arrived I found Danielle in the driveway piling children into the car, two of hers and one belonging to a friend, ready to go shopping. She had forgotten our appointment. After realising who I was and making hurried apologies, she explained that she had to get to the shops, but would only be an hour so could I come back then. When I returned an hour later the baby was asleep and the two pre schoolers were donning their bathing suits ready to swim in the pool. Danielle made coffee, organised the children for their swim and finally sat alongside of me on the couch to start the interview. Throughout the interview the two pre-schoolers come in and out announcing they have finished their swim or asking for help to dress their Barbies. The friends child and I realise we know each other from another setting (I was her sister Kitty's 4 year old teacher) and soon she begins chatting to me about Kitty's school. Danielle also asks me about the connection, which breaks the ice and very soon I was feeling as if I had visited this house many times before.

On another occasion I visited, the house was much quieter as Caroline was now at school and Rochelle was asleep for most of the interview. When she did wake up she sat with Danielle until she was awake fully, looking at a book and peering at me cautiously from under dark eyelashes. Slowly she began to warm up and moves off Mums lap to get a drink and put away her dummy. When I leave Danielle sees me to the car asking me about my research. I feel really comfortable with this participant.

Danielle's Story

It was a dream really. To live in another country. We looked at Canada and the USA. In fact Mark was offered a job in Canada when I was pregnant with Caroline but we didn't want to have our first baby in a strange place. It was not the right time for us. It was the weather really that decided us on Perth. That and it was easier to migrate to

Australia. So after Caroline was born we came here, that was 3 years ago now. My family were very happy for me. They understood it was my dream and they were happy for me to fulfil it. Mark's family didn't believe in our dream and they still don't support us comin' here. I suppose it would have been harder for me if m' Mum was alive, but she died 8 years ago. Even so I still would have come. All m' family was very excited for me even my brother and sister.

M' Dad comes out here every year to visit. It's really nice. We are close since Mum died. Before that we argued lots. Mark and him didn't get on at first but now they do. It's hard having Dad, but nice too. He's easy to have. He sees more of the kids this way than he would if we were in England. If we were in England we would only see him like on Sunday afternoon but now he is here for 10 weeks and sees the kids everyday. When he's home he never writes and only calls like once a year. Anyway 10 weeks per year holiday, that's enough. Mark's parents came to Australia once, they didn't like it but then they had no intention of liking it. They miss the kids, they are their only grandchildren. Sometimes Caroline will ask to phone Grandma but it's so expensive. We probably talk to them on the phone like every 2 weeks. I didn't think they would ever come back because its so expensive, but they are coming again this year, we offered to pay but they said they can manage it. I'm getting really excited because they don't really know Rochelle. She was just a few weeks old last time they were here and now she's like a little person. They will be here for Christmas so that will be nice. I invited her for Christmas but I said don't feel that you have to come for Christmas and don't think anything specky of Christmas.

Christmas here is weird. Well it is. Its like... like one big posh Sunday. Do you know what I mean? It's just a lazy day. You don't have any of the films on the TV. It's

not a family issue. The decorations are not the same and it's hot. I want Caroline and Rochelle to experience an English Christmas. There's always singing and lights. But I never want to go back for Christmas. Christmas has not been good since m' Mum died. One Christmas my sister and a friend from England were here and this Christmas we had breakfast at the neighbours and spent the rest of the day home together. Mark wanted to work around the house but I wouldn't let him. It was Christmas day. I don't enjoy Christmas here. It's just like a big posh Sunday.

Birthdays are when I want to be with my friends and family. It's a really quiet time, the kid's birthdays. I always have a birthday party for the kids in their home. It's important for other kids to visit them in their home. I'll always make a big deal of their birthdays because they have no relatives to fuss over them. Oh parcels come in the post but its not the same. I probably buy them more because they don't get presents from the relatives. Dad doesn't send anything and my sister forgets. If someone does send money I buy a present for the birthday or to go under the tree so they have something to open. I only buy presents for the immediate family but it's so expensive to send over. Sometimes I can't afford \$10 for the present and \$10 for the postage.

Another time that was hard for me was when Rochelle was born. I was very homesick then. When Caroline was born I had all my friends and family around me. In Australia I only had a few friends and not the sort you could ask to help with jobs like the ironin' or baby sittin'. Mark's Mum was here at the time. She arrived the day I bought Rochelle home from hospital. The baby was only 2 days old. This was a BIG MISTAKE. We had no time to bond as a family. You know you need that time to get to know each other and get your own routines. Rochelle was a colicky baby. Every time she cried Mark's Mum would giver her a bottle. She really spoilt the baby and we

argued lots. She spoilt the baby and it was very difficult when she returned to England. You need 3 or 4 weeks to settle in before anyone comes. It was hard because I had no friends here. I went to the clinic but all the groups were for new Mums. I was a second time Mum but still needed first time Mum feedback. Like about the colic and that.

I miss my friends more than my family. Like m' sister wouldn't be the first person I'd call. Like I wouldn't keep anything from her, she'd find out but I might not call and tell her. My friends were from when I first started to work. We were like 16 years old. We all had our kid about the same time. I would love to go back and see them but this is just a dream. It's too expensive, a four week holiday and all the moneys gone, then we're back here. We still have so much to do here. We're living in a sandpit and the money could be better used here. This is our home now. We will never leave here. There's probably six friends I keep in touch with still. I write maybe 3 or 4 times a year and ring sometimes. When we first arrived this was more often but it's hard to keep up when you've got a new life here.

I'm much closer to Mark really. Well there's no one to run to if things go wrong. You just have to go to ya' bedroom. I've got some friends I could go and visit but you have to come back, don't you? But we're very close. This is my family now Mark and the kids. I don't know if I could live here without the kids though. You meet people through the kids.

I joined a playgroup in Kingsley to meet people. That's where we lived before. Someone told me to ring the Playgroup Association when Caroline was about 2 ½ years old. I met a group of friends through the playgroup. We were good friends. Something happened when I shifted here and I don't see them anymore. At first I kept going to Kingsley everyday for playgroup and Kindy, but it got too hard at the end of the

pregnancy and then with a little baby. They didn't want to come up, it was too far for them to travel to have a coffee. Then they forgot me. It was harder moving from Kingsley to Kinross, than it was from the UK. There were only 3 houses in the street then. I joined 2 other playgroups up here.

My neighbour saw an ad for Friends of the Family and I started there. It was really nice there, relaxed. I met Jenny there and we are still friends. I made another friend there, she just lives over the back here, but that didn't last. I think I came on too strong for her. I only stopped going to Friends of the Family because it got too hard with older children and babies all there together. It was not relaxing, it became hard work. Also Friday was not a good day for me. I might go back when Caroline is in school because I really liked going there.

We did meet friends from Mark's work. He worked with lots of Poms before. We still see them sometimes. Mark doesn't meet with my baby friends. These are my friends and the kid's friends. We mix with Maria and her family as a family. I met Maria through Caroline's gym class. There was this loud woman there and I thought she was with Maria and Maria thought she was with me. Then I spoke and Maria asked me where I was from. We just started sitting together each week at gym class. We both like socialising out of our immediate area and school network. There is less gossip. Maria and I get together once or twice a week. They are good family friends. When the guys mix it becomes more of a family thing. Girls will get together for a coffee on a Monday morning. The same as in England. The guys come home and don't want to do anything. The weekend is family time, just the four of us. I like it like this.

I used to just dump on anyone in the park, but I don't do that anymore. In England Caroline had a big social life, Rochelle doesn't have that. My goal for this year

was to get Rochelle a best friend to visit and that is happening already. I have 3 good friends now that's all I need really. I use the phone a lot. I'm the sort of person that has to speak to another adult every day. My neighbour over the road is great I can ask her for help anytime and I know I'll get it. Her kids are older than mine. My neighbour's 17 years old baby sits but it costs a lot to have a babysitter and a night out. Sometimes I do swaps with a friend. It's easier not to go out. In England Marks's Mum did it but we never took advantage of this.

When we first got here we had a friend here from England who helped us with settin up. They told us what sort of things to bring and that. We bought out all our furniture but it was still very expensive.

I find it hard to get into the groups here. They are very structured not like in England. In England they had Mother and Toddler groups which were really casual. The Mums put chairs around in a circle and the kids played in the middle. Sort of a free for all. Here they want you to participate with the kids too much. There were no fees so if you didn't want to go one week you didn't. Here you have to commit for a term and it's expensive. I wanted to try out a few and see what they were like. One group I went to was awful. Everyone was rostered for an activity and if you didn't want to do that you had to find someone to swap with you. You couldn't take the baby on roster so you were expected to get a sitter. I couldn't afford to get a sitter so I could go on roster. Besides I looked forward to this time to go shoppin' or have a coffee. No one spoke to you. I felt like crying. I just kept thinking "I want to go home!" My friend went with me and she didn't feel the same but she 's not as sensitive as me. She said "If they don't speak to you, so what". I couldn't stand it. But it wasn't like that at the Kingsley playgroup I

gelled with them. That's why I liked Friends of the Family, there was no commitment there either.

Caroline went to four year olds but I didn't meet many people through that. Sometimes I would stay for part of the session and talk to the other Mums. They were nice but I didn't socialise with them. It is hard with a little baby. That was a bad year. When my network was getting small again I joined Kinross playgroup.

Now I am waiting for Mark's parents to come out. That will be really good for the girls. It will be nice for them to have their Grandma and for her too. I'm getting really excited for them.

Themes emerging from Danielle's data

At the end of the first two interviews the data collected from Danielle was analysed in order to identify any themes that may emerge. These were identified as:

- Homesick - When Danielle's second child was born she was very homesick. She had no family or friends around to share the experience with her.
- Family visits - Danielle has not been home, however, her Dad visits every year and she has less regular visits from her in-laws and sisters. She enjoys having her Dad but visits from her in laws can be stressful. Even so she sees these visits as good opportunities for her children to form relationships with their grandparents.
- Friends missed more than family - At home Danielle had a close group of friends and she misses these more than she does her family.
- Cost - This is restrictive to Danielle's contact with her extended family and friends. She is trying to establish a new home and the cost of phone calls and visits home is prohibitive to a family of four.

- Guilt - Danielle's mother in law sometimes makes her feel guilty about Christmas time.
- Change in relationship with partner - This relationship has become stronger as a result of being isolated from the extended family. They rely more upon each other than they would have at home. They only have each other to turn to when there is a problem.
- Establishing new networks - Danielle has worked at establishing relationships through various groups and neighbours.
- Loss of people from new network - Danielle has experienced quite a few losses from her network and each time she does some self reflection to see what she could have done differently or what she may have done to instigate this breakdown.
- Size of network - The size of Danielle's network is small approximately 3 but she feels that is a good size for her.
- Need for adult contact - Each day Danielle finds it necessary to have contact with someone other than her children during the day. This may be via the telephone or a coffee chat.
- Children's friendships - The children's friendships are particularly important to Danielle. It is important to her that the children are happy in their friendships more so than herself and she consciously works on this as necessary,
- Feelings establishing networks - It was difficult for Danielle when she was establishing new networks and there were times when she felt like crying. Some groups were easier to join than others but it was always emotional.
- Child care - Child care is expensive as a result Danielle and her husband do not go out a great deal without the children.

- Difficult times - Christmas and Birthday's are difficult. They are not the same in Australia.
- Impact of children on new network - Danielle feels she has met most of her network through the children at various children's services. Even at the shopping centre she is recognised through the children. She sees the children as having a large impact on her current network.
- Difficulty mixing - Having a young baby makes it difficult to mix. Danielle found it hard to go on roster and join other activities whilst she was pregnant and had a young baby. She found this period of time restrictive to forming new networks.
- Developing new family friends - This is something that takes time for Danielle and she is forming a family friendship with one of her friends at the moment. She feels she can rely on this person in a crisis and visa versa. These two families have begun to socialise together. Although she likes her family time on the weekends with just their little family.

When the story and themes were returned for verification Danielle she was able to confirm the story as being hers and easily recognised her own words in the story. The themes Danielle identified as being the most significant to her were the home sickness that she experienced, missing her friends more than her family, the need for daily adult contact, child care, the difficult times such as Christmas and birthdays and developing new family friends.

Jan

I have met Jan many times before in a professional capacity at the University playgroups but I have never met her outside of the University. The first day I arrive at Jan's it is 42 C. This is the fourth day in a row over 40C. Even the air-conditioning in

the car makes little difference in this heat. Jan answers the door wearing her bathers and with Sarah on her hip. Her first words to me are “Oh if I had your numbers I would have cancelled today”. My heart sank. If I had not known Jan previously I may have headed out of there but I knew our relationship was strong enough to withstand the heat. At least I hoped.

Jan like the others lives in the northern suburbs, her area is new and her home is well kept and tastefully furnished. The lounge is scattered with children’s toys, books and videos. Jan is what she describes as a “Mature Mum”. She and her husband adopted their child, Sarah, three years ago. Jan considers them very lucky as there was no hope of them getting a child, they had exhausted most avenues, when most unexpectedly Sarah came along. Both Jan and her husband are English but Sarah is of another culture, due to circumstances (not to be divulged) Jan is unsure of Sarah’s cultural background but thinks she may be Indonesian. Sarah is a quiet child, she has dark skin, large brown eyes and shiny black curls all over her head. Jan and Sarah adore one another. During all my visits Sarah is awake and plays in the room where Jan and I are talking. There are constant interruptions as Jan helps Sarah put on a video or gets Sarah a snack. It is evident during this time that just as Jan says “Sarah is No1 priority” and nothing is going to alter that.

Even though I knew Jan previously it was awkward that first day. Jan appeared preoccupied and I was nervous. Perhaps it was the atrocious heat we were experiencing. Everyone in Perth was feeling frayed around the edges. The second interview was very different. Jan was chatty and became much more involved in what we were doing despite having to work around the Foxtel man drilling through the double brick. I never realised how long and loud it was to install Foxtel.

Jan's Story

Well, there wasn't a lot for us in England. There's a lot of problems in England. I suppose we were wanting a change. Yeah, we came to Australia for more opportunity and we were attracted by the lifestyle. It was pretty difficult to get here, because we didn't have jobs to come to we had to show we were employable and had means. They had various categories of people they wanted and computer engineers and teachers were not on the list. They wanted hairdressers and nurses and the like. It was a very complicated process and there was lots of paperwork to complete. At one point they lost our AIDS test. This was our first indication that things were not slickly organised in Australia. But we both wanted to come and at our age we could let England go.

I have a big family in the UK, too big. I have a good relationship with them but they are spread out at opposite ends of the UK, so we only get together for big family do's. We're not close, don't contact each other daily or anything. The contact is less now we are in Australia, but I haven't had family support for years. My family are much more in the background now. Mum has visited twice. First time was three months and the second two months. That was weird having her here every day. It's different when they are always here. It's an intense one off special time. She wanted to see things while she was here, so we did lots of sightseeing. The first visit was good. We had lots of issues to sort out. The second visit, I had Sarah and I was very angry. I think Mum could have done a better job as a Mum. I always made excuses for her that times were different then. But now I have Sarah I think she could have done much better. Cause I just love her (Sarah) everything I do is for her. Well, it is isn't it? I just can't understand my Mother. I don't want her to have any input in to how I bring up Sarah, cause everything she did was like totally wrong.

Before we got Sarah most of my networks were through work. I accepted every invitation that was offered. People only ask once, if you don't go they might not ask again. I was very conscious of always being positive. Not whinging. I always say Australia is marvellous, which it is, better than the UK. I did evening classes, Tao Chi, meditation, pottery....I met people and built up my network quickly. I was very conscious of needing a network. I would have gone out of my head if I didn't do it. I made a conscious decision to do that because I am an extrovert and need people. But these networks have totally changed since we got Sarah.

Most of my friends who are parents have teenagers now. I had no one with young children. Now I have a huge group of friends. I can relate more to my new friends. I began visiting the child health nurse. It was Friends of the Family I went to first, then from there I found out about the Uni playgroups and I did a first aid course at Granny Spiers. Everything that was offered I accepted. I put out invites all the time. "Come over for a swim", "Come for a cup of tea". You soon find out who needs a network. Some don't need it they are very busy already. I need to get out. Now Sarah expects the day to be one fun filled occasion. I started with the services. Then you get invites and you invite back. Now we go from one house to the next. Probably for the first 18 months I had no friends. I have now. I suppose you have to find who's in the same boat as you and who you can relate to.

Playgroup is wonderful! I'd go off my head if I didn't see people every day. I adore her (Sarah) and I want to raise her but it's hard and I want to see others. I look at the others and I think "Oh we're not that bad after all". Friends of the family really got me started but I have closer friendships from the Midlife Surprises group. It was worth going to Friends of the Family because I had this idea for the Midlife Surprises group

and I saw what Sally had done and I saw that it was possible. I asked if we could use the facility at Edith Cowan University and it is fantastic to have that facility. Some of the women from Midlife Surprises are in my network of friends.

It can be strange when you first start going to a group. You have to keep at it, not just go once, you've just got to keep going and eventually you will find somebody you can relate to, but you have to work on it. It's not like when you were kids and "Oh your my best friend" People aren't like that, it's different. You do feel uncomfortable at first but you've just got to keep working at it. I issue lots of invitations, have lots of people around and it's sort of rolling on from that now. Its got a life of its own.....See for me, I really hate being on my own, I'd rather have that than be sitting here looking at the four walls and tearing my hair out. I've made some really good friends out of going to different things.

Most of the people I see now have been met because of Sarah. I knew none of these people before and the people I knew before I don't really see much now. I suppose the child is demanding the most, you have to do things for that child so therefore you meet other people with kids of that age. I think the only thing that's different in my circumstances is that I deliberately set out to look for people who were in my age group, because naturally I would be meeting people who were a lot younger. So now there's sort of like a bunch of us older ones, that join things together. I have this cohort of ancients that I take around with me, we're all sort of clubbing together. I suppose that's what happens to our age group when you find people you're comfortable with. We go walking on Thursday and we go to Granny Spiers Friendship group and just do things together. Like I was away and they decided to run a course on menopause. When I came back they said "Oh by the way we've signed you up" I thought, it doesn't really suit me,

but ok. At least it gives me two hours break from Sarah while she is in the crèche there and she loves it. This group of ancients make a huge effort to stay together. We're all very different people. I mean we're not from the same background or anything. Maybe that's part of being a bit older you just tolerate people a bit more. And the fact that we are all people of our age with little kids and no family here.

I suppose I was uncomfortable with the younger ones in playgroups. I think human beings are very shallow and we sum each other up in like 20 seconds and I felt people were doing this to me. Then I thought it's not only me there are other mature age mums out there and I was right. I was impressed by the way Sally used her personal circumstances to make Friends of the Family work, so I started Midlife Surprises. I am determined to make the group work, so I make everyone feel welcome. When they come. I say "Oh and we do this and we do that and you're welcome to come along". If they want to stay they will take up on everything. I never felt comfortable with the younger mums. I could feel them looking at me like, "Who is this women?" With the older group we all like to feel we are more mature but were not. You should hear us sometimes. Like, "How do you toilet train?" "Well you've had three other kids what did you do with them?", "I can't remember". But I suppose our interests are the same. The young ones talk about going out and clothes. Whereas I'm normally in bed by 8.30pm. Twice we have been out since we have had Sarah both John and I were miserable without her, so we don't bother anymore.

So now I've lots of friend and lots of social life. But these are my daytime relationships. Sometimes John and I might go to the odd BBQ but mostly these relationships are separate to him. So on Sunday it's like, "What are we going to do?" On like family days, Christmas, it's harder. In England we'd go around and have family

Christmas and all get together. Before Sarah I always hated Christmas here, being just a couple with no children it's really difficult. This year we went to friends, they have older kids and they wanted to make it more family. Now we have Sarah we are starting to make our own family traditions.

When we first got Sarah I could have done with more support. I was trying to see all sides of it and yeah I would have loved more support, but actually I'm really glad in another sense. It can be interference, you're under stress, you've got a child who's very needy, you're having to find out for yourself how to manage it and your mothers coming in and going mmmmmm. It actually might not help, or it might, it just depends. Also when you're not well you need more support, it's the practical help you need. I have in desperation used Jenny. But we've always said to each other we'll help out but you really need to be desperate.

It's probably just the way I am. If I really needed help I would ask but it would be physical help like I needed someone to drive me to the hospital or pick up a bit of shopping. If I was feeling down and miserable my response would be "do something, get out there and do something, don't burden yourself or others" Go for a walk, go shopping, lets do something together. But I don't feel I can call on my friends here unless it's an emergency. This girl told me the other day she was really knackered because her daughter woke at 5am and she was going around to her Mums for a sleep" I thought "Oh that would be nice!" But I know it wouldn't happen at home. I always try and look on it from the other side when I'm thinking "Oh poor me" I think, "No come on there is a negative to these things too.

I suppose what's changed for me is that I've always gone for a best friend but there's two sort of things with that; there's nobody around, its harder to achieve that

when you're older because your potential best friend has got those relationships and they're satisfied and also there can be a an intenseness in that sort of relationship. I think I'm starting to change, wanting less from relationships. Like I say if I want to go into town and I want someone to come with me, it could be one of six people, I don't care. Although I do have preferences. I still want to achieve that kind of close best friend kind of thing but I think it's not realistic anymore. Mostly I meet my friends in the groups except for two people who I meet outside groups.

Lifelong friends are important. Being in groups and continuity and being part of something. Like in my family, my grandmother's group they all just stayed, so they have that sense of belonging. My Mum and one of her sisters stayed and then of course, my generation have gone, they've all gone. But my Mum talks and my grandma talks and I hear all this rich stuff about all these people and it gives you a sense of being part of something, continuity. I don't really have that. In a romantic idealised way that's a lovely thing to have. But then you can be pigeon holed. Oh you're so and so's daughter and therefore that's who you are and where you've come from.

It's the place as well. The place I've come from I know the changes that happened in that village in the time I was there. Like the bistro was moved, there used to be a pub there, that sort of thing. I know nothing about here. I know the changes that have happened in the last six years but I don't know the history. Even if I'm told I don't know it. If they said they bulldozed down such and such I'd think "Oh ok" whereas if it was at home you'd have an evening full of reminiscences. Like when it was bombed in the war and old so and so used to sit there with his pipe. "We can't knock it down". There is a feeling of regret, but what can you do?

My husband is talking of moving to Melbourne and I think that is exciting but I also think "Oh my God!" I think it really takes 18 months to 2 years before you really feel like you're at home with a group of people. I will have to go through all that again but I suppose on the other side of it is having done it several times, it actually does work. It means you don't have lifetime friendships, which I feel jealous of, lifetime friendships. And then I think "Do people really have good friendships or is it just me fantasising?"

Themes emerging from Jan's data

After the first two interviews with Jan the data were analysed in order to extract the themes. The themes emerging from Jan's data were as follows:

- Family visits - Jan's mother has visited twice. One visit was a success and the other was not. This relates to the relationship Jan and her mother have had for some time. This has been highlighted since the arrival of Jan's child.
- Relationship with child - Jan has an extremely strong relationship with her daughter. Her life revolves around her daughter at this stage and Jan is happy with this situation. She believes this is the way it should be.
- Change in relationship with partner - The relationship between Jan and her partner has been strengthened by the fact that they are away from their extended family. It means they rely more on each other but this has been beneficial.
- Establishing new networks - Jan works very hard at establishing her new network. She has started a self-help group for mothers over 40 years of age with young children. Any invitation that is extended Jan accepts and she sends out many invitations also.

- Impact of children on new network - Jan's child has had a significant impact upon her new network. Most of the people in Jan's network have been met through groups Jan has attended because of Sarah.
- Developing family friends - The friendships Jan has are her daytime friendships. They do not flow over into the family. Jan is happy to keep these relationships separate.
- Need for adult contact - The daytime relationships Jan has formed fulfil her need for daily contact with adults. It would not be possible for Jan to stay at home all day with her child without other adult company.
- Feelings establishing networks - At first Jan finds it uncomfortable making new networks, however, she knows if she keeps at it, it will work. Jan finds people quite shallow and judgmental, summing one another up in the first few minutes. This is a disadvantage for Jan as she is a mature age mother and many mothers at the playgroups are younger and immediately feel they have nothing in common with her.
- Fantasy of Friendships - Sometimes Jan feels that the ideals we build up about friendships and the roles they play are just fantasy and in reality they are completely different.
- Importance of continuity in relationships - Jan likes to be involved in the richness of people lives, like hearing stories of family and friends so that she knows and feels part of the other person's background.
- Sense of place - Jan feels a connection with her past home in that she knows its history and that is important. She knows what used to be there, who lived there before. She knows none of those things about her new home.

- Difficult times - Christmas's are difficult because there is no family to help celebrate. Other times that are difficult are when Jan or Sarah are ill and they need some practical support.
- Positiveness - It is important when establishing new networks to remain positive at all times.
- New friendship qualities - The new friendships Jan has developed are from a variety of backgrounds and that is something that Jan has become as a result of her circumstances, more understanding and tolerant of others. The set of friends are different, yet there are similarities. They are a strong clique who would always be there when Jan needed them and visa versa.

At the third interview both the stories and themes were taken to Jan for verification. Jan was able to verify both the stories and themes as being an accurate account of her experience. When asked to identify which themes were most significant to her Jan found this difficult and said they were all important with the exception of the theme relating to sense of place. Jan ranked the themes as follows. Level one themes included the relationship with both her partner and her child and the influence her child had upon her new network. Level two encompassed the need for daily adult contact, the way she established new networks, always having positive attitude and her new friends. The third level theme Jan identified were family friends, the importance of continuity of friends and family, the feeling establishing new networks and the difficult times. Finally Jan rated family visits and her fantasy about friendships as least important.

Conclusion

The stories of the five participants have been retold. Their beginnings are all similar as they arrive in a strange new place to live. However, their reasons for coming to Perth are varied. The tales that unfold are different yet similar in many ways. They end by leaving the women continuing their lives and networks. Sally is excited about embarking on friendships without the children for the first time in five years; Toni is on her way to the States for the winter with her three boys; Jenny is hoping to start forming family friendships; Jan is waiting to hear if her husband will move them to Melbourne where she will start all over again, Danielle awaits the arrival of her in-laws and hopes for a more successful visit this time. This chapter has identified through these stories the issues faced by the individuals. The following chapter will present the similarities that have occurred as these women have set about establishing new social support networks.

Chapter Five

Thematic Analysis of Data

Introduction

The data from each of the participants have been analysed in the previous chapter to identify the major issues for the individuals. This was presented as the women's stories. In this section the data have been further analysed across all participants in the study to identify any common themes or concepts that have arisen. This analysis has identified several common themes. A diagrammatic (Figure 1, p.102) representation of these is included to allow easy identification of the major themes and for clear representation of the level of importance given to each theme by this group of participants. It is important to remember that themes not identified by all participants do not mean that they did not experience these just that they were not significant enough to them to mention. The first level of themes are those that all five participants identified. These include, the impact of children on their new networks, the change in their relationship with their partner, their feelings when establishing their new networks, family visits and how they began to establish their new networks. There were three themes emerging at the second level, these were identified by four of the five participants in this study. Themes at this level were, difficult times experienced by participants, the change in various relationships at home and the cost associated with being isolated from their extended family. Level three identified four themes. However, these were only identified by three participants. These themes were, loss of people from the new network, guilt, developing family friendships in the new place and the qualities of the new friendships. In the final level the themes were only identified by two of the five participants. There were three themes, child care needs, need for daily adult contact

other than partner and the differences between old friendships at home and friendships developed in the new place. Each of these themes is discussed in the more detail in this chapter. They are presented in level order beginning with level one themes through to level four themes.

Level one themes

Impact of children on new network

All five participants reported that their children had a heavy influence upon their new networks and they had met people because of the children. Most of the participants would not have the people in their networks that they do, if it was not for the children. They have met people through playgroups and first time mothers groups, hospitals, kindergarten, children's gym classes and crèches. Two participants stated that the children were useful for meeting people and gave a perfect opener for conversations, it is a lot easier to meet people having children because they supply common ground immediately. One participant reported that the relationships developed as a result of her child, were much stronger than any other relationships. She felt that in a short time after meeting, mothers were comparing birth stories and other intimate details. At present she feels her entire life revolves around activities with children.

It appears that children assist mothers in meeting people by providing entry into conversations with other mothers and through the various services attended with children. However, it can be said that the children also restrict the mother's entry to groups. Some mothers were aware that the different ages of their children sometimes restricted their access to groups.

Change in relationship with partner

All participants stated that their relationship with their partner had changed since arriving in Perth. Three of the participants reported that they were closer to their partners as a result of living away from extended family. Two felt that the relationship was not as good as before shifting to Perth. One of these participants stated that she blamed her partner for them being isolated from the extended family. This has eaten away at their relationship. However, before their child was born she felt the relationship was stronger and she relied heavily upon her partner. It was after the birth of the child that the relationship began to deteriorate. The other participant felt that she had become more independent out of necessity, her partner believes she has become hard and it scares him. The three who reported closer relationships stated that they had become more reliant upon one another since shifting to Perth. They had become a close family unit and spent a lot of time together.

Change occurred in all relationships. However, the manner in which these altered varied depending upon the individuals and their circumstances.

Feelings establishing networks

All participants reported feeling anxious when beginning to establish networks. Nervous, dreadful, scared, vulnerable, lonely, tearful, desperate, strange, uncomfortable and like the new school kid were all descriptions of the feelings used by the participants. A common feeling was one of being judged upon entering a new group and a fear of not meeting other's expectations. These feelings occurred each time it was necessary to join a new group. Another anxious time for some was when the relationship moved from one within the group to meeting individuals apart from the group. These feelings again reared when it was time to meet the partners.

At the same time as these feelings were occurring the participants had a determination about them that ensured they soldiered on and went to new groups and met new people, despite their feelings. Two of the participants set up self help groups in an attempt to broaden their networks. Both of these groups were successful in establishing networks for these participants and for many others in similar situations. All the participants made a conscious effort to attend their various groups on a regular basis. They were aware that networks would not just form, they had to be worked upon.

Apprehension and nervousness seem to be common feelings when establishing networks. However, these are overcome by determination to establish new networks.

Family visits

Four of the five participants try to return home on a regular basis; this ranges from every 6 months to two years. These visits are looked forward to with great anticipation. One participant is unable to return home due to financial constraints, however, she has regular visits from her family every year.

All the participants have family visit them regularly. Four of the participants looked forward to these visits. The duration and regularity of these visits vary for each of the participants. All five participants had visitors, usually including mothers or mother in laws, visit them close to the birth of their child/children. This was considered of great value for those whose mothers visited, however, for the participant whose mother-in-law visited the experience was a negative one. These visits are important to the participants for support and family contact but they are particularly important for their children. These women see it as important for the children to have contact with extended family members.

Although visits from family were greatly enjoyed they were not always easy. It is difficult having other people living in the house 24 hours a day. Grandparents often did things with the grandchildren that were against the parent's beliefs. However, this time was seen as being so important that these things were often overlooked. Family visits are very busy times as there is a lot of catching up on as well as sightseeing and friends to meet. The participants were often relieved when family members left as they had their homes back to themselves and routines were put back into place. At the same time the participants were sad and often upset after the family member left. Tears were often part of this farewell process.

The other participant although enjoying the first visit her mother made did not enjoy the second one. At the time of the first visit the participant had no children but by the second visit had one child. During this visit the relationship between the participant and her mother deteriorated. She is not looking forward to any future visits.

Family visits play an important role for those isolated from extended family. However, the success of these visits is dependent upon the type of relationship that the individuals have.

Establishing new networks

When beginning to establish networks all the participants cited settings that involved their young children. Three of the participants joined first time mother groups through the child health nurse and met people through these. They all saw this group as being important in starting up their network and vital for the support they needed as first time mothers. All of these participants still keep in contact with people from these groups and some have developed close relationships from these groups. The remaining two participants did not have the opportunity to join such a group because one of the

children was adopted at a slightly older age and the other participant was not a first time mum. However, she feels she could have benefited from such a group as she lacked the support she needed.

All of the participants joined some sort of playgroup and the structure of these varied. Three of the participants joined playgroup at a local university where they were involved in student groups. These were successful for the participants in that they provided an avenue where they could discuss child rearing issues with others including students, professionals and other parents. This group also allowed them the opportunity to meet other mothers and have time for a coffee while the students interacted with their children.

Four participants had contact with neighbours regularly and the intensity of these relationships varied from a partner to walk with, to a close friend who became central to the participants network. Once these relationships developed they began to be seen more in terms of friends than neighbours and so they became part of the network.

One participant joined the American Women's Club where she met several women, a couple of these she has kept up with outside the group. She enjoyed this because it gave her the opportunity to talk to people who instinctively knew what it was like at home (common experience). The same women also met with mothers at a multiple births group, however, no friendships have formed out of this group. She met one of her close friends through the crèche at the local gym.

Another participant met a close friend through the children's gym classes. This same participant had attended several playgroups but other than the first one she had trouble fitting in at these. She felt this was because she was over sensitive to people's

reactions. The people she met at the first playgroup formed a strong relationship that ended abruptly and painfully when she shifted to another suburb.

The older participant in the study joined several courses at a local community centre that has a crèche facility as well. She accepted every invitation that was sent and offered many more. This participant found it difficult mixing with the young mothers as they had little in common. As a result she decided to start up a group for mature aged mothers of young children. She based it at the local university and it has flourished from there. Although this group of women comes from various backgrounds they have formed a strong network for themselves.

Yet another participant decided there must be other women out there isolated from their families so she decided to set up a self-help group with a little assistance from the child health nurse. They started meeting in parks and moved into the university premises by the first summer. This group was successful and many networks were formulated from this group. All of the participants joined this group. They heard about it either by word of mouth or through local advertising. All enjoyed this group mainly because they realised they were not alone with their plight, that there were many others out there in a similar situation.

Mothers of young children are actively involved in the lives of their children and it is through the various children's services that most networks begin to evolve. The one that stands out as most successful is the first time mothers groups operated by the clinic sister. These are effective in starting off the networks and developing long standing friendships. However, many other children's services are utilised after this to build networks.

Level two themes

Although these themes were only mentioned by four of the participants it does not mean that they were not experienced by the other participants, simply that they were not significant enough to mention.

Difficult times

Four participants reported experiencing hard times as a result of being isolated from their extended families. Their responses to these difficulties ranged in severity from crying every three weeks in the first year to chronic post natal depression continuing over 12 months. Three participants reported their difficult times as relating to their children. When the children were ill there was no one available to assist in the care of the child or to provide some respite for the mother. It is for this reason that at least two of the participants look to winter with dread because of the influenza and illnesses it brings. Another issue relating to the children was when children were first born or adopted, at this time physical help was needed and this was not available, causing difficulties for these women. Again this assistance was needed in the area of respite care or domestic support and for child rearing advice. One resourceful participant arranged for a student nanny to complete her practice in their home when the twins were born.

Times of celebration were reported as difficult, Christmas and Birthdays in particular, although one participant mentioned Mother's Day and Christenings. Four out of the five participants reported these times as difficult. Mostly they did not enjoy Christmas because it was different from home and was seen as a family affair. Christmas in Perth was not special to these participants and in two cases was a very sad time of the year. Another time reported as being difficult was during domestic disputes. Three

participants reported that during arguments with their partner they missed family and friends. Without this network there was nowhere to go and no one to discuss the issues with.

The participants found they had few people to call on for practical assistance when they themselves were ill. This was reported as an issue by four of the participants. The areas assistance was required in was with the practical tasks such as, washing, household chores or respite care while the mother caught up on sleep. One participant reported difficult times around going on school roster. As she has a younger child who can not go on roster with her and she can not afford child care for this purpose. This causes her difficulty in attending any roster. None of the other participants have children old enough to have experienced this as yet.

Difficult times are experienced by most and these appear to relate mostly to not being able to access practical assistance as needed. It was the day to day tasks people needed help with yet did not feel comfortable enough to ask those they knew or did not know anyone to ask. Celebrations and domestic disputes are also times when families are relied upon and again they were not available to provide the support.

Change in relationships at home (the one left)

All participants indicated a change in the relationships they had at home be it with family or friends. The degree and manner in which these changed varied between participants. Most participants reported that over time some relationships had been let go off completely. It seems it is not possible to continue all relationships. Two of the participants reported some improvement in their relationship with members of their families. Both of these participants reported weak relationships with their families prior to migration. Three participants reported a weakening of the relationship as a result of

the isolation from their extended family. Two of these participants reported having strong relationships with their families prior to migration. Only one participant reported a poor relationship prior to migration and an even poorer one after migration, although she did not contribute this to the migration, but to other personal factors.

Changes occurred in all relationships. Sometimes it was for the better and other times for the worst. It depends upon previous relationships and individual circumstances.

Cost

A theme that emerged quite strongly for four of the five participants was the cost of living away from extended family. This generally presented in terms of child care, travel and phone calls.

The cost of airline tickets from Perth to any other state or country is very high due to the general isolation of Perth. Some participants found this manageable while the children were under 2 years of age but after this the airfares increase significantly, making it expensive to travel with children. Most participants seem to have managed to return home about every 18 months to two years. However, now the children are older and in some cases another child or two has been born, this makes it very difficult to return home. For one participant the cost to return home is too great, making it only a dream for her. For those that can manage a trip home it often means the wife taking the children on her own, as the extra money for the husband's ticket is out of reach for the family. Some of these women must endure an 18 - 24 hour flight with 2 - 3 children under 5 years. Another consideration is that many of the partners can only get 4 weeks annual leave and to spend such a large sum of money for 4 weeks is unjustifiable to these families. They are just establishing themselves in new homes and this in itself is

expensive. One participant used to return biannually but since purchasing a home she realises this would no longer be possible.

Another large expense is phone calls home. Most of the participants described the size of their phone bills; these ranged from \$100 to \$200 per month. All of them saw this expense as justified and felt that they went without other things such as movie going. One participant had discovered a system that allows cheap calls to the USA and she has joined this system and uses it weekly to save on her phone calls home. The cost of calls seemed to be a legitimate expense for all but one participant. This woman called home less frequently than the others. This was the same participant who was unable to substantiate the expense of travelling home and who has difficulty in affording a baby sitter and an evening's entertainment. It may be that she is less financially stable than the other participants, although this is not identifiable in this study.

The financial cost of living isolated from you extended family is high. Most families will go without to maintain the contact with their extended family. However, for some families this cost is not within their reach and therefore their isolation increases.

Level three themes

As with level two themes all participants did not mention these, however, this does not mean they were not experienced but that they were not significant.

Loss of people from new network

Three of the participants had experienced losses from their new networks, although this appeared only to be a major issue for two of the participants. The third participant simply described it, "you sort of feel a narrowing". For the other two

participants the loss of people from the new network had varying effects upon them depending on the type of relationships they had developed with these people. If they were just acquaintances, usually meeting at groups, there was very little impact. When the relationships had developed a little further to meetings outside the groups the impact was a little stronger. With this second type of relationship there was some degree of soul searching, trying to identify what the participant had done to cause the rift. One participant was quite acceptable of losing these people from her network and justified this by believing that these people were probably not true friends anyway. The loss of a person at this level is manageable, however, it is particularly traumatic if the loss is of a close friend.

For one of these participants this subject took up a large portion of the interview process. She had lost a significant number of friends from her new network when moving to a new area. However it is the loss of two close friends that are most difficult for her to cope with. She describes herself as feeling neglected and upset; her feelings were hurt. One particular friend she states "really hurt me". For this participant there is a sense of confusion about what she did to deserve this. There is a lot of self reflection that occurs as she tries to understand the situation and what has happened.

Similarly with the other participant, when one of her closest friends tells her she is shifting to the country this participant is devastated. She describes her feelings as selfish because all she can think about is what this will mean to her. Her baby-sitter will be gone, her friend will be gone and her child's companion will be gone. This was a relationship that had developed far enough for her to rely upon and now it would be gone. This participant has developed a fear of losing people from her new network. She is concerned about going on holiday in case she loses someone from her network and is

working toward some of them coming on holiday with her. Overall when a loss occurs in the new network the feeling is one of fault caused by the participant and what could they have done differently to have avoided this situation. The severity of the concern is related to how close the person was to the participant.

Guilt

Three of the participants describe feelings of guilt associated with living away from their family. The guilt is generally related to family members being deprived of grandchildren, nieces and nephews and children being deprived of extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The most guilt was associated with the participant's parents or parent in laws and their own children. Two blamed themselves significantly for this and spent a considerable amount of time trying to deal with this. One of these two participants was talking about returning home so her Mum could see the children take their first steps and be christened. Despite the fact that this may mean the children's father did not witness these events. Both of these participants talk regularly of how ill their children are. They both decided they must return home or holiday in a warmer climate with their parents for the winter, in order to maintain their child's health. These children appear to be healthy children apart from suffering from mild asthma or bronchial illness during the cooler months. It would seem this feeling of guilt is so strong that sometime radical solutions are implemented to appease some of this feeling.

Guilt is associated mainly with parents and children. This is a feeling that is difficult to deal with and seemingly can lead to irrational decisions being made in some cases. This is an attempt to deal with this overwhelming feeling.

Developing new family friends

Although the women participating in this study all have or are developing new networks that are stable it takes much longer for these relationships to develop into family friendships. However, four of the participants are now working towards family friendships with at least one other couple. The activities are organised by the women and usually involve such events as movies, dinner, BBQ or a party where both couples are involved. One participant has gone as far as to organise golf days for her husband with another friend's husband and this has been successful. Each of the participants is at varying stages of developing these family relationships. During the interviews all the participants became quite excited and animated at the prospect of having friends that involved the entire family and not just themselves. However, it was clear that some friends would remain daytime friends and never become family friends. The one participant who kept all these relationships separate was the older mother. The participant describes her friendships as daytime relationships, not weekends, she keeps those times for her family.

Most people seem to be keen to develop their friendships further to encompass the entire family. It is the women who work at organising the activities that will instigate these relationships.

New friendship qualities

Four participants are very aware of their new friendships and appear to have a relatively stable cohort of friends in their new network. The fifth participant has had several losses from her network and although there are some stable friends she has not consolidated her network as yet. All four describe their networks as consisting of a small number of close friends (3) and a couple of others who are not as close, anything larger

than this is too difficult to maintain. These are the people they would call in on for coffee, go to town with or telephone for advice regarding their children. The type of relationships varied between participants, some were involved in regular baby-sitting swaps, others had daily telephone contact regarding insignificant issues such as what they were having for dinner that night. Still others were involved in holidaying together or having social evenings with their partners. Much of their time together revolved around the children.

What was evident in these friendships was that there was a common denominator between the participant and their friends. This was often young children, living away from their family, country of origin or age. One of these participants, an older mother, would spend most of her time socialising in various groups with these women such as playgroup and friendship groups. She describes her network as “the cohort of ancients” as all these women are older mothers of young children.

Analysing the data from the five participants, it shows that networks develop at varying rates for individuals. The number of people in the network needs to be manageable in order for quality relationships to develop. The participants are involved at varying level with their friends depending on the closeness that has developed in the relationship. It would appear that common factors between people are important in establishing new networks.

Level four themes

Themes at this level were not mentioned by all participants, however, they may have been experienced by others, but not seen as significant enough to mention.

Child care

As none of the participants in this study works full time their child care requirements are restricted to social occasions. No child care is required for work, as the part time work they are involved in is after hours when their partner is available to care for the children. Child care may have been a deciding factor in the type of work chosen by these women, however, this was not substantiated in this study.

Both of the participants identifying child care as an issue have organised for paid child care in their homes when required. For one participant this appears to work well whereas the other finds this a financial burden. This participant has some reciprocal arrangements with friends however she is always aware of having to pay back the other person.

Although child care was identified as an issue for only two of the participants in the study, this would appear to be related to need and how far along the individual was in the settlement process. One of the participants who did not identify this as an issue did not have a need for child care. Both she and her husband were older than the other participants were and she felt most of her socialising had been completed in their earlier years. On the one occasion they had managed a baby-sitter neither of the parents enjoyed their evening out and so have not bothered since. The two other participants who did not find child care an issue have a reciprocal baby-sitting arrangement and this works well for them. This has alleviated any problems for them in this area.

Child care does not present itself as a major issue to these participants. However, they may have arranged their working hours accordingly. This is not clear in this study. Social child care is an issue if your network is not established enough to call on others for baby-sitting swaps. The cost of this can be prohibitive for some families.

Need for adult contact

Two of the participants identified the need for adult contact, other than their partner, on a daily basis. Both of them felt that it was not enough to have the company of their young children throughout the day. One of these participants used the telephone daily for contact with others or would drop in on neighbours and friends for coffee. This was something that she found difficult due to the small size of her current network. The other participant identifying this as an issue has joined several groups where she has daily contact with other adults. She accepts all invitations and issues lots in return. For both these participants the thought of staying at home all day alone with a young child is unbearable.

For some participants daily adult contact is vital and this can be achieved through various ways, telephone, coffee mornings or group activities.

Old friends versus new friends

Two of the five participants make some mention of the difference between their old friends and new friends. The common thread here is the importance of history. With the old friends there is background knowledge. They understand about the participant's family, where they went to school and grew up. They know exactly what it was like which is not the same as describing what it was like to new friends. Both these participants return home regularly for holidays. They always catch up with their old friends during these visits. They just pick up where they left off last time. For one of these participants she feels that with her old friends she did not have to see them all the time, phone conversations were enough to keep the friendship alive. Here she feels it is necessary to regularly visit her new friends to maintain the relationship. She describes her new friendships as fragile and her old ones as solid and reliable. The other

participant is, after 2 years, beginning to feel a “confinement” with her two close friends here.

It would appear from this data that it takes time to develop comfortable relationships. Those relationships that are steeped in history have more stability to them and this can only be achieved with time.

Conclusion

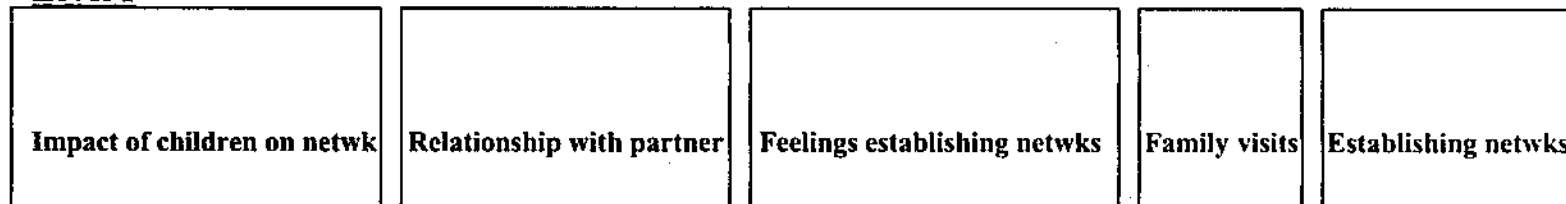
There are several major themes associated with this study. One related to the significant impact made by children on their mother's networks. The change in relationships between the marriage partner was also significant but depended on the individuals and their circumstances as to how the change occurred. Common feelings of anxiety were evident when establishing new networks but when teamed with determination these feelings were overcome. Family visits played a significant role in these people's lives and although these were enjoyed on the whole there was a bitter sweetness to them. The participants used various groups to form their new networks. Often these were children's services as this was where common ground lies. Slightly less common themes related to the difficult times and the most common areas here were lack of practical help during illness and times of celebration. Changes in relationships occurred almost naturally, however, they all differed between individuals. The financial cost associated with living away from family was identified as great and out of the reach of one participant. Other themes were identified by some participants and not others. These related to loss of network members, guilt, family friendships and the qualities of the new friendships. Some participants identified child care issues, a need for adult contact, and the differences between new and old friendships. When all these themes and the women's stories are perused we can see that for these participants there are

many issues for them to deal with on a daily basis. These include emotional, financial and social issues. The next chapter will address these findings in relation to the literature in this area.

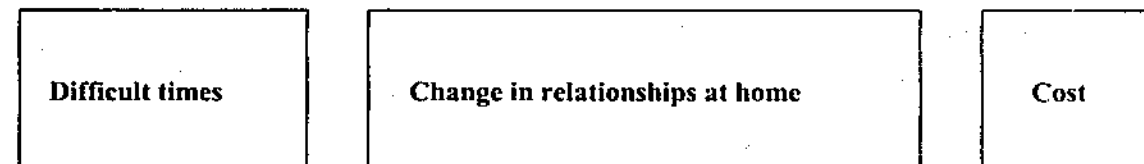
Figure 1

(Levels 1-4 in descending order) Hierarchical Diagrammatic Representation of Themes and Concepts

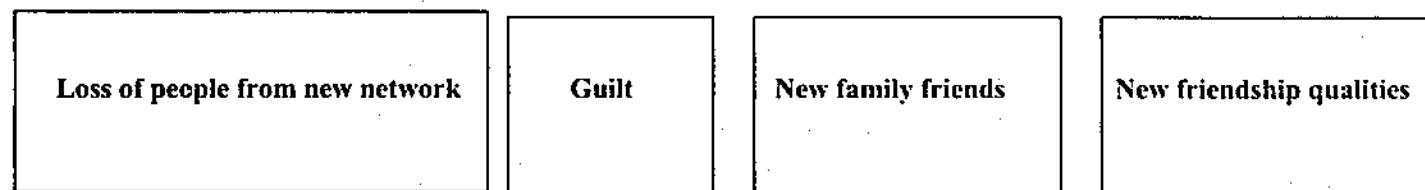
Level 1



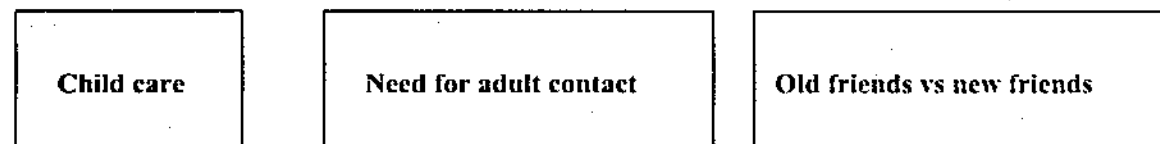
Level 2



Level 3



Level 4



Chapter Six

Discussion

In the previous two chapters the data have been presented firstly, as the stories and themes of the individual participants and secondly, as the common themes elicited from the accumulated data of all the participants. This chapter will discuss the common themes in relation to current research in the area. The most significant issues arising from this study can be divided into two sections the process and the elements of the subjective experience of the mothers. The process examines the role played by the children, the child health nurse, voluntary organisations and partners in establishing new networks. The elements are generated using the subjective experience of the mothers themselves. The data have shown that the processes used to establish support networks and the various elements found to contribute to the formation of these networks was often common to these women.

Networks -The Process

One of the major findings identified in this study is the instrumental role played by young children in the establishment and maintenance of their mother's network. Children are identified as playing an instrumental role when first meeting people, as they supply their mothers with common ground and an easy topic for conversation. Similarly, they are also used as an opportunity for escape when needed. If an interaction became too difficult then the mothers busied themselves with the child thereby bringing the interaction to an end. There have been other studies (Cochran & Brassard, 1979, Tietjen, 1985, Cochran, 1990), which have addressed the issue of the importance of the mother's network on the child. However, research has neglected to study the impact the

child has on the mother's network. Jennings, Stagg and Connors (1995) in their study of mothers of young children looked at the personal and maternal networks separately, ignoring the impact these networks have on one another. They found that 86% of the personal networks also belonged to the maternal network. These findings support the experience of the participants in this study. However, these participants further emphasised that most of the friendships they developed are formed as a result of their children. They have few friendships that developed apart from the children. Any friendships that have been formed apart from the children usually diminished over time. Therefore, this study has demonstrated the vital role the children play in maintaining the ongoing relationships their mothers' form. The children also provided the mothers with entry to various children's services that would have otherwise been unavailable to them. These services provided the mothers with a meeting place. Research shows that women regularly meet with other women either kin, neighbours, in groups or on the telephone Bryson, Thompson and Oxley (cited in Wearing, 1985, p. 243). However, what has been neglected is the instrumental role played by the children who act as the vehicle through which their mothers gain entry to groups for the purpose of meeting other women. The various children's services provided these mothers with a semi-formal meeting place where relationships with other women could begin to formulate through their children.

Many relationships are developed by the mothers while involved in various children's services attended with their young children. These services are essential in the network formation process. The services included the child health nurse, first time mothers' groups, playgroups, crèche and children's gym classes. The most successful of these is the first time mothers' group, organised by the child health nurse. Most participants reported feeling comfortable and safe in these groups with other women

who are experiencing similar issues. Campbell (cited in Phillips, 1985, p.58), a convenor of mothers groups, stated that these groups aim to be a safe and comfortable place for mothers to share their common experience. This supports the experience of the participants in this study who attended such a group. Those who didn't attend were aware of such a service and felt upset at not being able to attend. Many long-standing friendships are developed from these first time mothers' groups. This is born out in Lawson and Callaghan's (1991) study of Australian mothers of newborn infants, in which they identified prolonged commitment, by mothers to these groups. Many of the women in the aforementioned study were socially isolated and utilised the groups to develop relationships. They saw the child health nurse as an important person in this process acting as the facilitator. This is consistent with the reports made by many of the participants in this study which refer to the invaluable skills of the child health nurse in facilitating the first time mothers' groups. The value of these groups is evident by the mother's eagerness to remain involved in the groups as they took on the responsibility for the group from the child health nurse and kept the group operational themselves.

Another children's service utilised frequently by the participants of this study is community playgroups. They use playgroups for developing new networks with people in similar circumstance to themselves (mothers of young children). Wearing's (1985) study supports this by identifying that women join playgroups to meet people, these people then became friends as the relationships developed. However, what the previous research has neglected to discover is that there are a variety of community playgroup models in operation and the success of these relates to the match between the service and the participant, some looking for more structured models than others. This finding indicates how imperative it is for playgroups to operate under a variety of models in

order to meet the needs of the constituents. A complaint by two of the participants in this study was that community playgroups are too heavily focused on children's needs and often neglect the needs of the mother. This varied in severity depending upon the type of playgroup attended. Phillips (1985) and Brown, Lumley, Small & Astbury (1994) supported this finding by noting the limited use of playgroups for fulfilling the needs of the mothers. This limitation propelled the participants to search for a service that was tied more closely to their needs.

In an attempt to address the limitations of the current services, self-help groups were established by two of the participants who decided there must be others with needs similar to their own. Shared needs is one of the major characteristics of self-help groups (Thorman, 1987). The participants saw this as a way of extending their own network. Involvement in self-help groups is seen to be a common response by women (Lieberman 1979, Young and Jamrozik, 1982, Wilson, 1986, Thorman, 1987). One group was formed for families isolated from extended family. As with all voluntary organisations there are periods of expansion and contraction, this is often related to the drive of one individual (Jupp, McRobbie & York, 1991). This group is currently in a stage of contraction as the energy of the individual driving this group is low. The other group was formed for mature age mothers with young children. This group is currently in expansion mode. Just as with ethnic organisations providing networks which can form a substitute for extended families (Jupp et al, 1991) so too do these self-help groups. They offer opportunities for social contact and alleviate isolation. There have been an increasing number of self-help groups appearing in the Western World. One reason given for this is the breakdown of the extended family structure (Kickbusch and Hatch, 1983, Katz, 1984, Wilson, 1986). This study pinpoints the need for women isolated

from their extended family to establish new support networks for themselves and their families.

The participants reported a variety of negative feelings, in establishing new networks. Most significantly there is a sense of vulnerability as they began this process. However, what was clearly identified is that they are acutely aware that it is their responsibility to establish their network and they make a conscious and courageous effort to develop the network. As there is no institutionalised system for women to form networks the participants actively work towards forming networks in a variety of ways and utilise a variety of community organisations to achieve this. Courage, determination and a sense of survival are the distinguishing characteristics that make it possible for the participants to succeed.

Another crucial finding in this study is the change in relationships with the participant's partner. The way in which the relationships altered varied with some relationships becoming close and others becoming further apart. However, almost all the relationships are closer and the participants described their relationships as depending more upon each other as a result of being isolated from extended family. This change in the relationship with their partner was an unexpected one for the participants. Other studies in this area have overlooked the positive change in relationships between partners as a result of isolation from the extended family.

Networks - The subjective experience of the mothers

As well as revealing processes this research indicates certain elements common in such situations. An area that appears to have been overlooked in the research is the regular and significant family visits that occur in migrant families. These visits are a critical element in the mother's experience. Although they cause much upheaval in the

lives of the participants, they are looked forward to and any upheaval caused by them is generally overlooked, as they are considered so meaningful to the participants and their children. Although a time of great delight, visits can be quite stressful and when they end participants are relieved to have their lives back to normal. The participants find the relatives interfere with their child rearing practices, however, this is overlooked and when the visit is over they work hard at re-establishing the routines. Visits from family usually occurred during the birth or arrival of a child. These visits were generally seen as positive experiences. Further, Nicholls, Cassell and Kaplan (1972) and Lantican and Corona (1992) in their studies of other populations corroborate the significant role played by familial support in the outcome and experience of a woman's pregnancy and childbirth. However, what has not been identified previously is how crucial this is to those isolated from their extended family. The family visits at this time in life lead to the much-needed physical and emotional support lacking in the lives of these women. Consequently most of the participants were happy to have their family available to support them through this exciting and trying time.

Another vital finding is the denoting of difficult periods by the participants. Times that are classified as most difficult to cope with are during celebrations that usually involve the extended family such as birthdays and Christmas. Most participants do not enjoy these celebrations as they do not have their family around them to join in the celebrations. Other times are when children or the participant themselves are ill. Soldo, Wolf and Agree (1986), in their study of women with disability, identified kin were more apt to care for relatives when they were ill, than friends. They were also better at organising social occasions and assembling resources in an emergency (Coe, Wolinsky, Miller and Prendergast, 1984). However, research has not previously

addresses this issue when extended family is unavailable. Predominantly the difficulty evolves around not having the necessary physical support to help with domestic chores and respite care. There are not enough people of various ages and stages in life within the networks to provide the necessary support. Research by Walker, Wasserman and Wellman (1993) upholds the need for variety of ties needed in order to provide the various types of support necessary. This study also classifies domestic disputes as another awkward time. Participants had no-one to turn to during these periods, for time away or someone to listen to the issues. Research has identified the main support within families related to, financial, material, physical, legal, spiritual and emotional problems (Barth & Schinke, 1984, Colletta 1981, Pazarine, 1986, Richardson, Barbour & Bubenzer, 1991, Mc Donald, 1995 and Walsh and Connelly, 1996). This substantiates in part the discovery of this study that the main areas of support lacking are in the physical and emotional areas. However, in this population the focus remains a lack of physical and emotional support from extended family.

An additional critical finding in this research is that as a result of the isolation from extended family and friends at home, these relationships changed. At the same time some relationships with family and friends at home changed in a positive manner, others weakened. This varied depending on other factors. Walker et al. (1993), found that family relationships usually survive distance better than friends. Mc Donald (1992), Barth and Schinke (1984) and Richardson, Barbour and Bubenzer (1991) found most individuals have strong ties with family members, even those living elsewhere. This is particularly the case for parents and children. The family is considered the centre of an individual's support network. All but one of the participant's classified their relationship with extended family as strong. Those relationships that had strengthened were usually

weak prior to migration. Those that were strong prior to migration and had weakened since migration were still strong. Previous research has failed to identify that in spite of the relationships with extended family continuing it was no longer possible to call on family for everyday assistance as it had been prior to migration. Despite regular contact there was a degree of letting go that had to occur in order to cope with the separation.

The participants in this study identified financial cost as being restrictive in relation to contact with extended family. Miller (1986) stated the financial cost of migration is high, however, the costs identified in his study relate to loans to migrate, establishment costs and airfares to the place of migration. It neglected to address the costs associated with maintaining contact with extended family after migration. The costs identified in this study relate specifically to return airfares and telephone expenses. These costs are vital for maintaining links with extended family. Other researchers have identified the importance of frequent family visits and the telephone in keeping traditional family roles operating (Sussman and Burchinal 1962, Lee 1980, Litwak, 1981, Parish, Hoa and Hogan, 1991), however, they ignored the costs associated with maintaining these links. In spite of the cost of telephone calls, the telephone played a significant role in the participant keeping in contact with her family. As Walker et al. (1993) found, the telephone acted as a "social catalyst that keeps network members connected" (p.79). Telephone contact was seen as strengthening the relationship, however, these ties were not more likely to provide additional support. This is reinforced by the findings of this study as participants maintained contact with extended family members via the telephone, however, these people were unable to provide the daily support needed for mothers of young children. Flights home were another large expense for the participants in this study, however, most managed it regularly. Only one

found this out of reach. This same participant had also mentioned other financial restrictions and may have been less financially stable than the other participants. Most participants were prepared to forego other luxuries in order to have regular flights home and make phone calls home. This is a significant indicator of the importance of this contact.

There is an overriding sense of loss amongst the participants. Firstly a sense of loss of the extended family support. Secondly, some participants had experienced losses from their new network and this could be particularly traumatic depending upon the closeness of the relationship. With the loss of each member there is a degree of blame and guilt placed on the participant as they search for the reason this relationship ended. Similarly, a sense of guilt and blame is felt by some participants, concerning their children not having access to their grandparents and visa versa. Participants blamed themselves for this situation. This led to sometimes radical solutions of ways to achieve this. Many participants talk of the need to return home during the winter as their children suffer from asthma, bronchial infection and influenza. On occasion this meant the child's father may miss out on a Christening or the child's first steps, however, this seemed less important than the return visit home to see extended family members.

One of the most momentous achievements for these women is to develop individual friendships into family friendships. The participants found that family friendships take longer to develop than individual friendships. This is a common goal for the participants (women) who work towards developing their relationships into family friendships. Wellman and Wellman (1992) also identified women as organising support networks for the whole family. The partners play little in this process and are simply a part of whatever is organised. Most participants see the importance of having

family friends as opposed to friends they mix with alone during the daytime. The "value of friends in common" was also identified in other populations by Lewis and Spanier (1979), Milardo, (1980) and Cotton, Cunningham and Antill, (1993).

All the new friendships formed have a common denominator; such as children, place of birth, lack of extended family or age. This is substantiated by Hartup and Stevens (1997) where common ground is identified as necessary for the formation of friendships. These new relationships took time to develop and did so at varying rates. Quality versus quantity is important to the participants, they have only a small number of people in their network, however, the quality of these relationships is sound. The participants generally have 3 close friends they can rely on for assistance and 2 others that they meet with regularly. Other studies have shown the average network size to be much larger (Walker et al, 1993, van der Poel, 1993). However, what is evident in this study is the all important fact that support is not related to the numbers in the network but to the support received from them. Elkins and Peterson (1993) and Walker et al. (1993) agree that the quality of support is important..

Support for child care is arranged on an informal basis. This is generally a reciprocal arrangement with another mother. DiMateo and Hays (1981) and Hartup and Steven (1997) saw reciprocity as an important component of a relationship and lack of reciprocity could lead to destruction of the relationship. However, some participants are paying for child care in their home and this is causing them some hardship. At home family would have been utilised to provide this type of child care. Parish, Hoa and Hogan (1991) identified families as providing short term child care. Generally the change to paid care happened only as the hours of care increased. Webb (1994) in her study of migrant women in Sydney identified child care as a major issue for these

women. This was not the case in this study. The subjects in Webb's (1994) study were all from non-English speaking backgrounds and many needed to work. The women in this study were all from English speaking backgrounds and those who worked did so during the hours that their partner is available for child care. Phillips (1985) identified this as a common pattern with mothers staying at home or finding employment that was flexible enough to meet their child care requirement.

Staying at home for the participants' means they experienced their social isolation on a daily basis and have a strong need to have daily contact with an adult other than their partner. Cramer et al, (1991) identifies stay at home mother's major social contact as their children. Phillips (1985) saw "isolation from family and old friends" as a common experience for "mothers at home" and one for which they are ill prepared. Daily contact is important and is often via the telephone, drop in for coffee or meeting at an organised group such as playgroup or a self-help group.

The final critical issue elicited from the data is the sense of fragility about their new relationships and a sense of stability about the old friendships at home. This related to history. The old friends knew and understood the participants past whereas that takes time to develop and has not happened with new friends as yet. "...shared histories, accumulated experiences and simultaneously moving through major developmental transitions" form the basis for long term friendships (Hess, 1972, Rawlins, 1992, Hartup and Stevens, 1997). Some of the participants anticipated this would change with time.

Summary

The data and the literature show that young children play an instrumental role in the establishment of their mother's networks both providing them with entry and exit points to individual conversations and relationships. Ongoing relationships are

maintained through the children. They also provide them with entry to community services, where they would otherwise be denied access. These services, in particular playgroups and first time mothers groups are utilised as venues where networks can be established. This again emphasises the instrumental role the children play in the network formation. These types of services are important for mothers to access support. When first attending these services the women experience feelings of vulnerability that they have to overcome in order to establish networks. Sometimes they need to extend themselves even further and open their lives and vulnerabilities to others in order to help form their own networks and help others to achieve the same. It is important for women to be involved with others having similar experiences to themselves. Self-help groups became a common solution for women isolated from extended family. Both the relationships at home and here change over time, some in a positive manner and others in a negative manner. However, it remains important to have contact with extended family and visits were always anticipated. Women are prepared to put up with a great deal of inconvenience to have their family around them, particularly during the arrival of a child. Despite any inconvenience the visits brought they also brought the much-needed physical aid. This is particularly evident when either the mother or the child is ill and at times of family celebration. The financial cost of maintaining contact is great and becomes an ongoing expense for migrant families. All these major issues highlight the importance for support to people in this particular situation. This support needs to include, emotional, physical and financial support. Much of this can be gained by assisting these people to establish new networks. This could be achieved through the various children's services the women are able to readily access. However what is important is that these new networks have similar formation to extended family

networks, including people from various ages and stages in life. Any successful relationship must have an element of reciprocity, thus the relationship must work both ways.

Many of the elements relate to feelings during various stages of the network formation. How it felt to experience loss from the new network, a sense of guilt at grandparents and children not having regular contact, the sense of trying to establish family friendships after individual friendships have been established, the daily isolation from adults and a sense of fragility about the new relationships. These are feelings that can perhaps only be overcome with time and with the formation of the new network. Strong networks would assist in alleviating some of these feelings. Two other issues that arose were child care and the common denominator when establishing new friendships. Women find something in common to base their new friendships on, this can often be children in the same age range. This in turn can lead to reciprocal child care arrangements, which may otherwise be the role the extended family would take. It is important to utilise this common denominator as a basis for forming new networks and again children's services can act as the facilitator of these relationships.

The themes elicited from the data of this study and discussed in relation to the current literature have shown commonalities and differences with other populations. Components of some themes emerging from this study have been substantiated by the findings of other studies. Some themes are common not just for mothers isolated from their extended family but for stay-at-home mothers generally, other themes are unique to this sample. The findings have highlighted the need for emotional, financial and physical support for this courageous group of women.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This study of women who have migrated to Western Australia has highlighted many of the issues these women face on a daily basis when trying to establish their new networks. The analysis of the data shows that although the women's stories are very individual there are also many common themes emerging. Each story highlights the way the individual participant experienced the process of establishing their new networks. It is clear that each one experiences this process differently according to her circumstances. What becomes evident is that despite the individual differences there are many common themes which emerge as part of this process. It is these common themes that led to the recommendations of this research. The findings emphasise changes required in both policy and practice which will assist migrant women in the settlement process. It has also highlighted areas for future research in relation to this field.

Implications for Policy and Practice

One of the most obvious issues to arise from this research is the role played by the child health nurse. Most of the women joined the first time mothers groups operated by these nurses. It appears that strong and lasting friendships are established within these groups. This is probably because child birth is a major life event and it is during major life events that significant relationships are developed. The success of these groups for these women should ensure the continuation and even expansion of such services. The role played by the child health nurses in relation to women with no extended family has not been officially acknowledged. This is an area where a service currently in operation could be expanded to further meet the needs of this group. As this

research has shown, all friendships developed from common bonds. These were often people with the same place of birth, children or the lack of extended family. These first time mothers groups could be extended to run a group specifically for women who lack extended family in Australia or ethno specific mothers groups. The opportunity to operate second time mothers groups may also be of benefit as pointed out by the one participant who was unable to attend such a group because this was her second child. The expansion of services such as this one, is an issue at a time when health funding is being dramatically reduced and services are providing only the basic services. It is important to continue and increase the funding to these services as they are providing a valuable and necessary service. The discontinuation of such a service could see these women becoming more reliant upon welfare type services as the stress of parenting without a solid support network takes its toll.

Many of the participants accessed playgroups as meeting places. What was evident was the importance of a match between the person and the service they attended. Therefore it is advisable for playgroups to provide services that are operating under a variety of models. Currently most playgroups are community based and operated by small groups of women. These services cater mostly to middle class women. Playgroups need to expand their services to cater for a wider range of families. This could be in the form of alternate models of service delivery such as ethno specific groups, operation by trained staff, structured models and free play models. Services need to provide for the needs of the mothers as well as those of the children. Playgroups are often the first experience for new mothers and seen as a forum for supporting ideas and gaining both knowledge and support. Alternate models need to be implemented for this to freely occur across the community. Another area that appears to be important is the extension

of friends into the family. This may be an area where playgroups could also assist. An alternate model of this could be to provide playgroups over the weekend when all or some of the family could attend, these could include fathers, grandparents and other family and friends. This approach would encourage family friendships to develop and may assist in a broadening of the types of people constituting the network.

The women in the study indicated that their children played a significant role in establishing networks for them. It is important to identify if other children's services can play a role in this network formation as well. Other children's services need to be maximised to provide services to this population. This could include child care services which have recently undergone massive funding cuts forcing many into closure as they cannot maintain financial viability. These services need to be looking for new areas to branch into. They have the necessary facilities and expertise to facilitate family groups such as the aforementioned. Traditionally child care has provided care to children of working families but the skills and resources within many of these centres are much wider ranging. They are able to provide services to meet the needs of all families and like all human services need to be responsive to their community's needs. As the needs of the community changes so to do the services need to change. Currently child care is an untapped resource that could fulfil this need in the community.

This concept of utilising current children's services can be expanded into the family day care scheme. Family day care provides child care within a family environment with the support of a scheme. This service could provide playgroups facilities for a variety of models. Furthermore, the carers and their families could provide an extended family role; that of aunt, uncle, cousins, grandparents. Many of these people already provide an extended family role to the children they currently care

for, however, most of these are children of working families. The service is currently limited for those who are not in the work force. Expansion in this area could provide for this need to other family types. Currently use of child care by non working families is discouraged by the government policy restricting these families to only 20 hours of subsidised care per week. This policy may need to be reviewed for families who have no support networks to assist them.

Other services could be provided by Family and Children's Services such as an adopt a grandparent's scheme. There is a system currently in operation through Anglicare, however, the service is limited. Systems such as these need expanding and monitoring.

Implications for further research.

This study has identified other areas within this field where research is required. One area identified for further research is investigating women from NESB and how they establish networks. There has been a significant amount of research with this population already, however, it appears to look on the general settlement process and not focus on how they established networks for themselves and their families. The focus usually revolves around language and cultural barriers. Much research in this area looks at women who have entered the work force and the difficulties they experience there. The work force may in itself contribute significantly to the new network of these women, however, what of those NESB women who do not enter the work force, how do they establish networks? Is their experience a similar one to the women in this study? Do they use the same types of services? Research shows that migrants in general join ethnic groups and use these for support. Is this the same for women as men and do the women use these groups as the participants in this study have used the self-help group?

A comparative study of ESB and NESB women could provide interesting and useful information. Some researchers believe that all migrants should not be grouped together and that each group should be researched separately. Australia offers the opportunity to research many ethnic groups residing in this country.

Another area not covered in this study or others is exploring the process for women migrating when their children are of school age. Do they use the school in the same way that these participants have used the services available in their community for younger children. In Australia it is common place for women with school age children return to the work force and this would alter the opportunity for making new networks. Timing would be a factor in such a study. Some migrant women may enter the school early in the school life as opposed to later. Many mothers at the school would already have established strong networks and these may be difficult to enter afterwards.

As the literature shows migrant women often return to or enter the work force for the first time to supplement the family income. It would appear that this entry to the work force would change the process for establishing new networks. Are these relationships developed in the workplace of a different quality to enduring relationships?

This study was limited to one geographical location. This area had limited community support available, as it was relatively new area. Older more established areas would have more facilities available to the population. As such research in a more established area may provide different results and as such is an area requiring exploration.

This study raises many issues regarding the process utilised by women in establishing new networks. It is clear that this process is a complex one that takes a great deal of effort and persistence on behalf of the individuals. In order for this to be

successful the individuals must be unwavering in their pursuit of this new network. The responsibility lies with them to establish this network for both themselves and their family. They become resourceful people making the most of every opportunity offered to them. When opportunities are not forthcoming they create these opportunities and in doing so provide opportunities for others as well as themselves. It becomes a quest for survival in their new environment. There is no formal assistance available in this process, however, these women become adept at utilising community services to assist them achieve their goal. Something that becomes clear during this study is that there is no replacement for the extended family network. The new networks established did not have the same attributes of the extended. There were not people from various age ranges to assist when needed, nor the comfort that one has with their family to ask for assistance with the menial tasks when everyday life become too difficult. The most outstanding factor that was evident from this study was the women's courage and fortitude to ensure that they established their new network in order for their family to maintain a quality lifestyle in their new home. They are to be commended on their dedication to an awesome task and to their individual families.

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Interview Schedule

Opening Statement

I would like to talk to you about your experience in establishing your social networks.

Could you please talk to me about how you established your social network and what that was like for you.

As this is an informal interview the flow of the interview is important. Therefore a checklist of points will be used to guide me in the interview. The points to be covered in the interviews are:

- First experiencing isolation
- Arrival of new baby
- Child joining play group or kindergarten
- Spousal relationship
- Relationship with extended family
- Relationship with child/children
- Feelings and emotions
- Informal contacts
- Work contacts – yours and spouses
- Organisations and clubs.

Dear

I have become interested in the experiences of mothers who have no extended family living within a close proximity and the way in which they establish their personal networks. My interest in this area has been stimulated through my work with families. Therefore, I am conducting a study into this phenomenon for my Masters of Social Science degree at Edith Cowan University. As part of this research I would like to talk with you to hear your views on this subject. This would involve meeting with you several times at a place of your convenience. Each meeting would last approximately one to two hours.

Important information can be gained through talking to people and learning of their experiences. This can provide valuable information for those working in related areas. The information generated from this research will be used to further the knowledge of those working or studying in the area of family research. It is possible through the collection of this type of information that policies and services can alter to better suit the needs of their constituents. Research is vital in order for the community to be able to respond more appropriately to the needs of its members.

In order to maintain your anonymity the data will be presented using fictitious names. However, as the number of the participants in the study is small it is not possible to disguise your identity further and some people may be recognisable. The information gathered during our conversations will be recorded and then transcribed. These records will be held by myself, in a secure place for a period of five years, after which they will be destroyed. The only other persons with access to this data will be my supervisor. We

are both aware of the need to maintain professional confidentiality. These procedures will insure that every possible attempt will be made to uphold your privacy.

If at any point throughout the study you should wish to withdraw, please advise me and the data collected to date will be destroyed. It will not be necessary to provide any reasons for your withdrawal. Similarly, if you wish to alter or withdraw any of the data relating to yourself please advise me and this will be done. As this can be a sensitive issue, if you feel the need for support at anytime throughout the research this can be provided through Family and Community Services.

In order for the study to commence it is important to receive your consent. This can be achieved by you completing the section below and returning it to myself in the stamped self addressed envelope provided. Any further queries regarding this study can be directed to myself on either of the numbers below:

Stephanie Jackiewicz Work: 400 5742 Home: 345 1064

yours sincerely,

Stephanie Jackiewicz

I fully understand my role as a participant in the aforementioned study and give my informed consent for the study to take place.

Signature:.....

Date:.....