Living With Contradictions of Love and Violence:

A Grounded Theory Study of Women’s Understanding of Their

Childhood Experiences of Domestic Violence

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ABSTRACT

Compared to the quantitative studies that have looked at the impact of domestic violence on children, few quantitative studies have looked at the continuing impact of domestic violence exposure on adult children and still fewer qualitative studies have explored this topic from the perspective of adult women reflecting on their exposure to domestic violence over time. None to date have taken a systemic, relational perspective to illuminate the complex family dynamics in a domestic violence context.

To address this gap, a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) design, using a systemic lens, was used to illuminate the understanding of adult women’s experiences of childhood domestic violence in the family that they grew up in. In depth interviews were undertaken with a sample of 15 women who were recruited through health and social care professional colleagues. Data collection and data analysis happened concurrently and theoretical sampling, constant comparative method, memo writing guided the research process.

The category “Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas” was presented as the core category that sought to throw light on the continual contradictions of love and abuse that the women had to struggle with, in making sense of their experiences. The three key categories that made up the core category were: a) “Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification, as a related and relational process”; b) “The traumatogenic effect of the violence on the child and adult development” and c) “Turning points/ Developmental processes that foster change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption”. The research participants’ childhood experiences and cultural contexts such as gendered beliefs, beliefs about religion, the limited professional responses and issues of secrecy and shame were presented as the contexts to understand their adult experiences, and these in turn gave meaning to their childhood experiences in an iterative process.

The results highlighted a number of implications for practice, research, supervision, policy and service development, such as the need for practitioners to
understand and manage intense contradictions and hold complex dilemmas when working with violence. One way that this can be done is by embracing an integrative theoretical framework including using systemic psychotherapy both as a meta-theory and as an intervention, with adult survivors and child witnesses of interpersonal violence.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Clarissa Sammut Scerri

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“If you dream of moving mountains tomorrow, you must start by lifting small stones today” – taken from http://annettamiller.weebly.com/proverbs-on-life.html

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In the words of John Hills (2002), “This has truly been a labour of love… and like all love it has had its moments of doubt, but this has never succumbed to the burden of the labour” (p. xv).
ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1.0 ORIENTATION TO THE THESIS

1.1 The Study’s Research Questions

1.1.1. The initial research question of this study.

1.1.2 The main research question of the grounded theory research study

1.2 The Structure of the Chapters

CHAPTER 2.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

2.1 Orientation to the Chapter

2.2 Definition of Terms

2.2.1 Definition of domestic violence

2.2.2 Terminology regarding children “witnessing” domestic violence and abuse of children

2.3 Setting the Contextual Framework: The Legal Context, Service Provision and Prevalence Rates

2.3.1 The legal context

2.3.1.1 European convention

2.3.2 Domestic violence services provision

2.3.2.1 The first domestic violence shelter

2.3.2.2 The first Domestic violence Unit (DVU)
2.3.3 The development of the psychosocial professions

2.3.3.1 Social work

2.3.3.2 Psychology and psychotherapy

2.4 The Extent of the Problem of Domestic Violence in Malta and Prevalence Rates of Children Witnessing Violence

2.5 Conclusion

CHAPTER 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Orientation to the Chapter

3.2 Search strategy

3.3 Introduction to the themes discussed in the literature review below

3.3.1 The impact of domestic violence exposure on children

3.3.2 Gender differences in the impact of exposure

3.3.3 The co-occurrence of domestic violence and other forms of child abuse

3.3.4 The continuing impact of domestic violence exposure on adult children

3.3.5 Intergenerational transmission of violence

3.3.6 Parenting in the context of domestic violence

3.3.6.1 Mothering in the context of domestic violence

3.3.6.2 Fathering in the context of domestic violence

3.3.7 Resilient children

3.3.8 Methodological limitations of the quantitative literature on child
3.3.9 A review of the qualitative studies on the experiences of children and adults witnessing domestic violence

3.4 Theoretical Frameworks

3.4.1 Theoretical frameworks from the marital conflict literature

3.4.1.1 Social learning theory

3.4.1.2 Cognitive contextual framework

3.4.1.3 Emotional security theory (EST)

3.4.2 Family systems theory

3.4.2.1 Central ideas

3.4.3 Attachment theory: A theory of social and emotional development in a relational context and of safety and protection in family relationships

3.4.3.1 Dynamic-maturational model of attachment (DMM)

3.4.4 Trauma theory

3.4.4.1 Posttraumatic stress disorder

3.4.4.2 Complex trauma

3.4.4.3 Trauma and memory work

3.4.5 A resilience framework, posttraumatic growth and adversity-activated development

3.4.5.1 Relational resilience

3.4.5.2 Family resilience

3.3 Conclusion
## CHAPTER 4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Orientation to the Chapter

4.2 Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Paradigm in the Research Study

4.3 Generalizability in Qualitative Research

4.4 Why I chose Grounded Theory Methodology as a Strategy of Inquiry
  - 4.4.1 Definition of constructivist grounded theory

4.5 Epistemological and Ontological Underpinnings of This Study

4.6 Conclusion

## CHAPTER 5.0 METHOD

5.1 Orientation to the Chapter

5.2 The Design

5.3 Research Procedure
  - 5.3.1 The participants
  - 5.3.2 Recruitment of participants
  - 5.3.3 The interview as a data collection tool: Its strengths and limitations
  - 5.3.4 The interview guide: The semi-structured interview
  - 5.3.5 Pre-Piloting the Interview Guide

5.4 A Focus on the Data Collection Process
  - 5.4.1 Transcription
  - 5.4.2 Translating the transcripts: First steps in the analysis process

5.5 Continuing With the Grounded Theory Analysis Process
  - 5.5.1 Line-by-line coding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 First level focused coding</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3 Theoretical sampling</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.4 The development of the research question</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.5 Continuation of the grounded theory data analysis: Axial coding</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.6 Theoretical coding</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.7 The core category</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Critique of Grounded Theory as a Methodology</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Ethical Issues</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Credibility of the study</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.1 Self-reflexivity</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.2 Credibility checks: Discussion groups with health and social care professionals in the field</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8.3 Credibility checks: Member checks</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 6.0 RESULTS</strong></td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Orientation to the Chapter</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Part One</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 Childhood experiences in the context of family violence</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1.1 Father-daughter relationship: Growing up in the shadow of a violent father and dealing with dynamics of fear, love and retaliation</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1.1.1 Witnessing the horrible physical and psychological abuse by their father on their mother</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.1.1.2 Being sadistically physically and psychologically abused by father

6.2.1.1.3 “Because at the end of the day, he is still your father... you cannot break the bond between you and him, even if he were a monster, you cannot”

6.2.1.1.4 “And there were moments when I wished him dead”

6.2.1.1.5 Daughters retaliating with aggression against their father

6.2.1.1.6 More complex dynamics with the father: Befriending her to silence her

6.2.1.1.7 “He wanted to give me a good upbringing”

6.2.1.2 Mother-daughter relationship in childhood: Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and betrayal’’

6.2.1.2.1 Feeling loved by mother

6.2.1.2.2 But why doesn’t she leave? Why doesn’t she stand up to him?

6.2.1.2.3 Mother’s minimizing of father’s violent behaviour and not protecting the children enough

6.2.1.2.4 Mother as perpetrator of child abuse

6.2.1.3 Sibling relationships in childhood: Protection, abuse, witnessing triangulation and support

6.2.1.3.1 Witnessing their siblings being physically and
psychologically abused by the father 153

6.2.1.3.2 Siblings being aggressive with each other 153

6.2.1.3.3 Siblings: Sources of support 154

6.2.1.3.4 Siblings’ different experiences in the same family 156

6.2.1.4 Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult:

Extreme coping, extreme consequences, and with some support 158

6.2.1.4.1 “Living in hell” 158

6.2.1.4.2 Worrying for herself and her siblings’ well-being 160

6.2.1.4.3 Desolation and loneliness 161

6.2.1.4.4 “You don’t want other people to think that you are coming from a bad family” 162

6.2.1.4.5 Sources of support and ways of coping 162

6.2.2 Adult women with childhood experiences of violence: Legacies of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience – a context for understanding self, relationships with family members, with intimate partners and with one’s children 165

6.2.2.1 Daughter-father relationship in adulthood: Dealing with anger, fear and bitterness and a sense of betrayal, together with possibilities of forgiveness, redemption and transformation 165

6.2.2.1.1 Cycle of cut-off and connection with father 165

6.2.2.1.2 Transformed daughter-father relationships:

Forgiveness and reconciliation 167
6.2.2.1.3 “Bad fathers, good grandfathers” 170

6.2.2.2 Daughter-mother relationship in adulthood: Persistence of
anger and sadness, love and protection of the mother and witnessing
the mother’s transformation 171

6.2.2.2.1 “The relationship with my mother is complicated” 172
6.2.2.2.2 Transformed daughter-mother relationship 172
6.2.2.2.3 Losing mother: A pervasive sense of loss 174

6.2.2.3 Sibling relationship in adulthood: The persistence and
significance of early family of origin roles 175

6.2.2.4 What these women go through as individual adults: Legacies
of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and
resilience 177

6.2.2.4.1 “I am afraid that I will repeat my parents’ mistakes” 179
6.2.2.4.2 “Trying to make sense came much later, as an adult” 180
6.2.2.4.3 Processes that hindered the participants’
understanding 182
6.2.2.4.4 Suffering and resilience 183

6.2.2.5 The women’s understanding of the impact on their intimate
relationships: Childhood survival strategies, trauma legacies, and fear
of replicative scripts make relationships hard but relationships can be
transformative too 185

6.2.2.5.1 “The fact that couples attack each other – for me it is
normal”

6.2.2.5.2 “How the relationship with my father affected my relationship with men”

6.2.2.5.3 Marriage as a form of escape

6.2.2.5.4 “Looking for a man who was completely different than my father, with help”

6.2.2.5.5 Secrets and shame regarding childhood experiences of domestic violence in intimate relationships

6.2.2.5.6 “It feels like you are trying to make a mountain move” – Trauma legacies and challenges in relationships including managing one’s anger and aggression

6.2.2.6 Piecing together the puzzle: Remembering and understanding more the impact of their domestic violence experiences with becoming a parent and struggling with replicative and corrective scripts with their own children

6.2.2.6.1 “I am determined that my children will have a happy childhood” – the challenges of corrective and replicative scripts

6.2.2.6.2 Mothers’ dilemma of what to tell their children about their own childhood experiences of domestic violence

6.2.3 Cultural contexts: Gendered beliefs, religion, limited professional response, secrecy and shame
6.2.3.1 The impact of normative and cultural expectations on women and men regarding family dynamics including abuse

6.2.3.2 Beliefs around intergenerational transmission of abuse and other professional discourses that come in the way of children seeking help and professionals and other adults giving help

6.3 Part Two

6.3.1 Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification as a related and relational process

6.3.1.1 Being triangulated: “It was time for the verdict to say who was right”

6.3.1.2 Parentification

6.3.1.3 The impact of triangulation and parentification on the women’s development

6.3.2 The traumatogenic effect of violence on the child and adult development

6.3.2.1 “Living a different reality”

6.3.2.2 Remembering and forgetting

6.3.2.3 How different individuals understood the trauma incidents

6.3.3 Turning points/developmental processes that foster change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption

6.3.3.1 Change as a result of growing older

6.3.3.2 Change through observation, social comparison and feedback
as the women grew older

6.3.3.3 Rebelling and confronting the father and standing up to the abuse – Holding firm against the abuse and fighting the helplessness

6.3.3.4 Getting support/talking about the violence, bringing things out in the open, cautiously and slowly

6.3.3.5 Naming the childhood experiences as domestic violence

6.3.3.6 Entrances and exits, into and from the family system

6.3.3.7 Focusing on self-awareness and taking opportunities for self-growth

6.3.3.8 Reconciliation, reconnection and redemption

6.3.4 Living with contradictions, double-binds and dilemmas

6.4 Part Three

6.4.1 Impact on interviewees on taking part in the grounded theory study

6.4.2 Findings from the credibility checks with health and social care professionals

6.4.2.1 Results from the first credibility check with professionals

6.4.2.2 Results from the second credibility check with professionals

6.4.3 Findings from the credibility checks with participants

6.5 Conclusion

CHAPTER 7.0 DISCUSSION

7.1 Orientation to the Chapter

7.2 Implications for Clinical Practice, Supervision, Training and Personal,
Professional Development (PPD): The Need to Manage Intense Contradictions and Holding Complex Dilemmas When Working With Violence

7.2.1 Embracing an integrative theoretical framework and using systemic theory as a meta-theory

7.2.1.1 Drawing from attachment theory

7.2.1.2 Being guided by Trauma theory, memory work and a narrative perspective

7.2.1.3 The therapeutic relationship and the therapist as containers of dissonance and paying attention to examples of “agency” and resilience

7.2.1.4 Using systemic psychotherapy as an intervention with adult survivors and child witnesses of interpersonal violence

7.2.1.4.1 Paying therapeutic attention to interpersonal processes such as triangulation and parentification

7.2.1.4.2 Looking at the impact of cultural contexts

7.2.1.4.3 Doing family and conjoint couple work: Benefits and challenges

7.2.1.4.4 Working therapeutically with children as witnesses and survivors

7.2.2 Supervision as a supportive, reflective space

7.2.3 Supervision as a context for monitoring personal beliefs and personal experiences around violence
7.2.4 Training that prioritizes systemic thinking as an integrative framework

7.2.5 Prioritizing inter-professional training

7.3 Implications for Policy and Service Development

7.3.1 The need to invest more in violence prevention

7.3.2 The need for professionals from different disciplines to ask about violence and to take into account all kinds of violence

7.3.3 The need for domestic violence services and child protection services to be more family-oriented and systemic

7.3.4 Current practice challenges

7.3.5 The need for more therapeutic services for families with domestic violence

7.3.5.1 Working with men as perpetrators and fathers

7.3.5.2 Systemic services for families with domestic violence

7.4 Critical Review Of The Study

7.4.1 Approaches to credibility of the study

7.4.1.1 Contextualised accounts of participants

7.4.1.2 Detailed accounts of the analytic process

7.4.1.3 An account of the researcher’s “speaking position”

7.4.1.4 Grounding of the interpretation in research data

7.4.1.5 Providing credibility checks

7.4.1.6 The coherence of the data
7.4.1.7 Resonance with the readers

7.4.2 Limitations of the study

7.4.2.1 Limitations of constructivist grounded theory as methodology

7.4.2.2 Issues related to the sample

7.4.2.2.1 The participants’ gender, having the women as sole informants and their cultural context

7.4.2.2.2 Sample size and theoretical saturation

7.4.2.3 Issues related to the gender of the research team

7.5 The Way Forward: Ideas for Further Research

7.5.1 Parenting by fathers who are abusive

7.5.2 Looking further into processes like triangulation and parentification

7.5.3 Focusing on the language

7.6 Concluding Thoughts: Research Achievements and Contribution to Knowledge

REFERENCES

APPENDICES – VOLUME 1

Appendix A - Historical Development of Grounded Theory

Appendix B - Interview Guide: Pre-pilot

Appendix C - Interview Guide

Appendix J - Second Interview Guide – Geraldine

Appendix K - Second Interview Schedule -Donna

Appendix L - Second Interview Guide – Marika
Appendix O - Ethics Approval Documents From Surrey Research Ethics Committee

Appendix P - Ethics Approval Documents From the University of Malta Research Ethics Committee

Appendix Q - Ethics Approval Document From the Foundation for Social Welfare Services Research Ethics Committee

Appendix R - Information Sheet for Participants

Appendix S - Consent Form

Appendix T - Tables Showing the Details of the Participants’ Profiles

Appendix U - Tables Showing Links Between Focused Codes, Sub-categories, Axial Codes, and the Key Categories

APPENDICES – VOLUME 2

Appendix D – Line-by-line Coding - Hannah

Appendix E - Constant Comparison Between First Four Interviews

Appendix F - Mapping of G1 Initial Codes

Appendix G - 1st Level Focused Coding

Appendix H - Constant Comparison Process: Looking at Patterns Across Seana’s Sandra’s, Jessica’s, Mary’s, Rose’s and Geraldine’s Interviews

Appendix I - Constant Comparison Interviews 1-9

Appendix M - Attempt at Axial Coding - Mary

Appendix N - Theoretical Coding
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1  
Demographic Information of Participants  
93

Table 2  
Participants’ Profile re: the Violence They Were Exposed to, the Violence They Personally Experienced and Their Position re Reconciliation With Their Parents at the Time of the Interviews  
97

Table 3  
Attendance to Psychotherapy Sessions or Alternative Support  
103

Table 4  
The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Category of Childhood Experiences in the Context of Family Violence  
364

Table 5  
The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Category of Experiences in Adulthood  
365

Table 6  
The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Cultural Contexts  
367

Table 7  
The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 4.3.1 Being Triangulated in the Parental Conflict and Parentification as a Related and Relational Process  
367

Table 8  
The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 4.3.2 The Traumatogenic Effect of Violence on the Child and Adult Development  
368

Table 9  
The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 4.3.3 Turning Points/Developmental Processes That Foster Change and Resilience, Including Reconciliation, Reconnection and Redemption  
368

Table 10  
Summary of Participants’ Quotes and Researcher’s Observations Regarding the Core Category “Living With Contradictions, Double-Binds and Dilemmas”  
234
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  Grounded theory study flow chart: Data collection and analysis process  92

Figure 2  An illustration of the women’s recall of representational and interactional processes over time, linking childhood experiences of violence and adulthood experiences, highlighting the core category and related categories  135

Figure 3  Double binds and dilemmas in Geraldine's triangulation in her parents' conflicts  215
CHAPTER 1.0

ORIENTATION TO THE THESIS

Jane was a 35 year old single parent of an eight year old boy, who sought an appointment with me because she was at a loss at how to manage her son. He was insisting that he wanted to know who his father was and wanted to meet him. In the course of our conversations, Jane told me that she had lost all contact with her son’s father. She had only known him for about a week or so when he had come over for a holiday in Malta and she had became pregnant after she slept with him for the first time in her life. When he returned to his country, and she had told him that she was pregnant, he wanted her to have an abortion and did not want to have anything to do with her.

Jane regretted very much getting pregnant despite the fact that she dearly loved her son. She had been a naïve young woman charmed by this handsome foreigner and by how he was interested in her. Jane told me that that night she had been out with her friends- one of the few nights that she had managed to go out, despite her father’s oppressive hold on her. She described a very difficult background at home, one where her father was very aggressive with both her mother, with her and her sister. She was the youngest of three siblings and she always lived in fear that her father might one day kill her mother. She mentioned that she went through a lot. But now, as the mother of her son, she was adamant to do all she could so that she and her son have a good life, despite the financial difficulties that they continually faced. Jane commented that life had been hard with her but she tried to “steal” every opportunity for happiness from life. She was not going to give up and this is why she had sought my help.

Jane was someone with whom I had worked with in the past in my clinical practice. Her words, particularly what she said about how she tried to “steal” every opportunity for happiness in life, despite all the adversity that she went through kept

1 The name and other identifying details have been changed or left out.
coming back to me when I was thinking about a topic for my PhD. Jane and other women like her, who I saw in my practice as a psychologist and a family therapist did not fit the stereotypical adult woman with childhood experiences of domestic violence who necessarily repeated the cycle of victimisation. Yet the notion of being victimised in adult children who have witnessed childhood domestic violence was and remains strong in both lay and professional contexts. A journalist who was interviewing me about the impact of domestic violence on children a few months ago, remarked that few if any, professionals mentioned the resilience of such children. She also seemed sceptical of my claims of resilience in these children!

I came to the PhD research after having worked for a number of years in a social welfare agency as part of the services offering family therapy and psychological work to families. I enjoyed working with families who were fostering children or who had adopted children, with families undergoing marital separations, and also families who were trying to manage a history of domestic violence. If I look at my clinical practice, I realise that I came to this research study with beliefs about the importance of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby 1969, 1973, 1988; Crittenden 2006, 2008) and how the early years and the relationships with significant others are formative. These theoretical beliefs also have personal resonance as they have been helpful for me to understand my sensitivity towards feelings of abandonment, loss, separation from significant others and rejection.

However, I am also engaged both personally and professionally with the idea of resilience-how despite going through difficult and traumatic circumstances in their lives, people manage to overcome them, manage to experience growth and transformation and have meaningful relationships. This is the stance with which I approached the research and my interest to explore in more detail how the participants made sense of the impact of their experiences on their relationships.

Thus I was intrigued by Jane and other women’s understanding of their childhood

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2 Attachment theory and other theoretical frameworks will be discussed in the Literature review chapter.
experiences and the link that they made between these experiences and the way that they managed their relationships in their adult life. These were in fact some of the research questions with which I approached my PhD qualitative research thesis.

1.1 The Study’s Research Questions

1.1.1 The initial research question of this study. The initial research question was in fact “How do women understand the impact of childhood domestic violence on their adult relationships?” However, as I engaged myself in the stories of the women that I interviewed in the context of a constructivist grounded theory study, the theoretical significance of what the participants were saying became clearer in terms of the study’s contribution to existing theoretical knowledge.

I became captivated by the women’s reflections on their childhood experiences: their stories of intense emotions of love and fear in the midst of managing complex family dynamics with some respite from meaningful significant others such as a grandmother or an intuitive teacher. The women also reflected on their adult lives: on their determination not to replicate their parents’ mistakes and on the trauma legacies and the survival strategies that affected their relationships across time. In addition, some also talked about how they reconciled with a parent who had abused them. As a practitioner and researcher, I struggled to understand and keep together the contradictions that characterised these stories but in the process, I also learnt tremendously about working with these women and families with domestic violence.

1.1.2 The main research question of the grounded theory research study. The main research question of the study developed into: What is the understanding of adult women’s experiences of witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew in? The sub-research questions then became: a) what is the women’s understanding of how such experiences and their relationships with their parents and siblings, their relationships with their partners and children, now and then, might have influenced each other? b) What is their understanding of how such experiences and their development might have influenced each other? And c) what is their perception of the strengths and sources of
support that might have been helped them in their lives?

This study thus illuminates and adds to the knowledge of the complexity of family relationships in the context of domestic violence. It draws out the women’s complex dilemmas and contradictions of love and fear, terror and defiance, hate and forgiveness they felt as children and as adults, embedded in the different cultural contexts of gendered beliefs, religion, limited professional response, secrecy and shame. It also clearly shows that we cannot reduce the experience of such women and others like them to a belief that the violence will be simply repeated with them as victims. Reality is much more complex, much more nuanced and these stories are also testament to how nurturing relationships can be transforming and transformative.

In throwing light onto these complexities in the shape of interconnecting hypotheses and constructs rather than one middle range theory, my hope is that this work can be a contribution for practitioners, supervisors, trainers and policy makers who work with adult survivors of childhood domestic violence and with families with domestic violence contexts.

1.2 The Structure of the Chapters

The following is a guide to the thesis chapters in order to help the reader make sense of it.

Following this chapter, chapter two introduces the topic of the thesis giving the reader a definition of terms used and a presentation of the contextual settings in which the study is located. Chapter three is a first stage literature review that gives a rationale for the exploring the research question. This chapter also includes a presentation and a critique of the various theoretical frameworks that guided the development of the research question in the study.

Chapter four outlines the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) methodology that informed this research study and the research design whilst chapter 5 includes a discussion of the method. It also includes a discussion on ethical procedures
and strategies to ensure the credibility of the study

Chapter six presents the results with ample quotes from the participants. The chapter starts with a diagram that represents the relationship between a set of interconnected hypotheses and a core category represented by the theme “Living with contradictions, double-binds and dilemmas”. The results are presented in the same manner with the presentation of the core category at the end of the chapter. Furthermore, the results are also discussed in the context of similarities and differences with the extant literature in the form of a second stage literature review.

Chapter seven discusses the results’ implications for practice including those for clinical practice, supervision, training, personal and professional development, policy-making and service development. Suggestions for the way forward for further research are also included in this chapter.

The appendix is then divided into volume one and volume two, with volume two containing excerpts of the different sections of the coding of the data.
CHAPTER 2.0

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

2.1 Orientation to the Chapter

This chapter presents the contextual setting in which the research is located. This takes into account the past legal and social contexts in which the research participants lived as children. This chapter also presents the current legal context and the present domestic violence service provision, as well as that which was current twenty-five to thirty years ago in Malta. The chapter discusses prevalence rates of domestic violence in Malta and estimated rates of children witnessing domestic violence.

2.2 Definition of Terms

To adapt a quote by Shlonsky, Friend, and Lambert (2007), it seems that conflict in the home has ironically and isomorphically created conflict in the field of domestic violence. The conflicts are various. For example, different terms are used in the literature to describe the same phenomenon: “domestic violence”, “interpersonal violence”, “inter-parental violence”, “intimate partner violence”, “partner abuse” and “family violence” which can lead to confusion and difficulties in conducting comparisons across studies. The domestic violence research and practice field is also characterised by controversial debates such as: what causes domestic violence? Are women equally as violent as men? Are children brought up in families where there is violence more at risk of becoming perpetrators or of being abused as adults?

In this study, I will be using the term “domestic violence” as it is most commonly used in the field and it is the language that the wider public recognises (Cooper & Vetere, 2005). The term “domestic violence” is also being used as it includes all kinds of family relationships including violence between siblings and violence from the children to the parents. Although the word “domestic” might mask the fact that this kind of violence is a crime and a human rights issues in many countries, it is here being used to describe the kind of violence that happens in the home, where family members usually expect to feel
safe and secure (Stanley, 2011). I use the term “intimate partner violence” or “interparental violence”, to describe the violence between two people involved in an adult intimate relationship – be it the relationship between the mother and the biological/ non-biological father of the research participants or the heterosexual/ homosexual intimate relationships of the research participants and their partners.

The domestic violence field includes many experts with diverse theoretical frameworks and who very often do not share a common goal for their work (Loseke, Gelles, & Cavanaugh, 2005). One prominent perspective is the feminist perspective. Proponents of this framework explain violence against women as violence perpetrated by individual men as a form of coercive control (Yllö, 2005). This framework emphasises the importance of looking at the consequences of gender equality in society as well as issues of race, social class and so on.

On the other hand, scholars like Dutton and Bodnarchuk (2005) take a more psychological perspective and understand violence as a consequence of individual men’s personality disorder. Other scholars within the psychological perspective have looked at attachment strategies between men and women in abusive relationships (Godbout, Dutton, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2009) and still others have also looked at women’s experiences of love within abusive relationships (Shah & Vetere, 2012). These different theoretical positions have created rifts between professionals in that feminist scholars have seen psychological explanations as exonerating men of their responsibility for their violent and abusive behaviour (Nicolson, 2010). Yet more recent writers who also identify themselves as feminists argue that it is simplistic to explain violence solely using patriarchy as the cause of violence. They advocate embracing a variety of explanations to look at and work with intimate relationships in contexts of violence and holding people responsible for their behaviour that harms others, at the same time (Cooper & Vetere, 2005; George & Stith, 2014).

This position is closest to my position on domestic violence. Thus, I believe that while notions of patriarchy can be useful to understand aspects of some types of
interpersonal violence such as intimate terrorism (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), it is also useful to keep in mind that violence happens in a relationship and so there are complicated emotions, behaviours, meanings and consequences to contend with.

At the same time, research studies have also shown that other contextual factors like being out of work, family-of-origin experiences that have been abusive and/or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol might mediate or exacerbate violent behaviour (Nicolson, 2010). In addition, it is also important to consider women’s contribution to violent adult intimate relationships, although the research is still unclear on this issue. A comprehensive review of literature by Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Misra, Selwyn, and Rohling (2012) suggested that not all aspects of women’s perpetration of intimate partner violence are symmetrical to men’s perpetration of violence. In addition, higher ratios of male-to-female unidirectional violence were found only in criminal justice studies that relied on police reports of perpetrators and/or from samples drawn from the US military (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012). The authors discuss different competing explanations for the difference in ratios of male-to-female violence and female-to-male violence and advocate for the need for further studies to empirically determine these explanations. In the meantime, it is important to keep asking and thinking about violence by women and not only focus on men’s violence. It is also important to look at rates of intimate partner violence in same gender relationships (Russell, 2015). This leads me to a definition of domestic violence.

2.2.1 Definition of domestic violence. The definition of domestic violence that is adopted in this research study is the one used by the UK Government: “Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between those aged 16 years and over who are, or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality” (UK Home office, 2013). The text also gives definitions of controlling and coercive behaviour. This definition was chosen because: (a) it recognises all forms of violence including psychological violence; (b) it is gender-inclusive; (c) acknowledges relationships in a family context, both in the past and present; and (d) it explicitly recognises issues of power and control in the acts of violence.
However the text unlike that in the UK Government policy of 2004, does not explicitly acknowledge that children often witness violence and that there is an overlap between abuse of women and abuse of children (Matczak, Hatzidimitriadou, & Lindsay, 2011). I think these are important issues to continue raising awareness about, when discussing domestic violence. Instead, reference to children as witnesses of domestic violence is made in a separate document by the Crown Prosecution Service (n.d.). It would be more helpful for practitioners and the general public if the two issues were clearly linked. This will be addressed in detail in the Discussion chapter.

2.2.2 Terminology regarding children “witnessing” domestic violence and abuse of children. The word “witnessing” might give the understanding that children are being seen as mere observers of their family context. In fact in this research study, the use of the word “witnessing” acknowledges that children are often centrally involved in domestic violence incidents in their families, both directly, when they physically witness the aggression of their significant others and indirectly when they overhear the violence, and/or experience the aftermath (Stanley, 2011). Children might also try to intervene to stop the violence or they might be coerced to “join in” the violence and to take sides.

This position concurs with that of Øverlien (2010), who in fact argues for the use of the term “experiencing” rather than “witnessing” violence as it provides a clear focus on the children’s perspective. In addition, Holden’s (2003) taxonomy of different forms of children’s exposure to violence gives a further detailed understanding of the different ways in which children live these experiences. Such descriptions bring to the fore what are very often hidden experiences that occur in the intimacy of homes. In this study, I have tried as much as possible to bring forth a nuanced understanding of the children and adult children’s experiences, through attention to language, and to opting to represent the research participants’ words through detailed quotes.

A distinction is also being made between children witnessing or experiencing violence, and child abuse or maltreatment. Arguably, witnessing domestic violence in one’s family has short term and long-term impact on the development of children, as has
been substantiated by several research studies (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; McGee, 2000; Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl, & Moylan, 2008) and in this respect, is considered a form of child abuse. However, in this study when the words “child abuse” are used, these are taken to include physical, emotional, sexual abuse, neglect and bullying, according to the definitions provided in the UK Government guidance document “Working together to safeguard children” (2006), as cited by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), in 2009.

2.3 Setting the Contextual Framework: The Legal Context, Service Provision and Prevalence Rates

2.3.1 The legal context. Maltese law has only quite recently recognised the concept of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Act was enacted by Act XX of 2005 and came into force in 2006. According to this Act, domestic violence is defined as “any act of violence, even if only verbally perpetrated by a household member towards another household member and includes any omission which causes physical or moral harm to the other” (Article 2). This definition of domestic violence is very broad.

The intention of the legislators at the time was that no form of violence would be left out (Aquilina, 2013). At the same time, the disadvantage of a broad definition is that it does not specify the different forms of violence that unfortunately exist and in this way, the conviction of the aggressor can be dependent on the interpretation of the individual Judge or Magistrate, unless the case clearly involves physical violence. In the same manner, the law does not qualify the term “moral harm” (Aquilina, 2013). The law gives a definition of what is a household member including any person who has lived in the same household for at least a year, including partners and others adults living in the same household. This definition also includes children who are “conceived but yet unborn” (Article 2 ix), highlighting the awareness that pregnancy-related violence is also a serious public health issue (Jasinski, 2004). Moreover, children are also included as perpetrators of violence, legislating for children who abuse their parents.
The enactment of the Domestic violence legislation also brought out amendments to the Criminal and Civil Code of the Maltese Law (Aquilina, 2013). The amendments to the Criminal Code have introduced harsher penalties when certain offences are committed on the spouse and on the person of the child (Article 202, (h) (i) and (iii)) and when certain offences are committed in the presence of the child, or within hearing distance (Article 202, (h) (1)). Moreover, another amendment included the police being able to prosecute cases *ex officio* in domestic violence cases.

Prior to this change in Maltese Law, the police could not initiate criminal proceedings unless the victim filed a formal complaint (Azzopardi, Camilleri-Cassar, & Scicluna, 2006). However the victims now still have the power to stop procedures in court. When this happens, the Court decides what is in the interest of all concerned, giving attention to what is in the best interest of the children - which again depends on the decision of the individual Judge or Magistrate (Criminal Code, chapter 9, Article, 543 e).

Thus such an amendment acknowledges the agency of the victims to make their own choices and decisions. However, it does not take enough into account the fact that victims might find it very difficult to persist with their complaint especially if they are living continually in fear for their safety. It also does not take into account the loyalty dilemmas that the family members have to grapple with when going ahead with these court proceedings.

Other amendments to the Criminal code include the empowerment of the Court of Magistrates to issue protection, restraining and treatment orders involving domestic violence (Aquilina, 2013). Protection and restraining orders are issued to protect the injured person from the perpetrator, including protection from any forms of harassment or other behaviour by the perpetrator which could provoke fear of violence in the victim (Article 412 C I, Article 382 A 1). Whilst these are beneficial, a restraining order might also be problematic in the context of family relationships, when a woman might still need to get in touch with her violent partner during care and custody visits, unless supervised.
access visits are in place.

With respect to the amendments of the Civil Code, Azzopardi et al. (2006) state that these have further protected the victims of domestic violence. Prior to this, the law did recognise “cruelty, threats or grievous injuries” as a condition for marital separation (Chapter 16, Article 40). However, now in cases of domestic violence, the hearing of the cases needs to take place within four days of application where the court will decide on alimony and who shall reside in the matrimonial home (Lepre, 2006). In addition, the Civil Court may issue Protection and Treatment orders.

2.3.1.1 European convention. Malta has recently committed in full to the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention (Maltatoday, 2014). This convention represents the Council of Europe’s efforts to set comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women including stalking, sexual harassment, sexual violence, forced marriage, forced sterilisation and domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2014).

In this respect the Council of Europe distinguishes between gender-based violence as violence against women that is committed against women because they are women, and domestic violence which is violence that is not only suffered by women. The convention acknowledges that its protective framework needs to be applied to men, children and the elderly within the family or domestic unit. This is a comprehensive legal framework and it is an important step forward in the country’s commitment towards the prevention of violence, the protection of victims including children, and the prosecution of perpetrators.

To further understand the context of the study, the reader also needs to know about the development of domestic violence services as well as the development of the professions such as that of social workers and psychologists on the Maltese Islands.
2.3.2 Domestic violence services provision. Despite the rather late-in-coming legislative framework for domestic violence, the provision of some domestic violence services in Malta has fortunately been in place for longer.

2.3.2.1 The first domestic violence shelter. “Dar Merhba Bik” was opened in 1980 by a nun of the Good Shepherd, Sr Joan Garner, who used to offer help to women in difficulty, particularly those abused by their husbands (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, NCFHE, 2012). During the earlier days of the shelter, space was very limited. Help was offered to all women who asked for it but not all children were accepted. Boys were only accepted up until the age of 9 years and girls up to 10 years of age. (P. Cuschieri 3, personal communication, January 15, 2015). Nowadays, they host about 100 to 120 women per year, including women who are victims of human trafficking and prostitution. There are no age limits for children, except that the Shelter does not accept boys over the age of 18 years. Residents can now stay up to about 6 months in the shelter but there are residents who stay longer mostly due to safety reasons.

2.3.2.2 The first Domestic violence Unit (DVU). The service started running in 1994 within the Social Welfare Development Programme, SWDP, which was a public agency set up in the same year and financed by the then Ministry for Social Policy (Macelli, 1998). Its aim was and still is to “provide quality social work service to adults and their children suffering abuse in family and intimate relationships. As a service it is also committed to the promotion of a society with zero tolerance to violence,” (Foundation for Social Welfare Services, FSWS, 2012a).

The service also includes an emergency Shelter called “Ghabex”, which was set up in October 2000. Again, its aim is to “provide an immediate safe environment to female victims of domestic violence and their children” (FSWS, 2012b). Finally, there is also a Men’s Service, which aims to “assist men who are abusive in intimate relationships to become aware of, understand and take responsibility for their behaviour. This was set up in 1999” (FSWS, 2012c). There is no service for men who have violence perpetrated

3 Director of Merha Bik Home
on them. Neither is there a specific service for children who have experienced domestic violence. Normally if the mother asks for help for her children, these are referred to either Psychological services or Family Therapy services within the same Foundation but there is a waiting list for these services.

Nowadays, women and children who experience domestic violence can also find support in a second stage refuge similar to “Ghabex”, called “Program Sebh” which was founded in 2001 as a joint venture between the Catholic Church and the local government (Times of Malta, 2010). Other services include a recently opened shelter in Gozo and other non-governmental entities (NGOs) like Victim Support Malta and SOAR, a self-help support group for victims and survivors of domestic violence (Atanasio, 2014). Just recently, there was also the launch of a coalition called Men Against Violence that brings together different government bodies and NGOs and aims to “engage men and boys of any age to stand up and end all forms of violence, particularly against women and girls” (Men Against Violence, 2015).

Thus one can note that the development of services was rather slow and although there are various supportive services nowadays, services were few and far between at the time when the research participants interviewed in this study were children. At the same time, there is currently also scope for the development of services specifically for children who have witnessed domestic violence.

A look at the development of the professions of social work, psychology and psychotherapy can further give the reader a more thorough understanding of the social context that the participants’ families had to contend with, when faced with getting help thirty years ago.

2.3.3 The development of the psychosocial professions.

2.3.3.1 Social work. In Malta, the psychology, psychotherapy and social work professions are relatively speaking still in their “early childhood years”. The first University-led social work training held in Malta was in October 1983 and social workers
became warranted in 2004. Prior to these dates, initially going back to the early 1880’s and early 20th century, the Catholic Church was perceived as the pioneer in social work (Schembri & Abela, 2004). Later, the Maltese government began to take a more active role in the development of the welfare sector, through appointing Welfare Officers who completed their training in the UK. Social work services were carried out first by the Government’s Welfare Division and then later on by the Government designated agency “Centru Hidma Socjali.” According to Schembri and Abela, the different categories of social work included family case work with a focus on marital reconciliation, child care including the protection of minors, adoption and residential care, the treatment of delinquents and other types of social care like repatriation and social investigations on behalf of local and foreign agencies.

At this stage there were no specialised services for families with domestic violence, despite the set up of Merhba Bik shelter. According to the Director of Merhba Bik, some of the families did have contact with a family welfare officer (P. Cuschieri, personal communication, January 16, 2015) but it seems that the service then did not match its present collaboration with the Domestic violence Unit, where all cases are now assigned a DVU social worker.

2.3.3.2 Psychology and psychotherapy. Along the same lines, psychological and psychotherapeutic support were in the hands of religious and philanthropic organisations up until the early 1980’s (Abela & Sammut Scerri, 2003) when psychologists who had trained abroad, returned to the island and were mostly employed either in the Health or Education sector and then in Academia. In fact, the first University-led undergraduate degree course in Psychology was held in 1988 and it was not until the late 1990’s that the local University offered professional training in Psychology. Professional training in systemic psychotherapy also started in the late 1990’s. With the increase in human resources, psychologists began to be employed in the social welfare sector too and it was then within the context of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services that psychologists, family therapists and social workers started collaborating together on cases that historically were usually tackled exclusively by the social work field. This collaboration
between psychosocial professionals, including within the Domestic violence field became more possible when SWDP became agency “Appogg” in 2000 and the majority of the services were based in the same building.

Thus in the case of families with domestic violence difficulties, women and children can find help within the DVU services and men willing to work on their abusive behaviour can be referred to the Men’s group. When the physical violence would have stopped, the family would either be referred to Family Therapy Services (FTS) or the individual mother, father and children would be referred to Psychological Services. Child Protection Services (CPS) was and is still based within the same Appogg premises and the Protection services – DVU and CPS often work together with the family therapy and psychological services on the same cases.

There are good examples of collaborative practice that I can attest to having worked within Appogg for 10 years. There are also instances when the different victim mandate between Child Protection and Domestic Violence Service often create complex dilemmas for workers who are burdened with the responsibility to ensure the safety of vulnerable women and children. From a psychological and psychotherapeutic perspective, I and my colleagues have on the other hand, often felt the burden of proving to other professionals that issues of safety and responsibility are essential moral and ethical values in our practice and that working systemically, therapeutically with the man, if he is the abuser, does not in any way justify his actions or diminish his responsibility (Cooper & Vetere, 2005; Nicolson, 2010). These experiences echo experiences of other professionals in the international context as earlier highlighted in this chapter.

2.4 The Extent of the Problem of Domestic Violence in Malta and Prevalence Rates of Children Witnessing Violence

The first Nation-wide survey in Malta on the prevalence of domestic violence

4 With the enactment of the Domestic violence Act (2005), Appogg became the designated agency responsible for preventative, therapeutic and, or treatment programme for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence through its DVU service.

5 Some referrals are also court-mandated.
revealed that 26.5% of ever-partnered women have experienced one or more acts of physical, emotional and sexual violence by a current or former partner at some point in their lives (Commission on Domestic Violence, 2011). The survey was conducted by means of in depth, one to one interviews, with 1200 females between 18 years and 59 years, through quota sampling, using the World Health Organization (WHO) research instrument “Survey on women’s health and life events” (WHO, 2015). The result from the Maltese sample is slightly lower than the global average (30%) of ever-partnered women who have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime (WHO, 2015). In terms of an estimate of children witnessing violence, the Fsadni & Associates survey did not ask the women to indicate how many children were in their families as this question was not originally part of the WHO instrument. This lack of data, together with the fact that intimate partner violence is one of the most chronically underreported crimes (Watson MacDonell, 2012), makes it difficult to get an estimate of how many children are currently witnessing domestic violence in Malta.

Instead, an estimate of the prevalence rate of children witnessing domestic violence can be obtained through the results of a European wide survey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, FRA, 2014). Forty-two thousand (42,000) women were interviewed across 28 Member states of the European Union, including Malta. A minimum random sample of 1,500 women took part in each member state, with the exception of Luxembourg where 908 women were interviewed. The survey asked women about their experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological violence including incidents of intimate partner violence (domestic violence). The survey also included questions on violence experiences since the interviewees were 15 years old as well as violence experienced in the 12 months preceding the survey In addition, the survey included specific questions on the research participants’ experiences of violence in childhood. The survey also asked women if children in their care have been exposed to violence or threats, that is, if their current or previous partner had ever “threatened to take the children away from her; b) threatened to hurt the children and c) hurt the children” (FRA, 2014, p. 134).
In terms of data regarding the women’s experiences of violence in childhood, the Maltese data indicated that 23% of the women have experienced physical, and/or sexual, and/or psychological violence before the age of 15 years. This is a lower prevalence rate than the EU average of 35% of women experiencing childhood violence before the age of 15 years, but it is still a considerable percentage when translated in number of persons going through hardship.

In addition, on a European level, 73% of the women who have been victims of violent incidents by their previous or current partner indicated that children living with them were aware of the violence. Although no local data were available about the percentage of children who are aware of the violence that their mother experienced/ or is experiencing, again, the EU-wide rates are worryingly high. Such rates strongly underscore the need for children witnessing domestic violence to be high on the priority list of Maltese policy makers.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter sets the theoretical, legal and service contexts in which the study is situated. It introduces some of the controversies in the domestic violence field around theoretical explanations for domestic violence – the feminist perspective, the psychological perspective, the view that looks at women’s experiences of love within abusive relationships and the perspective that advocates the importance of looking at a multiplicity of explanations for understanding domestic violence in a family context. This chapter also outlines the definition of domestic violence in this context, which recognizes all forms of violence, is gender-inclusive, acknowledges past and present relationships in a family context and recognizes the issue of power and control in the acts of violence. It also discusses the debate around the use of the term “witnessing” and “experiencing” violence when describing the experience of children in the context of violence in their families. Finally, the chapter also presents the different legal and service contexts and prevalence rates of domestic violence in Malta.
CHAPTER 3.0

Literature review

3.1 Orientation to the chapter

As previously stated in the Orientation to the thesis chapter, the initial research question of this research study was: How do women understand the impact of childhood domestic violence on their adult relationships?

The aim of this first stage literature review is in fact to outline and discuss the extant knowledge in the area of the exposure of childhood domestic violence and its impact on adult women’s development and relationships, in order to identify gaps in the current literature and hence make explicit the rationale for exploring the research question and the choice of methodology.

Literature review in Grounded Theory studies is a hotly debated issue. Briefly, one view is that it should be delayed until after all the data collection is complete so that researchers are sensitive to the emerging issues (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Another view is that some awareness of the existing literature and relevant theories is required so that the new research will contribute new knowledge (Dallos & Vetere, 2005; Willig 2008). This latter statement represents my position with regards to this literature review.

3.2 Search strategy

In order to conduct a review of the literature, I carried out a comprehensive search of the main Psychology databases - Psychology Cross Search, PILOTS (Published International Literature on Traumatic Stress), Sage Premier, SciVerse, Scopus, Social Sciences Citation Index, Proquest Nursing & Allied Health Sources, and Science Direct, using the following keywords “adult”, “women”, “survivors of childhood domestic violence”, “partner abuse”, “intimate partner violence”, “inter-parental violence”, “domestic violence exposure”, “family violence”, “domestic abuse” “partner aggression”, “child”, “witness” and “retrospective account”, “female adults”. I used these keywords to
review the literature on the impact of exposure to domestic violence on children, adolescents and adults

I also used the following key words to look into the literature that focused on the impact and legacy of domestic violence: “Intergenerational transmission of violence”, “abuse and later intimate relationships”, “relationship satisfaction”, “resilience and domestic violence” and “parenting and domestic violence”. All these keywords were also used in Boolean combinations.

The literature spanned the period between 1994 and 2014. Although it is only within these three decades that the impact of exposure to violence on children and young adults has become an important feature in the domestic violence research agenda (Holt et al., 2008), I also consulted earlier literature to reach key theoretical and research articles that subsequent authors and researchers built upon. The search was augmented with a review of the bibliographic related articles. I also set up alerts on “Scopus” for prominent North American and European researchers in the domestic violence field and for when new literature is added to the keywords searched. In addition, I also set up alerts in the database JournalTOC (Journal Table of contents) for the major Psychology, Violence and Family journals as well as a Google scholar alert with the following keyword “meta-analyses long term effects of witnessing domestic violence”. I also consulted UK and Maltese Government documents, published meta analyses and relevant books to help gain a broader knowledge base surrounding the subject.

The literature search yielded a vast amount of articles (over 1000) in the initial searches. I then used the abstract information to select material that met the following inclusion criteria: 1) those directly exploring the short-term and long-term impact of domestic violence on children and youth; 2) those exploring long term impact of domestic violence on adults including impact on parenting and intimate relationships. Articles were excluded if 1) the sample included boys or men only; 2) if exposure to violence dealt with violence in neighbourhood and communities only; 3) if the impact of domestic violence discussed or measured only substance abuse in adults; and 4) if the
articles were not written in the English Language or Maltese.

3.3 Introduction to the themes discussed in the literature review below

Most of the research studies in the area of short-term and long-term impact of witnessing domestic violence on children and adults are quantitative in nature. This review starts by critically appraising the numerous quantitative studies that have examined the impact of domestic violence exposure on children, including gender differences to the exposure. The quantitative research shows that although exposure to domestic violence is associated with increased risk for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in children, not all children who were exposed to domestic violence show negative outcomes. Moreover there is also a wide variability in the findings that looked at gender differences in children exposed to domestic violence. In addition, the critical review includes the studies that looked at the co-occurrence of domestic violence exposure and of child abuse. It also highlights the significant overlap between these two phenomena.

Furthermore, the review focuses on the fewer quantitative studies that examined the long-term impact of domestic violence, by looking at the impact on adults, and includes the literature on intergenerational transmission of violence. The overall critique of the quantitative literature is then discussed in section 3.3.8

As the impact of domestic violence on children takes place in the context of the family and family life, the literature review also examines studies about parenting in the context of violence, including studies on fathering and mothering.

Finally the literature review reveals the few qualitative studies that have looked at the complexity of the experiences of children and adult children who have been exposed to domestic violence and are included in the review, as these are key to the research development of the thesis.

3.3.1 The impact of domestic violence exposure on children. A review of the published literature in the area of children’s exposure to domestic violence shows that in
the past three decades, a considerable research effort has been invested in examining the effects of domestic violence on children’s behaviour and development through quantitative research designs (Holt et al., 2008). Most of the earlier literature was first concerned with the exploring the association between male-perpetrated violence towards women and the various types of childhood symptomatology (Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998). Then, from the 1990’s onwards, most of the empirical studies attempted to investigate the mediating and moderating variables that are involved in understanding the effect of witnessing violence, using more sophisticated designs to address some of the methodological limitations employed in the earlier studies (Evans, Davies, & DiLillo, 2008).

The vast majority of studies that have attempted to examine the effects of domestic violence on children’s behaviour and development have shown that witnessing violence is associated with a wide range of psychological, emotional, behavioural, social and academic problems (Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1989; Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). More specifically, children who have been exposed to domestic violence reported more depressive symptoms and anxiety than those who have never been exposed to such violence (Graham-Bermann, 1996). Children exposed to intimate partner violence also showed increased symptomatology on the post-traumatic stress disorder scales of the Child Behaviour Checklist when compared to children who were not exposed to domestic violence (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrok, 1983; Rossman 1998).

However, a review of the more recent meta-analyses on the impact on children on living in violence in their families (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003; Evans et al., 2008; Chan & Yeung, 2009) shows that although there is agreement between substantial number of studies that there is an association between children’s exposure to violence and developmental problems, the linkages between exposure to family violence and child’s adjustment only appeared to have a weak to moderate association. Also, some studies have also shown that not all children who were exposed to violence had negative outcomes. For example, in a study
by Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, von Eye and Levendosky (2009), 54% of the preschool children sampled maintained positive adaptation after witnessing violence at home; similarly in another study by Graham-Bermann, Gruber, Howell and Girz (2009), 20% of the children had low adjustment problems. Interestingly, in the former cited study the children were characterised by an easy temperament and mothers who were not depressed while in the latter study, the resilient children had less violence exposure, and the mother had better parenting as measured by the Anxiety and Parental Childrearing Styles Scales (APCSS, Sameroff, Thomas & Barrett, 1990), more family strengths as measured by the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD; Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop, 1983) and no past violent partner.

3.3.2 Gender differences in the impact of exposure. The meta-analysis by Evans et al. (2008) concurred with that of Wolfe et al. (2003) in showing that the association between exposure to domestic violence and externalising symptoms such as aggression and hostility, is stronger in boys than it is in girls. In addition, both studies were consistent in not finding that the associations between childhood exposure and internalising symptoms like depression and somatic complaints, to be stronger for girls than for boys. Moreover when carrying out further exploratory statistical analyses, both the studies by Wolfe et al. and Evans et al., found that the stronger relationship to externalising symptoms among boys remained. In contrast to both these studies, the meta-analytic review by Kitzmann et al. (2003) did not find significant gender differences. Perhaps as Evans et al. suggest, these inconsistent findings can be explained because few quantitative studies have examined the moderating effects of gender on exposure to domestic violence and because of the methodological differences across the three meta-analytic studies.

In addition, other studies have looked at whether there are similar effects between boys and girls when domestic violence is perpetrated by mothers versus fathers. One such quantitative survey is that by Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers and Reebye (2006) who found that girls who had observed their mother’s aggressive behaviour toward a partner, were more aggressive towards friends, as were boys who had witnessed their father’s aggressive
behaviour towards a partner. The results of this study also showed that mother-
perpetration of violence was unrelated to boys’ aggression to their friends. But father’s
intimate partner violence was related to girls being physically aggressive towards their
fathers but not for boys.

Another study by Balliff-Spanvill, Clayton, & Hendrix (2007) examined the
response of 27 boys and 35 girls, exposed to domestic violence across five types of
simulated conflict situations, using a quasi-experimental design with a non-equivalent
comparison group of children who had not witnessed intimate partner violence. Both
boys and girls who had been exposed to domestic violence were significantly more
violent than non-witness children, in situations involving aggression and social exclusion.
But they did not differ from the comparison group in conflicts involving limited
resources, jealousy over possessions or intimidation. Interestingly in the intimidation
conflict situation, all the children, in both the experimental and comparison group
engaged in significantly more aggressive behaviour that they did in the other types of
conflict situations, possibly indicating how psychologically difficult intimidation is for
all children to contend with. Finally, the results showed that when threatened with
exclusion from peers, boys who had been exposed to domestic violence were far more
likely than the girls exposed to violence, to engage in violence.

Clearly, as Wood and Sommers (2011) comment, the impact of gender on the
exposure of children is multifaceted and there are a variety of mediating factors that
might contribute to the differences in responses in boys and girls. Thus more research is
needed to understand these gender differences. This has been the main reason why I have
opted to have a single sex sample in this qualitative study, rather than a mixed sample of
men and women so as to have a base on which to start from, as an explanation and
illumination of repeated domestic violence exposure.

3.3.3 The co-occurrence of domestic violence and other forms of child abuse.
Researchers draw our attention to the significant overlap that is found between child
abuse and intimate partner violence (Appel & Holden, 1998; Edleson, 1999; Herrenkohl
et al., 2008; Jouriles, McDonald, Smith Slep, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003). In the Appel and Holden study, rates of co-occurrence for abuse and domestic violence exposure were in the range of 6% to 18% for community samples and about 40% for clinical samples. In the Edleson’s review of research, the rates of co-occurrence were much higher: there was an overlap of abuse and domestic violence exposure in 30% to 60% of all identified cases.

This implies that a “pure witness group” that is, individuals who only witnessed parental physical conflict but did not experience physical abuse is hard to find. Apart from this, one can argue that children exposed to intimate partner violence are also living in an environment that is psychologically abusive (Holden, 2003), being exposed to a parent being assaulted, denigrated and/or threatened is emotionally distressing and often trauma-response inducing. So again this points to the complexity of the phenomenon investigated and the difficulty to neatly examine exposure to domestic violence in isolation from the impact of other stressors or trauma in children’s lives (Rutter, 1999).

In addition to the above, a child’s age, frequency, severity and chronicity of violence in the home and the child’s relationship with his or her mother and the perpetrator all may influence the impact of exposure on a child (Cooper & Vetere, 2005; Edleson, 1999). Furthermore it is also important to examine the wider contextual forces that might also have an impact on the child, that is, the availability of family support in the community as well as the response to violence exposure by professional services in the mental health field, the education system and the social services field.

Such quantitative studies continue to highlight the complexity and multi-layered nature of exposure to violence as a phenomenon and the need for research designs like small-scale qualitative studies that take into account these important contextual factors and illuminate the kinds of processes that are involved. For example, what is it like for a daughter to see her father kick her mother and being terrified for her mother’s safety and for hers, whilst wanting to be loyal to her father who she loves too? Such qualitative studies would help practitioners to develop a clear picture of the severity and extent of
exposure of children living in a family with domestic violence and would guide them in their interventions, locally.

3.3.4 **The continuing impact of domestic violence exposure on adult children.** Compared to the studies on effects on children and youth, fewer studies have looked at associations between childhood and youth exposure to domestic violence and adult outcomes (Watson MacDonell, 2012). An overview of the published literature in the area shows that it has only been in the last decade or so, that there has been an increasing interest in examining the long-term effects of having witnessed domestic violence as a child (Stanley, 2011). Similar to the child outcome studies, studies on adult outcomes showed internalising symptoms in adults.

A quantitative survey by Davies, DiLillo, and Martinez (2004) that examined the relationship between childhood exposure to intimate partner violence and adult psychological functioning, with a sample of predominantly Mexican American women undergraduate students, revealed that witnessing parental violence in childhood was associated with depressive symptoms, low self-esteem and trauma symptoms in adult women, even after controlling for child physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Trauma-related symptoms remained the sole outcome after controlling for levels of non-physical family conflict. Similar results were obtained by Roustit and colleagues (2009) who conducted a quantitative survey with a representative sample of French adults, through face-to-face interviews. They found that persons who had been exposed to childhood domestic violence had a higher risk of being depressed, of having alcohol dependence, a higher risk for child maltreatment and conjugal violence.

Finally, another quantitative survey by Howells and Rosenbaum (2008) looked at how depression can mediate the experience of witnessing violence and aggression for males and females. The findings indicated that the relationship between experiencing family violence and aggression was partially mediated by depressive symptoms for women only. This was one of the first studies that started looking at mechanisms by which exposure may produce aggression. But the authors again concluded that exposure
to domestic violence is a complex constellation of variables and future quantitative research needed to contribute more to the understanding of both exposure to violence and subsequent aggression.

3.3.5 Intergenerational transmission of violence. A review of the intergenerational transmission of violence throws more light on the understanding of the impact of domestic violence exposure on adult children. Interestingly, in the domestic violence literature there has been a persistent interest in intergenerational transmission of violence (Thornberry, Knight, & Lovegrove, 2012). The questions that keep recurring are: Do child witnesses continue to replicate the violence that they have witnessed in their family of origin? More specifically - do boys, as witnesses become adult perpetrators and do girls become victims in their intimate partner relationships?

Various family violence scholars have commented about the embedded assumptions of researchers, clinicians, policy makers and also in the adult survivors themselves, that children raised in violent homes tend to replicate what they experienced as children and adolescents in their family of origin (Widom, 1989a, 1989b).

However, a meta-analysis study (Stith et al., 2000) and a systematic review of risk factors for intimate partner violence twelve years later by Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim (2012) reviewing articles from 1980 to 1997, and from 2000 to 2011 respectively, concluded that findings suggest a low to moderate significant association of witnessing parental intimate partner violence and later perpetration or victimization for intimate partner violence. These researchers draw attention to the fact that much of the evidence for intergenerational transmission of violence was based on retrospective reporting and hence might demonstrate stronger relationships than actually exist (Widom, 1989a). This in part may be because retrospective work relies on participants’ memories of childhood experiences, which might vary in accuracy and in part because the population sampled might already have selected characteristics such as depression (Rossman, 2001).

Researchers have thus highlighted the importance of more methodologically robust studies such as those that use prospective data (Thornberry et al., 2012), which
will more likely provide a more accurate estimate of the cycle of violence hypothesis. One such prospective study is that by Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, and Silva (1998) who used an unselected birth cohort part of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary, Health and Development study, in New Zealand, to look at developmental antecedents of partner abuse. The antecedents were measured in four domains: socio economic resources, family relations, educational achievements and problem behaviours. The partner abuse outcomes included psychological and physical abuse measures collected at age 21 years. The researchers also measured both male-to-female abuse and female-to-male abuse. In terms of family relations, they measured conflict and harsh discipline but did not include a direct measure of childhood exposure to violence between parents.

The results highlighted that close parent-child relationships at age 15 were associated with low risk for later partner abuse which can be explained through an attachment theory framework, that is, that early warm and support significant relationships influence later adult intimate relationships. In terms of socioeconomic resources, results highlighted that having parents with higher socio-economic resources and growing up with both parents present were both related to low risk for adult partner abuse. Leaving school early, parents’ reports of conduct problems at age 15, self-reports of delinquency and substance abuse, all at age 15, were consistently related to adult partner abuse, underscoring the importance of prevention programs addressing low educational achievers and adolescents not attending school. In addition, these results also throw light on the importance of early preventive work with children and adolescents with conduct problems.

The emphasis on looking at children with conduct disorder was also highlighted by another (partially) prospective study - by Ehrensaft and colleagues (2003). These researchers followed a community sample of 543 children over 20 years through maternal interviews in the first instance, then through three subsequent interviews with the youth and their mothers at fixed intervals at 1983, 1985-1986, and 1991-1993 and then through a mailed questionnaire in 1999 on “recent life changes, work history, aggressive behaviour, intimate partner history and partner violence (p.743). The impact of domestic
violence exposure on the child was assessed through the questions in the questionnaire section on partner violence. When Ehrensaft et al. tested the independent effects of parenting, exposure to inter-parental domestic violence, maltreatment, adolescent disruptive behaviour disorders, and emerging adult substance abuse disorders on the risk of violence to and from an adult partner, results showed that conduct disorder was the strongest predictor for perpetrating violence for both sexes, followed by exposure to inter-parental violence and power assertive punishment. Thus whilst exposure to violence between parents still remained a strong predictor, conduct disorder was again highlighted as an important variable. Also, the link with power assertive punishment shows that this kind of punishment might serve as a model for the young adults’ means of conflict resolution with their partners and also points to the importance of looking at the child-parent relationship.

In terms of receiving violence from a partner, the researchers were surprised to find that child abuse was not a significant risk after controlling for demographic variables but exposure to inter-parental violence seemed to pose the greatest independent risk for being the victim of any act of partner violence. On the other hand, child physical abuse and conduct disorder were strong independent risks for injury to a partner. The researchers were unable to detect sex differences in the above processes and this was discussed as one of the limitations of their study. They were also unable to differentiate between levels of exposure of violence for example, frequency, or severity and age at exposure. More recent research studies have attempted to take into account these important variables.

For example, in the article by Narayan, Englund, and Egeland (2013), the researchers investigated whether timing or continuity of children’s exposure to inter-parental violence in early and middle childhood predicted dating violence at ages 23 and 26 years and whether timing or continuity of externalising behaviour mediated these pathways. This study used prospective data from a longitudinal study of low-income families. Interestingly, the findings indicated that exposure to violence in early childhood was a direct predictor of both dating violence perpetration and victimization at age 23
years after controlling for maltreatment, maternal age, family socioeconomic status, and child sex. These findings underscore the harmful effects of early relational traumatic experiences on long-term adaptation. The researchers also suggest that their findings seem to show that it is the timing of the exposure to inter-parental violence during early childhood rather than the continuity or persistence of exposure to violence through early and middle childhood that is a substantial risk for dating violence in early adulthood.

Furthermore, independent of exposure to interparental violence, externalising behaviour in middle childhood also predicted dating violence through externalising behaviour in adolescence and life stress at age 23 but this pathway stemmed from maltreatment. Thus the researchers suggest that there seem to be two independent pathways of risk to dating violence: one coming from exposure to violence between parents and one that stems from maltreatment and externalising behaviour in childhood. These are informative results for practitioners working with families where there is parental violence and abuse of the children, as well as for practitioners, scholars and policy makers working in the area of prevention given that according to this study, both child abuse and children’s exposure to violence are important influences on the continuation of domestic violence in intimate partner relationships.

Gender has also been looked at as a possible influence on the transmission of risk. However, again quantitative research findings are contradictory (Moretti, Bartolo, Craig, Slaney, & Odgers, 2014) - some studies show associations between exposure to parental IPV and aggression in romantic relationships only for daughters (e.g. Wofford Mihalic & Elliot, 1997), or only for sons (e.g. O’ Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994) and some report few (e.g. Smith, Ireland, Park, Elwyn, & Thornberry, 2011) or no gender effects at all (e.g. Ehrensaft et al., 2003). Again, these results support the rationale for researching a single sex sample in this study. In addition, while there seems to be some support for intergenerational transmission of interparental violence, direct causation is not supported (Wood & Sommers, 2011).

Another interesting recent study that continued to further illuminate the
intergenerational transmission of risk of violence looked at the impact of exposure to both maternal-perpetrated, and paternal perpetrated interparental (IPV) violence and assessed the link to the girls’ perpetration of violence within romantic relationships (Moretti et al., 2014). The researchers also examined whether the link to violence in the girls’ relationship was mediated through sensitivity to interpersonal rejection.

Results indicated that maternal-perpetrated interparental violence was significantly related to concurrent levels of rejection sensitivity and aggression towards romantic partners during adolescence. Across time the impact of maternal interparental violence appeared more complex. The researchers confirmed that maternal IPV exerted a significant direct effect on risk for both physical assault and psychological aggression towards romantic partners in early adulthood; however, this effect was not mediated by interpersonal rejection. Instead, maternal IPV also exerted an indirect effect on interpersonal rejection in adolescence and in young adulthood. On the other hand, paternal IPV was significantly related to girls’ psychological aggression towards their romantic partners in early adulthood.

It is worth noting that these results need to be evaluated in the context of the limitations of the study, for example, the fact that the sample of young girls (N=139) was obtained from a custody centre and hence may not be generalizable to a community sample. In addition, the study examined only perpetration of aggression and not experiences of victimisation in romantic relationships. These quantitative results again highlight the need for qualitative designs that serve to illuminate complex processes and mechanisms which can explain the impact of interparental violence on children, both in the short and long term, especially the impact on the adult children’s intimate relationships.

Arguably, these results also emphasise the fact that mothers often are primary caregivers and hence from an attachment theory perspective, might play an important role in their children’s ability to regulate their emotions, particularly their feelings of anger in intimate relationships (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Children might also be
particularly influenced by how their mother deals with emotionally distressing interpersonal relationships (Moretti et al., 2014). It is thus apt to look into studies that have investigated how parenting is impacted by interparental violence and in turn, how, the children might be affected by parenting in a violent family context.

3.3.6 Parenting in the context of domestic violence. Research in the area of parenting in the context of domestic violence is to a large extent influenced by tensions in the philosophy related to the traditional feminist paradigm of focusing on heterosexual men’s abusive behaviour on their women partners and conceptualising them solely as perpetrators and women as victims. Recent research throws light on the fact that these men are also fathers to their children (Cooper & Vetere, 2005; Featherstone & Fraser, 2012).

In addition, traditional feminist writers draw our attention to victim- and mother-blaming practices (Radford & Hester, 2006), where mothers are seen as inadequate parents because they live in a domestic violent context, without taking account of how parenting can be physically and psychologically more challenging for women who are abused. Such writers and others also argue how professionals especially from Child Protection Services may hold these women responsible for their children’s safety and fail to engage and work with the fathers.

The picture becomes yet more complex when research studies also highlight how women sometimes also behave violently towards their partners (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012) and how older children can also behave violently towards their siblings and towards their parents too (Farmer & Owen, 1998). This again supports research that takes a family-oriented, intergenerational systemic view at domestic violence by looking at the different relational interactions and contexts in a family where there is domestic violence.

3.3.6.1 Mothering in the context of domestic violence. Quantitative research studies in this area have produced mixed findings (Stanley, 2011). Some studies have indicated that being physically and psychologically abused by a partner predicted less warmth in mothers of school age children in a behavioural observation study of parenting
(Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). Similarly, another study found that maternal mental health difficulties as determined by depressive and posttraumatic symptoms, were significantly predicted by domestic violence. In turn, this predicted significantly both parenting and children’s functioning in children’s ages 7 -12 years of age (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001).

However, more recent studies have indicated that whereas maternal depression played a crucial role in a decrease in parenting functioning, other mothers appeared to compensate for the violence by becoming more effective parents. This was indicated in the study by Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, and Semel (2003) that looked at the interaction of 103 pre-school children and their mothers. Similar results were obtained in a later study by Letourneau, Fedick, and Willms (2007), using a longitudinal survey of Canadian mothers and examining their parenting interactions with their 2 – 12 year old children.

Another study which looked at the quality of maternal parenting in women who had experienced intimate partner violence and were involved with the child protection system found that women who had experienced domestic violence in the past but were no longer current victims of violence, had significantly better parenting practices than women who were currently experiencing intimate partner violence. The sample included mothers of children who were less than 10 years and whose children were not in out-of-home care. There were also no significant differences in parenting practices between women who were currently experiencing domestic violence and women who had never been domestically abused. Furthermore, the stress associated with being abused appeared to have no effect on the number of times that the mothers used corporal punishment (spanking) as a form of discipline (Casanueva, Martin, Runyan, Barth, & Bradley, 2008).

In contrast to the above study, another research study carried out in the same year and using the same national sample of families in contact with child protection services in the US - the National survey of child and adolescent well-being (NSCAW) found contradictory results (Kelleher et al., 2008). In this study, women’s reports of experiences
of being domestically abused were associated with higher rates of self-reported psychological, physical aggression and neglect towards their children (1-14 years) when compared to those with no domestic violence experiences.

Perhaps as Stanley (2011) suggests, the difference in the studies can be explained due to the Kelleher et al.’s sample of older children who could have had more challenging behaviour. More importantly, however, this inconsistency in these results and in the ones reviewed above underscore the usefulness of exploring children’s (and mothers’) accounts of being parented and parenting in domestic violence contexts using qualitative studies. This again supports the need for a study that gives importance to looking in more depth at family relationships including looking at the mothers’ relationship with her child/children in the context of the marital relationship and in the context of the relationship of the father with the child/children.

3.3.6.2 Fathering in the context of domestic violence. As has already been noted earlier, there seems to be only a small number of studies focusing on fathers in domestic violence research (Stanley, 2011). Various scholars have in fact argued for more research on the parenting of men who are abusive to their partners (Featherstone & Peckover, 2007).

Similar to the perspective on mothering in the context of domestic violence, research on fathers in this context has been influenced by a deficient paradigm, arising from fathers being seen as perpetrators of violence (Perel & Peled, 2008). Thus fathers have been portrayed as under-involved, neglectful, irresponsible, self-centred and manipulative (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002). These authors based their profiles on their clinical experiences with violent fathers and to a smaller extent on the limited literature on the topic. Concurring with Perel and Peled (2008), arguably this is methodologically problematic and presents a one-dimensional view of the fathering of men who abuse their family members.

A more complex picture of violent men as fathers seems to be portrayed by qualitative studies such as those by Fox, Sayers, and Bruce (2002) and Perel and Peled
(2008). Fox and colleagues interviewed eight men who participated in a batterer intervention group where the men expressed feelings of guilt, and remorse and responsibility for the harm that they caused. In the Perel and Peled’s study, the fourteen men interviewed presented with complex dynamics of an unfulfilled yearning for connection with their children, together with processes of reflections around the influence of their childhood on their fathering, and their personal limitations. There were also mixed reactions about the impact of exposure of violence on the children. Whilst some perceived the exposure as harmful, others showed less concern or complete disregard for the exposure and the ensuing harm. The co-parenting relationship was seen as most problematic to them. The authors concluded that the men seemed to be located on a continuum between feeling a failure as a father and a sense of growth and improvement on the other end of the continuum. Although one cannot generalise from these small qualitative studies, the results are meaningful and further add to the knowledge of parenting of fathers who are also abusive.

Looking at children’s perspectives about their fathers in the context of domestic violence helps add to complexity. The children in the Mullender et al.’s (2002) study talked about a complexity of emotions-fear, shame, and anger, a longing for the violence to stop and pain and sorrow. The mothers’ accounts however, showed that the children made “attempts to draw love and affection” from their father (p. 190). In addition, the narratives by adolescents about their experiences of domestic violence showed how the fathers’ position as the “reluctant or dangerous or weak aggressor” was actually negotiated in family, in the context of the dynamics of the mother and the children. Such studies continue to underscore the complexities of the dynamics living with domestic violence.

3.3.7 Resilient children. The majority of the quantitative studies looking at outcomes of children who are exposed to intimate partner violence have concluded that they are at risk for a range of adjustment difficulties when compared to non-exposed children (Holt et al2008). But as has already been noted, there also have been studies in recent years that have started to begin recognising that outcomes vary from child to child,
and that there are children who fare well despite the exposure to violence (Howell, 2011). Resilient children are those who demonstrate “a relatively good outcome despite suffering risk experiences that would be expected to bring about serious sequelae” (Rutter, 2007, p. 205).

In fact, an often cited meta-analytic review of the literature on children exposed to family violence found that 37% of children who witness or experience abuse fare well or better than children who are not exposed to such violence in the home (Kitzmann et al., 2003). More recently, studies have started looking in more depth at the profiles of adjustment of children exposed to domestic violence.

One such study used a sample of families primarily living in the community with only 4% of the sample living in domestic violence shelters (Graham-Bermann et al., 2009). Using cluster analysis, all the data were described by four profiles of children’s adjustment, using the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL, Achenbach & Edelbrock 1993), Child Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovacs, Brent, Steinberg, Paulauskas & Reid, 1986), General Self-Worth and Social Self Competence measures in the Harter Perceived Self-Competence Scales for Children (Harter, 1982, 1985). These profiles were: children with severe adjustment (24%); children who were struggling (45%); children with depression only (11%) and children who were resilient with high competence and low adjustment problems (20%), as noted earlier in this chapter. Interestingly, what distinguished the different profiles of adjustment for children exposed to domestic violence were factors related to the child, to the mother and to the family.

Resilient children had less violence exposure, fewer fears and worries and mothers with better mental health and parenting skills. Struggling children had mothers with better parenting, more family strengths and no violent partner whilst parents of children with severe problems were lacking these characteristics. Such findings indicate the importance of understanding in depth family relationships, particularly the parenting context and how this helps children balance or buffer the harmful impact of domestic violence on the child’s development. In addition, such results also highlight important
areas for the intervention of practitioners: that is, intervention strategies should be systemic, targeting both the child and the parent/s, for the better functioning of all the family members.

The importance of intervening at the level of parent-child was also highlighted by a study that looked at the relationship between protective factors and outcomes for children exposed to violence (Shultz et al., 2013). The analyses revealed that the child’s increased self-control and a positive parent-child relationship were related to changes in child posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and behaviour problems. Again such a study suggests that intervening at the level of the parent-child relationship helps improve outcomes for the child.

3.3.8 Methodological limitations of the quantitative literature on child and adult outcomes of witnessing domestic violence. While the quantitative studies reviewed above help us to understand the extent of the impact of domestic violence and its effects on both children and adults, researchers have pointed out the methodological concerns in these quantitative studies. Researchers have drawn attention to the fact that there are variations in sample sizes, differences in cultural contexts and differences in the ways in which witnessing of violence and violence have been defined and measured (Davies et al., 2004). Also, most research studies did not report whether the violence is perpetrated by one parent or perpetrated by both parents (Watson MacDonell, 2012). In addition, earlier studies have used samples drawn from women’s shelters, which were likely to over-represent more severe domestic violence and did not necessarily represent the general population (Evans et al., 2008). Living in a shelter may in itself be a stressful experience for children, which in itself influences outcomes. In a similar vein, samples of children largely drawn from clinical populations may have skewed results in favour of children who had more severe negative outcomes. Moreover, having mothers as sole informants may have led to both under- and over-reporting of psychopathological outcomes (Holt et al., 2008).

The conclusions from a meta-analytic review conducted on articles spanning from
1995 to 2006, conclude that there is also contextual insensitivity (Chan & Yeung, 2009), meaning that quantitative research has tended to focus on children exposed to violence in a vacuum. However, results in many quantitative studies have repeatedly drawn attention to the complexity of mediating and interacting factors associated with the impact of domestic violence on children and adults. Along similar lines, there also seems to be the general agreement that it is difficult to identify a direct causal pathway leading to particular outcomes (Holt et al., 2008). Thus researchers advocate for studies that take a holistic approach designed to capture the individuals’ unique understanding of their experiences within particular families and within specific social contexts. This further supports the rationale for conducting a research study informed by a qualitative paradigm that attempts to take into account the complexity of the mediating and interacting factors associated with the impact of domestic violence as well as the different types of exposure to domestic violence, the varying degrees of chronicity of the violence and the different kinds of violence.

3.3.9 A review of the qualitative studies on the experiences of children and adults witnessing domestic violence. Instead of eliciting views of the mothers, shelter workers and other professionals, more recent studies informed by a qualitative paradigm have sought to explore directly from the children and adolescents themselves their experiences of domestic violence (Holt et al., 2008). Perhaps, as these authors argue, this reflects the shift in perception of the position of children, from passive observers of their parents’ violence to active participants trying to navigate their way around safety, loyalty binds and complex emotions: the terror, love, sadness and fear that are often characteristic of domestic violence between family members and which in themselves create unresolvable dilemmas.

Listening to the children themselves, rather than using their mother or other caregivers as informants is important both to elicit the children’s understanding of their family context and also to bypass some of the limitations of the quantitative research such as bypassing ambiguous definitions of what is exposure to violence. Children experience domestic violence in a number of ways, including hearing, smelling and experiencing the
aftermath of violent episodes (Øverlien & Hydén, 2009). More importantly, as has been already pointed out, how these incidents are understood by the children depend on the interaction of a myriad of factors including the age of the children, the children’s relationship with their parents, the impact of the marital relationship on the children’s sense of security, and the availability of supportive networks amongst others. Thus, qualitative research with its emphasis on holistic, context-based knowledge as one of its strength would be the paradigm of choice for such studies.

However, in relation to the quantitative studies carried out in the area of children witnessing domestic violence, qualitative studies are few (Øverlien, 2010). The majority of these studies come from the United Kingdom and Ireland (Buckley, Holt, & Whelan, 2007; McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002; Swanston, Bowyer, & Vetere, 2013). These all bring to light some of the experiences and feelings that children have to deal with: for example, living with a pervasive sense of threat and fear and the realisation of a loss of a normal childhood.

Still fewer qualitative studies have explored this topic from the perspective of adult women reflecting on their exposure to domestic violence over time. Williams, Boggess, and Carter (2001) argue that the perspectives of adult children can give significant insights into the effects of exposure over time, such as what they thought could have been helpful for them, and what these women would have wanted from their parents and the other family members.

However, three of the qualitative studies looking at adult daughters have predominantly focused on their experiences of resilience, adaptive coping and turning points in their life (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Humphreys, 2001; O’ Brien, Cohen, Pooley, & Taylor, 2013). Another study sought to explore the lived experience of adult children exposed to their parent’s intimate partner violence throughout their life-time (Band-Winterstein, 2013). The researcher used a mixed sample of men and women. Variability in qualitative research is useful and expected as it helps the researcher raise hypotheses about the results obtained. But in the context of the mixed results in the quantitative
research looking at gender differences in the impact of exposure as discussed earlier in this chapter (section 3.3.2), the use of the mixed sample in this qualitative study still left questions as to whether some processes or themes were specific to men or to women. Moreover, although the researcher stated that the qualitative study is phenomenological in perspective, the method of analysis used a grounded theory form of analysis, which was confusing given the differences in the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and grounded theory analysis as qualitative strategies of inquiry. While both phenomenology and grounded theory as methodologies are said to be influenced by symbolic interactionism, which is a theoretical perspective that views humans as active beings in constructing their world where language and symbols play an important role in meaning-make, the philosophical emphasis in phenomenology is phenomenological philosophy, particularly the writings by Husserl, and those who expanded on his views such as Heidegger, Satre, and Merleau-Ponty (Creswell, 2012). These similarities and important differences were not elaborated upon in the Band-Winterstein (2013) article.

In addition, all these four studies take the individual perspective rather than a family-oriented one. Instead, it is argued here, that taking a systemic, relational perspective in a qualitative study can illuminate better the complex family dynamics that have been discussed above. For all the reasons that have been outlined above, this study will interview a sample of 15 women about their understanding of their childhood experiences of domestic violence across time, through a systemic lens, using a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006), as the methodology of choice for illuminating complex social processes, as will be explained in the next chapter.

3.4 Theoretical Frameworks

Following the review of the extant literature that has hopefully clarified the rationale for exploring the research question of this study, I will now discuss the various theoretical frameworks that I anticipate will guide the development of the research question. These theoretical frameworks include theories from the marital conflict...
3.4.1 Theoretical frameworks from the marital conflict literature.

3.4.1.1 Social learning theory. One theory that is often mentioned in the marital conflict literature and which is also often cited in the domestic violence literature is the social learning theory (Bandura, 1973). This theory explains how children acquire maladaptive models of problem-solving or conflict resolution through observing the behaviour of their parents who arguably, are powerful role models especially for same-sex offspring (Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994). This theory suggests that children then use the same models of behaviour in similar situations (Grych & Fincham, 1990). This can provide a possible explanation as to why children who witness domestic violence manifest increased level of externalising behaviour. However, social learning theory has its own shortcomings as research studies that have looked into children exposed to simulated scenes of violence have shown that children are more likely to use intervention strategies or avoidance behaviour rather than imitate the violent behaviour (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2002).

3.4.1.2 Cognitive-contextual framework. Another interesting framework from the marital conflict literature is Grych's and Fincham's (1990) cognitive-contextual framework, which attempts to explain the processes that are involved in examining the effects of interparental conflict on children’s short term and long-term development. This framework proposes that when children witness an interpersonal conflict, they try to understand how it may affect them (perceived threat), why it is happening (attribution) and what they can do as a result (Fosco, De Board & Grych, 2007). These authors also explain that children’s perception of threat or attribution are affected by several factors: the way the conflict is expressed, whether disagreements concern a child-related issue, whether the child has had prior exposure to parental conflict, the characteristics of the child and family - such as level of positive and negative affect, and finally the child’s age. The model also takes into account other contextual factors such as the impact of the
parent-child relationships, exposure to violence in the community and the impact of culture. In this sense, it supports a systemic approach to understanding the impact of violence on children.

Many of the hypotheses drawn from the cognitive-contextual framework have been supported empirically. Studies have shown that children’s attributions of threat and self-blame mediated relations between interpersonal conflict and children’s adjustment (Grych, Harold & Miles, 2003). More specifically, studies consistently show that children’s appraisals of threat are related to internalizing problems but not externalizing problems (Grych et al., 2003) whilst attributions of self-blame predict both internalizing and externalizing problems (Grych et al., 2003). However, it is important to note that most of the studies used to empirically investigate the framework, have utilized community samples that typically report fairly low levels of interparental violence (Fosco et al, 2007) as this framework was originally developed to understand children’s responses to marital conflict rather than violence.

When the framework was studied in the context of family violence to understand children’s adjustment in this context, studies showed that children’s appraisals guide both their immediate response to domestic violence, as well as shape their beliefs and expectations about aggression, and about close relationships more generally (Fosco, DeBoard, & Grych, 2007). This in turn could influence their relationships with peers and romantic partners.

One particularly pertinent belief is the degree to which aggression or violence is perceived as justified or acceptable. Although this belief may run counter to other messages that children might receive, for example, not to hurt others, children may also receive the message that violence is indeed acceptable or justifiable. This happens if they witness incidents where the person who is aggressive gets his or her way, or perceive the abused parent as somehow responsible for being victimised or see the use of aggression as a form of self-defence. In such contexts, children also face a difficult dilemma of seeing someone they love perpetrate violence on a family member that they love too
Moreover, children may be frightened and overwhelmed in such situations and may respond to the violence either by physically intervening, which might put them at risk for being directly abused or may feel powerless to cope or may identify with the aggressor and be aggressive to have a sense of control in a context when everything seems out of control (Balbernie, 1994).

Depending on these beliefs and how children interpret the violent family interactions, this theory thus may explain why some children may perpetuate aggressive behaviour in their relationships whilst others may become anxious or depressed and may avoid close relationships and still others may not perpetrate aggression in their own close relationships. However, it is still unclear why some children follow one path and not another. Perhaps focusing on the sources of support or resilience for these children and their affect regulation strategies might illuminate these different paths. Thus a discussion on Attachment theory and a framework focusing on Resilience will follow later in the chapter.

**3.4.1.3 Emotional security theory (EST).** Davies and Cummings (1994) developed this theory to explain how children’s concerns about emotional security in families where there is inter-parental conflict, play a role in their vulnerability to psychological problems. Together with the cognitive – contextual framework discussed above, it is one of first process-oriented approaches that have attempted to offer explanatory mechanisms as to how children are affected by marital conflict. (Cummings & Davies, 2010). This theory posits that an important goal for children in families is to maintain a sense of protection, safety and security. Consistent with attachment theory about the importance of the parent-child relationship (Bowlby, 1969, 1973), this theory explains that when parents are not available as sources of protection and support, or worse, are the sources of fear and threat as might have in families where there is domestic violence, children lose their sense of emotional security.

This theory also argues that children derive emotional security from multiple aspects of family functioning, particularly from the quality of the marital relationship -
their adjustment is actually influenced by their feelings of security in the family system. For example, children can infer that conflictual marital relationships can mean the breakdown of the family and difficult life changes for them and their family. Marital conflict can also result in parents being unavailable both physically and psychologically and can also threaten the child’s physical and psychological wellbeing.

From a process perspective, it emphasises that when children appraise conflict as destructive of the marital relationship, they become fearfully aroused. Their emotional regulatory functioning may be strained to such an extent that information is misinterpreted and other cognitive processing is disrupted. According to this perspective, children may also be motivated to attempt to regulate their parents’ behaviour either by misbehaving and thus focusing their parents’ attention to their behaviour or by directly intervening to stop the marital conflict. This is similar to the family system concept of triangulation, which will be discussed further below, in the next section. This theory also looks at children’s past experiences with marital conflict as internal representations and thus play an important role in their adjustment to conflict, including how they assess conflict and threat, why it is occurring, who is responsible and whether they have the skills for coping (Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Emotional security theory as a process-oriented approach has been repeatedly supported by longitudinal studies which have revealed strong mediating effects across early and middle childhood and adolescence and where emotional security has been shown to be the higher-order construct that can explain the relationship between the interparental conflict and the child’s adjustment. At the same time, to date, few studies looking at intimate partner violence have utilized emotional security assessments (Cummings & Miller-Graff, 2015). However, studies that have looked at intimate-partner violence and children’s externalizing and internalizing problems, sleep problems and posttraumatic symptoms and have assessed emotional security, have shown that it acts as a mediating factor between the above stated variables (e.g. Kelly & El-Sheikh, 2013). Thus one can still argue that there is empirical evidence for the use of emotional security
framework in understanding the effect of marital conflict and intimate partner violence on children’s adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Cummings & Miller-Graff, 2015;)

3.6.2 Family systems theory. This section encompasses both a brief discussion of the systemic paradigm as well as relevant ideas from systemic family therapy that are thought to be applicable to understand these adult women’s stories of their family of origin experiences of domestic violence. A more comprehensive discussion of family systems theory can be found in Vetere and Dallos (2003) and Dallos and Draper (2010).

3.4.2.1 Central ideas. One of the key ideas of the systemic paradigm is the emphasis on interpersonal relationships as opposed to an intra-psychic focus. Thus problems and “pathology” are seen as interpersonal in nature rather than emanating from the individual.

Using the analogy of a biological system, family systems theory proposes that a system like the family is composed of distinct sub-systems that are also interconnected and operate to maintain stability (Bateson, 1972). Thus applying this to the structure of the family, a family is made up of smaller sub-systems for example, the parent-child system, the parental system or the sibling sub-system. Each sub-system continually influences and is influenced by each other sub-system. An implication of this is that we no longer speak of linear causation - A causes B - but we look at patterns or processes of interactions between the parts of the system, what is known as circular causation, in order to make sense of relationships and relationship difficulties. This also means that the pattern of the whole system is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

One positive aspect of an interpersonal perspective is that it frees families and family members from being seen as determined by their past experiences and/or by their genes as psychodynamic and/or biological theories would imply. This is consistent with a resilience framework that will also guide the development of this study’s research question.
Another central idea in family systems theory is the importance of looking at triangles or three-person interaction as a unit of analysis. The proposition is that what happens between two people in a family can have an important influence on a third person and vice versa. Early family system scholars theorized that families could engage in different triangular processes such as coalitions or alliances (Dallos & Vetere, 2012). This is relevant in this research study, as the participants will be talking about their understanding of their parents’ relationships, amongst others. In addition, the process of conflict detouring might be one mechanism through which family members might de-escalate the conflict between two people in a domestic violence context.

With the influence of constructivism on family systems thinking, there has been a shift from looking at functional/dysfunctional patterns to looking at patterns of beliefs and levels of meanings in family (Vetere & Dallos, 2003). Social constructivism stresses a view of reality as subjective and family therapists moved away from seeing themselves as “objective” observers of the families’ dysfunctional patterns. Instead, therapists saw themselves as part of the system and constructed ongoing hypotheses to guide their work with families and to help the families reach their desired change (Vetere & Dallos, 2003). The importance of cultural and societally shared beliefs also became increasingly important with the advent of social constructionism when families started to be seen as linked to the wider cultural contexts they made part of.

Thus in this study, it will be important to note participants’ beliefs about seeking help from professionals about domestic violence problems, and/or about any gendered beliefs which they might have as a result of their experiences. It will also be important to pay attention to the language used when talking about the experiences of witnessing domestic violence especially about power, abuse and responsibility, minding the language used both by the participant and the researcher, given that the researcher is also part of the system created by the research context.

Finally, another important idea from the systemic field is the notion of looking at patterns of behaviour over time, through taking into account the concept of family life
cycle, and processes of change and stability that might take place at the different stages of the family (Vetere & Dallos, 2003).

Thus a systemic analysis allows for formulation of complex processes at different levels of analysis: the individual, family, cultural and social level. However, one critique of Family Systems theory is that with its emphasis on interpersonal processes, patterns and contexts, it has overlooked the role of emotions and emotional experiences of family members and lacks a developmental perspective (Dallos & Vetere, 2009). Thus it is useful to look at an attachment framework with its focus on social and emotional development and emotional regulation, to help explain how children and adults manage their feelings especially in contexts where they are frightened, distressed and anxious as happens in families where there is domestic violence.

3.4.3 Attachment theory: A theory of social and emotional development in a relational context and of safety and protection in family relationships. This section will mainly focus on a discussion and a critique of the contributions from Bowlby’s work (1969, 1973, 1988 and Crittenden’s (2006, 2008) Dynamic-maturational model of attachment.

An attachment framework can throw light on how negative experiences and disruptions of affectional bonds between parents and child, as sometimes happens in domestic violence contexts, can lead to psychological difficulties in the child such as anxiety, anger and depression which can then result in their having relational and social difficulties in the short term and long term (Pearlman & Courtois, 2005). Although Bowlby (1988) argued that the attachment behavioural system is most critical during the early phases of a child’s life, he assumed that this system is active over a person’s entire life span especially when the child perceives danger.

When significant others are available in times of need and provide sensitive and attuned-responses to the proximity-seeking behaviour of children especially in situations of perceived danger, then according to Bowlby, children develop a sense of attachment security. However, when caregivers are unpredictable, or not available, or unresponsive
to the children’s needs as might happen in domestic violence contexts, the children’s distress is not relieved, and they do not attain attachment security. In this sense, attachment theory has also become known as a theory of emotional regulation, that is, how children learn how to manage their emotions and calm themselves down when distressed with the help of their parents (Dallos & Vetere, 2009).

Extending Bowlby’s proposition further, Shaver, Hazan and Bradshaw (1988) proposed that attachment bonds in adulthood are conceptually parallel to a child’s emotional bond with his or her primary caregivers in the way that these attachment patterns with one’s significant others are then translated into relationship representations or what Bowlby termed as “internal working models”. According to Bowlby, the child’s significant attachment experiences with the caregivers are stored as mental representations of expectations about a) others’ availability to relieve distress; b) about one’s behaviour and that of others in intimate relationships in general; as well as c) representations of the self as competent and valued (Mikulincer et al., 2003). In time, these models are presumed to operate in a habitual and automatic manner. In other words, these models affect the way we interact with others. Depending on the kind of feedback that we obtain, our beliefs are either reinforced or challenged. If our internal working model is that significant others are emotionally unavailable or neglectful, and our beliefs are not challenged or changed by life experiences, then we may enter adulthood relationships influenced significantly by early attachment experiences.

Bowlby’s concept of internal working model offers a valuable way of thinking about social and emotional development that is dynamic. Although at its inception this model was a “conceptual metaphor” (Thompson & Raikes, 2003, p. 696), since then, numerous neuroscientific studies about neural processes and memory development have helped to develop further this concept. Bretherton and Munholland (2008) present a review of a selection of these studies, amongst which is the “mirror neuron system” by Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallesi and Fogassi (1996).
Clearly, attachment theory can be a useful theoretical framework to understand the impact of adverse experiences on the development of the child and adult growing up in a family where there is domestic violence. At the same time, feminist critics of attachment theory draw attention to the fact that one cannot consider attachment theory in a vacuum and that larger social context such as economic resources, societal stresses and quality of maternal support all influence the ability of parents to be significant attachment figures (Buchanan, 2008). Such a perspective, which is also in line with a systemic framework, is particularly pertinent in a family context where there is domestic violence.

Moreover, feminist theorists also raise the issue of gender and how in Western society, women are often expected to be the glue that holds relationships together, not only with their partners but also with their children (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005; Mahoney & Knudson-Martin 2009). Although Bowlby does clarify that by significant carers, he is referring either to the father or the mother, in Western contemporary society, it is usually the mother who is responsible for the care of the children (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005). Mothers in challenging contexts such as domestic violence, which very often is detrimental to their physical and mental health, may feel additionally burdened that they are not providing optimal conditions for the development of their children’s secure attachment. Such situations again highlight the importance for practitioners to have a systemic lens when trying to understand domestic violence contexts and not be too tempted to categorize attachment styles or patterns and blame the mother as the primary caregiver without taking into account the various contexts that are influencing the behaviour of the different parts of the system.

3.4.3.1 Dynamic-maturational model of attachment (DMM). As has been highlighted earlier, critics of attachment theory have sometimes argued that its explanations and the descriptive categories might be too deterministic and rather pathologising (Dallos & Vetere, 2009). Instead, the DMM model appreciates the dynamic nature of attachment, that is, that it is not fixed early in life and that it becomes increasingly complex with maturation and experience (Crittenden, 2006, 2008). While the model appreciates the interaction between early experiences and development, it takes
the view that early experiences do not determine it (Crittenden, 2008). Thus the model allows for the resilience of persons and opportunities throughout the life span for “corrective emotional scripts” (Byng-Hall, 1998). This is in line with both the Resilience and Systemic framework, described below and above respectively, which will also support and develop the study’s research question.

One of the central ideas of the DMM model is that it conceptualises danger rather than safety, as the key motivator of attachment behaviour. Thus, rather than describing troubled children as showing disorganised attachment patterns, DMM understands their behaviour in terms of self-protective strategies that come into place in dangerous or threatening circumstances (Farnfield, Hautamäki, Nørbech, & Sahhar, 2010). These self-protective strategies are learned in interaction with protective/attachment figures and will change when individuals perceive that these strategies are not functional to a specific context, and when they feel and believe that it is safe to behave in alternative ways.

Another important aspect of this model is the patterns of information processing that underlie the self-protective strategies. This is where the DMM becomes complex as it attempts to reflect the “complexity of human behaviour in a developmental and interpersonal context across time” (Farnfield et al., 2010, p. 314). Briefly, the strategies are seen as the outcome of processing two types of information: a) the temporal order of stimulation, that is the order in which stimuli occur and b) its intensity (Crittenden, 2006). The author explains how the temporal information is processed by the brain as cognitive information about causal relations, and the intensity of the stimuli is processed as affective information about the somatic feelings associated with contexts.

In terms of mental representations, Crittenden builds on Bowlby’s working models, and posits that they are “dispositional representations” – that is, we become “disposed” to act in a particular way (Wilkinson, 2014) rather than have display or have a specific attachment pattern or style. Building on Bowlby’s use of memory systems (Bowlby, 1980), the DMM refers to six memory systems: procedural and semantic memory to represent cognition; imaged and connotative language to represent
affect/arousal and episodic memory and reflective integration memory systems make up
the Integration system (Crittenden, 2005). The author explains that procedural memories
refer to the preconscious and non-verbal forms of cognition; semantic memory is verbal
and refers to generalisations of how things have been in the past and how they should be
in the future. Imaged memories again refer to preconscious and non-verbal memories,
whilst connotative language includes communication about feelings, verbally and also
provoke feelings in the listener. Lastly, integration of information is associated with
episodic memory - memories of recalled or imagined occasion-specific episodes,
beginning at about three years of age and reflective integration or functioning which start
after about 6 years of age.

Thus practitioners and scholars using this model have the possibility of
understanding a much wider gamut of self-protective strategies than Bowlby’s
classification system, by which to understand complex behaviour, especially in contexts
of danger and threat.

Although a more thorough explanation of a DMM assessment is beyond the scope
of this thesis, nevertheless, as discussed above, it is a model that has a lot of relevance to
researchers and practitioners working in the area of children and adults in abusive
contexts. The complexity of the DMM assessment implies that it requires extensive
training and practice for a practitioner to attain reliability but as a theoretical framework
it has a number of benefits: it is non-pathologising, and its complexity helps in the
understanding of some of the relational dilemmas and challenges in abusive
circumstances (Farnfield et al., 2010). In terms of empirical validity, there have been
more studies looking at infant and preschool-aged children rather than with adolescents
and adults and future research could address this gap (Crittenden, 2005). In addition,
recently the model also has been raised to the family level, which has added its usefulness
to practitioners and scholars working with families (Crittenden & Dallos, 2009;
Crittenden, Dallos, Landini, & Kozlowska, 2014).
3.4.4 Trauma theory

3.4.4.1 Posttraumatic stress disorder. From a psychopathology perspective, exposure to chronic family violence has been linked to Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. In a study that looked at PTSD symptoms in children who had witnessed their mothers being abused, 52% had intrusive memories of the traumatic events, 19% displayed traumatic avoidance and 42% suffered from traumatic arousal (Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998). In addition, research studies have indicated that childhood domestic violence exposure experiences appeared to be linked to current trauma, psychiatric symptoms, distress, and self-injurious behaviour in adults (Rossman, 2001). Thus the DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD may be helpful for practitioners to understand some aspects of their clients’ experiences.

According to the DSM-5, the diagnostic criteria for PTSD include a history of exposure to a traumatic event which is defined as a person being exposed to death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury or actual or threatened sexual violence - all events which are likely to take place in a family where there is domestic violence. The other diagnostic criteria for PTSD include symptoms from each of the four symptom clusters: 1) intrusion, 2) avoidance, 3) negative alterations in cognitions and mood and 4) alterations in arousal and reactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Although this definition of trauma can be helpful, it however focuses on a one-off trauma event. It does not say anything about chronic, intergenerational abuse that a person might have to face in domestic violence contexts (Jonsson, 2009). Most often children who live in families where there is domestic violence are reacting to continuous events that might be happening in the home or they might be reacting to triggers, such as a brewing argument between their parents. Thus re-victimization might happen at any time.

In addition, in limiting trauma to “exposure to actual threat or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence” risks not taking account of events which might not be
life threatening but be experienced as equally upsetting such as experiencing verbal abuse, being coerced, degraded or humiliated.

3.4.4.2 Complex trauma. Thus in responses to clinical work and also to research studies in the area of prolonged or repeated trauma, many scholars have proposed the diagnosis of complex PTSD (Herman, 1992) or “disorders of extreme stress, not otherwise specified” (DESNOS; Pelcovitz et al., 1997) or “complex trauma” (Courtois, 2008) or “developmental trauma” (van der Kolk, 2005) to describe the symptoms of people who had been exposed to early and severe abuse and neglect as well as in many cases later adult traumas. In such cases, the difficulties not only included symptoms of PTSD, anxiety and depression but also problems with identity, affect regulation, managing relationships as well as substance abuse, dissociation, somatization and self-harm behaviour (Courtois & Ford, 2013).

It is worth noting that these difficulties are almost always interpersonal in nature and in the absence of sufficient affect regulation skills, individuals may have to rely on external ways of reducing activated abused-related distress such as aggression, suicide attempts, drug and alcohol abuse and other unhelpful avoidance strategies (Briere & Scott, 2015). These behaviours are attributed to disruptions or mis-attunement in parent-child attachments (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008) described briefly above, and are also typical of childhood abuse, or neglect (Ford, Connor, & Hawke, 2009).

Finally, although trauma experts remain divided whether complex PTSD or DESNOS is a distinct diagnosis that should be recognised in the DSM6, it is important to state that clinically, complex PTSD has helped widen clinicians and researchers’ conceptual understanding of cumulative trauma responses in children and adults and thus remains a useful component to consider as part of a trauma theory framework (Friedman, 2013).

3.4.4.3 Trauma and memory work. Another useful perspective in trauma theory is looking at memory work and how this is impacted by trauma experiences using studies

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6 It was not included in the DSM-5
from neuroscience, specifically looking at hypotheses of how the brain functions in circumstances of extreme stress (Damasio, 1995; van der Kolk, 2007b).

Briefly, numerous authors postulate that in conditions of extreme stress, or perceived danger, parts of the brain known as the amygdala and the hypothalamic–pituitary-adrenal axis are triggered into action and lead the person to either a fight, flight or freeze response (Jonsson, 2009). When this happens, parts of the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which normally inhibits the amygdala so that persons are able to calm themselves down and feel in control, also become inhibited. Persons then have a limited ability to be in control of thoughts and actions. When parts of the prefrontal cortex are “shut down”, this implies that memories of particular stressful events might lack a narrative basis and hence lack a sense of meaning making for that particular experience. Thus it is thought that as a result, memories get stranded in the implicit memory system and hence are remembered and expressed as sensory-motor actions and body feelings instead of words (van der kolk, 2007a). This lack of information processing leads to trauma experiences getting organised as fragmented emotional and sensory memories with no verbal account and then experienced by persons as flashbacks possibly many months or years after the even has occurred.

Furthermore, it is hypothesised that the above mentioned part of the prefrontal cortex and its link with the amygdala is not so well-developed at birth and the infant is dependent on a significant caregiver to regulate their affect, by providing a safe, nurturing and protective environment (Schore, 1994). As has been pointed out earlier, in conditions where attuned parenting might be compromised as might happen in a family with domestic violence, the child’s affect might not be regulated leading to the child being over flooded with stress hormones, with implications for the child’s short term and long term healthy affect regulation processes and interpersonal functioning (Schore, 1994, 2003).

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7 The implicit memory is thought to comprise the emotional, somatic, physiological and behavioural part of our experience (Rothschild, 2011).
All this is relevant for clinicians working with adults who have experienced childhood domestic violence. In addition, it is also relevant for researchers asking participants to share their childhood experiences of domestic violence. Thus, while it is important for researchers to know that high states of arousal or anxiety seems to promote the retrieval of traumatic memories, survivors who have a fairly good psychosocial adjustment and are already in possession of a narrative (possibly in construction) stand to benefit from talking about their experiences in a research context (Sammut Scerri, Abela, & Vetere, 2012). The emphasis on making meaning of their experiences as a result of participating in the research interviews can also aid them further in the understanding of their experiences and hence help them with the further processing of these same experiences.

Finally, apart from considering the usefulness of a trauma framework, it is also important for researchers and clinicians to take a critical outlook too at what seem to be the dominant assumptions underlying theories of psychological trauma. This refers mainly to the assumption that certain events provoke a trauma response in all people, instead of being traumatizing for some people. Thus it is important to keep in mind the distinction between an “event” and the “impact of the experience of the event” (Papadopoulos, 2005).

In addition, it is also useful to keep in mind, that as discussed earlier, not all children and young people who experience domestic violence fare more poorly than the average child or young person who does not witness of domestic violence and thus it is also important to look at resilience or protective factors as part of the experience of witnessing domestic violence (Hughes & Luke, 1998; Kitzmann et al., 2003).

3.4.5 A resilience framework, posttraumatic growth and adversity-activated development. As has already been noted earlier, resilience is here taken to refer to a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). Several authors have highlighted that there seems to be no general consensus regarding a definition of resilience, reflecting
perhaps the marked increased interest of clinicians, researchers and policy makers from different disciplines such as child development, and systems theory to focus on resilience rather than risk and psychopathology, particularly in the last two decades (Masten, 2014; Rutter, 2012).

This broad definition was chosen because it highlights the dynamic perspective of resilience, implying that people can be resilient in some adverse contexts but not in others. Similarly, they may be resilient with respect to some outcomes but not others because of the complex interplay between genetic and environmental influences (Rutter, 1999, 2007). In addition, resilience is not a trait or quality of an individual (Masten, 2001), but rather a process of positive adaptation within an adverse context (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Rutter (1999) also highlights that there are multiple risks and multiple protective factors involved as well as individual vulnerabilities or sensitivity to risk, which could be a result of genetics and/or prior experiences.

One particular protective process, which has been linked to healthy early childhood development, is the quality of the parent-child relationship, that is, a relationship characterised by parental connectedness, concern and open communication (Brookmeyer, Henrich, & Schwab-Stone, 2005; Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006). These qualities apply both to parents and significant others who are warm, sensitive and supportive (Werner & Smith, 2001). Peer group influence has also been found to be important for adolescence’s resilience, particularly because a lot of social formation happens within the peer group for adolescents (Rutter, 1999). Thus a life span perspective is important for the understanding of resilience as well as looking at resilience from a relational perspective.

3.4.5.1 Relational resilience. Echoing the importance of a nurturing relationship, Vetere (2013) looks in detail at how relationships can be contexts for resilient coping and can actually give rise to resilient coping. The author discusses how safe relationships contexts can support the development of affect regulation, a clearer and more reflective communication style, a view of others as helpful and trust-worthy as well as support the
development of the capacity to be less preoccupied by one’s emotional state and increasingly have space to deal with complex information. Thus safe relationships can in fact be contexts of “earned relationship security” (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, p. 334).

**3.4.5.2 Family resilience.** This perspective looks at the family as a system and how family processes helps families and family members to overcome crises and withstand persistent hardships. Walsh (2003) groups these processes into three: (1) family belief systems – (a) looking at making meaning of adversity, (b) a positive outlook in orientation, and (c) a belief in the transcendence and in spirituality; (2) Organizational patterns - looking at flexibility, connectedness and access and mobilization of resources; and (3) communication processes – (a) clarity, emotional expression and collaborative problem-solving. These are all important processes for researchers and clinicians to look into when trying to understand the experiences of families in adverse contexts. Such a family resilience approach is consistent with a systemic approach that looks not only at family processes but also looks at how individual and family adaptations are embedded in broader social contexts such as extended family system, schools, work, and other wider cultural contexts (Rutter, 2007; Walsh, 2003).

It is also important to mention that despite the development of resilience research, certain controversies have been enduring throughout the years, particularly around the meaning of resilience, who defines what it means to be resilient and whether being resilient does in fact imply a price for coping well in adversity (Masten, 2014)

Finally, it is also useful to mention other concepts similar to resilience that are found in the trauma literature, such as posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) and adversity-activated development (Papadopoulos, 2007). Both these concepts focus on the transformation of adversity into positive development.

Posttraumatic growth emphasises the positive changes and psychological growth following trauma where suffering is transformed through a process of meaning making. However, the concept of posttraumatic growth presupposes that positive growth experiences happen after the trauma and in this regard it might not be appropriate for
contexts where the trauma is continuous (Papadopolous, 2007). For this reason, the author instead proposes the term “adversity-activated development”. This term accounts for any positive adaptation/development that may be experienced during the period of adversity and thus is more reflective of the complexity of the processes of resilience at play. It is also more directly relevant for looking at the impact on children and adult children witnessing domestic violence in their family.

3.5 Conclusion

The quantitative and qualitative studies appraised in this literature review attempted to draw out the different factors that are at play when children witness domestic violence in their families, largely taking as a level of analysis either the children, or the mothers or the parent-chid relationships. As has been discussed, this has left gaps in the understanding of practitioners who work with these complex family dynamics, especially in the area of providing guidance for practitioners’ interventions.

This study will attempt to address some of these gaps by illuminating the understanding of adult women survivors of childhood domestic violence who grapple with some of these dynamics in their family, as children and as adults. This study also attempts to explore the women’s understanding of the impact of their childhood experiences on their intimate relationships and parenting. The following were the research question and sub-questions of the study: What is the understanding of adult women’s experiences of witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew in?

The sub-research questions were:

a) what is the women’s understanding of how such experiences and their relationships with their parents and siblings, their relationships with their partners and children now and then, might have influenced each other?

b) what is their understanding of how such experiences and their development might have influenced each other?
And c) what is their perception of the strengths and sources of support that might have helped them in their lives?

The following chapters will focus on the methodology and the methods used to achieve these aims.
CHAPTER 4.0

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Orientation to the Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to present to the reader the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, that is which philosophical positions influence one’s theory of knowledge and one’s view of reality during the research process both within the general context of a qualitative study and within the context of the specific methodology used in this study - a constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006)

4.2 Rationale for the Use of a Qualitative Paradigm in the Research Study

The emphasis in qualitative research is on gaining (incomplete) access to the subjective perspectives of others and how they make sense of the world. These subjective meanings are analysed in a relational context, taking into account the different settings that people live in, their different relationships and the wider society context. This relational analysis also includes the participant-researcher relationship and how this affects the different steps of the research process. This process is known as reflexivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003). Epistemologically, this also means that qualitative research is influenced by an interpretivist stance: that the researcher presents an interpretation of the participants’ accounts and that these interpretations, in turn, are culturally derived and historically situated (Crotty, 1998). Finally, qualitative research also gives importance to how and what kind of language is used to describe our experiences and to what extent language helps construct versions of reality (Willig, 2008).

The exploratory nature of the question implied the need to situate the study in a qualitative research paradigm. This paradigm has at its heart, the holistic analysis of complex phenomena as they emerge through the research process, as opposed to having a-priori, firm definitions of hypotheses and related variables that are characteristic features of quantitative research (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). Qualitative research
also allows the analysis of real-life contexts without the need to manipulate or artificially control key variables. Camic et al. (2003) use the metaphor of a video for qualitative research, in that it should convey to the reader in vivid detail what it is like to experience some of the lived phenomena.

4.3 Generalizability in Qualitative Research

A discussion of the essential features of qualitative research would not be complete without considering the kind of claims that a researcher can make with qualitative findings, particularly where issues of generalizability are concerned. In these contexts, where the sample of participants is usually small, given that the emphasis is on drawing out the uniqueness and depth of the phenomena under research, it is helpful to think about “theoretical generalisation as opposed to empirical generalisation” (Dallos & Vetere, 2005, p. 44). This means that qualitative studies can offer tentative, middle-range theoretical frameworks, which readers can possibly connect with their contexts, especially if there are similarities between the readers’ and research contexts.

In addition, one can also argue that although we might not know how many people share a particular experience, once this particular experience has been highlighted through qualitative research, we can assume that it is shared in a particular culture or society and hence it has potential for generalizability (Willig, 2008). Nevertheless, assumptions of similarities within the same culture, and between cultures cannot be taken for granted and good qualitative studies give the readers ample details of the research context to make relevant comparisons (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). A description of the Maltese cultural context has been given in the Introductory Chapter and will be further elaborated upon in the Results and Discussion Chapter.

4.4 Why I chose Grounded Theory Methodology as a Strategy of Inquiry

In social science research including qualitative research, there needs to be coherence between the research question/s, the kind of phenomenon that the researcher wants to investigate, and the methodology that guides the study. In this sense, the
research question guides the choice of the methodology.

If one were to look at an overview of the different qualitative approaches and apply a simple classification system, one can argue that Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), grounded theory and narrative analysis all fall under the category of experiential epistemology (Lyons, 2007). So the three approaches could be potentially suitable to explore in more depth the participants’ understanding of their childhood domestic violence experiences.

With respect to a choice between IPA and grounded Theory, both have a broadly inductivist approach to research and both focus on an interpretive analysis of people’s subjective meanings (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2006; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, while the emphasis in an IPA study is the detailed description of the individual experiences and the process of meaning-making, grounded theory focuses more toward a conceptual explanatory level of a particular phenomenon and has in fact, been designed to illuminate, explore and help theorise about social/ relational processes (Creswell, 2012)

As has been highlighted earlier in the previous chapter, the first stage literature review seemed to point to an under-theorized gap about adults’ understanding of their childhood experiences of domestic violence. The extant literature does not guide practitioners enough in their interventions, when working with the complex dynamics underlying exposure to domestic violence. While the use of IPA as methodology would focus on the texture and the quality of these women’s experiences and would make a valid contribution to researchers and clinicians, it would not provide the theoretical and explanatory framework that would help practitioners to work with the dynamic processes in the family (Payne 2007).

In the same vein, the focus in narrative analysis is on the “story” and on keeping intact the sequence so that it can be interpreted (Reissman, 2008). There is in fact no attempt, again to inductively generate “stable concepts that can be used to theorise across cases” (Reissmann, 2008, p. 74). This then led to grounded theory as the methodology of choice for this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) opposed to using IPA or
narrative analysis.

Having given a rationale for the methodology of choice for this study, I will now give a definition of constructivist grounded theory. This will be supplemented by some reflections, illuminating how I have attempted to make sense of this approach.

### 4.4.1 Definition of constructivist grounded theory.

A clear definition of grounded theory methods or approach is that by Charmaz (2001, 2005), who has introduced a constructivist version of grounded theory and further developed the approach from its original founders of grounded theory, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967). She explains grounded theory methods as a set of inductive steps that successfully enable researchers to focus their data collection and to build inductive middle range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development.

By the use of the word “inductive”, Charmaz implies that the focus is on the emergence of new, contextualised theoretical explanations directly from the data, as opposed to an emphasis on a predominantly deductive approach, which is designed to hypothesis-test new theory, and apply existing theories to new data. A more thorough description of the defining features of this approach will follow.

According to Mills, Chapman, Bonner, and Francis (2007), constructivist grounded theory is Charmaz’s engagement with a post-modern critique of traditional grounded theory, where there is a moving away from the idea of the researchers as distant experts, to seeing them as being co-constructors of meaning with participants in the generation of data. According to Charmaz (2001), this approach places “priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of research and participants and the researcher’s relationships with participants” (p. 677). The data are no longer seen as objective facts that the researchers find “out there” if they carefully apply their methods but the researchers “enter and are

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8 A brief overview of the seminal steps in the development of grounded theory methodology through time is included in Appendix A (Volume 1)
affected by the participants’ world” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 678).

Charmaz also emphasises the importance of the researchers’ reflexivity in that if they are not reflexive, they risk giving “objective status” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 678) to their own unstated assumptions and interpretations, and will not be aware of how their presuppositions are affecting the research. Researchers reconstruct data into a theory reflecting on their own process and simultaneously ground the interpreted theory in the participants’ words.

Following Charmaz’ constructivist grounded theory, other grounded theory scholars have used her work as a launching pad for further developing a grounded theory methodology that is more explicitly underpinned by a postmodern epistemology and ontology. Some of these studies are Rennie’s (2000, 2006) work on grounded theory and methodical hermeneutics and Clarke’s (2003, 2005) situational analysis that both extends and goes beyond grounded theory (Morse et al., 2009).

As a systemic thinker and practitioner, I found most resonance with Charmaz’s (2006) version of understanding and doing grounded theory. Both systemic thinking and constructivist grounded theory have been influenced by constructivist epistemology (Dixon, 2007) and both give a lot of importance to the practitioner/researcher’s reflexivity (Dallos & Draper, 2010). This is the recognition that our own beliefs and assumptions influence our formulations about the individuals or families we are researching or seeing in therapy.

Another point of resonance with Charmaz’s work is her discussion that such a methodology may be used as a conduit for possible contribution to social justice research (Charmaz, 2005). This ties in with some of the values that I find most meaningful in my life as a person and a professional: being part of a process that helps create better societies and gives importance to ideas and actions concerning fairness, equity, individual and collective rights and obligations.

Ultimately, hearing about these women’s stories about their childhood
experiences of living in violence may lead to a contribution to new knowledge. However, the critical aim for me is that such a project leads to making a difference, even though a small one, to the professional services that such women and families receive as well as to the development of policy (I will discuss specific recommendations for practice and policy in the Discussion chapter).

Having presented the version of grounded theory that guided this study, I will now elaborate further the epistemological influences of this study, attempting further to explicate to myself and to the reader the philosophical influences of this study.

4.5 Epistemological and Ontological Underpinnings of This Study

In line with the constructivist underpinnings of Charmaz’s version of grounded theory, I would position myself within a contextual constructionist perspective (Madill, Jordon, & Shirley, 2000). This position which is on a continuum between naïve realism and radical relativism highlights the assumption that all knowledge is “necessarily contextual and standpoint dependent. This means that different perspectives generate different insights into the same phenomenon” (Willig, 2008, p. 153). This also implies that the emphasis is on capturing, as completely as is possible, the complexity of a particular phenomenon.

At the same time, I also subscribe to a critical realist position implying that as a researcher, I believe that it is possible to identify patterns of human behaviour that are useful to others to help them understand this behaviour (Dilks, Tasker, & Wren, 2013). It is realistic to the extent that the researcher endeavours to represent the participants’ viewpoints as faithfully as possible, representing their realities in all their complexity and diversity. This position also acknowledges that the representation of the data is a “representation of experience,... and not a replication of it” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 51). A radical constructionist position would in fact challenge the notion of representation itself. Interestingly, these two seemingly awkwardly-fitting positions of contextual constructionism and critical realism were referred to as an “epistemological tension” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003, p. 134). Qualitative researchers often have to
grapple with this “tension,” when they try to reconcile the creative aspect of the interpretive research process with the systematic rigour that is associated with a particular methodology.

It could also be argued that a purely social constructionist grounded theory perspective rather than a social constructivist approach would have to theorise more explicitly the role of language in the construction of categories, which in turn would mean engaging with the notion of “discourse” (Willig, 2008). Although in this study attention has been given to the words that the researcher and participants used to describe their interpretations, there was not an exclusive emphasis on the role of language such that one would find in a discourse or narrative analysis study.

Epistemologically this study also acknowledges resonance with feminist ethical concern about the issue of power and authority of the researcher and the tensions of doing research within a collaborative framework (Wilkinson, 1988; Stacey, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). All these scholars have written about the difficulties that challenge researchers to empower participants in the research process. The challenges regarding power and authority of the researcher do not stop when the field work stops but also permeate the writing process – “how and whether we can represent members of groups to which we do not ourselves belong – in particular, members of groups oppressed in ways we are not” (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996, p. 1). The debates are complex and difficult to reconcile; a more detailed discussion will follow in the section entitled “Ethical Issues”. But perhaps at this stage, I believe it is important to acknowledge that it is impossible to produce an authentic reflection of the “Other” and that one should strive to write about the participants’ words in a way that will make it amenable to important stake holders in the area of policy and practice to effect the necessary changes that will benefit the participants (Coyle, 1996).
4.6 Conclusion

After having highlighted the main philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory study, I will describe the research procedure that guided this study, including recruitment, the preliminary data collection steps, and the process of data collection and data analysis. I will also discuss the ethical dilemmas and constraints encountered and the criteria for supporting the rigour and quality of this study. The process of researcher’s reflexivity will be interwoven in the different sections and will also be discussed in further detail in a specific section on its own as part of the section on Credibility of the Study.
Chapter 5.0

Methods chapter

5.1 Orientation to the Chapter

The aim of this chapter is to present to the reader the details of the grounded theory study – the research design, the sample and sampling strategy, the concurrent data collection and analysis process, and to show how the research question developed as the research process. This chapter also includes the strategies used to enhance the credibility of the study. It also highlights some of the researcher’s ethical dilemmas and constraints while researching a sensitive topic.

5.2 The Design

Figure 1 shows the different phases of the grounded theory study. I used constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001, 2005) with some adaptation, as a guiding methodology of this study.

The research process included the following stages:

a) Pre-piloting the interview guide content and interview method with a purposive sample of three participants and subsequently interviewing the respective participants;

b) Concurrent data collection and analysis of interviews with 15 participants, including constant comparison and memo-taking; All the interviews, were conducted in Maltese and then translated to English, and coded in English. However, the last four interviews were not translated to English from Maltese. They were line-by-line coded in Maltese but subsequent coding was done in English

c) Second interviews with three participants, on theoretically-significant categories, making a total of 18 interviews; and
d) Credibility checks: three reflexivity interviews, two discussion groups with health and social care professionals working in the field of domestic violence and member checks with two participants.
Figure 1: Grounded theory study flow chart. Data collection and analysis process.
5.3 Research procedure

5.3.1 The participants. The sample consisted of 15 women (18 interviews) and these were between the ages of 20 and 43 years, with an average age of 28.5 years. They were well-functioning women, in paid employment, and had significant relationships in their lives. They had never been in a shelter for women with domestic violence issues but three - Anita, Geraldine and Carmen, had been in a children’s residential care facility in their teens to early adulthood. At the time of the interviews, none had a history of substance abuse.

The following table (Table 1) showing the participant demographic details conveys a picture of their varied background. All the participants’ names are pseudonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birth order</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1st of 3 siblings</td>
<td>Care worker in residential care</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2nd of 2</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1st of 4</td>
<td>Professional in caring profession</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2nd of 2</td>
<td>Sales executive</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1st of 3</td>
<td>Media executive</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the names have been changed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Separating and in a steady relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah*a</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 1 b</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 2 c</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next table (Table 2) illustrates the kind of interparental violence that the participants witnessed, whether it was mostly father-only physical and emotional assault, or mother-only physical and emotional assault, or the presence of mutually violent parents, according to the participants’ perceptions. The table also shows the kind of abuse they experienced on themselves as children and their stated position in terms of their wish to reconcile and/or forgive their parents.

This table helps situate further the sample to the reader, and recognises the different forms of intimate partner violence and the kind of child abuse that the participants experienced as children in their families.

The table shows that 13 out of 15 participants were exposed to physical violence perpetrated by the father on the mother. These 13 participants also experienced their parents being emotionally abusive to each other. For the remaining two participants, Farrah and Tori - Farrah stated that her parents were mostly engaged in emotionally abusing each other whilst in the case of Tori, she said that she had witnessed her parents’ incessant emotional abuse but had also been very afraid when she had one time seen her father threatening her mother with a gun\. The participants were also abused by their parents – all women except Tori, were maltreated by their father while six participants, were also abused by their mother. As can be seen from Table 2, Tori was severely emotionally and physically abused by the mother.

\* Although exposure to severe violence between parents is a much stronger predictor of criminal behaviour in the child than exposure to less severe violence, (Park, Smith, & Ireland, 2012), a single episode of violence, perceived as life-threatening can be just as detrimental to the child.
As has already been indicated in the Literature review Chapter, child abuse has been found to overlap significantly with interparental/interpersonal violence. Moreover, the table indicates that some of this child abuse was still ongoing at the time of the interview. This of course had important consequences on the relationship with the parents, especially the father. In such cases, there seemed to be a pattern of oscillation between cut-off, rage and a wish for connection from the part of the daughters towards the parent who was abusive. Thus one can see that these women were on different trajectories in terms of their witnessing and experiencing violence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Exposed to physical assault: father- only on mother; mother-only on father or mutually violent parents; Exposed to emotional violence</th>
<th>Experienced Physical and emotional abuse by father, on participant</th>
<th>Experienced Physical and/or emotional abuse by mother, on participant</th>
<th>Position on Reconciliation and Forgiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes - often sadistic physical and emotional violence from father towards mother; emotional violence from mother to father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse by father</td>
<td>Emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td>Reconciliation – good relationship with father and mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Yes, father-only physical assault and emotional violence</td>
<td>Physically abused by father; Retaliated with aggression during teens</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Does not want to reconcile with father; close relationship with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Current Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Yes, father-only physical assault; mutually emotionally violent parents</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Father–only physical and emotional assault.</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father; Physical and emotional abuse is still ongoing as an adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oscillating between feeling murderous rage, feeling guilty, cutting off from father and taking up opportunities to connect with him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Yes, physically abused by father; Retaliated with aggression during teens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical and emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reconciled with both (late) father and mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault leading to the mother’s murder</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father; Emotional abuse by father is ongoing as an adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oscillating between anger, disappointment and wanting to keep connection with father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault; Mother emotionally violent</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse and neglect by mother</td>
<td>Cut off from mother; keeps distant from father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Step-father only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severely physically and emotionally abused by step father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse and neglect by mother</td>
<td>No reconciliation with her (late) mother but would have liked mother to ask forgiveness and to hug her but mother did not do so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Father only physical assault</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Has given up relationship with father; close connection with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Witnessed father holding gun to mother; Mutual emotionally violent parents;</td>
<td>No abuse by father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse by mother</td>
<td>Attempting to build relationship with both parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Father's Behavior</td>
<td>Mother's Behavior</td>
<td>Current Feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Father-only emotional assault on mother</td>
<td>Severe physical and emotional assault by father</td>
<td>Reconciled with father during his terminal illness before he died; good relationship with mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severe physically and emotionally abused by father; Emotional abuse is ongoing</td>
<td>Cut off from father but does take up opportunities to connect; angry with both parents for what she had to go through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severely physically and emotionally abused by father;</td>
<td>Cut off from father. Close relationship with mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Father-only physical assault; parents mutually emotionally violent</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No longer angry with father and has developed empathy for him but is not close to him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Type of Abuse</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Father's Abuses</td>
<td>Mother's Abuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Oscillating between cut off and connection with father; deep down wishes for a connection but keeps her distance to protect herself; good relationship with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault on mother</td>
<td>Severely physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Cut off from father but does take up opportunities to connect; angry with both parents for what she had to go through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Yes - often sadistic physical and emotional violence from father towards mother; emotional violence from mother to father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse by father</td>
<td>Emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td>Reconciled with both her parents; has a more understanding relationship with father than with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Oscillating between cut off and connection with father; deep down wishes for a connection but keeps her distance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reference to definitions of physical, emotional, and sexual violence have been made in the Introductory Chapter*
The next table (Table 3) also gives another possible viewpoint of the participants’ trajectory in terms of psychologically processing and deconstructing their experiences through support. The table shows who was currently attending psychotherapy or other alternative forms of therapy at the time of the interview, who had attended psychotherapy in the past, and who had had no psychotherapy. In this sub category, Anita, Carmen and Rose had significant relationship with their mentors at work, while Claire was given a few names of professionals from whom she could seek a service when she indicated an interest to do so, after the interview.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently in psychotherapy or alternative form of therapy(^a)</th>
<th>Attended psychotherapy in the past 4yrs</th>
<th>No psychotherapy</th>
<th>Mentoring relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Anita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika</td>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Like Reike, yoga and meditation
5.3.2 Recruitment of participants. Participants were recruited through health and social care professional networks. I asked colleagues who were family therapists and/or psychologists working at Appogg, whether they knew of adult women who had childhood experiences of domestic violence, and who had grown up in families where there was fear (Pearson, Hester, Harwin, & Abrahams, 2007) either through their work at Appogg or through their private practice work.

Given the potential for participants becoming distressed and re-traumatized whilst recalling their experiences, especially if the interviews re-evoked an early trauma memory that was unprocessed, the protection of the research participants was kept foremost in my mind (British Psychological Society Code of Ethics, 2010). I thus opted to interview women11 who were in paid employment and who had supportive networks, including the professionals who referred them.

The potential participants could either be currently in contact with the said professional or could have been in contact with the professional in the past. Out of a sense of collegiality and ethical responsibility, the health and social care professionals also accepted to be available if the participant requested to make contact with him or her, after the research interview.

The decision to recruit through professionals and to recruit women with supportive networks was informed by literature which showed social support often buffered domestic violence victims from developing anxiety and depression (Carlson, McNutt, Choi, & Rose, 2002) and that positive social reactions, for example from someone validating one’s experience as a victim of domestic violence, is associated with psychological health benefits (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014).

The decision to recruit through health and social care professionals limited the availability of participants. But as the data collection and analysis process progressed, it became increasingly apparent that it was important that participants had the opportunity to further discuss issues such as memories of trauma experiences that might have arisen.

11 The rationale as to why women participants were chosen was given in the literature review chapter.
in the interview, if they desired to, due to the interventive effect of the questions (Burck, 2005). It was important that these professionals were the safety nets for the participants, and if needed, they could provide a safe and therapeutic context where the participants could process the research interview (see section 5.7 on Ethical issues for a more comprehensive discussion).

Three participants, Claire Anita and Carmen were the only participants who were recruited through word of mouth or through snowball sampling through another participant. Both Anita and Carmen had significant relationships with their mentors at work and felt they were able to talk about their interview experiences with these people should they have needed to do so.

5.3.3 The interview as a data collection tool: Its strengths and limitations.

Payne (2007) outlines how interviews, group discussions and focus groups are suitable data collecting tools in a grounded theory study. Group discussions are typically used in group settings such as schools and are a cost-effective way to collect data from many participants. During focus group interviewing, participants are encouraged to interact with one another so that different views can be elicited.

I chose to use in-depth interviewing as the main data-collecting tool given that this provides the framework for open-ended, in-depth, directed conversation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In-depth interviewing also gives the participant the opportunity to talk at length about an aspect of life about which the participants have substantial experience. The interviewer also has the flexibility to follow the participants’ stories, picking up and pursuing themes, which seem significant to the participants and which then become important to address hypotheses and to fill in the conceptual gaps.

According to Charmaz (2001), in-depth qualitative interviewing fits well with a grounded theory analysis and, at first glance, this data collecting procedure seems to be full of advantages. At the same time, if one reflects about the number of inherent assumptions that are made when using interviewing as a data-collecting tool, one realises that this approach has a number of issues that the researcher needs to keep in mind.
Hollway and Jefferson (2007, p. 11-12) succinctly summarise these assumptions about the research participant, as a person who: (a) shares meaning with the researcher, (b) is knowledgeable about him or herself (his or her actions, feelings and relations), (c) can access the relative knowledge accurately and comprehensively (that is, has accurate memory), (d) can convey that knowledge to a stranger listener, and (e) is motivated to tell the truth.

Such assumptions imply that the researcher cannot take it for granted that the participants are hearing the questions through the same meaning-framework as that of the interviewer and thus meanings need to be clarified through prompts, when necessary. In addition, one can argue that given the different experiences of witnessed and experienced violence that the participants went through, and the different kind of supportive networks that they had, the women were at different points on the continuum of understanding and processing their experiences. At the time of the interview, some might have reached a clear understanding of why they experienced or felt things as they did whilst others might not have had this understanding and this might have affected what they talked about. The use of in-depth interviewing makes the assumption that people can reflect on their own and on other people’s assumptions, and that this can be done in a straightforward manner. But as Honein (2013) says, “interviews will never produce the desired results, if the story itself did not already exist within the participant” (p. 124). Engaging in interviewing of this kind makes one realise that the assumptions that were stated above certainly need to be unpacked.

Hollway and Jefferson (2007) also speak about the “intersubjective defences against anxiety” (p. 20) that can be produced in the interview context in relation to sensitive topics, that is some participants might feel the need, perhaps unconsciously to minimise or disguise some of their feelings to protect themselves from feeling distressed or from feeling shamed. In the same way, these women may have felt a need to position themselves (Harré &Moghaddam, 2003) as women who have undergone painful struggles but who also have been and are resilient, in order to be helpful to the researcher. This of course, does not belie the fact that these women may see themselves as resilient
in their daily life. But one can argue that in this research context, this resilient position may have been perceived as being more valuable as compared to other positions where they feel less competent, more depressed and less hopeful. All this had implications on their ability and extent to which they could access childhood memories and talk about them. Thus a researcher needs to be cognizant both of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular data-collecting tool especially when this is the main source of information.

5.3.4 The interview guide: The semi-structured interview. I chose to construct a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B, Volume 1), adapted from the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996) and also included “reflexive and circular” questions (Tomm, 1987, 1988) informed by my training as a systemic psychotherapist.

The AAI is a one-hour long, 20 question interview which taps in adult representation of attachment by assessing general and specific recollections from persons’ childhood. The interview transcript then is coded on the quality of the discourse (for example: over all coherence) and content. Depending on these characteristics, the transcripts are classified according to four attachment patterns: (a) autonomous, (b) dismissing, (c) preoccupied, and (d) unresolved/disorganised (Hesse, 2008).

In this research study, the AAI was not used to code the participants’ transcripts according to their attachment categories but some of the questions were used to help individuals relate their childhood experiences such as their relationship with their parents. Through these questions, and similarly to what happens in the AAI, persons were also asked to evaluate the influences of these experiences on their development and current functioning (Hesse, 2008). Thus the AAI questions were seen to fit well with this study’s research question-where I was asking women to reflect retrospectively on their childhood experiences of domestic violence and to talk about their understanding of the impact on these experiences on their individual development and on their relationships.

“Reflexive” questions were included to enable the participants to reflect on themselves and on their relationships in different contexts and between different levels of
meaning. “Circular” questions were also asked to highlight the possible patterns and connectedness of events as well for the researcher to be able to follow feedback, where the reply to one question influences the next question and connections are made between one question and the next (Burck, 2005).

Thus as can be seen in Appendix B, (Volume 1) the first set of questions focused on general description of the relationships with parents during the interviewees’ childhood. I then asked the participants to describe specific episodes which worried them as children and which parent or other significant figure comforted them and were available to take care of them. I also asked them whether they remembered how as children they made sense of what was happening to them, then. The participants were asked about their current relationships and what kind of link, if any, they made between these childhood experiences and their development as adults. I also asked them in what ways, if any, they might see that these childhood experiences affected their current relationships.

Upon looking at the interview guide, one might remark that the number of questions might be extensive? One might also wonder whether the first questions could have focused on their current relationships, and then their childhood experiences?

5.3.5 Pre-piloting the interview guide

To answer some of the above questions, I pre-piloted\(^\text{12}\) the interview guide both for methodological purposes given that the research-topic was under-theorized and also for ethical reasons given the topic was a sensitive one. The interview guide was pre-piloted in terms of the structure of the interview and also for the content of the questions. The first three participants were asked whether they would feel more comfortable with an unstructured interview where they would be given space to tell their story according to how they felt comfortable or whether they preferred our interview to be guided by the questions in the interview schedule. I also asked them which questions they would find comfortable to answer, which questions they think would distress them, and which

\(^{12}\) This section has already been published in a paper: Sammut-Scerri, Abela, & Vetere (2012)
questions they would think are redundant. I also asked them about the sequence of the questions and which they would feel better to start with.

All the three participants remarked that they felt that the interview questions provided some kind of “structure” which helped them feel less overwhelmed when they were talking about their experiences. It seemed that having a series of questions as conversation guide helped create a context of “safe uncertainty” (Mason, 1993) which both acknowledged the degree of risk that the participants might have felt to speak about their experiences and also acknowledged the participants’ sense of control over the interview process. I also hypothesised that the questions helped them organise the telling of their story. But this was done in a way that was respectful of their pace. Although the interview schedule was long, the questions were not asked in a definite sequence but they followed the feedback of the participants’ story as they narrated one aspect to another. As an interviewer, it was helpful to almost memorise the questions by heart and to ask them in the appropriate time according to where the participants were at in the story. My experience in interviewing individuals in a clinical context was in fact an important resource that I could draw from. I could let the interview flow and follow the lead of the participants.

One of the three participants told me that she appreciated the fact that I did not constrain her experience, just like violence had constrained her, with my questions. The fact that I gave her space to tell me her story in the way that it came to her, and that I guided her with the questions, resulted in a conversation that was useful to both of us. In terms of the sequence, the three participants told me that it was important for them to tell me what they had gone through as children, otherwise it would have been difficult for me to understand who they were today and to understand their present relationships. I realised that for them their childhood experiences were an important context, which had meaning for their present. After the initial interviews, I realised that a briefer interview guide was more representative of the kind of questions that were guiding my conversations with the participants and thus I changed the interview guide (see Appendix C, Volume 1).
5.4 A Focus on the Data Collection Process

At the pre-piloting stage, the participants not only commented about the structure of the interview guide and the nature of the questions but they asked me whether they could proceed with their story. They felt that the questions were appropriate, meaningful and although the topic was at times upsetting, they thought that it was important to proceed. We continued with our conversation and thus I used the first three interviews as data. Given that the pre-piloting stage went well, I continued with the interviewing process.

All the interviews, except one, were held in Maltese. One interview was held in English, as the participant was a foreigner who was married to a Maltese. The interviews were an average of one hour and a half hours long and took place either in my office at the University of Malta campus or in a rented office in a private practice setting (where there were no safety issues) according to what was most convenient to the participants’ schedule. The interviews were also recorded with permission, on a small digital recorder. During the interviews, I also took down a few key words as a memory aid, being attentive not to get distracted from what the interviewee was saying.

5.4.1 Transcription. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including the interviewer’s questions and the participants’ replies. Pauses, within and between speakers, and extended pauses and sounds were noted (e.g. ahhhh). Emphasis on words was also noted as well as non-verbal language (e.g giggles, angry tone, sadness). These guidelines were adapted from Drew (1995). The data were also anonymised in terms of names, local and temporal references (Flick, 2014).

I transcribed the first few interviews myself. Each interview transcript was an average of 45 pages long, single-spaced and took an average of 20 hours per interview to transcribe. Since the transcription process was very time-consuming, I asked for help with transcription from three trusted clerical staff working at the University of Malta where I am employed, after making sure that they did not know the interviewed person. This was done in order to safeguard the participants’ anonymity and so that
confidentiality is respected. After the transcriptions were completed, I re-listened to the tapes and carefully checked for errors and omissions. The transcribers also drew my attention to any unintelligible sections and these were amended accordingly. The transcripts were also compared with my field notes to further ensure their accuracy.

5.4.2 Translating the transcripts: First steps in the analysis process. I translated all the interviews, except the last four, from Maltese to English, which again was a very time-consuming exercise and then engaged in the analysis process in English. The rationale for this was to create an audit trail for the analysis and also for the supervisors to be able to follow my work.

In translating the interviews, I aimed for a conceptual equivalent of a word or phrase and not for a literal translation, keeping in mind the linguistic variations and nuances and also attempting to manage the negotiation between the Maltese and English culture (Tarozzi, 2011). I also asked a Maltese University English lecturer to translate an excerpt of one transcript back to Maltese to check the accuracy of the translation, a process which is known as back-translation (WHO, 2014).

Overall, I struggled when translating swear words, which at times I felt were untranslatable! For example, I found it hard to find the emotional equivalent of the anger, the defiance, the sacrilegious and the aggression that are connoted in the Maltese swear words uttered against God and Holy Mary, in English swear words. Perhaps it is because I am not a native English speaker; perhaps the cultural difference is another explanation. My supervisors (one English and the other Maltese) and I continually discussed these differences and we came to “reconcile” them by agreeing to include the literal translation into English, adding an explanation and keeping the Maltese translation in brackets too (Fathi, 2013).

Many times, I also struggled with finding the rights words that appropriately conveyed the callous cruelty and the sadistic aggression that the participants described to me. It seemed to me that the words “abuse” and “violence”, “trauma” and “being traumatised” had become so much part of every day language that I felt that the words
that I was choosing were bland and minimising of the participants’ experience. This raised ethical issues for me as a researcher regarding my responsibility to faithfully represent as validly as possible the terror and the suffering that these participants went through as children. At one point, I found it helpful to search for different words that mean abuse and violence. It helped me extend my vocabulary of words that could describe the horror and the suffering that these women went through as children.

Another explanation for my struggle was that I too was probably trying to minimize the impact of the emotional trauma on my self as a researcher (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Laimputtong, 2007) and precisely the process of translating the stories to English took away some of emotional texture that was in the Maltese version (Schrauf, 2000; Tehrani & Vaughan, 2009). My supervisors challenged me not to default to formal, academic and hence more neutral English and to stick to the emotionally intense expression of the language. I must admit that this struggle kept surfacing at intervals, not only at the translation phase but also at analysis phase and I kept being reminded of this process. I also became aware of the frustration that I felt with the lack of coherence and fragmented nature of some of the interviews that perhaps was reflective of the fact that some participants had not processed extensively their traumatic experiences (Mundorf & Paivio, 2011). Thus I remained mindful not to change the format and make the text more coherent, both in the translation and in the analysis and use the participants’ words as much as possible. Naturally, as the data collection and analysis progressed, my interpretation was also given space but care was taken that as a researcher I kept continually grounded to the emerging data.

As mentioned above, the last transcripts were not translated into English. This was done both for comparison purposes and also so as not to further prolong the data analysis process.

In terms of audit trail, my Maltese supervisor still read the transcripts but during our 3-way supervision meetings, we discussed the initial codes, focused and axial codes, as well as my field notes. Whilst working with the Maltese transcripts, it was easier to be
closer to the participants’ experiences. The interviews came alive more readily, given that I was reading it in the language that it was spoken and also because it was my native language. It was also easier to line-by-line code. However, for more abstract coding, I preferred coding in English, concurring with Tarozzi (2011) that “English is a more conceptualising language….and is more suitable to express complex and tricky categories with synthetic nomenclature (p. 171). As one can see, the process of translation needs to be problematized within a research context and being neutral is impossible (Fathi, 2013).

5.5 Continuing With the Grounded Theory Analysis Process

5.5.1 Line-by-line coding. After the translation was completed and re-checked against the transcript and against the audio-recording when necessary, I line-by-line coded the transcript, constructing a column for the transcript, a middle column for the line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence coding and the last column for the initial codes and for the writing of the memos (in italics) (see Appendix D, Volume 2 for an excerpt of line-by-line coding from Hannah’s transcript).

Initially, the temptation was to jump to the initial codes from the transcript directly, but in supervision, I was advised to continue with the line-by-line coding and to stay close to the data as much as possible. I realised that this allowed me to gain a closer look at what the participants were saying, what they struggled with and what was meaningful for them. It was also useful to follow Charmaz’s (2006) guidelines to use in vivo codes as these “preserve the participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (p. 55). I also tried to find words that captured the participants’ explicit and/or implicit actions and meanings, coding with gerunds to focus on processes.

Following the coding of the first interview, I looked for similarities and differences from within the interview – noting any changes in the codes and drawing hypotheses as to why this might be so. However, it was only after the line-by-line coding of four interviews that I felt I had enough data to engage substantially in the first process of constant comparison (see Appendix E, Volume 2 for a comparison between the first four interviews).
5.5.2 First level focused coding. At this point, I also attempted to take the data to a higher level through a 1st level focused coding process – trying to find “umbrella terms” through which I could categorise large amounts of data. I carried out this process together with my principal supervisor (AV). Printing each transcript on a different colour, we cut each initial code into individual pieces of paper with the corresponding excerpt of the transcript. We then placed these pieces on the floor and grouped similar codes together, mapping out the groups of codes for each interview (see Appendix F, Volume 2 for an example, for the first interview with Geraldine). Then I grouped the initial codes of these four interviews into initial categories as part of the first level focusing coding, as illustrated in the example in Appendix G (Volume 2).

From this point onwards, I conducted constant comparisons with the addition of each interview after completing line-by-line coding and focused coding with each subsequent interview (see Appendices H and I, Volume 2, for a write-up about the constant comparison process encompassing interviews one to six and including interviews one to nine - as per Figure 1).

These appendices hopefully illustrate how specific theoretical constructs started showing up in the data in consistent ways. For instance: (a) the persistence and intensity of family systems triangulation, of being involved physically and/or psychologically in the parental conflict, (b) the process of emotional cut-off and reconnection in the father-daughter relationship, (c) experiencing physical abuse from the father and sometimes from the mother too, (d) the sibling relationships and the continued significance of early sibling roles, (e) the impact of normative cultural expectations on family dynamics, (f) the concept of parentification: taking on and being constrained to parent their parents and their siblings at the expense of their own needs and pursuits, (g) the concept of forgetting childhood experiences to cope and remembering these experiences, with triggers, and (h) the fear of replicating the parental/family script and seeking ways to be different in their own relationships and families.

These tentative theoretical constructs were also shared with health and social care
professionals working in the domestic violence field in a discussion group organised by the Maltese Psychological Association. This was done as a form of credibility check and also for the peer debriefers to offer questions and suggestions for further analysis (see the section on Validity, later on in this chapter).

I also attempted to draft tentative diagrams of the relationships between different processes—for example, how the participants were talking about their process of understanding their childhood experiences and what helped and hindered their understanding according to their perceptions stated in the interviews. I also tried to map the changes in the family relationships that the women talked about, for example, the change in the relationship with their father across time. Theoretical ideas from trauma theory, such as the notions of “memory triggers”, trauma memories, affect regulation, protective strategies like hyper-activation or de-activation strategies started showing up as helpful sensitising ideas to connect the data to extant theory. Processes of change, Resilience and Developmental theory also started to emerge as being important.

I also tried to look at what could potentially be a core category. In the initial stages, the persistence of family systems triangulation that kept being mentioned by the participants led me to believe that this was an important process in these experiences of violence. With further analysis, I shifted to the process of “Living in danger, in fear and with unpredictability” as a higher category than family systems triangulation, notwithstanding the fact that family systems triangulation was and remained showing up as a significant process.

5.5.3 Theoretical sampling. Over the course of the research process, the data collection started to be more fine-tuned along these emerging theoretical constructs which then led to the second interviews of three participants: Geraldine, Donna and Marika (see Appendices J, K and L, Volume 1, for the interview guide of the second interview with the respective participants). These were done as part of the theoretical sampling in order to further illuminate some of these emerging theoretical constructs, especially the process of family systems triangulation, parentification, the father-daughter
relationship and the sibling relationship amongst others. I was interested in exploring whether the process of triangulation changed when the daughter had a close relationship with the mother and what happened in circumstances when the mother was abusive or neglectful. Also, what was the mechanism through which the daughter kept getting drawn into or drawing herself into the process of triangulation? How was the sibling relationship impacted by these experiences over time?

However, this was not the only form of theoretical sampling in the study. For example, in hypothesising about the impact of Maltese culture and the extent of this impact of the women’s experiences, I also interviewed Hannah who was raised in an Eastern European country, in order to obtain disconfirming evidence, and analysed her experiences. Interestingly, there were a lot of similarities between her experiences and that of Maltese women and thus I hypothesised that although the impact of culture is important, there are equally important similarities across cultures that potentially make the transferability of results possible.

The second interview with Geraldine took place three years after the first interview whilst that of Marika and Donna took place a year after. It was thus interesting to see how these women’s relationships and their understanding of their experiences changed over time. The data from the second interview did indeed help me to obtain “thickened description” (Geertz, 1973) about the theoretical constructs that were explored. The data between the first and second interviews were compared to each other and then also compared to the rest of the interviews as part of the grounded theory study.

5.5.4 The development of the research question. The more focused data collection led to the further fine-tuning of the data analysis as well as to the development of the research question. As was discussed earlier, the focus of the initial research question had been the women’s adult relationships and their understanding of how these had been impacted by their childhood experiences. However, as the research progressed with the interplay of the conversations with the participants about what was important for them, together with the emerging theoretically significant constructs and the influence of
the researcher’s sensitizing concepts, the main research question became the following as has been highlighted at the end of the first stage literature review:

a) What is the understanding of these adult women’s experiences of witnessing of domestic violence in the family that they grew up in?

The sub-research questions then became:

a i) What is their understanding of how such experiences and their relationship with their parents and siblings, their relationships with their partners and their children, now and then, might have influenced each other?

a ii) What is their understanding of how such experiences and their development might have influenced each other?

a iii) What is their perception of the strengths and sources of support that might have helped them in their development?

This is in line with what Charmaz (2006) refers to as grounded theory researchers needing to “evaluate the fit between their initial research interests and their emerging data… not force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data…..[but] follow leads that we define in the data” (p. 17). Thus, I first started my research, interested in how the women understood the impact of their childhood experiences on their development and adult relationships. But as I interviewed the participants, they felt that it was crucial for them that I understand in detail what they went through in their childhood in terms of witnessing and experiencing violence at home. I felt both compelled and engaged to explore the rage, the horror and suffering that they went through but I also listened to the great attachment that they had to their father and mother in the context of the abuse, juxtaposed with each other, something that I had not anticipated to find so strongly.

5.5.5 Continuation of the grounded theory data analysis: Axial coding. The next phase of coding: the “axial coding” phase involved going through the focused
categories and drawing further analytic categories at a more abstract level of coding (see Appendix M, Volume 2 for an example). In this phase, it was challenging to find a balance between keeping the richness of the emotions, thoughts and experiences and also to attempt to take the data to a more abstract level. For example, my first attempt at the following category read “Losing one’s relationship with father as she grew up”. After supervision, it was amended to “Feeling distant from father and losing the relationship that she had with father as a child, as she started to understand more what was happening at home and siding with mother against the father.” Although the amended categories seemed long, I realised, with hindsight, that these categories possessed enough detail to allow yet further abstraction to take place.

5.5.6 Theoretical coding. As stated earlier, the next phase of coding-Theoretical coding—moved the analysis to a yet, a more abstract, theoretical level with the following categories emerging as significant processes:

1. Childhood experiences of love, terror and violence: extreme contradictions as a context for understanding adult development and adult relationships;

2. Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult: extreme coping and extreme consequences in the midst of some support;

3. Processes or Turning points that help bring about change and/or foster resilience; and

4. Adult women with childhood experiences of violence: Legacies of traumatic experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience – a context for understanding self, relationships with family members, with intimate partners and with one’s children.

Refer to Appendix N, Volume 2 for an excerpt of the axial codes under the tentative categories one to four above, including the axial codes leading to the core category below. Appendix N is a document showing some of the work-in-progress where I started exploring both the axial codes and the tentative relationship between them.
Theoretical coding was a lengthy process involving continually going back and forth between the theoretical codes, the interviews’ axial codes, focused codes, initial codes and to the transcripts themselves. In the process, this involved re-checking the translations, the emotional tone of the words, where necessary, and making sure that the meaning of the words was consistent with that of the words in the interview. In some ways, it was like looking at the data with a fresh pair of eyes.

If, for example, an important process was identified or if a particular code for a process was fine-tuned, then it was important to return to the earlier coding and even to the interview transcripts themselves to check if this “new” code better captured what the participants were saying.

The link with extant theory was also continually made, as well as reflections about which researcher’s assumptions and experiences were impacting the data analysis and how. (More detail will be given in the self-reflexivity section further on.)

5.5.7 The core category. When all the data were analysed at the different levels, the category: “Living with contradictions, double-binds, binds and dilemmas” kept emerging as a core process/category that had the potential to explain all the other processes underlying these women’s interviews. As a core category it incorporated the participants’ struggles and dilemmas to hold together discrepant, intense emotions and experiences, of living with, loving and depending on someone who abused them. This process of “living continually with contradictions”, itself hindered the understanding of this process and made it difficult for the participants to comment on.

The other significant processes that emerged from the data and were part of the Core Category were:

1. Being triangulated in the parental conflict, and parentification as a related process and relational process

2. The traumatogenic effect of the violence on the child and adult

13 The concept of Theoretical saturation will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.
development

3. Turning points/ Developmental processes that fostered change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption.

These other significant processes then, incorporated in them the women’s perspectives of how they understood their relationship with their family of origin both as children and as adults, how they understood the trauma legacies and survival strategies in their experiences and also what they had found helpful throughout their experiences. I will discuss in more detail these processes making links with extant literature in the following chapter.

5.6 Critique of Grounded Theory as a Methodology

The strength of a grounded theory approach lies in its ability to generate theory about processes and enables researchers to conduct contextually sensitive research (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1996). The step-by-step analysis, particularly the line-by-line coding helps the researcher to conduct a close reading of the data and to carry out an in-depth analysis. The constant movement back and forth between the data collection and the analysis also ensures systematic rigour. It is a rich methodology but it is also demanding of the researcher, both in terms of time and researcher’s skills.

It was indeed a challenge to cope with the enormity of the data. For instance, each interview yielded an average of a 45-page transcript. In terms of grounded theory research skills, one of the skills which I have referred to earlier is the ability to be both immersed in the participants’ world view and also be able to interrogate the data about the processes that are significant. This was a challenging endeavour more so, when trying to listen to and understand the horrific stories of abuse that also involved a murder. Some of the stories were re-told in a fragmented manner, which also made them difficult to follow.

Grounded theory analysis also has been critiqued by research scholars as fragmenting the participants’ stories as stated earlier. In this respect, I did find that the
“fracturing of the data” (Reissman, 2008) took away from the flow of the story and took away from the context in which it was said. This was also why it was important that the focused and axial codes could not be neutral in tone, drained from the intensity and importance of the women’s experience nor too succinct, as otherwise their essential meaning would have been lost. I also did not find this approach helpful to highlight the changes of processes over time as I found it difficult to distinguish between what the participants said had happened in their past and what they were talking about as happening in the present unless I specifically indicated this in the code using words like “shifting from …..to….” which again meant lengthy phrases for coding. In fact, this makes sense as the gerund in English has no tense and gives no indication of the time of the action that it refers to.

The last challenge that I want to mention is the need to be continually attentive to the balance between the objectivist and constructivist aspect of grounded theory and to continually interrogate what is going on between the researcher and the interviewee and how these dynamics are influencing the interviewing process.

5.7 Ethical Issues

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the nature of interventive interviewing (Burck, 2005), the ethical principle of responsibility for research participants and doing no harm (The British Psychological Society, 2010) was uppermost in my mind. I was also crucially aware that the women were being recruited to contribute in my PhD research—thereby doing it for my benefit; this was my departing stance. It is in this spirit that I opted to interview women who were high functioning, who were in employment and who had supportive networks, as has been indicated earlier. It is also for this reason that I recruited mainly through health and social care professionals who could, at the first instance, approach women who they thought would not be too vulnerable to participate. These professionals could also provide support to the participants should our interview raise issues such as re-evocation of an early trauma memory that needed further

14 Some of this material was published in an article by Sammut Scerri, Abela, and Vetere (2012).
processing beyond the interview.

These professional colleagues as referrers had the option to refer potential participants either from their private practice, or from the main Maltese social welfare agency where they worked. For this purpose, ethical clearance was first obtained not only from the University of Surrey and University of Malta research ethics committees but also from the research ethics committee of the Foundation of Social Welfare Services (see Appendices O, P, Q, Volume 1 for the approval given by the respective committees).

For recruitment purposes, the referrers were first sent a copy of the Interview schedule (Appendix C) so that they could personally evaluate whether the women that they had in mind would be suitable participants and also to assess the nature of the questions and how in their opinion these would impact the women. Once the potential participants indicated their willingness to participate to the referrer, the professionals either passed on my contact details so that the potential participants would contact me by phone or email or the referrers passed on to me the women’s contact details if they preferred me to make contact with them.

It was also important to give participants the opportunity to give their consent not only once but also at different stages of the research process. Initially, I asked the referrer to discuss the information sheet (Appendix R, Volume 1), the interview guide and the consent form (Appendix S, Volume 1) with the potential participants. Once I got in touch with interested participants, I also discussed with them the interview guide and the information sheet if the referrer had not already done this. This was done before the interviews were held in order to give the participants more control over what they would talk about. Thus, the participants had different opportunities to think about their participation and to decline if they so wished. I also requested permission to record the interviews and to transcribe them with the condition that the recordings would be kept safe, stored in a password-protected document on my personal computer and that all information kept will have identifying details removed, safeguarding confidentiality and guaranteeing anonymity.
During the research interviews, I was also very aware of issues related to the fact that besides being a researcher, I was also a trained clinician. I was mindful to pursue aspects of conversation that were guided by the research schedule to which the participants had consented. In reflecting upon my stance, I realised that there were instances with one of the participants Rose, where some of my research questions remained unanswered both because she found it very difficult to remember what life was like when she was young and also because during the interview, I felt very strongly at an intuitive level that she was feeling vulnerable. Moreover, I was also aware that she still lived with her parents and that after the interview she had to go back to her parents and to her abusive father.

As a clinician, I wondered whether Rose could not remember because she had repressed some memories because of the traumatic experiences that she went through (McFarlane & van der Kolk, 2007) and I opted to take a cautious position and not continue prompting her, privileging her well-being rather than completing the research interview. Instead, I asked her to pick and choose which questions she felt able to answer. She replied that she still preferred me to guide her in the questions. However, when she continued presenting me with vague answers to some of the questions, I did not prompt further.

One can argue, as one research colleague pointed out to me, that Rose might have not answered the questions because she could not understand the actual wording of the questions. However in the debriefing part of the interview, at the end, where I left some time for participants to ask questions and to comment on the interview, and the kind of questions which they might have found difficult to answer, Rose did not state that the questions were difficult. However, she did re-iterate that she does find it difficult to remember aspects of her childhood.

At the end of the interviews, all the research participants were debriefed as per section in the interview guide “Reflections on the interview”. This was done to help the interviewees back to a normal state of arousal from the intensity of the research interview.
I also asked participants’ verbal consent to contact their referrer as part of giving them feedback about how the interview went and about how they were doing. This did not involve disclosing details of the research interview but it was part of giving feedback to the referrers about any distress that the participants might have felt in the interview, to ensure that continuity of care takes place. A day or two after the interviews, I also emailed or texted the participants, thanking them for the participation and inquiring about how they were doing. All the participants appreciated this.

As the interviews progressed, the participants gave me feedback that our conversations helped them make links between their past and their present. In the interviews, the research participants said that they also had the opportunity to talk about things that they could not talk about with many people. One participant also told me that our interview helped her to take a stand with someone who was abusing her emotionally in the context of an intimate relationship as she had realised that what she was experiencing was reminiscent of what she went through as a child. Another participant told me that she had felt it her duty to participate in the interview as she hopes that through her participation, others in similar situations would not have to suffer what she went through and for the length of time that she did. She hoped that this research would help contribute bring a change in the services offered to children and families.

I was thus reminded that one cannot see these participants solely as “victims” in need of protection as this, in effect, has the potential to perpetuate their victimhood. But as a researcher, one also needs to bring to the fore participants’ qualities like altruism, activism and a sense of agency and in this way, participating in this research would also be a form of empowerment for these women.

Finally, a discussion about ethical issues would not be complete without considering the emotional impact of the interviews on the researcher (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000). As already highlighted, I was taken aback at how emotionally draining and demanding the interviews were, especially the initial interviews. The narratives of callous cruelty and instrumental violence were very difficult to listen to and the
fragmented nature of some of the experiences compounded the difficulties to continually attend to the participants. Sometimes, I felt emotionally exhausted after about an hour of listening to one traumatic event after the event. After one particularly difficult interview where the participant described how her father had premeditated the murder of her mother, I ended up dreaming about her and her family, which I experienced as quite distressing.

To manage this emotional impact, it was helpful to write about my thoughts and feelings in my research diary (Pennebaker & Graybeal, 2001) as it helped me to reflect about my emotions rather than just experience them. I also found it helpful to leave enough space between interviews to process any distressing information. Finally, having the opportunity to discuss these issues in the safety of the supervisory network and hearing about how they too found it distressing to read certain issues was invaluable—both because of the support provided to manage the anxieties, emotional distress and ethical dilemmas that emerge whilst doing this kind of research and also as a way of offering a thinking space—a “stable third” (Cooper & Vetere, 2005, p. 17) to explore these tensions.

5.8 Credibility of the study

5.8.1 Self-reflexivity. It can be argued that engaging in a self-reflexive process is a way of increasing the integrity and trustworthiness of the research process, through making transparent how the researcher’s motivations, theoretical assumptions, training and biases have impacted the data collection and data analysis process (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). In order to facilitate this process, I kept a research journal and I also had three self-reflexivity interviews where two different colleagues interviewed me in order to push my thinking forward, and to give me feedback. One colleague conducted the first reflexivity interview. A different colleague interviewed me during the subsequent two reflexivity interviews. The regular 3-way Skype call meetings with my supervisors were also invaluable to help me articulate my position in relation to the research process. What follows are the themes that emerged from the interviews, from the research journal and
from the supervision meetings.

As stated earlier in the section entitled “Pre-piloting the interview guide”, when I started interviewing the participants, the participants’ focus shifted to their childhood experiences rather than their adult relationships. I later wondered whether this happened as a result of what the participants felt I needed to know from their past, to understand who they were in the present. I also speculated whether their stories reflected their back-and-forth recall of trauma memories process between the past and the present? I also wondered about the impact of my process of having become a mother close to the time when I started my PhD and the sensitivity that I had around that subject?

At the same time, when I realised that my interviewees and I were spending all the interview time talking almost exclusively about their childhood experiences, I pondered about what was going on and agonised whether I should have a second interview. Was this focus on childhood also because of the sequence of the questions? Was it because of my personal interest or theoretical bias? However, when I specifically asked the participants whether they would have preferred me starting from the current relationships and then gone to their childhood, as stated earlier, they said that I needed to know what they went through first.

With hindsight I think that the participants were telling me that this is what was important for them and this was how they were re-telling their story in our interview. The stories in fact were so rich, encompassing narratives of trauma, resilience and growth, that I was fascinated by the depth in which the participants were processing and talking about their family of origin relationships in the context of violence. Whilst they talked about the horror and abuse that they witnessed and experienced which I anticipated, even though it was hard listening to these stories, I was also shocked to hear about the love and the connection with the father, although he was a perpetrator. It was as if, the two aspects were contradictory and it was hard to keep the two notions together. I think that this is also to some extent what these women felt, that is the difficulty or the impossibility of keeping two intense contradictory emotions together about a significant person and to
also try to reflect about it. This is, in fact, where having systemic training was so helpful because it provided the framework to hold polarities together.

I was also intrigued by the women’s perception of their mother as a weak person who had not protected them against the father and even worse for some of them, had emotionally abused them in a way that they had experienced as being more harmful than the father’s physical violence. It was difficult for me to understand emotionally the mother’s utter helplessness that did not let her protect her children. I linked this to my vision of my mother who is a strong, powerful woman, and who goes out of her way for her children. But then, my father was never physically violent with my mother—both my parents have in the past (and in the present), verbally abused each other in the context of conflict but there was never the kind of horrific physical violence, emotional abuse and neglect that some of these women experienced.

Despite the fact that there has never been violence in my family, I found myself identifying with the processes of family systems triangulation and also the process of parentification, processes which I too had experienced. These links made in the context of the reflexivity interviews helped me widen my conceptualisation of these processes and also made me ask the participants more widely. For example, being triangulated in the conflict between my parents was also my way of actively trying to have influence on their continual arguments, which for me were unpleasant and distressing. Thus I asked the research participants about this and when the participants also confirmed that this was their way of stopping their parents’ arguments, I shifted my perception of the children from victims to seeing them also as having agency. I also started asking about possible benefits of parentification and not just assume that the process of parentification is a negative experience just like I did.

It was also fascinating to explore and learn more about the sibling relationships. I had anticipated siblings supporting each other rather than being violent with each other as emerged in some interviews. Moreover, I was surprised by the fact that when the sibling who got involved in the parental conflict exited the family, another sibling took over the
Initially when I started interviewing I thought that as adults, the women would have taken compassionate positions towards their parents and forgiven them for what they had done, understanding their vulnerability. However, my assumption had to be revised. The trauma triggers, the continual violence in some cases, the need to protect themselves through deactivation strategies like shutting down their feelings and the inability of some of the participants to name their childhood experiences as witnessing or experiencing violence all came into the way of the participant’s processing their experiences. This brought to the fore the great difficulty of processing such experiences without someone else’s help.

In terms of my relationship with the data in the process of analysis, I was continually cognitively stimulated to explore further, to the extent that I felt that the vastness of the topic could lend itself to a lifetime pursuit and not just seven years! On the other hand, it was not easy managing the enormity of the data. Despite the extent of the data, one can argue that it is still a small study and it was difficult to let go of the idea of coming up with a theoretical model. Nevertheless, I am confident that the findings, which will be presented in detail in the next chapter, have the potential to contribute to the theoretical and practice literature of those scholars and practitioners working in the domestic violence field and who have the interest of families at heart. I will now outline and discuss in more detail the approaches to validity that I was attentive to in this study.

5.8.2 Credibility checks: Discussion groups with health and social care professionals in the field. I conducted two discussion groups with health and social care professionals working within the domestic violence field. The first group also included 25 professionals from the child protection and the forensic field. In the first group, I presented the preliminary findings from the analysis of the first 12 interviews out of a total of 18 interviews.

The second credibility check was carried out after the ground theory analysis was completed. This group was conducted with four experienced psychotherapists and
psychologists: two female psychologists and family therapists, one male family therapist and one male gestalt psychotherapist. The four practitioners had experience working with children and adult survivors of domestic violence and the two male therapists had experience with working with men who were abusive to their partners in heterosexual relationships. In the second credibility check, I presented the final results of the study including an audit trail showing the link between the focused codes, the axial codes, the key categories and the core category.

During both credibility checks, I asked for the professionals’ comments, that is, whether the findings made sense to them and whether they thought they were useful findings for their practice.

5.8.3 Credibility checks: Member checks. Following the completion of the analysis, I also took back the final results to two of the participants who were interested to share with me their comments. I asked these participants whether the results and the way I presented them, as illustrated more fully in figure 2 in the next chapter and tables 4 to 9 were valid representations of their experiences.

The results of both types of credibility checks will be presented in Part Three of the following chapter, the Results chapter.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined in detail the methodological approach used to address and explore the research questions guiding this study. The chapter also presented the research procedures used including information about the recruitment, and iterative process of data collection and data analysis. The chapter included a discussion of the ethical procedures used and the approaches to validity that were to support the trustworthiness of the research. With this chapter in mind, I now would like to invite the reader to the Results chapter overleaf.
CHAPTER 6.0

RESULTS

6.1 Orientation to the Chapter

As the analysis proceeded, it was apparent that the topic was complex and that I was not going to develop one middle range theory, but rather a set of interconnecting hypotheses and constructs. These illustrated the women’s understanding of the links they made between their childhood experiences of family violence and their adulthood.

Figure 2 is my proposed illustration of the women’s recall of the key representational and interactional processes at play and how they saw their childhood and their adult processes connected to each other. The figure attempts to capture the complexity of these dynamic processes over time. The diagram could look like a path analysis but it is important to clarify that this is not a causal study. It is both a description and a formulation of how the adult women recall and understand their experiences. In this way, the diagram incorporates the women’s specific memories, associated thoughts, emotions and meanings, which may or may not be similar to the original experience (Kirkegaard Thomsen & Brinkmann, 2009).

In line with a grounded theory methodology, I am proposing the category Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas (numbered as 6.3.4 in figure 2, and subheading 6.3.4 in the text) as the core category. I am raising it as the higher context-marker, being that it was a main running thread in the participants’ stories. The other key processes or categories that make up the core category are:

• 6.3.1 Being triangulated\(^\text{15}\) in the parental conflict, and parentification, as a related

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\(^{15}\) The word “triangulation” here is being used according to the current usage in systemic literature. It refers to the idea that “what is happening in a significant relationship between two people in a family can have a powerful influence on a third family member, and vice versa, in mutually reinforcing ways” (Dallos & Vetere, 2012, p. 119). As these authors explain, as a verb, being triangulated refers to the process of a third person being drawn in, in the relationship of a dyad. As a noun, it also incorporates the idea of a network of relationships and also draws from intergenerational attachment relationships and the idea of corrective scripts. Within a social science research tradition, triangulation also refers to a “combination of different methods, study groups, local and temporal settings and different theoretical perspectives” in exploring a phenomenon (Flick, 2014, p.183). But here, using triangulation according to the systemic theory is consistent with the complexity of the family dynamics being studied.
and a relational process,

• 6.3.2 The traumatogenic effect of the violence on the child and adult development, and

• 6.3.3 Turning point/developmental processes that foster change and resilience including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption.

The key processes (6.3.1 to 6.3.3) were not sequential but occurred concurrently, although as the reader will see from the participants’ interviews, there was slightly more emphasis on the process of triangulation and parentification in childhood rather than in adulthood, and a similar emphasis on turning points and developmental process around change, as the participants were growing up.

These three key processes in turn characterised the more specific, lower-order processes or sub-categories that captured both childhood and adulthood experiences, which are outlined to the left and right of the figure. As the reader can see, these specific processes include the family-of-origin relational context, the individual context (in both childhood and adulthood), and the intimate relationship context, and the parenting contexts (in adulthood) for these women.

Finally, all the (above) different contexts are embedded in the diverse cultural contexts (section 6.2.3): the gendered beliefs, beliefs around religion, the limited professional responses, and issues of secrecy and shame. As the participants stated, these dynamic feedback processes ultimately took place across time. I also observed that in recalling their experiences, the participants shifted back and forth through time, from their adult voice to what seemed to be their child voice and back again, both to understand their memory fragments and to make sense of their adult development too.

In order for the reader to further understand figure 2, I am also presenting tables 4 to 9 (Appendix U, Volume 1) that show the link between the focused codes and sub-categories, and the link between axial codes and the key categories.
This chapter is divided into three parts. Part One (section 6.2) focuses on the childhood and adult experiences and the different cultural contexts in which these participants’ experiences were embedded. Part Two (section 6.3) then deals with the presentation of the key categories and the core category of the study. Finally, Part Three (section 6.4) encompasses the impact of the interviews on the interviewees and themes from the credibility checks with the health and social care professionals and with the participants.

I am starting the chapter by presenting the childhood experiences first, to honour the participants’ advice- that I needed to know about their childhood and what they went through in order to understand their present. Also, influenced by a systemic and a developmental framework, amongst others, I understand the childhood experiences and the cultural influences as contexts to make sense of the adult experiences. I then present the key categories and core categories at this point, to hopefully make explicit to the reader how these categories have emerged. The last part of the chapter then reverts back to the participants and to their reflections of how they have been affected by the interviews. Finally the last section focuses on health and social care practitioners’ views on the findings and how these have struck them in relation to their work in the field. I also include the feedback about the results from two participants.

Before going into more detail into these women’s experiences, it is important to note that in line with a critical realist and contextual constructionist perspective, as explained in the Methodology chapter, the following is my interpretation of their interpretation of their childhood experiences, which in turn, is influenced by their understanding as adults. I will thus present how the participants perceived their relationships with their parents, their siblings, and their extended family.

Although each relational dyad, for instance, the father-daughter relationship, will be presented separately, this is only being done for the purpose of clarity. It is important to note that each relational dyad needs to be understood in the context of all the other perceived relational dynamics.
I opt to present the participants’ quotes in detail so as to convey some of the contexts in which the events occurred as the participants explained them in their stories. Some participants might be more represented more often than others, although I have quoted from all the participants’ transcripts. This is because in my view, their words might have captured more poignantly and/or more clearly the particular category.

In addition, the pseudonym in brackets indicates who the quote belongs to, and the number is the page number in the translated transcript. The “I” in some of the quotes refers to what the interviewer asked or stated and “P” refers to the participant. For ease of reference, I am also including a summary of tables about the participants’ information (see Appendix T, Volume 1 as a fold out) so that the reader can easily refer to this information whilst reading the results. In this chapter, I will also link the results to existing theories and empirical work. This is my second stage review of the literature.
4.2.1 Childhood

4.2.1.1 Father-daughter relationship - growing up in the shadow of a violent father: Dynamics of fear, love and retaliation

4.2.1.2 Mother-daughter relationship in childhood: Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and betrayal

4.2.1.3 Sibling relationships in childhood: Protection, abuse, witnessing triangulation and support

4.2.1.4 Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult: Extreme coping, extreme consequence, and some support

4.3.4 Living With Contradictions, Double Binds and Dilemmas

4.3.1 Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification as a related process

4.3.2 The trauma-togenic effect of the violence on the child and adult development

4.3.3 Turning points/Developmental processes that foster change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption

4.2.2 Adulthood

4.2.2.1 Daughter-father relationship in adulthood: Dealing with anger, fear, bitterness and betrayal together with possibilities of forgiveness, redemption and transformation

4.2.2.2 Daughter-mother relationship in adulthood: Persistence of anger and sadness, love and protection of mother and witnessing mother’s transformation

4.2.2.3 Sibling relationship in adulthood: The persistence and significance of early family of origin roles

4.2.2.4 What these women go through as individual adults: Legacies of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience

4.2.2.5 The women’s understanding of the impact on their intimate relationships: Childhood survival strategies, trauma legacies and fear of replicative scripts make relationships hard but relationships can be transformative too

4.2.2.6 Piecing together the puzzle: Remembering and understanding more the impact of domestic violence experiences with parenting and struggling with replicative and corrective scripts with their children

4.2.3 Cultural Contexts: gendered beliefs, religion, limited professional response, secrecy and shame

Dynamic feedback processes over time

Figure 2. An illustration of the women’s recall of representational and interactional processes over time, linking childhood experiences of violence and adulthood experiences, highlighting the core category and related categories.
6.2 Part One

6.2.1 Childhood experiences in the context of family violence.

...you need to understand the family context...domestic violence happens within the context of a family, so these questions (about relationships with family members) need to be asked. Because it did not happen everyday and every day was not the same, do you understand? (Geraldine 1, p. 5).

This was a quote from one of the first interviews, by Geraldine, during her first interview. It was a quote that struck me and which I tried to keep in mind, together with the other participants’ words detailing the horrific suffering that these women went through as witnesses and victims of the violence in their family.

6.2.1.1 Father-daughter relationship: Growing up in the shadow of a violent father and dealing with dynamics of fear, love and retaliation.

6.2.1.1.1 Witnessing the horrible physical and psychological abuse by their father on their mother. Although parents might believe that their children are not aware of the violence that is going on in the house, research shows 81% of children who were present during violent episodes in their home had direct exposure to these violent incidents (Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007). Graham-Bermann, Lynch, Banyard, DeVoe, and Halabu (2007) in their efficacy trial of their community intervention programme corroborated that 82% of children witnessed physical violence and 89% of the children witnessed psychological maltreatment of their mother.

The participants talked about witnessing horrific scenes of physical abuse on their mother and also very frightening scenes of psychological abuse: where their father exerted his power and control on their mother. The participants remembered their mother feeling terrorised by their father and always being afraid, to the point where one mother (Jessica’s) was feeling so afraid that she needed her daughter to accompany her to the bathroom. This portrays how children who are maltreated are often engaged in role reversal (Macfie et al., 1999), taking care of their parents.

Jessica remembered that this was a time when the mother was having a lot of “accidents”, which the daughter, with hindsight, understood as being a prelude to her
Yes, he was in the leisure business, a restaurant, it was unique for Malta at that time. And he used to return home very late; he used to come home drunk and he used to come home to have sex with mummy; I don’t know, perhaps she did not let him or she used to be sleepy ... At three o’clock in the morning, it is not nice to wake up..., nowadays, I understand this ..., and he started to beat her, and he started to beat her a lot and they were beatings in front of us, it was ugly ..., Sometimes with a broom, sometimes on her head with the jewel box, throwing her here and there .. so we saw a lot of this (Jessica, p. 4).

..., and she used to wake me up [at night] to go with her to the bathroom. That’s the extent that she was frightened [of him]... (Jessica, p. 7).

Such experiences draw our attention to the fact that the most serious form of domestic violence is in fact the murder of the woman – what is termed as femicide (Campbell, 2004). This author reviews several studies that show that 30% to 55% of femicide victims are killed by an intimate partner.

Sandra also remembered frightening scenes, as a 3 year old, of her father assaulting her mother and she, as a young girl, trying to shield her mother from her father’s beatings (Øverlien, 2009). Sandra also remembered her father almost killing her mother during one incident and the fights did not end with the separation. Sandra’s experience is supported by research, which shows that ending the relationship does not end the violence (Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000):

Yes. I was four [years old] and I remember things even from when I was 3 years ..., I did not go to school but I remember mummy trying to lock me in the bedroom so that I would not hear the shouting and the fighting and I did not want to go in (the bedroom), and I remember stamping my feet and grabbing her feet and not wanting to leave her ..., and doing this to daddy with my finger so that he does not touch her ..., these are the things that I remember most (Sandra, p. 1).

Claire, on the other hand, did not remember her father ever physically hitting her mother but she remembered feeling very upset and angry at seeing her father humiliating her mother. This supports research highlighting the coercive controlling behaviour of the
domestic violence abuser (Johnson, 2006). In remembering these incidents, she found herself again feeling so angry with him:

I remember once he had to go to the toilet to expectorate his catarrh and he spat everywhere, everywhere- maybe I was about 5 years – and then all of a sudden he told my mother – you can clean now- we will still go out. And I was still about 5 years – and I still look at him now and I feel anger inside me and I remember my mother cleaning after him ..., he was ..., he was cruel... (Claire, p. 15).

All these findings are consistent with those of other qualitative studies (Buckley et al., 2007; Mullender et al., 2002; Swanston et al., 2013), which show how the children are keenly aware of all that is going on in their homes, including all the different forms of domestic violence. Furthermore, the participants were not only distressed by the witnessed physical abuse but also by the psychological abuse on their mother.

Marital conflict research (Buehler et al., 1998; Davies et al., 2006) informs us that hostile, overt conflict styles – such as verbal aggression and threats, are more strongly associated with internalising and externalising symptoms in children when compared with conflict frequency.

6.2.1.1.2 Being sadistically physically and psychologically abused by father. The participants also spoke about their very vivid memories of suffering sadistic, physical and psychological violence by father and feeling absolute terror, drawing practitioners’ attention to the significant overlap that is found between child abuse and intimate partner violence (Appel & Holden, 1998; Edleson, 1999; Herrenkohl et al., 2008; Jouriles et al., 2008; and Wolfe et al., 2003):

This was the time when my father had an accident with the ploughing machine and he had made this sacred promise to God that if his leg would not be amputated then he would carry heavy chains during the Good Friday procession, and once he got better and he could walk well, he did carry these chains ..., Yes, the Good Friday procession. And he used to beat us with the same chains he carried in this procession. Of course you would think he was going to kill you, man!!

Because I knew ..., that the same chains he used on the Good Friday during the procession were the same chains he used to beat us with. I mean think about it ...,
damn it! (blasphemes against God) ... he goes to walk behind the statue of Jesus and then ... But he was a real great hypocrite! I used to get really angry that during the procession, Jesus, Good Friday, something so sacred and serious and so solemn and are you not fucking ashamed of God? Because God is supposed to know what you are dragging ..., then you beat us with them ..., do you understand? ..., (Geraldine I, p. 51-52).

Anita recalled one incident when her father hit her repeatedly with a garden hose; how terrifying it was for her as a young girl and how painful it was:

I: You used to be afraid of him even when you were young? P: Yes fear, terror, we all used to be horribly scared of him ..., he gave us one look and it was terrifying ..., literally terrifying ..., and it’s understandable since he would beat us terribly, that we will remember those beatings for the rest of our lives ..., and really and truly for the rest of your life. Once ..., he gave me this incredible beating with a hose ..., I can still feel that beating to the present day ..., it was one of those green garden hoses ..., and you know why all this? Because my mum had left home ..., so we were alone with him in the house ..., he had sent me to buy something for him and I met my uncle, my mother’s brother and he gave me 10c and I being just a child, I bought some sweet sticks. They used to be 1c each so I bought 10 of them. I was going to divide them between us siblings ..., maybe at that time we were still about four siblings ..., I went back home and I was giving these sweets out ..., and he told me “Where did you get the money from?” and I told him ..., and let me tell you, he beat me with this rubber hose and each hit was a searing painful hit ..., it was terrifying ..., (Anita, p.7-8).

The psychological abuse and the “grooming” started early too. Donna remembered her father trying to enlist her help as a 3 year old, so that he would know where the mother had been and how she has spent her day and whom she met and whom she had spoken to. This is reminiscent of the behaviours of sexual abuse offenders when they try to win over the trust of their victim (Mcalinden, 2006), to later abuse of it.:
little girl ..., he used to get me sweets and then he would ask me what my mother had been doing on that day .... For example, I would tell him, for example, I don’t know, we went shopping, because my mother did not go out because of his jealousy .... Then he would tell me, but do you know what she bought ..., do you know who she spoke to ... and sometimes I would not know ..., and he would kick up a whole fuss ..., and he used to tell me don’t tell your mother that I stay asking you about her ..., and for a three year old that is an enormous burden and even my relatives they used to tell my mother “how annoying this girl is, why does she continuously stay with the adults?” .... (Donna 1, p. 5).

6.2.1.1.3 “Because at the end of the day, he is still your father... you cannot break the bond between you and him, even if he were a monster, you cannot.” Together with the dynamics of violence, fear and terror, the participants also spoke about instances of wanting to reconnect with father, highlighting the strength of the attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1988). The above quote is from Jessica’s interview (p. 19), who even though her father murdered her mother, did not want to break her bond with him.

Seana’s interview also illustrated how caught up participants were struggling with being abused and trying to maintain a connection with their father. This struggle, where children are caught between two opposing emotions concerning their father, has been researched by Peled (2000) and also supported by Mullender et al. (2002). The daughters wanted to maintain a connection for different reasons: because they yearned for their father’s love, because they wanted to please their mother who wanted them to keep their connection to their father and because they also felt pressured by cultural beliefs around daughters’ submission to their father’s authority and by the beliefs around the need to keep the family together.

Thus the relationship with the father was not only intrinsically complicated by way of the intense opposing emotions but also because it was embedded within the child-mother relationship and the cultural discourses around fathering, around being a daughter and about the importance of family in the Maltese context. The following quote from Seana, brings to light these dilemmas:

He phoned me at home and he spent an hour on the phone and it is like he makes you cower and hide into your shell. So you start saying to yourself, I did something wrong.
Let me see what I did wrong. But then when you start reflecting ..., you start saying but what did I do wrong? It’s not like I never did anything wrong, I did do wrong things for sure because I am human like everyone else but he did more wrong things especially in his role as a father ..., he did more wrong than I did. Because logic tells you or better it’s like a lot like how many Maltese people think, “He is your father so you must be submissive”.

Now the last telephone conversation ..., I went for the medical certificate and he told me now I will get it for you ..., because I spent the whole Christmas holidays in hospital because of a slipped disc and he told me that he will get me the certificate himself and so that he doesn’t say that his daughter wants to exclude him completely from his life or so that he does not feel ..., so I let him take the role of father ..., I went all out for him ..., I told him okay and he took very long to get it for me and when he got it for me, it had a mistake and I phoned him and I was almost in tears because he took 2 months to get it for me and at that time I told him ‘Can you tell me .. where I can go’ .., and he started: ‘I am not your servant and leave me in peace’.. I told him, I ..., and I remember him telling me, but I don’t want to use his words ..., he told me I ... of you ..., and at that time, it is like the world closed down and I cried so much ...,

... Yes, I was like a bouncing ball ..., bashed against the wall and re-bounding ..., This is how I used to see myself ..., like a bouncing ball ..., I used to say but am I a puppet? But let me let it go so that I leave the family in peace as much as possible ..., but I was the one who suffered ultimately because I did not stand up to him (p. 46–48).

Seana’s narrative was replete with such emotionally-intense yo-yoing experiences between cutting off from her father after being abused and then giving him another chance, which often a times led her to being abused again, then Seana ending feeling betrayed, and cutting off again. Seana’s suffering in the interview was palpable. At the same time, I admired her resilience in trying to reflect (Fonagy & Target, 1997) how to understand her father’s behaviour but more importantly, on thinking about what she needed to do for herself to keep herself mentally and physically safe.

6.2.1.1.4 “And there were moments when I wished him dead.” Together with this need for connection the women also spoke about the murderous rage that they felt as children
towards their father - wishing he were dead and then feeling guilty for wishing so:

_There were moments when I wished him ..., And I still have these thoughts nowadays, when I wished my father was dead, dead ..., do you understand? I used to tell my psychologist ..., I feel guilty and I still feel guilty to this day because when I hear someone say my father died or I miss my father because he is dead ... I think ... (sentence left uncompleted)”_ (Seana, p. 9).

Such a conflicted and ambivalent daughter - father relationship is consistent with the qualitative study by Lopez and Corona (2012) who interviewed high-risk Latina adolescents about their relationship with their non-resident father. The family context in Lopez and Corona’s sample was not exclusive to domestic violence but also included contexts of father’s and/or mother’s substance abuse, as well as incarceration of either or both parents. However, similar to the participants in my study, the Lopez and Corona’s participants’ shared their “reactive rejection-anger” against their father – “I hate him ..., he doesn’t really matter to me - he’s dead” (p. 731).

The participants in my study did not remember their father reaching out to them or trying to repair the relationship in their childhood. This is supported by the quantitative study by Salisbury, Henning and Holdford (2009) on fathering by partner abusive men, which indicated that although the majority of men acknowledged that their children had witnessed and been exposed to intimate partner violence, few perceived that their children had been affected by the arguing.

Do these findings show that fathers find it difficult to take an empathic position with the children and thus need further education regarding the effects of domestic violence on their children (Stanley, 2011)? Or do such findings reflect these fathers’ reluctance to assume responsibility for the harm they incurred?

At the same time, some women spoke about having memories of a good relationship with their father as young children. Then their relationship with their father changed as the daughters grew older, and they rebelled and became aggressive towards their father:

_Eh ..., the relationship with my father was ..., very early in my childhood, I remember having a good relationship ..., Around 3 years of age ..., primary school age ..., let’s say till 10 yrs of age; Yes, till around Holy communion (around 7yrs) ..., I had a very_
good relationship with my father ... I was always going around with him; I used to help him in his work, he used to take us out, he used to take us out for walks here and there ... he used to take us to his aunts and uncles, who for me, were old in years and elderly and they were interesting people and I used to stay exploring their house ..., but then I think that the older that I got, the more I started understanding and seeing more what was happening in the house ..., (Mary, p. 5).

6.2.1.1.5 Daughters retaliating with aggression against their father. As they grew older, some participants fought the father’s violence towards them and their mother through aggression. Rose took on her mother’s fight with her father and Sandra trained in martial arts so that she would be in a position to beat and defeat her father. Perhaps, these were the young women’s way of getting their sense of power back and feeling less frightened and less out of control (Gorell Barnes & Henessy, 1995). It was also a way of demonstrating assertiveness and standing up to their father in ways that their mother could not or would not want to do (Mullender et. al., 2002).

No ..., No because when I grew up, I used to challenge and confront him ..., I used to tell him, ‘Are you going to beat me?’ ..., I used to tell him ‘Come on, beat me ...’, Come on ..., if you have the balls, beat me ‘...’, ‘Then what do I do? Do I go to the police station?’ I used to tell him, ‘Nowadays I will beat you back’ ..., then, in fact, I trained in martial arts and I still do so till today ..., I did not tell him (that I kept training) ..., when I was young he knew... then after I was 20 years of age, I used to defy him ... (Sandra, p. 27).

For many participants, growing up and reaching adolescence was seen as a turning point with respect to their relationship with their father and also a change as to how they looked at their family. It was a time when they started to have an understanding of what was going on in the house, reflecting the cognitive development associated in adolescents and their developing capacity to think with increasing complexity, and with more flexibility (Lehalle, 2006). This finding is also supported by research (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; McAdams, 1985) which shows that children reaching adolescence start developing their ability to create a coherent life story, which according to Erikson (1968) is the hallmark of the attainment of a psychosocial identity, occurring normally by the end of adolescence.

In trying to make sense of what was going on in their house, their relationship with
their father very often turned violent or more violent at this stage, and some used their newfound strength and intelligence to defy their father and beat him back. From the adolescents’ perspective, their newly found sense of autonomy and their increased sense of control over their life (Coleman, 2011) may have led them to feel less vulnerable than they felt when they were children and so they may have decided to try and put a stop to the father’s violence. In turn, the parent may have interpreted the adolescent’s assertiveness and new sense of autonomy as threatening to his authority and hence used violence to control or suppress the adolescent’s behaviour (Schofield, 2005).

Moreover, in interacting with school friends and teachers, and comparing themselves to others (Corcoran, Crusius, & Mussweiler, 2011; Festinger, 1954), they also realized that what they had considered “normal” behaviour was not normal at all and thus started taking action in different ways to stop the violence on them, on their siblings, and mother.

6.2.1.1.6 More complex dynamics with the father: Befriending her to silence her. For another participant, Geraldine, the dynamics with her father were more complex and more difficult for her to untangle as a young teenager. She believed that as soon as her father became aware that she had spoken to others about the violence that happened at home, he tried to befriend her. Given that she admired him a lot, despite being terrified of him, she was very happy that he was confiding in her about his work, about his difficulties with her mother and about his sex life, even whilst she was living in residential care:

*Because my father used to speak a lot with me. He used to speak to me about his stone masonry projects that he had, and words sometimes turned to sex and how he used to lose (his patience) with my mother, and how he had girlfriends and what he saw and what he didn’t see and a lot of words like these. And I used to say, ‘This is so cool! Where is the generation gap?’* (Geraldine 1, p. 16).

It was only a few years later that she realised, with help, that her father’s disclosures were not appropriate. Geraldine described how hard she had to work at understanding her relationship with her father. As a child, she felt that she identified strongly with him and even sat like him and imitated him in everything. She also fantasised that she would grow up to be a “proper daddy” and would take care of her wife and children. As she grew up and her body changes started showing her that biologically she was a woman, she struggled very much to accept that she was indeed a woman and not a man, and again with help had to learn how to
walk like a woman and act like one (Burck & Daniel, 1995; Wood, 2013)

Although Geraldine was the only participant who talked about her gender identity
difficulties linked to her relationship with her father in the context of violence, I thought that
it was interesting to highlight her experiences, as they demonstrate the intrusive and
devastating impact that abusive significant relationships can have on child development.
Further on in this chapter, I will also be describing Geraldine’s understanding of how she
linked being a woman to being weak and how being a man, in her family context, was the
only way to survive (Balbernie, 1994). Geraldine described this mechanism as part of the
process of family systems triangulation when she was drawn in, in the conflict with her
parents (see figure 3).

Other participants internalised their father’s aggression in a different way- Hannah
blamed herself for her father’s beatings and his lack of appreciation of her (Grych, Fincham,
Jouriles, & McDonald, 2000; Grych et al., 2003):

*Or when I was 14 or 15, you know, (hesitant) .., (nervous giggle) he hit me. Ok he
had a reason: because I was a very quiet child but then as an adolescent .., Ok I
always tried to do my best to be perfect but that was the time when I kind of became a
bit of a rebel you know and sometimes I did not tell them the exact truth, you know
how it was, and one day he caught me and told me that I was lying, I don’t know
exactly about what. I was 15 or something, when he caught me, that’s when he hit me
a lot and I went to school with the finger marks on my face. Mainly this was my
childhood, but you know, on the other hand even my father, as I said, he always tried
to provide everything but only material things you know, not emotions, and I would
give up all the things that I had so that he could have been a little kinder to us
(Hannah, p. 5).*

6.2.1.1.7 “He wanted to give me a good upbringing.” Farrah explained that her
father’s assaults on her, were his way of disciplining her, as his way of ensuring that she was
brought up well. At one point in the interview, Farrah described her father’s beatings “...beating me with a dog’s leash, punching me with his fist in my stomach, in my eyes,
everywhere. Even with hard objects.” (p. 2) and then further on in the interview, she said that
his violent assaults on her could be explained through his being over-protective of her and
wanting to raise her well:
... yes, towards me he was more aggressive (than he was towards my brothers).

Perhaps it was because he was over-protective towards me. He wanted to raise me well—or whatever. I think that is where it was coming from (p. 26).

One can argue that her reconciliation with her father as an adult, his subsequent demise and her grief at “losing her father when she found him” (Farrah, p. 67) may have influenced her trying to make sense of why her father was violent with her. The concept of the 'Stockholm Syndrome' describing the positive feeling between the hostages and their captor may also help therapists understand Farrah’s feelings towards her father. In addition, both child and adult tend to develop emotional ties with people who also beat and threaten them (Herman, 1997).

I did not feel comfortable to probe her in depth about the apparent discrepancy in what she was saying, given that this was a research interview and unlike a therapeutic interview, I did not have the opportunity to follow up on her process. But the contrast between her description of her father’s assaults and her explanation was quite stark.

Despite the fact that some may argue that children’s attachment to their father might be a form of traumatic bonding (Dutton & Painter, 1993), connoting negatively this attachment, at the same time, one cannot ignore the children’s strong yearning for the love and support of their father.

6.2.1.2 Mother-daughter relationship in childhood: Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and betrayal.

6.2.1.2.1 Feeling loved by mother. Jessica described a loving relationship with their mother, in spite of the adversity that she, her mother, and her siblings experienced in their family. Jessica said that despite the fear and the terror that the mother experienced, she tried to make up for the father’s violence by being present for her children (Mullender et al., 2002). Hannah also described having a loving relationship with her mother who showered her with affection and with warmth. These findings are also supported by the longitudinal research of Letourneau et al. (2007), which showed that mothers whose children had been exposed to domestic violence showed a greater increase in positive discipline and less of a decrease in warm and nurturing behaviours over time, when compared to mothers not experiencing domestic violence. The researchers argued that mothers from domestic violence contexts
might have tried to make up for the violence their children experienced, through being more sensitive and caring towards their children.

6.2.1.2.2 But why doesn’t she leave? Why doesn’t she stand up to him? Although other participants talked about having a good and loving relationship with their mother, they also described their intense feelings of frustration and anger at their mother’s helplessness and their mother’s fear to stand up against their father’s abuse including the mother’s refusal to leave him (Mullender et al., 2002). These feelings of frustration and anger were exacerbated when some daughters perceived their mother as siding with the father during a fight between them and him. For example, Marika expected her mother’s loyalty, especially because Marika felt that she protected her mother so much against the father and also took on the father’s beatings herself instead of her mother. She repeated this several times in her first interview which led me to hypothesise that she was very much preoccupied by the injustice she suffered as a result of her perceived lack of the mother’s support (Jory, Anderson, & Greer, 1997):

And the thing that used to anger me most and that still pisses me off till today is that my mother sides with him – I am always telling her about this. She is always siding with him; it’s like that she is afraid to take a stand ..., she is afraid to stand up for her rights, do you understand? ..., .because for example, I fight with him and she would know that I am right and she does not tell him “Look, our daughter is right”. And if I go the other way, and he tells me something and she knows that he is right, she will tell me this. So why can’t she do this in both instances? ..., .This is how I understand it... I am not my mother and I cannot ..., But from my end, I think that she really is afraid .... You know... three children; mummy does not work so she cannot rely on herself..., that she has something to fall back on (Marika 1, p.2-3).

Marika, as a 20 year old young woman, stated that she did understand her mother’s difficulties of having to provide for three children if she were to leave her husband, but she did not give any hint of understanding her mother’s dilemmas of, perhaps, also loving her abusive husband and not wanting to leave him (Shah & Vetere, 2012) – which Seana mentions about her mother: “Because I used to see mum ..., so frightened and so full of bitterness and yet full of love towards him” (Seana, p. 2).

Marika seemed caught in the crossed-generational boundaries (Minuchin, 1974), by
involving herself or being involved in the thick of the arguments between her parents, and yet also being disappointed with what she perceived as the lack of support that she felt entitled to, from her mother. Another possible hypothesis is that Marika’s mother might have been intent at placating her husband and trying to keep things quiet in order to avoid more beatings.

6.2.1.2.3 Mother’s minimizing of father’s violent behaviour and not protecting the children enough. Marika also spoke of her great disappointment at her mother’s minimization and justification of the father’s violence (Bogat, Garcia, & Levendosky, 2013; Cooper & Vetere, 2005). She also recalled an incident when Marika had filed a police report and after about a week or so, she had to withdraw it because her mother pressured her not to press charges against her father:

*And once he had punched me, here and in my stomach. Of course, he hit me with the table and pushed me on the floor. When I regained consciousness, I left the house and mummy came with me and we filed a police report. When they summoned us to court, my mother told me, ‘Why don’t you withdraw your charges?’ You know what happens to my mum? Time goes by, things calm down, for example, a week goes by, and she then tells me, ‘Drop the case. We only filed the report because we were angry.’ So I could never take action against my father. I was under age, I had to live with them and obey them, and I didn’t want them to hate and blame me if my father went to prison* (Marika 2, p. 26).

This quote clearly illustrates the different loyalty binds that family members can become locked in and how seeking help or redress is many a times a complex affair. As professionals we may at times forget the extent of the family members’ challenge, especially how difficult it is for the children, to take a stand against one’s kin. Jessica in a similar manner depended on her relatives to take care of her and her three siblings when her mother was murdered and her father went to prison (Connolly & Gordon, 2014; Harris-Hendriks, Black, & Kaplan, 2000). Besides losing her mother and their house, as they had to live with their relatives, Jessica had to battle the incessant denial of the father’s violence by his side of the family, even after the father was charged with and convicted for the murder of his wife:

*But I could not move on and I rebelled against my aunts and uncles, especially against daddy’s sister when she tried to brainwash me .., that we had not seen the things that we had, and that we were imagining things and I remember we really used*
to fight. They (did it) to protect daddy .., their reputation .., their family name (Jessica, p. 22).

Seana also recalled her mother trying to minimise her father’s violent behaviour and also trying to shut her up when as a young child Seana tried telling her aunt what her father did to her, perhaps out of fear of reprisal and a sense of shame around what was happening in her family (Cooper & Vetere, 2005). As an adult, Seana was able to take an empathic position with her mother as she recognised that just like her mother, feelings of anger, shame and embarrassment came in the way of her speaking out about what happened at home.

However, despite Seana’s good relationship with her mother, like Marika, she felt let down by her mother’s limited or lack of protection from the father’s violence when she was a child. Perhaps she grieved the loss of the “perfect mother” who would have protected her at all costs, above and beyond the abuse she (the mother) experienced (Miller & Dwyer, 1997). Claire also felt this maternal absence and strongly believed that both her parents should not have let her go through all the suffering that she endured as a child. She held both her parents accountable for the pain she went through and the violence she experienced and witnessed (Jory et al., 1997).

Donna too felt that as a child her mother did not protect her enough from the father’s violence and from taking on too much responsibility. Although she did recognise that when she and her sisters were very young, their mother established a routine where they would be in bed by seven o’clock and asleep by the time their father returned so as to protect them from witnessing the fights between her and their father. (Mullender et al., 2002). Similar to other participants, Donna as early as 7 years old, realised that she needed to be the one to challenge the father as her mother was never going to take any action. Donna told me how from a young age, she remembered feeling that she was more intelligent than her mother and so it was up to her to protect her and her siblings; she felt it was her responsibility to do so. What came out strongly in Donna’s interviews was the loss she felt about not having a mother, that she had to be a mother to her own mother, what among family systems researchers has been referred to as parentification (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Chase, 1999; Jurkovic, Jesse, & Goglia, 1991; Minuchin, 1974). This key category “Parentification” will be discussed in more detail in Part Two, section 6.3.1

Thus, although some of the participants’ mothers might have been empathic and in
tune with their children’s needs, and this kind of relationship was acknowledged by the
daughters, the mother-daughter relationship was not immune to the horrible physical and
psychological abuse that was also part of their family. Many times, from the daughters’
perspective, the mother either reached out for help from her children, as in Donna’s and
Jessica’s case, or else she was helpless to take action to stop the violence on her and on her
children and implicitly might have nudged the daughters to take a stand against the abuse
instead of her, as might have happened in Marika’s family.

The mother’s lack of protection of the daughters, as perceived by them, was
exacerbated in instances when the mother actively sided against the daughter, as for example
in Carmen’s case when her mother testified against her in Court and in favour of her abusive
stepfather. This is similar to the sexual abuse literature (e.g. Elliott & Carnes, 2001) which
indicates that although the majority of mothers of both incest and non-incest victims are
supportive of their daughters, a substantial number of them are not.

Carmen spent most of her childhood moving to and fro between residential care and
her grandmother’s house, going into care when her mother felt that she was unable to take
care of her, as when for example, the mother was pregnant with another child. Occasionally,
Carmen moved back into the grandmother’s house until her next entry into the Children’s
Home. Then her mother married her boyfriend and Carmen went to live with them
permanently. But as a growing child, up to her early teen years, Carmen lived “through hell”
in her mother’s house. The following quote illustrates some of the physical and
psychological abuse that she had endured both as a witness and a victim of abuse:

The 5 and a half years I spent with my mother and her husband were like suffering
martyrdom for me. I suffered so much with them; he used to beat my younger brother,
to the extent that he even broke his arm, and this simply because of a pen, because my
younger brother had taken a pen from him and he grabbed it from him and he beat
him. He still remembers it to the present day.

Yes he used to beat her (mother) too, he used to cheat on her, and he used to bring the
other woman home. Everything that could happen to a woman, she went through. He
was not an alcoholic, because he only drank tea; so it was not because he used to be
drunk and he would not know what he was doing. That was not an excuse. The woman
he used to cheat with, lived next door and she used to come to our house and they
used to do everything in front of us.

In the meantime I was growing up and I was constantly thinking and thinking and always living in fear of doing something wrong. So I was constantly thinking of how I was going to leave home, from where to get the money and the things to live with (Carmen, p. 7-9).

At 16 years of age, one morning, Carmen decided that she had had enough, and left the house to go the police station. Carmen pleaded with her mother to accompany her so that they would go away together but her mother reacted angrily to Carmen’s plan and told her that all that she was doing was creating trouble for her. Although her mother gave Carmen time to go to the police station, the mother returned to her house whilst the daughter went to the police station. Carmen, as a result, cut off her contact with her mother. When Carmen, her mother, and the stepfather were summoned to Court, she could not believe that her mother ended up testifying against her and in favour of her stepfather:

I had started the court procedure ... Yes together with the police. Can you imagine your own mother witnessing against you? You are on that blasted thing, swearing that what you are saying about your own daughter is the truth and can you imagine yourself giving witness against your own daughter? Because I would not be able to do it. Even if my daughter was guilty I would not be able to do it! How do you explain it to yourself that she managed to do it? P: I don’t, because I cannot explain it. You have to be a cold and heartless woman to give witness against your own daughter (Carmen, p. 20).

It does seem very hard to understand her mother’s behaviour unless perhaps one hears the mother’s version of the story, which would possibly throw light on the hardships that she herself had to endure and perhaps the lack of empathic parenting that she herself probably had. Perhaps she reacted out of being continually terrorised by her husband and felt helpless to take a stand against him? Perhaps she reacted out of shame (Cooper & Vetere, 2005) after having been exposed by the daughter’s accusations? It is difficult to know – one can only speculate on the circumstances that led the mother to take this position.

Along similar lines, Geraldine too, as a child, felt that her mother’s love towards her was limited. She felt that her mother had betrayed her when she told her father about her
misbehaviour at school because then it provoked a terrible beating from the father. This is supported by findings such as those in the study by DeVoe and Smith (2002) which suggests that mothers, burdened and preoccupied with basic safety and survival, may end up extremely frustrated with their children’s aggressive and/or acting out behaviour and may mistakenly enlist the help of the father, to the detriment of the child:

But anyway, I used to think that a mother’s love, if it is the ultimate love, as they say, it would be unconditional. But I never felt that her love was that way. Because if I, damn it, let’s say, fucking, she came for me at school and the teacher told her that I was fucking disobedient, she used to go and tell my father and he used to beat me. Then afterwards it was useless for her coming to tell him to stop because he used to beat me too much (Geraldine 1, p. 22).

6.2.1.2.4 Mother as perpetrator of child abuse. At times, the mother, besides being herself a victim of the father’s violence, also perpetrated physical and/or emotional violence on her daughter. This is supported by studies such as those by Salzinger et al. (2002), Dixon, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Browne, and Ostapuik (2007), and Motz (2008) that showed that both perpetrators and victims of partner abuse could be abusive to the children. Indeed according to the Salzinger et al. ’s study, according to mothers’ self-reports, they were more likely to be physically aggressive to their child than the violent father.

Anita, in fact, perceived her mother’s abuse and neglect as more damaging than her father’s severe physical abuse:

Let me tell you, more than picking on me …, let me tell you …, because my mother was worse and I feel more personally damaging than my father …, because her harassment was continuous …, it was continuous …, and I was a quiet child and introverted and she used to find me …, and I used to give her the opportunity to be her punching ball and whenever she felt like it she would lash out at me …, do you understand? …, it was continuously like that …, continuously …, Once my grandparents were going on a hike with my uncle who was coming for them with the car and my grandmother told me not to bother go back home to my mother. The next day my mother beat me with a shoe on my head until my head was bleeding, I had blood running down onto my school uniform and she sent me to school with my head still bleeding (Anita, p. 5).
Claire, also quietly talked about how her mother and sister fight violently with each other and how they often end up physically abusing each other:

*I remember her (the mother) pregnant and pushing the wardrobe on her own. She no longer has that strength but she is still strong. My sister gets defeated when they fight and get physical with each other. I: what do you mean – they get physical? P: they hit each other, both of them .., because it is mutual. I have never done this* (Claire, p. 32).

Thus, such participants’ words leads me to reflect how important it is to widen the violence context when working with families, at least initially in one’s mind, to include other family members’ perpetration of violence and not only to that perpetrated by the father, even if male-perpetration of violence is the kind of violence that is more often spoken about in the feminist literature. Concurring with Hamel and Nicholls (2007) and Cooper and Vetere (2005), we as family scholars and practitioners need to help create the space for different conversations about violence to occur and to hold these complexities without necessarily fragmenting them as child protection issues, and hence, divorcing them from domestic violence issues. These participants talked about living through these experiences in their family and, as children they had to contend with all these violent dynamics.

In summary, one cannot look at the mother-daughter relationship without taking into account the father-daughter relationship and the mutual influence on each. Moreover these relational dynamics were inextricably tied to the family context and to the parental relationship included the violence that seemed to dominate these dynamics.

More specifically, the co-occurrence of the dynamics of love and abuse, protection and danger, loyalty and betrayal, which in themselves are intense emotions, in an environment which is unpredictable and distressing made these relationships very tough to experience and to understand. Theoretically, one way of understanding these dynamics can be understood through the double bind theory (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956), which will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter. Amidst these contradictions, the daughters still mentioned trying to have a connection with the father. The daughters also acknowledged that they had a good relationship with their father but these went awry as the children became older and they started understanding what was going on in the home.

On the other hand, the daughters in general experienced their relationships with their
mothers as being more loving than abusive. The daughters recognised that their mothers tried to protect them from their father’s abuse but they felt that this protection was limited in that the children either took it upon themselves to take a stand against the father, often by retaliating back with aggression or took upon them the responsibility of emotionally-supporting the whole family. Other participants described being abused by their mothers which reminds us again that mothers can be physically, psychologically, and verbally abusive too in contexts where the mothers are themselves victims of abuse.

6.2.1.3 Sibling relationships in childhood: Protection, abuse, witnessing triangulation and support. It was interesting to note the several isomorphic patterns in the sibling relationships that seemed to mirror the daughters’ relationship with their parents (Caffaro, 2014). The women described similar relationships of love and protection but also rage and abuse.

6.2.1.3.1 Witnessing their siblings being physically and psychologically abused by the father. The women spoke about their sense of horror and feeling of powerlessness at witnessing their siblings being physically and verbally abused by the father and also being very frightened by father’s violence on himself and on the house:

"He used to beat my brother too, because he did not want him with him because he used to tell her, “You are sending him with me to monitor what I am doing.” He used to beat him in a horrible way I remember, really, really awful, like crazy he used to beat him... (Jessica, p. 5).

"For example, I remember something that used to distress us a lot. He would start breaking everything, pulling out the door from the hinges, tearing off his clothes and mother holding him. I: I imagine it was very frightening. P: Yes, I was young at that time (Claire, p. 15).

6.2.1.3.2 Siblings being aggressive with each other. The participants also spoke about the siblings being aggressive to each other (Kettrey & Emery, 2006). Seana talked about her brother beating her after she and her sister had had an argument over some clothes, after which Seana refused to speak to him again. Mary spoke about the rage that she felt that she and her brothers had:

"What I remember most, was that in our house, there was a lot, a lot of anger, even
between us siblings, between me and my brothers ..., ferocious anger ..., for example ..., I don’t know ..., we fight about something and then we used to go to each other’s rooms turn everything upside down and create havoc to each other’s things ..., and that is the rage that we used to feel. (Mary, p. 17).

In her second interview, Marika nervously described how she had ended up abusing her younger sister and when she realised that she was behaving exactly as her father did to her, she stopped:

Because there was a time when I was a bit like him ..., I used to beat my youngest sister (nervous giggle). She was not doing well at school and I helped her with her homework ..., but she did not obey and she didn’t do well and I hit her ..., (nervous snort). This went on for about a year or so, until I realised what I was doing (Marika 2, p. 13).

6.2.1.3.3 Siblings: Sources of support. For Anita, her relationship with her siblings was her only source of support and protection and she did not know how they would have made it without each other’s support (Caya & Liem, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Lucas, 2002):

I tell you one thing ..., I think we are who we are, my siblings and I, because I speak for my siblings because I like taking them into consideration a lot ..., I think if we had not supported and loved each other so much, I think that none of us would be here today ..., so I think our support for each other ..., today we all have found our place in life (Anita, p. 9).

In order to protect her siblings, Sara was the one to try and get back to the father in such a way that she and her siblings would have some kind of payback or redress. Interestingly, Sara took on her protective role after her brother had committed suicide. Previously, he had been the one to get involved in the fights between the parents and to protect the mother and the siblings. Sara does not explicitly go into the reason why she took on that role but her story seemed to lead me to understand that given that her remaining siblings were all disabled, she felt that it was up to her to continue supporting and protecting her mother and the siblings:

I think that I was a bit naughty because I used to tell them “Now you know what we will do to him” ..., for example, once he came to beat me with a piece of wood ..., I was
sleeping I didn’t know .., my siblings still remember it because sometimes they mention it .., especially the younger brother after me .., I told them “Leave it up to me” .., anyway we got this piece of wood and we threw it away for him and when he went to look for it, he made a huge fuss because he didn’t find it ... (laughs)” (Sara, p. 7-8).

_I think I am the only one from my siblings who managed .., who managed to take money from him .., I used to do it not as a form of stealing but to help the family (laughs) (p. 9)._

Hannah too spoke about the support that she had from her elder sister and how she felt protected by her: “There is a four-year age difference between my sister and I. She was always supporting me. She used to take care of me, she was my second mum kind of” (Hannah, p. 1).

At the same time, in the context of this caring relationship, witnessing her sister’s physical abuse by the father was frightening and for her it was a form of silencing - that she would better comply and not defy her father as she would end up being beaten like her sister:

_I have bad memories you know sometimes my father believed in giving punishments like .., you know .., sometimes he hit my sister and even me sometimes and but as I grew up, I saw him giving these kind of punishments to my sister, but I think now that I am an adult, I reflect on this thing I just became a bit quiet I think that I didn’t come out with my opinions for a long time because I didn’t want to get into the trouble like my sister_ (p. 2-3).

Hannah in fact was aware that there were instances when she let down her sister because she was not as vociferous as her sibling. Interestingly, both Marika and Jessica echoed the same sentiments from the other perspective, that is, of feeling angry and let down by the siblings’ helplessness and lack of rebellion against the father because the siblings were afraid.

This leads me to shed light on the differences between siblings’ experiences (Horn, Hunter, & Graham-Bermann, 2013). Although one might think that the siblings live in the same family context, and hence might have similar experiences, these women’s experiences remind us that in effect the family context is not the same (Sanders, 2004). The birth of each
child changes the relationship of each family; the passing of time also makes the context different; the stresses and the available resources for the family might also be different. The gender, as well as the temperament of the child, is important too. Different research studies indicate that the children’s own characteristics influence the extent that they are the targets of negative feelings in the family (Belsky, Hsieh, & Crnic, 1998; Muhtadie, Zhou, Eisenberg, & Wang, 2013; Rutter, 1999).

6.2.1.3.4 Siblings’ different experiences in the same family. Claire, actually talked about feeling misunderstood by her other siblings who were not exposed to the kind of violence that she had been exposed to, and she marvels at how her sister is more able to challenge her father:

… last time they [mother and sister] were talking to each other and they were saying how lively and happy my daughter is and my mum said – this is how Claire was- and my siblings didn’t want to believe her – who Claire? She’s so difficult and she does not smile a lot…. and then my mother didn’t say anything but she told them but this is how I know Claire (p. 8).

Yes, yes. First of all, I was the eldest and I have witnessed a lot of things that, till this very day, my siblings did not see and if the one after me saw them, she did not see the same things or she has not realised what she saw but – she either tried to forget them or in her own way, she’s trying to work it out in another way- all of us are doing it - the girls - three girls and a boy – (p. 6).

So then one thing after another you start being careful about what you say - for example, I am the only one out of the siblings that I don’t answer back - I am afraid… instead my siblings no- they are not afraid (p. 9).

Claire does recognise, however, that when her youngest sister was born, her father was older and mellower. In addition, her father had reacted violently to his wife’s fourth pregnancy and had insisted that she aborts the child but her mother had refused to do so. Claire thought that her father was more tolerant of his youngest daughter as he still felt guilty about the fact that he did not want her.

Such experiences again highlight the importance of taking a systems approach to understanding the impact of violence on the family as it helps family members come out with
possible meanings of family members’ behaviours which otherwise are very difficult to understand (Bentovim & Davenport, 1992; James & MacKinnon, 2012). Claire in fact looked beyond her father’s individual characteristics or her own, and found it helpful to include the family narratives in order to make sense of some of her childhood experiences, which were different from those of her siblings and which, of course, had different impact on their development.

In a similar vein, Seana explained how her siblings took sides against their mother and sided with the father because they did not see the violence that the mother witnessed and experienced. Thus, this is another explanation of how different siblings take different positions in family conflict. Both Seana and Sandra recall how as children, they then lost connection with the siblings who took the side of the other parent:

*My brother ..., He went through a different story than I did ..., so my brother’s story is much more difficult than the one I went through or else I coped differently. His opinion is that he went through many more things than I did and because he was older ..., so I don’t remember much about my brother because he used to live with daddy. He did not always live with mummy so I remember him more at 13, 14yrs ..., he does not feature much before.*

*I don’t remember ..., from what they tell me, when I was young, until they were living under one roof, I was 3 years old or 4 years old, my brother used to take care of me a lot when I was a baby. Then there was that distance. Then when I was 13yrs/14years, he was much older than I was. He was already living on his own and sometimes, he used to come and pick me up to go out with his car, for example, to go to the cinema ..., it’s like he was a stranger and I was getting to know him ...* (Sandra, p. 3).

Presumably, the parents were too distressed and taken up with their experiences to support the sibling relationship and the siblings lost the opportunity for another relationship that could have been supportive to them. Jessica was another participant who found a lot of support in her siblings and who was increasingly distressed when they were separated after their mother’s murder. When I asked her whether they had ever spoken about what was happening at home, she replied that they never talked about what was happening. They felt that they could not discuss this between them. Perhaps they could have been supported in the context of a containing therapeutic relationship to understand together some of the grief and
anger that, understandably so, they were going through as siblings. Instead they coped as best as they could, with Jessica being the one who now understands her feistiness and rage as a child being a consequence of what she was going through.

6.2.1.4 Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult: Extreme coping, extreme consequences, and with some support.

6.2.1.4.1 “Living in hell.” Anita, like Carmen, described her childhood as “living in hell”. She remembered praying to God for deliverance from the physical abuse, neglect and psychological abuse that she suffered at the hands of her mother and father.

Let me tell you, and I always say this, for a thirteen year old, family life in my home was hell, I remember always wanting to grow up .., I remember that at 12 years of age I prayed to God and told him, “If you save me from here, I will light a candle for you” because obviously in my mind, that is what I could afford at that time .., it was too hard for me living in that house.

My insecurity was sky high, it was frightening, at times I lived at home, at other times, I lived with my grandmother. If I went back home, my mother would beat me. My mother used to really vent on me as I used to let her. I did not challenge her. When she used to beat me, I used to stay in a corner and let her beat me. So it was insults, criticism, “You are ugly, you have bent legs, you look like a monkey!” (Anita, p. 2).

Anita was also terrorised by the frightening scenes between her father and mother. Anita described her father as an alcoholic and described her mother as a person who every so often, just stood up and left the house when she could not cope anymore with what was going on in the family:

When my mother used to leave home .., she used to wake up one fine day and it’s like, ‘I can’t take this anymore’ and she leaves - my father was an alcoholic .., when she used to leave home, he would drink more .., but it almost was better when she left home because she was disorganised .., the house was always topsy-turvy; she used to begin washing the clothes at 8am and it would come to midnight and she would still be at it .., it was like that .., today I know that she had some personality disorder ..,
I remember when I was about 4 or 5 years old, I remember it very clearly ..., my sister and I spoke about it a few days ago ..., my eldest sister and I ..., my mother was pregnant with one of my siblings, he put a flick knife against her legs. Thank God someone knocked at the door because he told her I will slash you to pieces ..., that is what it was like at our house (p. 3).

Almost all the women narrated similar overwhelmingly horrifying experiences of abuse that led them to try and survive in different ways. Geraldine realised that she was raised not to feel anything and to shut out her emotions, what van der Kolk (2007a) refers to as “emotional numbing” (p. 188), a process, which according to Geraldine led her to shut down her emotions in both trauma-related and everyday experiences in daily life.

On the other hand, Jessica remembered being constantly alert and preoccupied with her mother’s safety as a child: “I used to wake up, and go near mummy, checking that she is still alive. I could not sleep unless I made sure that she is okay [eyes welling up with tears]” (p. 6). Geraldine also remembered waking up at night and rushing to the top of the stairs, staying there, keeping very still, without moving one finger, to listen to what her parents would be saying to make sure that her mother was alright (Rivett et al., 2006) and then rushing back to the bedroom when her parents seemed to have stopped talking. Geraldine remembered not being able to understand all their words and straining very hard to listen. In such cases, both Geraldine and Jessica’s behaviour can be understood as forms of hyperactivating strategies (Mikulincer et al., 2003) as they tried to reassure themselves repeatedly that their mother, as their attachment figure, was safe despite the dangerous environment.

After her mother’s death, Jessica recalled needing medication to sleep, having panic attacks, and being constantly on the go. Sara recalled too that she was constantly on the go as a child. All the participants, as adults, understood their behaviours as being consequences of what they were going through, highlighting the overlap in the literature between hyperactive behaviour, post-traumatic stress disorders and the effects of children of witnessing domestic violence (Dallos & Vetere, 2009):

Nowadays, I say that that I was feisty because of the things that were happening; that nothing used to scare me, do you understand? My brother says that I drew people’s attention because I used to know what to say to people if they told me something. I
used to feel like I was a big (older) girl. I did not feel like I was a young child” (Jessica, p. 8).

6.2.1.4.2 Worrying for herself and her siblings’ well being. Marika worried about her siblings’ wellbeing and Geraldine also worried about who was going to provide for her basic needs – who was going to prepare her school lunch when her father sent her mother away. To the adult, these concerns might not seem so important but children in fact do worry about concrete issues and there was no one to reassure Geraldine and help her feel that some kind of predictability was possible (Dowling & Gorell Barnes, 1999).

Geraldine also described some of the extreme circumstances that she and her brother had to face. After a long fight, her father sent her mother away from the house and whilst the mother was packing some of her things, the father locked Geraldine and her brother in an internal yard as they were not allowed to speak to their mother before she left. Geraldine remembered trying to listen to anything that might indicate whether her father was seriously hurting her mother and, at the same time, she was worrying about who was going to take care of her and her brother when her mother was away. She remembered worrying about getting her menstrual period for the first time and asking her father’s permission to speak to her mother before she left the house:

_He had sent her away from home; I think that she went to her sister. I remember before she left I asked permission to speak to her because we could not speak to her ..., I told her- ‘What am I going to do, if I get the damned period?’ She told me, ‘I will speak to you later – one way or another I will speak to you’ ..., and I was so worried for her ..., _ (Geraldine I, p. 90).

_It is hard to believe that we are still alive ..., I used to worry a lot ..., about who is going to make me my school lunch and how long my mother will be away. And sometimes when she used to plead with him a lot not to send her away, especially in winter, she used to sleep in the bathroom on the floor_ (Geraldine I, p. 94).

Although Geraldine’ words conveyed some of the harshness that she, her sibling, and her mother had to go through at the hands of her father, it is probably difficult to really understand how overwhelmed and terrified she must have felt as a child under these circumstances. When Geraldine was describing the above incident, as an adult, Geraldine was
using a matter-of-fact tone and was somewhat surprised when I asked her with an incredulous tone about the fact she had to ask permission to speak to her mother. She replied “Yes, of course” as if it was the most usual and normal thing to do.

This led me to wonder whether Geraldine still thought of such circumstances as normal and whether such instances reflected unprocessed parts of experiences (Foa, Steketee, & Rothbaum, 1989). I continued to reflect about the pervasive impact that these experiences exert on a person’s life, despite the fact that Geraldine had talked about and processed what she went through in the context of therapy for a number of years.

6.2.1.4.3 Desolation and loneliness. Anita and Tori also echoed some of the desolation and loneliness that they felt as children, although in Anita’s case, she and her siblings supported each other:

Yes fear, terror, we all used to be horribly scared of him ..., he gave us one look and it was terrifying ..., literally terrifying ..., and it’s understandable since he would beat us terribly in a way that we would remember those beatings for the rest of our lives ..., and really and truly for the rest of our life... (Anita, p. 7).

I: But after the beating? What did you do? P: Nothing ..., I just stayed alone ..., yes ..., when I turned 13 years of age and I went to the children’s Home, I used to say when I grow up I want to show empathy for people who are in my plight, for children like me ..., because you would not know what is going on inside the four walls of a house ..., these children do not have a voice ..., because who would you go to talk to? Where are you going to go? How could I have spoken up and to whom? And it is not easy to speak up ..., there would be the fear and the terror ..., even a grown up woman is afraid where domestic violence is concerned let alone a little child ..., you feel literally alone ..., and you feel that you exist and not live ... (p. 8).

Very often this suffering was then experienced alone, as the violence and all that was going on in the house was kept a secret (Buckley et al., 2007).

Rose could not remember specifically how she used to be affected but she remembers: “… feeling down ..., you feel lonelier ..., bad ..., you rue the day that you formed part of this family” (p. 20).
The daughters were terrified that if they were to tell someone about the violence, they would get beaten more, and things would get worse. This is what happened to Seana when she went to tell her mother that her teacher had asked her if everything was okay at home. Her father got to know and she got a horrible beating from her father:

*Then one day, he beat me so much that I was so angry because he bruised me and I had a lot of marks, because he had thrown the keys at me and he left me bruised and I told (the teacher) and I started crying ..., and she asked me if I wanted to seek more help. I told my mother and I don’t know how he had got to know ..., I don’t know if she had told him herself, with the intention of stopping him and I remember he had insulted me so much and he had told me that he did not give a damn whom I talked to, and that nobody was going to stop him...*(Seana, p. 14-15).

6.2.1.4.4 “You don’t want other people to think that you are coming from a bad family.” Hannah and Marika spoke about being ashamed of having the family that they had (Holt et al., 2008). When Marika’s friends spoke about what they did with their parents, she kept quiet and did not utter a word. Hannah was afraid that she would be stigmatized - that others would think that she was coming from a bad family. She also felt loyal to her family (Karpel, 1980) and even in the interview, she repeated many times that although her father was abusive, he was a good provider and he did his best to raise her and her sister well. She also felt that she could not keep burdening her friends with her sadness:

*Still, I think it’s not really about the taboo, it is not about the culture; it’s more like that people are happy to bury their head in the sand. No one likes to talk about these things. You talk, perhaps, to your sister or someone who has had the same experience, but I am not just shy to talk about this, it’s more than shyness. You don’t want other people to think how bad a situation you are coming from. I: Like you are coming from a bad family? P: Yes. Yes. Yes. You don’t want other people to judge your parents obviously. You know my friends, they listen to me but sometimes the situation is impossible. On the other hand, you don’t want to put all your sadness, like a burden on someone else, so you know, so I talk about these things mostly with my sister and perhaps with one of my friends but mostly with my sister”*(Hannah, p. 34).

6.2.1.4.5 Sources of support and ways of coping. How did these women then cope as children? Many said that all they could do in their childhood was focus on surviving. Some
like Jessica and Donna coped by immersing themselves in schooling and studying. Having a special relationship with a teacher and finding support from a school counsellor made a big difference to their lives (Boyce Rodgers & Rose, 2001). Rose developed a sense of achievement and a sense of joy through sports and engaging in her hobbies, which opened her to new experiences of feelings of competence and positive self-esteem (Rutter, 1999). Mary lost herself in her thoughts and imagination and, similarly, Tori shut out her parents’ continual fighting through reading and reading (Overlien & Hydén, 2009). Similarly, Rose used distraction and physical activity to cope, while Donna and her siblings found respite by playing outside the house or spending time at the beach away from the house. Others like Marika, Seana and Geraldine found sustaining comfort from their grandparents (Doyle, 2001; Rutter, 1999) who were often like the parents they wished they had and in Seana’s case, a source of protection from her father’s violence:

… There was someone who protected me, for example, when I used to go to her house, I knew that my father would not come after me, because he used to love my grandma so once when I had left home, and I went to her house, he did not come after me to make a scene ... (Seana, p. 34).

But I used to find a lot of comfort in my grandfather ... my grandmother died at 94 .., and up to her death I used to go to her with all my problems. (Geraldine 1, p.24). So I felt that my grandmother loved me. So I felt that my grandmother loved me as a mother should love me. Even my grandfather .., My grandfather was a quiet man. But I used to feel safe, secure, really good. He used to make me feel like I have dignity. He used to give me, I felt that he used to give me dignity. Let me give you a little example ... (Geraldine 1, p. 37).

The participants felt that these grandparents were important positive relationships in their lives. Actually Carmen stated that she had learnt to love from the love that she experienced from her aunt’s family and these were important reference points in her lives, even though her relationships with them were not always smooth.

Thus together with the suffering and the sense of loss that they missed their childhood and adolescence (Swanston et al., 2013), these women also recognised that along their lives, there were important significant others who provided some sense of security, some sense of belonging, and the opportunity to be cared for. Although the participants did not explicitly
link the presence of these significant others to the fact that a lot of them did not replicate their abusive scripts, arguably these caring relatives were a source of earned security (Saunders, Jacobvitz, Zaccagnino, Beverung, & Hazen, 2011). Many of them were also open to the influence of supportive mentors and these people were also important catalysts of change in their lives.

Jessica also talked about coping through defiance – that the more she felt downtrodden, the more she felt energised to fight back. She remembered a time when she spent three months refusing all the food that they gave her and throwing it in the bin, including her school lunch, because she had noticed that her father’s partner was wearing her mother’s shoes. She also refused to speak to anyone in the house and persisted with this behaviour until her father gave in and pleaded with her to stop. She told him that she would stop on condition that his partner would stop wearing her mother’s shoes. The less support Jessica had from her aunts to study for her ‘O’ levels, the more she immersed herself in her work and actually did well in her examinations.

Seana also seemed to get energy in the same way when she described how she talked to herself after an awful abusive incident with the father:

*Although he did not abuse me physically, mentally the amount of insults that he hurled at me at the police station ..., the fact that he smashed my photo into pieces - I felt this like a stab in my heart... but I kept saying to myself... “You do that and you make me stronger”* (Seana, p. 29).

As a result of the abuse that Marika, her siblings, and her mother went through, Marika coped by wanting to take control of what was happening in the house and needing to get involved in everything that happened in the family. She also got involved in fights that her father had with her sister. Marika found it difficult to keep back, even though her mother often drew her attention that her behaviour was annoying her (her mother) and her sisters, or was making the whole situation worse. Marika felt it was her responsibility to get involved:

*I: You said that you always got involved. You defended your mother. Why do you think? You said you were always like this ...,*

*P: I feel responsible, you see? In fact I always felt the responsibility to help my mother, my sister and my youngest sister. I took that responsibility. I don’t know from*
where it came and how it came about but I took the responsibility because there wasn’t a father and I think that in my case, I did it because my dad failed to take it as a father and my mother was too weak to take care of all of us. I took the responsibility as the oldest, not financially because I didn’t earn any money but ...” (Marika 1, p. 21).

These participants used different forms of coping strategies that in turn helped them deal with their adversity context without increasing the “negative chain reactions” that would have predisposed them to further adverse experiences. (Rutter, 1999, p. 129). Having described what they went through in their childhood, the participants proceeded to tell me about their lives as adults. It was clear to me that they saw their childhood as a context for understanding some aspects of their lives as adults.

6.2.2 Adult women with childhood experiences of violence: Legacies of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience – a context for understanding self, relationships with family members, with intimate partners and with one’s children.

6.2.2.1 Daughter-father relationship in adulthood: Dealing with anger, fear and bitterness and a sense of betrayal, together with possibilities of forgiveness, redemption and transformation. As adults, some daughters were still living at home at the time of the interviews. Although some other participants were living in their own homes or with their mothers, they and/or their mothers were still in contact with their father and so, potentially they could still experience the father’s abuse.

The following categories bring to light how the adult daughters’ perceived their relationship with their father. To date, there is very little literature on father-daughter relationships, perhaps because as Nielsen (2012) argues, the quality of the father–daughter relationship is less obviously seen as having far-reaching effects when compared to the mother-daughter relationship. In fact, Nielsen’s book attempts to fill this gap through looking at the father-daughter relationship from a family studies’ perspective. Unfortunately even here, the reference to the father-daughter relationship in a domestic violence context is very scant.

6.2.2.1.1 Cycle of cut-off and connection with father. Donna described the shifting
back and forth process inside herself between cutting off and maintaining a connection with her father similarly to the participants in the Lopez and Corona’s (2012) study.

Donna talked about going back and forth between her conscience and herself, wondering whether to keep contact with her father on the one hand and on the other hand trying to be true to her needs and beliefs and staying away from him. When her mother kept telling her that her father has changed, she found herself considering the possibility to visit him at his house. But when she did go, and she witnessed her father verbally assaulting her mother, she left there full of anger towards both her parents, and full of bitterness and sadness for having once again allowed her father to abuse her and her mother.

She ultimately came to the decision that although deep down, she yearned for a connection with her father, she knew that in reality, she could not afford to have a relationship with him so far, as she perceived him as unpredictable and dangerously abusive and she could not be vulnerable with him. However, there were times when she then found herself yo-yoing between the different positions again:

You really would like to build a relationship with him because even the fact that he does not eat healthy food, it’s like even the fact that I might prepare some extra food and take it to him, he does not live very far away... he does not know where I live, no telephone numbers, because he starts taking over... but then I keep myself back and I say, I cannot do that, I cannot afford to do it... and I learnt by time... because you give this man a lot of chances but then you realise it’s a choice between yourself and him... so people, even my boyfriend, he used to comment... what if we had to take this (food) to him... I cannot because it is his personality... I don’t know how to explain it... but in reality, it hurts... because you would wish that things were different... and you do wish that things one day will be different but then you rationalise and it does not.... It’s like you do recognise the need inside you but you know it is not helpful... I believe that it is that feeling that every girl feels about her father, that he should be in her life, but then reality kicks in and you realise that it cannot be possible...(Donna 1, p. 61).

This shifting back-and-forth is similar to how Seana described her relationship to her father. In Seana’s case, her father was still very violent. Just a few months before I interviewed Seana, her father had forced his way into her mother’s house in the middle of the
night and tore everything apart whilst her mother was away. Seana and her boyfriend who were sleeping in the house, fled to the police station.

Seana felt that she needed to remember her feelings of devastation that she felt after this particularly terrifying incident so that she would be able to justify to herself why she stopped speaking to her father and so as not to feel guilty about her decision to cut off all contact with him. She was still very scared that one day her father would kill her mother and this would be devastating for her as she felt that her mother was her world. However, when her father contacted her a few days later and spoke to her in a civil manner, she went along and gave him another chance because he was still her father.

Jessica too opted to remain in contact with her father despite the fact that he was still verbally abusive towards her. It was important for her to retain a connection to her father, because she did not want to deprive her children from having a grandfather. She also saw this relationship as a way of compensating for the loss of her mother. She also did not tell her children about the insults and the abusive way that he was treating her presently, to protect the children’s relationship.

Thus whilst Donna’s cut-off and Jessica’s connection to the father seemed to be considered and conscious decisions, Seana’s emotional stability seemed still very much to be at the mercy of her father’s violent behaviour. Given that she was still experiencing her father’s assaults, and being triangulated in the conflict between her parents, one can argue that Seana did not have the reflective space to regulate her emotions (Fonagy & Target, 2002), which as highlighted before, were a varied mixture of love and terror. Also as discussed below, one also needs to take into account gender and cultural issues – how in comparison to men, women are typically more oriented towards attachment and connectedness (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1980) in relationships. This might be one way of explaining the daughters’ continual attempts to seek connection with their father, despite his abusive behaviour.

6.2.2.1.2 Transformed daughter-father relationships: Forgiveness and reconciliation.

Besides their experiences of suffering and abuse and feelings of anger, some daughters and fathers managed to transform their relationship into one where there was respect, and also forgiveness. This happened in the lives of Geraldine, Farrah and Sandra.
In all the three narratives, the process of reconciliation and forgiveness involved a change in both the parent and the daughter. The daughters also said that they thought that reconciliation with the father was possible because they had processed some of their earlier adverse experiences—some with therapy and others with the help of mentors or through alternative therapies, such as meditation. Whilst the rapprochement was sometimes initiated by the daughter when she came to know of the father’s serious illness, the reconciliation process was facilitated by the father’s respectful attitude. In the case of Sandra and Farrah, the fact that the father took responsibility for his mistakes made the reconciliation process possible.

Interestingly, although in the family therapy literature there has been an increasing interest in the area of forgiveness, very little has been written on the subject of repentance and responsibility for the wrong doing (James, 2007). The focus has generally been more on the role of forgiveness in healing relationships with studies such as those of DiBlasio (1998), Walrond-Skinner (1998) and Hill (2001). Farrah perceived her father as taking responsibility for the harm that he incurred her:

...because when he was dying of cancer, I used to visit him every day - at the end I had grown very close to my father.....after my husband got murdered, my father realised that he did wrong. He would tell me ‘you never wanted to get married, you married because of me..... He used to tell me ‘bring your daughter home and we will take care of her for you – go out, study – do whatever you need to do for yourself (Farrah, p. 13-14).

In Geraldine’s case, the process of forgiveness took on a slightly different turn. At the time of the second interview, Geraldine was still in awe at what she had experienced and she was keen to share her experiences with me but was also afraid that I would not believe her. She described her experience in detail.

Geraldine described forgiving her father as a profoundly spiritual experience. It was not something that she actively had searched for. She was also not sure how it came about and for a while she wondered whether she was going mad to experience feelings of peace when thinking of her father.

After a meditation retreat that she attended, Geraldine was taken aback at discovering
that she was no longer full of anger against her father. In this sense, she was not actively seeking to forgive her father (Hill, 2001) but with hindsight, she could identify what had helped her reach this point in her life. She was appreciative of the fact that professionals, mentors and relatives had hinted at forgiveness but she needed to have the space of time and choice of whether to forgive him or not. In this respect, she had chosen to cut off all communication and contact with her father for a long period of time - 20 years in her case.

Throughout this time, she had gone along her personal journey of achieving happiness, and serenity. She had found it helpful to be in touch with her feelings and to focus on living in the present (Briere & Scott, 2015). She had also kept working on learning about the consequences of her behaviour and to take action to act differently for example, not to default to being aggressive in her intimate relationships. Geraldine also recognised that it was very useful to let go off grudges towards people who had hurt her as ruminating about the injustices that she had experienced left her angry and upset (Herman, 1997). She recognised that all these different sub-processes were important steps that led her to the forgiveness of her father.

Looking at her father, at how much he had aged was helpful for her too as stated earlier. Geraldine also witnessed how much her father had changed when interacting with his new partner. He seemed happy, joked and teased her and also had a lot of patience with her. Geraldine also observed that her father’s partner was also able to elicit respect and kindness from him and she had made it clear to him, from the beginning of the relationship that she did not want to be shouted at or disrespected.

Geraldine was convinced that her father had changed with time and she was very happy to have had the opportunity to connect with this changed father of hers. Such findings are supported by the study by Ahrons and Tanner (2003) that looked at adult children’s reports of relationship changes with their father, 20 years after their parents’ divorce. The participants indicated that improvements in the relationship with their father took place due to their own and their father’s maturation. They recognised that their new relationship was based more on “adult principles of communication, mutuality and equality, rather than the traditional hierarchical parent-child relationship of childhood” (p. 344). This makes a lot of sense if one takes into account that the hierarchical parent-child relationship was in fact an abusive one.
Although some scholars such as Herman (1997) might be sceptical of the process of forgiveness after so much abuse that participants like Geraldine experienced and her lengthy period of 20 years of emotional cut off from her father, I cannot but honour Geraldine’s process. She has said that there had been many helpful processes that led her to the space where she was (at the time of the interviews). All of these processes have important implications for practice, supervision and training, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Geraldine’s experience was different than the experience of participants in the Band-Winterstein’s (2014) study which is one of the very few qualitative studies that looked at the impact of life long exposure to intimate partner violence on adult children and their aging parents. In this study, the participants could not let go off the picture of their father as a large threatening figure who had controlled their mother and their siblings, despite the apparent deterioration of his physical and mental health. One can argue that Geraldine’s investment in her personal growth helped her make this shift. It would be interesting to explore further such difference in the findings through future research work. I will discuss recommendations for future research in more depth in the next chapter.

6.2.2.1.3 “Bad fathers, good grandfathers.” Another interesting theme that came out of the participants’ experiences was some fathers’ redemptive process through grand parenting, which I also found interesting. This is an under-explored area in the extant research and it would be interesting for future research to look into ways that men, who have been abusive, have turned to be good-enough grandfathers (Holt, 2013).

Hannah spoke of the love that her father showed her niece and how much the young child loved him and although this was something that she really would have loved as a child, she was happy for her father to have this relationship:

*I think that he is obsessed with the idea that the whole world is against him and he tells us that everybody is against him. It’s obviously because he is very lonely. He can’t get much love; just from my niece because he loves her a lot.*

*I*: He loves her?

*P*: He loves her a lot and then I can see how he can be, how he can love someone, and show love. [Do] you know what I mean?

*I*: And how does that make you feel?
P: I am happy for my niece to be loved and I am happy that he gets a bit of love as well. But you know, my mother’s father, he was very bad as a father but he was perfect as a grandfather. He was the best grandfather I could imagine, so it is the same thing as my father, he was not good to be a father but very good to be a grandfather (Hannah, p. 31-32).

According to Hannah, her father felt misunderstood. Perhaps one can speculate that Hannah’s father believed that his daughters had taken their mother’s side and were against him. Hannah perceived her father as being critical of her and her sister, and although they tried many times to better the relationship, they had given up on the idea of their father ever changing his attitude and behaviour and they also had given up on having a good relationship with him:

I: So you still have a poor relationship with him?

P: Yes. I can say that we don’t really get on well with each other. I can say we don’t know anything about each other; we don’t talk too much to each other. Ok I go home, and I have to live with them when I go home for a visit. But now I am an adult. So when I was a child, he could control me. Now he cannot and I don’t even care, because whatever he says, he thinks that he is always right. He is always perfect, anything and anybody else can be only wrong, and our relationship is still bad and this is not going to change because I have tried and my sister has tried so many times to make it better but it is not enough for us to try and change. It cannot be one-sided and my father is not going to change, so our relationship is just going to remain like that or worse, unfortunately” (Hannah, p. 31).

On the other hand, perhaps Hannah’s father was able to find a different way of fathering through grand parenting. The theme of redemption through grandfathering is thus an interesting concept. Perhaps the fathers see grand parenting as being given a second chance to parent, without the added burden of having full responsibility for the child and without the complicating factor of a troubled marital relationship? Perhaps in caring for the grand children, the fathers feel less criticised?

6.2.2.2 Daughter-mother relationship in adulthood: Persistence of anger and sadness, love and protection of the mother and witnessing the mother’s transformation.
6.2.2.2.1 “The relationship with my mother is complicated.” Most of the women who were interviewed in this research project mentioned that their relationship with their mother remained complicated, characterised by a mixture of intense, different feelings. The daughters described their relationship with their mother as good but they also had feelings of anger and sadness around their mother’s lack of protection of them as children, and feelings of resentment and loss at having been burdened with the mother’s protection from the father’s violence.

These feelings of anger intensified in instances when the daughters such as Sara and Donna, noticed their mother feeling romantically drawn to the father again, and seeing her shifting back and forth connecting to and cutting-off from him. Donna acknowledged that she experienced a similar cycle of feelings towards the father, perhaps highlighting the strength of the attachment bond with her father (Bowlby, 1988). At the same time, she could not help feeling terrified and frustrated that the mother would place herself and her sisters in danger again. Donna expressed her fears through being angry with her mother. Sara too threatened her mother that she and her family would leave the mother’s house if the mother decided to re-connect with the father. This happened after someone came to tell Sara’s mother that her husband was interested in returning home and Sara noticed her mother’s face light up at the news. Sara could not fathom how her mother could still love her father after the abuse that she and her siblings suffered. (Enander, 2011; Shah & Vetere, 2012)

On the other side of the spectrum, Geraldine described how the mother was still very much consumed by the anger towards her husband and Geraldine had a hard time explaining to her mother how she had let go off her anger towards her father. All this created a lot of distress for Geraldine because it was important for her to have a good relationship with both her parents, irrespective of the troubled relationship that they still had with each other.

6.2.2.2.2 Transformed daughter-mother relationship. When I asked Geraldine to describe her relationship with her mother, she said that she still found the relationship very challenging but she thought that she and her mother had shifted from a position where they were continually fighting with each other to one where they tolerated each other. Nowadays Geraldine also caught herself loving her mother:

I: you told me that there was a time when things were not so good between you.

P: Yes, totally ..., we did not see eye-to-eye .., nothing .., then we started tolerating
each other .., now we still tolerate each other but the relationship is a bit strange because I feel I love her .., because sometimes I catch myself feeling love for her. I cannot deny it. But we tolerate each other a lot because we are very different. I am very different from my father too. But my father tries to understand me .., let me give you an example .., when I tell my dog, “let’s go and visit grandpa”, he humours me and does not criticise me or ridicule me like my mother does (Geraldine 2, p. 105-106).

Geraldine also spoke about the transformation that she saw her mother going through after she left her husband. Geraldine remembered hearing her sing to music on the radio. In time, her mother also went abroad with relatives and generally became an outgoing person with whom one could have a conversation. This surprised Geraldine because as a child she was used to seeing her mother as a very weak, and very ignorant woman.

During the second interview when Geraldine recalled incidents when she stood in front of her mother trying to protect her, she realised that in fact she must have had a relationship with her mother as a child and this was a new connection for her. With hindsight, she felt that indeed her mother had been a constant in her life. I think that there and then, Geraldine felt closer to her mother. It was a beautiful moment for Geraldine and for me too, to have had the privilege of witnessing it. Such experiences highlight how research interviews are indeed an intervention in people’s lives (Gale, 1992; Rosenthal, 2003).

Although Donna also referred to her relationship with her mother as being “complicated”, she also saw herself and her mother as working out a new relationship between them. Despite the fact that she too reverted to taking care of her mother and her siblings and being a reference point for them (Minuchin, 1974), when she lived with them in the same house for a few weeks recently, Donna was also aware that she was trying to reposition herself as a daughter in relation to her mother, and her mother was also keen to provide her with emotional and material support (This will be discussed in more detail in the section dedicated to “Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification as a related and relational process,” in Part Two, section 6.3.1).

Both Donna and Jessica also acknowledged the suffering that their mother went through and they were also appreciative of the fact that their mother continued supporting the family even in dire circumstances when she could have easily given up:
It is like you started thinking ..., like she does not deserve it ..., because she behaved like a model wife and mother ..., in the sense of taking us to school, to church, cooking food, cleaning ..., and church ..., because she took us to Mass every day and every thing done on her own as my father was non-existent ..., and I used to say ..., Mum really has a beautiful voice ..., because I used to hear her sing ..., and for her religion was comforting ..., She could not make do without saying the rosary and these things ..., So it is like, you would wish to be able to save her ..., I feel ..., I don’t know how other normal kids feel towards their mother but for me, she was a mother and a father to me ..., Perhaps someone else would have left earlier ..., so I feel very grateful towards her ..., but when she was being treated like a doormat, she did her best and remained fighting (Donna 2, p. 31).

Donna, unlike Marika, had let go of her anger towards her mother and seemed to be able to take into account the mother’s suffering even though she had let her down. This supports research that looks into how dispositional forgiveness is related to adult attachment styles (Webb, Call, Chickering, Colburn, & Heisler, 2006), hypothesising that a secure relationship between Donna and her mother helped the daughter deal with relationship distress with her mother in constructive ways (Feeney, 2008). Donna also seemed to be saying that she was also grateful that her mother did not give up and leave the family and leave them behind. In contrast, Marika’s anger towards her mother came out stronger in the interviews as she partly blamed her mother’s lack of courage and her inability to leave her father, for the suffering that she and her siblings went through. Perhaps besides looking at adult attachment styles, it is important to take into account research studies that have looked at developmental influences in the capacity to forgive (Mullet & Girard, 2000).

6.2.2.3 Losing mother: A pervasive sense of loss. Both Carmen and Jessica had lost their mother, one through illness and one through murder by her father. Both felt a pervasive sense of loss in their life:

I: When you look back-would you say that your past has affected your present? Do you still experience the effects of your childhood in your present day living?

P: You know what I feel most? That for example, when I am sick, I say to myself, now if I had a supportive mother, would she not be here to help me to look after the children? Or else at least to look after me? That is the thing that hurts me the most
In Carmen’s case, her feelings were complicated by the betrayal she felt that her mother did not ask her forgiveness before she died, but instead ended up insulting her on her deathbed. Jessica, on the other hand still felt that her mother was with her in spirit and drew her courage and inspiration from the courage that her mother had and from all that she did to her and her siblings. This can be understood through the notion of “continuing bonds” (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006), which draws on attachment theory and constructivist conceptualisation of bereavement.

6.2.2.3 Sibling relationship in adulthood: The persistence and significance of early family of origin roles. When the participants talked about their sibling relationships as adults, many seemed to echo the relationships that they had with their siblings as children. Sara was still the one to support her siblings and her mother as an adult. Marika worried about her younger sisters, especially her middle sister who seemed to cope by withdrawing and keeping everything inside – indicating a repressive coping style (Myers, 2010) which Marika believed was not helpful for her mental health. Marika often encouraged her sister to seek help from a counsellor or therapy. Jessica too still cared for her youngest sister as she used to do when they were young and as adults, they have maintained their close relationship.

On the other hand, Claire noticed how one of her sisters, who was close to her mother, was at pains whether to get married or not as she was worried about her mother’s mental and physical health because of her father’s psychological abuse. Claire’s sister’s doubts indicated that she was very much triangulated in her parents’ relationship. Donna too, still found it hard to untangle herself from not taking responsibility for emotionally supporting the mother and her sisters and still took on a parental role with both her sisters, even though her middle sister was only a year and a half younger than her. She had re-experienced this in an intense way when she moved back to her mother’s house for a few weeks when Donna’s house was undergoing some construction work. It seemed that it was hard for the siblings to change their relationships from their childhood roles unless the siblings took an active role to change their interactions even when the violence stopped.

When I asked Donna about the losses and gains in the sibling relationship given her parental role (Byng-Hall, 2008; Minuchin, 1974) she replied that having a lot of responsibility for her siblings meant losing the fun element in the sibling relationship and she
was not comfortable in the company of her sister in social settings. She was not able to relax in her presence. In some respects, it was like losing the sibling relationship. With her youngest sister, who is 10 years younger, Donna felt that it was okay to take on a more caring role but still she did not relate with her as a sibling:

*I feel it is a big loss ..., There’s my middle sister ..., I don’t feel ... sometimes, I tell my boyfriend. We would have friends and we take them out to dinner ..., I know that my sister would like to come with us but I don’t feel comfortable with her ..., because I feel that my line is that I have to be responsible for someone ..., I always have to take that responsibility and so I won’t be able to relax when I am with her ...*, I feel like I am the aunt if not the mother ..., and that annoys me ..., I see this as a loss because on the other hand, we understand a lot each other ..., the things we went through ..., And we learnt a lot from the ..., we learnt about life, about having certain values about money and other things that the youngest sister does not have ..., we appreciate a lot the things we have ..., because we had so many doors closed in our face, nobody cared ..., but my youngest sister was too young when my parents separated and she does not remember much (Donna 2, p. 66).

Donna also remembered that as a child, she was not able to play with her sister in the house as she remembered thinking that playing was a waste of time. Perhaps she was too preoccupied and concerned about her mother’s safety and her father’s violence to relax enough to play.

Marika did not talk specifically about negative impact on the sibling relationship. It is as if she is still very much taken up with her relationship with her mother and father. However, she worried about her sister’s sense of shame about having the kind of family that they had.

Donna, like Jessica, also felt that she was unable to talk with her sister about what they went through as children as she was afraid that they would both become emotionally distressed. However, they sometimes talked about what they went through in relation to how best to influence and guide the youngest sister and how to best support their mother. In this way, they were implicitly trying to re-negotiate their sibling relationship without directly addressing their relationship.
Like Marika, Donna also referred to the siblings abusing each other as young adults. Donna shared that her youngest sister is often physically abusive with her middle sister, grabbing her and throwing her around. Donna seemed to blame her middle sister for this, as she said that her sister takes a weak position with regard to her youngest siblings.

These experiences are supported by research, which shows that sibling violence is widespread and pervasive throughout childhood (see Khan & Rogers, 2014, for a review), although experiences of sibling violence are often considered harmless despite evidence showing its detrimental effect on the victims (Caspi, 2012). These findings in my research indicate that such sibling violence continues into adulthood too, even after the parental violence has stopped.

From these experiences, one can also argue that changing behaviours, like not getting triangulated in the family interactions when there was violence or in the aftermath, and also not taking parental responsibility, is very difficult. For the women interviewed, these were long standing challenges, which they regularly had to revisit. All of this has important implications for practice, training, and supervision of professionals working in this area.

6.2.2.4 What these women go through as individual adults: Legacies of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience. As these women recalled past childhood experiences and talked about important processes in their adult life as adults, what came through was their sense that the impact of their childhood experiences was pervasive and never-ending. Recent research looking at the quality of the parent-child relationships and psychobiological activity (Byrd-Craven, Auer, Granger, & Massey, 2012; Luecken, Kraft, & Hagan, 2009) has shown that there is a link between how the young adults deal with stress events and the quality of their relationship with their parents in their childhood. More specifically the parent-child relationship has an impact on the secretion of cortisol, the hormone that is released when we feel physically or emotionally threatened. This potentially has important implications on how well the adults cope with stress in their relationships (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012).

However these participants also spoke of their determination to develop an identity as different from that of their mother/father as another way of making sure that they were not going to repeat the same cycle of abuse – of being abused and being abusive as happened in their families of origin. I was struck by their determination of wanting to be happy in their
... because I say I would like to have children and I don’t want to make the same mistakes my parents made in the past. So you look at life differently. I would like to have a career. Then after some time, I would like to get married and then I have children (Marika 1, p. 27).

When I started seeing my parents’ marriage deteriorating, I said to myself that I never wanted to be in the same situation—I always wanted to leave home. I wanted to leave home young but I wanted to find my ideal partner, in a way of how I am going to benefit? Because I know that I am a very giving person—I will give you everything. I was afraid that I would be exploited or abused because of this – being that I saw mum giving up her life and she is still doing the same thing. And the marriage is still alive—it is still there—it didn’t dissolve—they stayed living in the same house—they didn’t separate—they are still living together till this very day but I know that there is no love between them and I never wanted this for myself (Claire, p. 5).

Carmen went as far as actively listing the ways that she was different from her mother and Marika was certain that the least time she spent in the presence of her father, the least he was going to influence her and the less likely that she would resemble him in her actions. She talked about her fear of having inherited his aggressive behaviour, and referred to the time a few years back, when she had started hitting her youngest sister. Marika gets upset when her mother tells her that she is becoming like her father and so she feels better cutting off all contact with him so that she does not find herself in situations where she is not able to manage her frustration and her anger. Such experiences are again supported by extant literature on emotional cutting off as a form of emotional regulation in domestic violence contexts (Murphy, 2003):

\[ \text{I: so it is helpful for you that you have cut all communication with your father ..,} \]
\[ \text{P: yes, yes a lot .., because daddy and I – we are both hard-headed, so when we fight, if we don’t get our way .., And then I started becoming afraid .., in fact, when I fight with my father (nervous giggle), I start getting agitated .., I start becoming afraid that we will get into trouble .., that we will end up being physical with each other .., because this part in me scares me .., because how do you say this .., it is like when I} \]
"lose it ..., I am afraid that I have my father’s character ..., so the less time that I spend with him, the better." (Marika 2, p. 12-13).

At this point, it is interesting to note Marika’s use of language to explain her aggression. Although Marika emphasised that she had stopped beating her sister out of her own will, she explained her aggression as if “you become mad ..., it is like something inhabits your mind” (Marika 2, p. 14), externalising attribution (Coates & Wade, 2004) much like the practice of abusive men when not taking responsibility for their abuse. In the case of Marika, both her sister and her mother were frightened of her and in turn, she could not believe the kind of person that she had become, feeling ashamed and blaming her father for what she had become.

6.2.2.4.1 “I am afraid that I will repeat my parents’ mistakes.” Along similar lines, the theme of not replicating the family script was foremost in the mind of many of the participants. Many were scared of what seemed to be a dominant psychological discourse in their mind - that they believed that once they were abused, they were at risk of being either abused or being abusive themselves and thus were afraid of anything that might make seem this true:

I know a lot of people who had an ugly past and the more that they did not want to beat their children, they still ended up beating their children because it is in the family genes – it’s hereditary. Do you understand this? I wonder whether I will be the same (Marika 1, p. 29).

They believed that these childhood experiences were a determining factor in their lives and given that psychological research was imbued with authority that research is normally connoted with, it was like their Damocles’ sword. I also got the impression that this belief tied with a stronger set of beliefs – those around intergenerational transmission of violence – also referred to earlier in the literature review chapter.

One can argue that such beliefs could feed a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy and/or feelings of helplessness and lack of agency. It also highlights the importance for professionals to understand the limitations of certain research findings as has been highlighted earlier in the literature review chapter. Moreover, this underlines the importance of propagating research, such as this project, which highlights the resilience of people who have gone through difficult life experiences and who have managed to transform their lives, despite the difficulties that
they went through. The resilience of these women will be elaborated upon in the section detailing the “Turning points and Developmental processes that fostered change” further on in the chapter. Thus while it is important that the legacies of childhood trauma experiences are given space, space also needs to be made for participants’ understanding of their resilience.

6.2.2.4.2 “Trying to make sense came much later, as an adult.” A recurrent theme in these women’s interviews was the process of trying to make sense of their childhood experiences. Many of the women said that their childhood was about surviving day by day and as children they could not make sense of what was happening at home, which many times was like trying to predict what was unpredictable (Swanston et al., 2013). The process of understanding, which involved an emerging understanding, started to develop as they grew older, perhaps, when they were likely to have the intellectual and emotional resources to support such understanding and reflection (Mullender et al., 2002). Interestingly, research seems to suggest that making sense of how and why abuse occurred and thereby achieving a sense of control may help people cope with various forms of child maltreatment (Doyle, 2001). As the children grew older, they were also in touch with different families and they came to the awareness that what they previously thought was normal was not normal at all and what happened in their families did not happen in all families. This is how Donna explained it in her second interview:

... even sometimes, they might have said .., ‘because my daughter .., ’ and you kind of intuit what life is like in their homes. And so you say – ‘So serenity does exist in a family! It is possible!’ It is possible’ And I did this in secondary school. The guidance teacher was like a mummy to me and I used to observe her a lot. And when the teachers used to share their personal experiences with you - not in detail you know, simple things but for me, it is like they were giving me gifts (Donna 2, p. 22-23).

The women described their process of understanding as a never-ending one. They described it as what seemed like a back-and-forth process, between revisiting childhood memories and trying to understand events and experiences in adult life in the context of these childhood memories. The process also involved trying to comprehend often-fragmented memories, which could also be scant in context.

One of the most important things that the women tried to make sense of, was why
there was violence in the family: some found a partial explanation in their father’s childhood experiences of neglect and physical abuse, for example, Seana; others blamed her father’s drinking - Jessica and Anita - although Anita also blamed what she described as her mother’s chaotic behaviour; others mentioned fighting about in-laws; others mentioned the general unhappiness in their parents’ marriage. Knowing about their father’s history of being abused, as a child, was not helpful in some cases. For example, when both Seana and Marika learnt about their father’s family of origin background, which had been kept a secret, they felt doubly betrayed. They could not believe that their father made them suffer and go through what he himself had gone through as a child.

One can speculate that when the physical or psychological abuse was still very much present in their mind, the young women were too angry to even consider such information about their father; they felt too aggrieved. On the other hand, in the case of Claire, who was a 40-year-old woman, and whose abuse had stopped a number of years ago, knowing her father’s background helped her to make sense of some of his behaviour. This has implications for practitioners who need to be mindful of timing when working with survivors of trauma experiences.

It was also important for the participants to understand why their mother stayed with their father and why their mother did not speak up about her difficulties in her marriage. They mentioned that their mother was not only afraid for herself but she was afraid that in speaking about the abuse with her own mother or other close family members, she would be putting them in danger. The participants also made links to important cultural beliefs about gender, and religion that, according to them, hindered their mothers from taking any action; these beliefs will be discussed in Part One, section 6.2.3.

Furthermore, for some participants, it was also helpful for them to look at their parents’ courtship and marriage. Geraldine discovered that her father had been rejected by his first love as he had very thick glasses. He had experienced this incident as very hurtful and as something that he could never forget. Geraldine’s mother was six years older than her then boyfriend - Geraldine’s father and she was not his first choice. But according to Geraldine, her mother accepted him and his thick glasses were not an issue for her because unlike her mother’s father, Geraldine’s father was a strong, healthy man, who was very good with his hands and who could provide for her and their future children. This is how Geraldine
understood her parents’ couple relationship. According to her, this kind connection was not enough to sustain their relationship. When she thought of her parents’ relationship in this way, Geraldine said that things started to make more sense and she found herself being mellower in the kind of language that she used. Before, she used to insist that the violence in her parents’ relationship was all her father’s responsibility. Now she found herself insisting on this less strongly than before. However she still thought that her father was perhaps in a better position to realise that his relationship with her mother was not going to work out because she still saw him as being more intelligent than her mother, despite her mother’s transformation after they separated.

Geraldine’s reflection about her change in the language that she was using is an interesting one. Perhaps she had processed her experience to the point that she could take more of an observer’s position and to think about her parents’ relationship rather than get triangulated in her parents’ conflict and get drawn into an impossible position of taking sides in her parents’ conflict and get swept by intense distressing emotions - as happens in a double-bind position (Bateson et al., 1956).

In summary, it was important for the participants to have different explanations as these gave meaning to the kind of behaviour which seemed too extraordinary for them to understand and make sense of (Smith Landsman, 2002). Also, these explanations seemed important when they had some respite from “surviving” and when they had the space to think and to try and make sense of what was going on in their families and in their lives. This process of understanding was a continual one and one that was done with help as will be illustrated further down in the chapter.

6.2.2.4.3 Processes that hindered the participants’ understanding. The participants spoke about how as adults they remembered very vivid trauma memories of seeing their mother being beaten. They also had sensory memories - feeling their father’s hand on their body and face beating them, which they experienced as very distressing. These are symptoms commonly associated with PTSD and are usually trauma-specific (McNally, 2009). Jessica also remembered experiencing persistent flashbacks, as a child, of seeing her mother beaten. During these episodes she had been convinced that she was going crazy and it was only as an adult that she understood what was happening to her, after her psychologist explained what these memories were. The participants remembered and suffered, feeling that their memories
were shameful (Dutton, 1999) and it was hard for them to believe that these memories were part of their reality!

*We had gone to one of the village feasts and he had friends there and I remember we went back home and he had been drinking and my mother was sleeping and he started hitting her indiscriminately, and I still remember the shoes and the cream-coloured flip-flop and the green colour of the flip-flop’s sole ..., and these were very flexible and I remember my mum in bed and me crying and telling him to stop and standing up on the bed ..., really (crazy) things ..., you might tell me, how come you are telling me this? ..., I told you these things really spontaneously because these are shameful things because these are things that you see only in the movies ...* (Seana, p. 19).

In the interviews, the participants described their psychological pain and their suffering and Seana emphasised that this kind of pain was worse than physical pain. Rose too talked about how her father’s insults continuously played in her head and she felt incapacitated. As a result, she found it difficult to pluck courage to go out alone to meet new people.

*In terms of insults, there was a word ‘you are an incompetent/ incapable (person)’ and this is something that has stuck in my head till the present day; even when I am going to do something today, I still feel this* (Rose, p. 5).

Similarly, Claire felt that part of the legacy of the immense fear that she experienced in her childhood, was her fear of being bullied, even as an adult (Band-Winterstein, 2014). She feels very afraid in situations of conflict and she chooses to withdraw rather than retaliate:

*He put a fist next to my face and I tried to hold off his hands but my father was really strong because he was into construction work at that time – so he was really strong and I remember that he had started telling me – almost in a jesting manner – come on, now tell me the opposite that I am telling you – and I now know that he was looking at me and “enjoying” the fact that he was seeing fear in my eyes- so that I will tell him – no, I will not do it because he knew that I would not oppose him because I was too afraid ..., and I am still afraid, not only of him but of everyone because I am afraid of being bullied – so I will not answer back at anyone* (Claire, p. 13).

6.2.2.4.4 Suffering and resilience. At the same time, these women’s stories of
suffering were also filled with narratives of resilience in their adult life too. Seana coped with her sleeping difficulties and her constant ruminations with the help of work; Jessica, both as a child and as an adult, invested in her education. Marika found it helpful to open up to a few professionals, slowly and cautiously. She also found her friend’s support as life changing. This supports research that shows that the support provided by friends and by a network of family members is important for women, especially in contexts of child trauma experiences (Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickes, 2007):

... and it is like .., you live in a family where everybody is unhappy .., everyone is in a bad mood, everyone fighting .., in a negative family, if I could put it this way .., and you too would be unhappy; so it is like you could have no one to talk to, to vent out with .., it is like you live in an ugly world .., then I went to College and I met different people and I met my friend .., and I am eternally grateful to her .., because I always liked clothes and that kind of thing and we became friends and we started modelling together .., and it is like she helped me draw out what was positive in me .., yes .., and even she had problems at home and we used to support and understand each other and we used to go out together and it is like .., she changed my life completely (Marika 2, p. 9-10).

Jessica, Donna, Anita, and Geraldine amongst other things found psychological therapy as supportive and helpful to process what they went through. Jessica realised that her feistiness and her inability to stop moving as a child were the result of feeling trapped and the pressure she felt to fit according to others’ wishes (those of her father, and his family) and the pressure to deny her own wishes (Herman, 1997). As a child she felt strongly that she needed someone to acknowledge the suffering that she and her siblings were going through (Tomm & Govier, 2007). In therapy, she was also able to articulate her feelings of sadness, anger and anguish for not having stood up to her father’s abuse earlier and got her life back (Courtois & Ford, 2013). She also understood her sensitivity to being used by others and also her sensitivity to the loss of loved ones. She realised too that behind her anger, the hurt is still there: the loss of a mother and feeling that she is alone in the world, and that all she has is through her own sheer effort (Bowlby, 1969; Crittenden, 1999). Carmen, who too grieved the loss of never having had a loving mother, also echoed these same feelings.

As a result of therapy, Donna became more aware of her feelings and behaviours and
more in touch with her vulnerable side. Amongst other things, she now sees herself as being more open to others’ help, something that she has been struggling with all her life, indicating that she is now more earned-secure (Saunders et al., 2011). It was so much easier for her to be in charge and to give to others, than let others help her. Donna linked her difficulty to trust others to her experiences of having been betrayed by her father and let down by her mother, when she had to be the one to take on the parenting role so early in her life. Finally one of Sara’s coping mechanism besides investing in her training as a professional, which was something that she could not do in her father’s time, was also forgetting some of the experiences she went through, using denial as a defense (van der Kolk, 2007b) as this helped her not to continually feel down. She was also proud of the fact that she was building her own house, and that they had all managed to save enough money to have a family holiday.

6.2.2.5 The women’s understanding of the impact on their intimate relationships: Childhood survival strategies, trauma legacies, and fear of replicative scripts make relationships hard but relationships can be transformative too.

6.2.2.5.1 “The fact that couples attack each other – for me it is normal.” Participants spoke about how for them, growing up and witnessing their parents’ arguing all the time was considered normal. Tori reasoned out that when her boyfriend was abusive, she still stood by him and did not leave, even though she was not tied by marriage. The following quote illustrates how she made sense of her behaviour:

I think that my parents’ relationship, the fact that they attack each other – for me it is normal – it is what couples do. But this is not reality, but for me that was how it should have been. So when I came under attack, I stayed when I could have left. I was not tied down because of marriage and I stayed. I stayed. Then the verbal attacks started six months into the relationship and I stayed and these were quite frequent. And maybe even with the children, perhaps I will have an unhappy marriage, I will be frustrated and vent out on the children ..., and because that was my mother, it is easy for that to happen.

And another thing. I believe that in a relationship it is okay for my partner to have friends who are girls and also men and if he goes out with them, it is not a problem, but because I know that my father used to give attention to other women, and he used to treat my mother in a certain way and I used to be with my mother when I was
young, I react like her. I know that it is okay but emotionally my heart sinks (when my partner goes out with his friends). I have to work on that. I know that it is okay. Yes, I know. There is no reason why I am like an emotional volcano. I think that these are the things that affect me in a relationship” (Tori, p. 16-17).

Tori was physically abused by her mother and at the same time, she identified herself with her mother. She also considered her parents’ unhappy relationship as a determining factor in her life. This supports the emotional security hypothesis (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Cummings & Davies, 2010; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Tori was very much preoccupied with her fear of replicating her parents’ script (Byng-Hall, 1998) and was actively trying to find ways of conducting her relationships differently, with the help of psychotherapy, at the time of the interview. For Tori, her childhood background of witnessing violence and being psychological and physically abused were the reasons that helped her understand why she did not leave her abusive, intimate relationship.

Similarly, Sandra explained her acceptance of abusive behaviour in her intimate relationship with her partner as a result of not having the experience of a more respectful relationship. She also talked about being submissive in her relationship and being afraid of showing who she really is and accepting everything, including abusive behaviour because she did not know any better.

You also learn things about yourself and the same thing about relationships, isn’t it? And I understand why I went through certain things in relationships when I was younger .., and a lot of times, it was a question of fear and fear of showing who I am. I did not defend who I was. In a relationship, I was always the one who got downtrodden .., even though these same persons, years later came to tell me, you were right .., or listen .., you didn’t deserve this .., or you know that you were the best partner that I had? (Sandra, p. 29-30).

In the interview, Sandra also explained in more depth her relationship with her partner, who also had childhood experiences of domestic violence and who was also going through her own search of sexual identity and shifting between a relationship with the participant and a relationship with an ex-boyfriend. When Sandra sensed her partner’s abandonment, she became violent. Such a finding highlights that using “complex trauma” as a theoretical model (Flemke, Underwood, & Allen, 2014) might be a useful model for practitioners to understand
women who engage in violence, specifically women who have a history of experiencing different types of child abuse:

_When I used to sense and feel this insecurity, I used to go mad. I never attacked her personally but I got to the point when she used to beat me and I used to beat her back because I was not going to continue getting beaten .., I remember for example, the last time that she left me for her ex-boyfriend I was in a do or die position and I was really down and I was also very violent .., not because I am a violent person but I was so much under pressure that my mind was not functioning well and I was feeling that things were happening quickly .., and I did not think that it was fair that things were happening to me because someone was unable to deal with her problems but I was not able to express these things so I grabbed her mobile and broke it into 400 pieces and one time I grabbed her from her hair, I know that I did wrong and like I don’t want these things to happen to me, then I am not supposed to do it to someone else..._

(Sandra, p. 34).

Interestingly, prior to the interview, Sandra did not make any links between her present behaviour and her past childhood experiences of abuse as she said that she was not the violent partner in the relationship. Furthermore, she also realised that it seemed that she had a “mental block” between her vast knowledge of domestic violence as part of her work, and identifying what she went through in her childhood as witnessing domestic violence. Therapeutic work with her psychologist and the interview was helping her make links within her experience and naming her experiences (Briere & Lanktree, 2012).

In terms of her awareness, she saw herself as being affected by her childhood experiences in the way that she was submissive and justified other people’s abusive behaviour in her intimate relationship.

I think that it is worth reflecting on the fact that Sandra did not see her behaviour as violent. Perhaps if Sandra were a man, one might quickly think about minimisation language and issues of not taking responsibility for her violent behaviour. But reflecting further, I am also wondering again about her difficulties with the articulation of her feelings and her emotional regulation (Dallos & Vetere, 2009).

I also reflect upon whether her difficulty in her awareness also ties with inability to
identify her childhood experiences as having included a lot of incidents of experiencing the violence of her parents and of being abused by her mother. Sandra also talked about how important it was for her that her family of origin’s sense of instability and lack of family unity did not affect her relationships. She was always trying to look for stable relationships but was not managing to be involved in a stable relationship. She also was very adamantly that she never wanted other people to pity her, as this would have stopped her from any form of psychological growth. She had also been convinced that these issues were in her past and hence were not affecting her present:

You grow and learn .., isn’t it true .., when my therapist told me and I told her that I did not go through domestic violence .., she told me .., do you know what you are saying? .., I told her, where was the violence? .., these are not things that happened now .., They are dead and buried for me because once you have dealt with these things and trashed them out, they are no longer part of your heavy baggage, because you would have got rid of them … (Sandra, p. 45-46).

One can thus speculate that her great wish and determination to put aside her past family relationships so that she could have better relationships in her present, possibly, hindered her from looking at how her childhood relationships could also be having an influence on how she was managing her present relationships. In fact, through the research interview, in co-creating a thinking space or a mentalising space (Bateman & Fonagy, 2006), she realised that her partner was actually abusing of her emotions and she decided to stand up for herself.

6.2.2.5.2 “How the relationship with my father affected my relationship with men.”
Participants made a connection between their relationship with their father and their relationships with men, in general. This connection is supportive of research that highlights the significant impact that the father has on his daughter’s romantic relationships (Nielsen, 2014). Rose explained that thanks to her father, she ended up hating men. Some boys also rejected her and this fact did not help her relationships with men in general: “Re: relationships.., thanks to my father.., I ended up hating men/not being able to stand men., and also I sometimes got rejected by some boys” (Rose, p. 29).

Sandra spoke about looking at men as inferior to women and seeing herself as trying to manipulate them to get what she wanted. Sandra made a connection to how she used to
have to manage her father so that he would not be in a position to blackmail her and also linked her behaviour and attitude to her having been sexually abused as a teenager by a family friend:

And I think that something that affected me too and I think that it affected me a lot is that I used to look at a man as inferior to a woman ..., this is something that I struggle with, today, not in a sexist way or feminist way but this is something that I need to learn more about myself ..., But I always used to try and manipulate a man ..., so I used to say ..., so it was difficult for me to find a person that is a man to go out with ..., I also was sexually abused so this affects me too...

I : so how did this belief come about, that you can manipulate a man as you please? P: because I used to see myself as more intelligent than a man ... even in the way that I communicate with my father and my brother ... I was good enough to manipulate (them)...I had to learn how to get what I want from my father so that he does not keep blackmailing me for example, or even from the other experience that I went through, so that the abuse stopped (Sandra, p. 25).

Both Rose and Sandra explained how their beliefs and attitudes hindered their intimate relationships with men. On the other hand, both had loving intimate relationships with women. Both, however, did not label themselves as gay. Although Rose had come out to her family as gay, she was at a point in her life where if the opportunity for a relationship with a boy came along, she would consider it because she was “discovering that not all boys and men are the same ..., I am not saying the word ..., not all are cruel sadists” (Rose, p. 30). Similarly, Sandra did not want to label herself as gay as this was not something that she felt as describing her completely. She said that being in a gay relationship with someone was part of her present but that anything could happen in the future. These findings are consistent with those of Hlazo-Tawodzera (2006) and others like Diamond (1995) who suggest that sexual identity and behaviour are not fixed for life but can fluctuate and change over a woman’s life span:

I never thought for example ..., I never thought of myself as gay ..., and I don’t like defining myself as gay, bisexual, straight because at the end of the day, the most important thing is that you know who you are, from the inside ..., I don’t know what’s going to happen in the future ..., In the sense, that I might meet Prince Charles (laughs) with Prince Charming next week. Actually, I think that he is gay too ..., I don’t know ...,
you can never ..., I believe that in life you cannot ..., First of all, if I come out that I am gay, it won’t ruin anything in my life ..., in the sense that, it’s how you feel and you fall in love with an individual’s personality, the way that that person speaks to you, not only on a sexual basis. That’s why that I don’t like labelling myself as gay or because at the end of the day, so what? You know? So that we say that there is another gay person in society? (Sandra, p. 29).

Seana on the other hand, found it difficult to trust her boyfriend completely - that he will not be violent, just because he was a man, like her father. Despite the fact that he was supportive of her throughout their eight years of courtship and has never been aggressive, she was still afraid that one day, out of the blues, he would betray her trust and turn violent:

This is after 8 years, almost, so there are still things that I don’t tell him because I am afraid that that devil that is in my father, will one day will appear in him, do you understand, I start saying to myself, after all he is a man. And I know that a man is totally different from a woman (Seana, p. 40).

Seana’s gendered beliefs about men and violence are theoretically supported by writings about hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005), which associates manhood with power achieved through sexual domination of women, and the exclusion of women through various means including violence. In Seana’s case, the experiences that she lived through and was still living through at the hands of her father were a living testament of these beliefs. Thus one can understand Seana’s fears around trusting that her boyfriend will not be violent. At the same time, one can also understand, that these gendered beliefs about men and violence and men in relationships exert a lot of pressure on both partners, in an intimate relationship. In fact, Seana found herself wondering whether she was relationship-material.

It was difficult for Seana to trust her boyfriend and she felt that she did not love him enough when she compared to how much she loved her mother. Although she felt that he supported her, he not always understood where she was coming from and when this happened, she doubted herself and the relationship:

But he does not understand me completely ..., But nobody understands you completely ..., because there are things that I went through in my world that he can never understand because he had a different upbringing ..., so for him, I start talking
difficult to him .., difficult not because I use difficult words but because for him it does
not make sense .., for him these are things that you see only in the movies, you don’t
see them in real life (Seana, p. 43-44).

It seemed as if the spectre of the violence always hovered over the relationship of this
participant and her boyfriend “like a shadowy third in the couple’s milieu” (Johnson, 2004, p.
513).

In a similar way, Donna saw herself as putting a lot of restrictions and conditions in
the relationship with her boyfriend, so that she made sure that her boyfriend was not like her
father. However, this created a lot of distress in her, in her boyfriend and their relationship,
and they ultimately decided to go for couple therapy:

They were things of the past, for example, I was being too rigid with him, I laid down
rules and regulations for him, don’t you dare get jealous about every single person I
talk to and things like that, don’t you dare do this or that and for him these were
things he would not even dream of doing but I had to tell them to him .., don’t you
dare raise your hand to me, don’t dream of becoming jealous and .., let me give you
an example, I am free to speak to anyone that I want to, I want to go to Junior
College, and no one is going to stop me, I want to work not like my mother .., at first
she was not working because he was jealous, then he forced her to go to work even to
the extent of sending the youngest daughter to a residential home because he wanted
her to earn money. You totally cannot understand his thinking this man .., so I had
stood up to him (her boyfriend) to the extent that even when he said he loved me, I did
not attach any particular value to it .., how can I put it, there would be things, for
example .., there were certain things like the truth and he used to tell me it’s my
principles and my word as man that are the core of my living .., if it’s black it’s black
.., and although he used to tell me that and he appeared to be genuine, I still .., I don’t
know, for example, I send him a message and he tells me something that was not
exactly as he had said it the day before or as I thought he would say it .., my goodness
I would create a whole scene .., and he would tell me so you’re telling me that I am
lying to you? And I would tell him, no you’re not outright lying to me, you’re just
bending the truth .., I would have then created so much fuss about something that
nowadays I cannot even believe I would have created so much stress about it. Then I
came to a point where the relationship was going to end. I told him, listen let’s do something about our situation because I am tired, I was not even concentrating at Junior College and we went to counselling ... (Donna 1, p. 40-42).

Both she and her boyfriend found it helpful for him to witness her individual work but also to work together on how he can support her and they both can support their relationship (Whiffen & Oliver, 2004). She learnt that it was important for her to trust a bit more and to let go some of her control. This related not only to her relationship with her boyfriend but also to her way of managing her relationships in general. Having her father tell her so many times that people’s betrayal was the order of the day, she found it very difficult to trust and also very difficult not to be ever-vigilant for when the next catastrophic event was going to happen, indicating her insecure-attachment style of relating and her strategies to protect herself from danger (Crittenden, 2008; Dallos & Vetere, 2009).

These findings are supported by research which shows that the quality of family-of-origin functioning and childhood emotional abuse experiences were more consistently associated with the quality of the marital relationship for women who had been emotionally abused than for men who had been emotionally abused (Dodge Reyome, 2010). However, other research which looked at representations of one’s parents’ marriage and how these influence couple conflict strategies shows that overall for couples, marital representations of their parents’ marriage together with higher insight, predicted cooperation between the couple and lower child involvement in the parental conflict (Curran, Ogolsky, Hazen, & Bosch, 2011) particularly for women. The results predicted that women who recalled more negative content about their parents’ marriage but who had high insight would show greater cooperation with their partner. In contrast, for women with low insight, more negative content predicted less cooperation with their partner. Incidentally, for men, however marital representations were less effective in predicting later cooperation. Nevertheless such findings underscore and support the participants’ experiences of finding therapy useful in understanding their behaviour as part of a couple.

It was also helpful for Donna to have her boyfriend’s support over what she went through in her childhood. Had not she talked about what she went through in the context of therapy and he had not been there, Donna was convinced that it would have been too difficult for him to understand her experiences:
You cannot control anything ..., I had to work very hard ..., I was always crying with him, and through counselling he started to understand. He realised the harm that my father had done to me. In the beginning he used to tell me you hate your father too much, then when he saw me crying all the time and sobbing my heart out ..., then we started doing some progress, we began to learn how to protect ourselves and care for us, thinking of where to go ..., those ..., for example... (Donna 1, p. 43).

6.2.2.5.3 Marriage as a form of escape. Participants like Sara, Farrah and Jessica described how marriage for them was a form of escape from the home environment, which is one form of coping strategy that can increase the likelihood that adverse sequelae persist in childhood survivors of violence (Rutter, 1999).

Sara recalled how she married her husband after courting for 2 years. In retrospect, she thought that she had been too young to marry. She reckoned that she had been lucky in her choice of partner as she was happy with him. Farrah described rushing into marriage after knowing her late husband for about four months. Although she described him as having had an “ugly background” involving drugs and prostitution, part of her was proud of herself for having tamed a “wild horse”. She also told me how her father blamed himself and his aggressive behaviour for her shotgun marriage.

Jessica too felt that her father rushed her into marriage. He had just come out of prison and according to her, he wanted to show the world at large that despite the tragic circumstances, his daughter had turned out well and that she was getting married. Jessica had hoped that getting married would give her the opportunity to finally have her needs met and to have someone who would love her and be dedicated to her. At the same time, she recalled having had second thoughts about her boyfriend’s sentiments towards her. But she had felt obliged to carry out with the wedding preparations as she had felt that her family had had enough trouble. However, Jessica was unhappy with her husband and the relationship did not work out.

6.2.2.5.4 “Looking for a man who was completely different than my father, with help.” Both Claire and Hannah seemed more aware that there were other types of men, who were not violent and both were very clear on the characteristics that their partners and future husbands needed to have.
I always felt that it [getting married] will be something nice to do, I always wanted to get married, but I said, never anybody like my father. I promised myself that if my husband is going to do just this part of (showing a gap between her forefinger and her thumb) what my father did and more for my children I never want my children to experience something like that, so, never not the type of my father and it seems that I chose a very different one. I: Did you have in mind, maybe characteristics that your husband should have? H: Yes .., the opposite of my father, I wanted someone who is very gentle and who listens to me, and gives me attention and who shows his love, especially that is what I wanted, that he shows his love, that he is gentle with children and this is the character I was looking for ... (Hannah, p. 14).

I also asked Hannah from where she had learnt about these characteristics, as I was interested in her understanding of what had made a difference in her relationships. She connected to the fact that she had a very loving mother and that this had a strong impact on her. This supports research, which indicates that warm, supportive, and responsive parenting behaviour in the context of interpersonal violence may buffer children from the negative effects associated with exposure to domestic violence (Sturge-Apple, Davies, Cicchetti, & Manning, 2010). In addition, Hannah’s insight about the importance of her relationship with her mother also theoretically links with the concept of reflective functioning (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002) which has been defined as “the capacity to perceive and understand oneself and others in terms of psychological states that include feelings, beliefs, intentions and desires (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin, 2014, p. 35). Fonagy et al. (2002) highlight the importance of a caregiver to make sense of his or her own mental health and that of the child’s to assist the child in affect regulation, which then increases the likelihood of intimate, sustaining and productive relationships. In fact, Hannah also said that she had come to know herself well and knew that she had these qualities in herself and so wanted them to be in her husband too:

I think partly because on the other hand I had a very loving mother, I guess that she left an impact on me, and I know myself very well .., I used to think a lot, and so I was really sure of the things I wanted to look for in a man, not the perfect one because no one is perfect but I know myself, I am like that too. I like to give attention, I am very loving and very emotional and I wanted someone I could share and enjoy these moments with, and I really didn’t want to have anybody like my father and I didn’t
want to do the same mistakes my mother did (Hannah, p. 15).

Hannah also spoke about having dated a boy in her teens who she described as masculine but who also had these qualities which society associated with the feminine, that she described above, which had helped her realize that such men exist. Furthermore, she also mentioned her psychology study units in her professional training as having helped her grow in her self-awareness and in the choice of a partner who was suitable for her.

6.2.2.5.5 Secrets and shame regarding childhood experiences of domestic violence in intimate relationships. Carmen, Claire, and Marika specifically talked about feeling very reluctant to talk about their family’s background of violence to their boyfriends and prospective partners. Carmen was very afraid that although her boyfriend might accept her, his family would not:

But then when I met my husband, all the anxiety that I had, was not whether I would get married to him or not, but my greatest fear was how I was going to go about telling him about my background. Because ok-he might accept you but then there is also his family, and sometimes it is the family that does not accept you, and many families do this, they stigmatise you and say that I would be like my mother (Carmen, p. 28).

Such fears need to be understood in the context of honour and shame that continue to be concerns in Mediterranean culture (Cassar, 2003), where the role of the woman, especially in the older generations, is to avoid shame, “by keeping pure, by remaining loyal to their husbands and by guaranteeing the continuity of the family lineage” (p.12). In this sense, then it was important for Carmen not to be seen as one that would bring shame to her future husband’s family.

In this context that Carmen emphasised all the different ways that she was different than her mother. Marika also described feeling uncomfortable when her family met her boyfriend’s family and she had to invest a lot of energy to prepare them to meet her father and reframe his behaviour in a socially appropriate manner – that he was very moody and not a very sociable person.

Claire kept her childhood experiences of violence a secret from her husband (Imber-Black, 1998). She told her husband only a few details and was probably ashamed to tell him
all about what she and her family went through. Perhaps this is something that I could have explored further had there been the opportunity of a second interview. I could have asked her about how she thought that this affected her relationship with her husband, whom she described as having a close relationship with. It does seem that the domestic violence experiences were kept secret in the family, mostly between the mother, the father and Claire who witnessed the worst period of the couple’s violence. This was also in conjunction of another secret – that the father had not wanted the fourth child.

One can thus argue that the ripple effects from family violence are far-reaching and very often go beyond the confines of the one’s nuclear family, even when the violence stops. Fearing other people’s judgement and of becoming socially bankrupt (Abela, 1997), together with loyalty to one’s family are very strong inhibitors of talking about what is happening in one’s home. The social isolation and the accompanying suffering is usually enormous to the extent that one can understand why Claire has not looked for support in her intimate relationships either.

6.2.2.5.6 “It feels like you are trying to make a mountain move” – Trauma legacies and challenges in relationships including managing one’s anger and aggression. In the following section, I will be describing some of the childhood survival strategies and trauma legacies that challenged the participants’ intimate relationships. Mary echoed some of the participants’ sentiments when she stated that very often she did not have the awareness of what she was bringing into the relationship but she only realised it when she found herself with the same problems again (Herman, 1997). Mary succinctly described how as a result of her childhood experiences, she missed very important relational foundations, both in herself and how to deal with others (Briere & Scott, 2015):

For example .., I don’t know .., I missed the sense of security, the sense of belonging, the sense of being seen for who you are and you have to get these from somewhere. And someone has to give them to you .., yes, you need to work on yourself but there needs to be someone to give them to you and if you do not find them, then, these experiences .., you keep living with a lot of symptoms .., symptoms of wrong beliefs, for example, where men and women are concerned, where relationships are concerned .., beliefs about yourself .., it’s like there are a lot of things .., it is very complex .., for example even the way you behave, for example by being angry and
leaving ..., it’s like nobody would have taught that you stay and talk ..., and sometimes, it could be that you would know this as well, you would have learnt it but to actually do it, feels like you are moving the trauma mountain that you went through, it feels like you are trying to make a mountain move (Mary, p. 25-26).

Mary’s words conveyed some of the great struggles that some of these participants had to continually contend with, in the relationship. She shared how upset she was when she found herself in circumstances similar to her parents, even though she had been determined not to replicate her parents’ story. Jessica too found herself in a joy-less marriage, as described earlier. She felt un-validated and unloved by her husband. With hindsight, she reflected on how difficult it must have been for her ex-husband to understand and cope with the rage that she had, that came out of a sense of injustice and unfairness of having been abused and downtrodden for twenty years (Johnson, 2004). Jessica believed that her husband had tried to get along with her but perhaps he saw her as too quarrelsome, and too determined to make her point at all costs. All this might have been too much for him. She also tried to speak to him about her dreams and wishes but felt that she was not taken seriously and he dismissed her words as adolescent fantasies.

Marika and Rose spoke about the difficulty that they had with managing their anger and coping with difference and conflict in the context of an intimate relationship (Briere & Lanktree, 2012). Marika felt unable to deal with her frustration and she coped by leaving the conflictual situation, a behaviour that invariably had negative consequences on her relationship with her boyfriend. Rose echoed the same feelings, including her inability to talk about what was bothering in the relationship:

*And how do you say it ..., even the fact that I am afraid ..., I have very low self esteem, very, very low ..., even the fact that I am afraid to state my opinion or that I keep myself back ..., I have been affected a lot by this ..., so I am either aggressive or ..., So in relationship with other people, it is a bit difficult for me not to become aggressive ..., once I reach that point up there, I up and leave ..., It does create a little (difficulty) because it does create ..., the other person, that is next to you would not know that you are going to take something negatively ..., so that this turns out against you.* (Rose, p. 26-27).

During her first interview, Marika spoke about how she thought that her bad temper
was stronger than her and that hard as she tried, it always got the better of her. Interestingly, in the second interview, whilst Marika was dating another boyfriend, she felt more secure in the relationship and this helped her deal better with her anger (Mikulincer & Goodman, 2006). Although she was still vigilant over her boyfriend’s behaviour as to whether he would turn out to be aggressive like her father, she felt that he was more committed to their relationship and this helped cope better with her temper. Although Marika did not specifically state this, her anger perhaps hid fears around being unhappy, like her mother, and around being alone and unloved in the future. This statement resonated with what Jessica also stated in her interview, “behind all the anger, the hurts are still there” (p.76).

It also reminded me of Carmen’s presence in the interview, when she spoke in a matter of fact tone with an underlying feeling of anger and no hint of sadness whilst expressing events, which I imagined, caused her a lot of pain. Such experiences illustrate the protective function of anger (Bowlby, 1988; Slade, 2000) but in a relationship, a predominance of rage and anger would leave the significant other, either feel victimised and abused himself or herself or at best, lost at to what might have caused this immense rage unless the person with childhood experiences of violence would have connected her anger to her experiences and would be ready to talk about them in a safe, supportive context. (Whiffen & Oliver, 2004)

Geraldine too spoke about how she had to be mindful of her need to be always right in her relationships. She saw her aggressive behaviour as an echo of how her father was in control over her and everything, in her family of origin. She needed to continuously keep herself in check so that she would not engage in such power struggles - with her need to win and be always in the right, which she saw connected with her need to be in control. After a lot of individual work in psychotherapy, Geraldine had come to the awareness of the meaning of her behaviour and also its consequences on her relationships. She took responsibility of them and has been working on them for a long time. Sometimes, she caught herself engaging in these battles, sometimes not. What she found helpful was that she remains alert to these changes in her behaviour and discussing them with her partner.

Despite their difficult childhood experiences, some of the participants like Geraldine and Donna had transformed and been transformed by their intimate relationships (Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Saunders et al., 2011). In this sense they are testament to the
resilient spirit in persons and also they have shared how their relationships have been contexts, which have helped them to grow from their adverse circumstances

The final segment in the Adulthood section refers to the participants’ reflections about parenting and their understanding of how this has been impacted by their childhood experiences

6.2.2.6 Piecing together the puzzle: Remembering and understanding more the impact of their domestic violence experiences with becoming a parent and struggling with replicative and corrective scripts with their own children.

6.2.2.6.1 “I am determined that my children will have a happy childhood” – the challenges of corrective and replicative scripts. For those participants who were mothers, being a parent was seen as an opportunity to provide their children a different life than the one that they had as children. They felt very protective towards their children and they did everything for them, determined that their children were going to be happy and not burdened by adult problems. Both Jessica and Carmen described how they felt that they had an extraordinary relationship with their children and life was all one big adventure when the children were young:

I had an extraordinary relationship with the children …, adventures …, imagine, I used to take both children to the beach with public transport …, a 3 year old and a one year old, carrying the cooler and going to the beach so that the children enjoy themselves. And we used to go to every circus that came along because my children love animals. Even if I used to be broke, I used to be in the first row with the children (Jessica, p. 38-39).

Carmen and Jessica, both said that they still had a close relationship with their children even as their children became teenagers. Carmen highlighted how protective she was of her three sons:

... No one hurts my son, no one. And since you have gone through so many things in your childhood, you want to show your children how precious they are for you. I tell them ‘don’t let anyone hurt you’ because if they hurt you, they will have to deal with me. No one hurts them. I tell you …, I don’t even allow my husband sometimes to get angry with them, let alone… (Carmen, p. 56).
Claire too, ended up fighting with her husband when he disciplined their daughter and he has recently commented how aggressive she was with him, when he was angry with their daughter over something that she did wrong.

It sounds as if, in their desire to protect their children, these women found themselves in positions at the other side of the continuum, with the children perhaps missing their parents’ authoritative aspect of parenting (Baumrind, 1991). In this regard, Jessica was disappointed that her sons did not inherit her determination and will power to succeed in life. But she did not connect to the fact that whilst as a child, she had to fight to get what she wanted, as a mother she was trying to provide everything for her children with the result that they did not need to make an effort (Rando, 2002).

While the participants were reflective about their childhood experiences so as not to replicate the same experiences with their children, it was difficult for them not to go to the other extreme. In the case of Claire, being exposed to violence and experiencing violence, helped her immensely to control her temper (Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003) with her daughter and not vent out if she was distressed about work or about other things which did not relate to the daughter. At the same time, as a parent to a 6 year old daughter, she was remembering more and more her childhood and connecting with anything in her daughter’s life that reminded her of how powerless she felt when being physically abused by her father as a 6 year old child (Courtois & Ford, 2013). Such experiences then made her react aggressively towards the husband, to the extent that her husband told her that that she becomes a “monster”:

You might tell me-you don’t cry about what happened to you? Rarely do I cry but on matters that concern my daughter – yes. That hurts me because I know- that hurts me because as parents they should have realised that they were doing something to me – that I had no control over, something that I could not fight. A while ago, my husband started getting angry with our daughter – he had come back from work, he was tired and he shouted at her. He tells me that I become a monster when something happens between him and our daughter. I don’t even realise that I have lost control. I don’t want anyone to shout at her for nothing. I: Are you very protective? P: Yes, a lot. Over-protective- a lot, a lot and this is because of what happened. I feel that this is because of what happened (Claire, p. 26-27).
This quote again further illuminates that the understanding of one’s childhood experiences never stops and different life stages and the related developmental tasks trigger different memories. If these memories are not overwhelming in terms of their distress, they can be used to learn from adversity. At the same time, in such circumstances, the participants also reminded me that despite their immense desire to make sure that their children were happy, they could not protect them from everything.

Not replicating the family of origin script was also complicated when intimate relationships did not work out, such as in the case of Jessica and her husband who was physically violent with her. Although she was not afraid of him, like her mother had been of her father, Jessica, nevertheless felt very distressed that her children had to witness their arguments and fights, as she was very sensitive to their position being that she went through the experience herself.

Farrah also described being very worried about the fact that she and her teenage daughter ended up being very physically violent with each other during 2 incidents. She described how her daughter stung her with her words during an argument that they had and she blanked out in anger:

I: when you told me ..., so that thing we don’t repeat the same things ..., what were you referring to?

P: I was referring to trying to overcome the things that you went through so that you don’t end up repeating the same things. If I stay beating my children, this is something that will continue from one generation to another .., My children and I, maybe once, twice I regressed. I had clashes but I had clashes because she provoked me so much, so much and they happened when she was dating this boyfriend .., she is 21 years old .., we ended up being physical with each other. She broke my nose. I grabbed her and threw her against the shower. It was a glass shower .., it was a disaster .., blood and whatever .., That was one time and then the other, she starts really offending me with her words and she made me lose it .., she made me lose it completely because I hate a malicious tongue .., so this thing really gets at me, I lose it completely (Farrah, p. 54-55).

As noted above, Farrah was aware of the risk of replicating the violence script which
she experienced and yet, like Sandra, earlier in this chapter, she was not aware of how she was shifting all the responsibility onto to her daughter and again minimising the details probably in an effort to minimise the horror that she and her daughter experienced through being violent with each other (Dallos & Vetere, 2005). Yet at the same time, when I asked her what her daughter would say about their relationship, she said that she thinks that her daughter appreciates that she is there for her and that she takes care of her. It would be interesting to ask the daughter the same question to see whether the daughter would give similar feedback. Such a response reminded me of the core category of “Living with contradictions”, in this case again, love and abuse between parent and daughter in the second generation.

6.2.2.6.2 Mothers’ dilemma of what to tell their children about their own childhood experiences of domestic violence. Participants like Jessica, Sara and Carmen spoke about their dilemma about what to tell their children about their (the mother’s) childhood experiences because it involved them and the children’s grandparents. This is similar to abused women’s dilemmas about what to tell their children (DeVoe & Smith, 2002) where although the majority of women in this study felt that it was appropriate and important to discuss domestic violence with their children, many did not feel equipped to do so. In contrast, in Mullender et al.’s (2002) study, about a third of the women in their sample said that they had never talked to the children at the time of the violence as a way of protecting their children. They also felt at a loss about how to talk about what was happening with them. In addition, not talking about the violence was a way of how the mothers coped with their daily lives. This last statement might be also relevant to the women interviewed in my study.

Sara was very ambivalent about talking to her children about what she went through. On the one hand, she felt it was important for her children to know her past, so that they do not do the same thing to their partners. On the other hand, it was difficult for her to tell them so she preferred not to say anything.

Jessica too, did not want to tell her sons about their grandfather having murdered their grandmother, as she did not want to ruin their relationship with him. But her sons got to know from a cousin, with devastating consequences on the boys, on their relationship with their mother, and their relationship with their grandfather. Thus it might have been helpful for her sons to hear from her first, in developmentally appropriate ways about her childhood
experiences. In the same way, Carmen too, not knowing who her biological father was, very often had to deal with awkward situations when her sons were growing up, especially when the boys asked for photos of their grandfather and wanted to know who he was. Thus it is important for practitioners to reflect more about these contexts and how best to help parents talk to their children about these difficult circumstances.

6.2.3 Cultural contexts: Gendered beliefs, religion, limited professional response, secrecy and shame.

6.2.3.1 The impact of normative and cultural expectations on women and men regarding family dynamics including abuse. The women felt very much the pressure to respect and forgive their father or to forgive and forget how their father had wronged them. They felt this pressure within themselves, in feeling guilty when cutting off contact from their father and/or when disclosing to a friend or a trusted adult about the violence. They felt that somehow as good daughters they should somehow seek to make amends. Most of them felt that their mothers expected this from them, as already highlighted above.

The women associated this pressure with religious beliefs stating that one should respect one’s parents, above everything else. In fact, Roman Catholicism raises the concept of honouring one’s parents to the level of one of the Ten Commandments: “Honour your father and your mother, that your days be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you”. This quote is taken from the Old Testament, from Exodus chapter 20, verse 12. It is again cited in the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 6: 1-3: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honour your father and mother, that it may be well with you and that you live long on this earth”. These quotes are referred to in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2003) which is a document containing the religious doctrine of the Catholic Church.

It is interesting that although this same document also highlights the duties of the parents as being “parents must regard children as children of God and respect them as human persons” (Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 4), such teachings have not been given the same importance as those outlining the duties of children. One can argue that such a position ties with issues of power and authority that are bestowed to parents and the lesser status of children in our society particularly before the advent of the postmodern child discourse and the children’s rights movement (Brannen & O’ Brien, 1996).
Participants like Sara have also commented on how gendered beliefs about married women were transmitted from mother to daughter. Sara recalled how her mother told her that according to her own mother (Sara’s grandmother), if a couple fight, then the wife should go to a different corner of the house and stay put. However, Sara dismissed such beliefs as being ridiculous and she did not subscribe to them (Dallos, 1997; Reiss, 1987).

Geraldine also shared her belief that her mother did not tell anyone about the violence that she experienced at the hands of her husband because as a married woman, she was expected to deal with the problems within the confines of her matrimonial home (Reder & Fredman, 1996) – and this is what her mother had been told by her own mother when she had got married. In addition, in Geraldine’s mother’s case, whenever she complained minimally about her husband, her complaints were minimised by her parents and her extended family. According to the daughter, her mother was told that she should be happy to have a husband who is so hard working and such a good bread-winner (Vakili Zad, 2013)

Such statements have strong ties with a number of cultural and religious tenets. One of these is the belief in the indissolubility of marriage – again the influence of the Catholic Church’s teaching - “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Mark 10:9, Bible English Standard Version), and the teaching that “A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh” (Matthew 19:5, Bible English Standard Version). Thirty years ago or so, when these women were still children, Maltese society strongly upheld Catholic values (Abela, Frosh, & Dowling, 2005). This implied that having problems in marriage and filing for separation was undesirable and a process, which brought shame to oneself, to one’s family including one’s extended family. Moreover, in the 1970’s and 1980’s, most married women were economically dependent on their husbands as very few women were in employment (Vakili Zad, 2013). Thus in case of marital difficulties, it was probably seen as more advantageous to keep silent and bear with one’s cross. In addition, for people of faith, suffering was also seen as a way of securing a place in heaven (Nash & Hesterberg, 2009).

Interestingly, most of the daughters interviewed felt that they could question these cultural and religious beliefs. The rapid social and cultural changes that happened at a fast pace in Maltese society during the last decade or so (Abela, 2013), possibly had an impact on the women’s dilemmas of trying to find their own position in between these external
influences and the permanence of their attachment (Bowlby, 1988) to their father. In cases where the mother was also abusive, two of the daughters - Carmen and Anita - could not reconcile their idea of a mother - being one that should provide unconditional love and their experience of their own mother who was abusive (Bailey & Eisikovits, 2014; Motz, 2009). At the time of the interview, both Anita and Carmen were full of anger against their mother albeit, behind all the anger, Carmen still yearned for the mother to hug her and ask for her forgiveness. In this sense Carmen’s yearning for connection with the mother who had been abusive is similar to other daughters’ yearning for connection with the fathers who had been abusive.

Participants, like Sara spoke about her belief that women are more capable than men of being partners and parents. Donna also spoke about not having good role models as fathers and men, both in her own family of origin and neither in her extended family where most of the men either had problems with the law, or had difficulties with alcohol, gambling or mental health issues. Such beliefs probably tie with the belief that taking care of the family in Malta is considered the business of women and that in general, fathers are both culturally and policy excluded (National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, NCPE, 2012a, 2012b). In this scenario, one can easily understand how men as fathers could have been predominantly cast as breadwinners, taking a peripheral position to the women and mothers. Men/fathers expected to be honoured and respected. Perhaps this position can also explain how most of the daughters described themselves as yearning for connection with the father but none talked about their father trying to make a connection with them as children. The shift in the father took place in time, when both the father and daughter grew older and circumstances such as terminal illness in the father seemed to play a role in the father wanting to reconnect with his daughter. This happened in the case of Farrah, and Sandra. In the case of Geraldine and her father, their reconnection was facilitated by a number of processes amongst which the father’s new partner and her support of the father-daughter relationship, the support of the aunt who provided the place for the first encounter, and more importantly (as Geraldine understood it), her psychological growth in time and that of her father too.

6.2.3.2 Beliefs around intergenerational transmission of abuse and other professional discourses that come in the way of children seeking help and professionals and other adults giving help. Participants such as Donna, Tori and Farrah, amongst others, believed quite strongly that having had a childhood full of experiences of abuse meant that
they would abuse their own children. This concurs with professionals’ beliefs around
intergenerational transmission of abuse that was discussed earlier in the literature review
chapter. As highlighted earlier, they were relieved to hear about studies on resilience and the
significant impact of supportive others, during our interview.

When discussing the support of professionals, in general, the participants commented
that this was limited and getting support was not straightforward either. It is important to note
that in the late 70’s and 80’s, as has been earlier noted in the Introductory chapter, there were
a very limited number of social workers who could provide help (Schembri & Abela, 2004).
Moreover, during this period of time, shelters did not accept older children. Thus according
to some of these women, their mothers did not resort to a shelter because they wanted all their
children to be with them and they did not want to leave anyone behind. This has also been
certified by M. Naudi16 (personal communication, November 24, 2014).

In addition, those participants who had the support of a social worker and/or a
psychologist as children, also spoke about the difficulty of speaking up about the abuse for
fear that they would be taken away from home. They also feared incurring the wrath of their
parents (Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Jones, & Gordon, 2003). Sandra’s quote below, clearly
communicates what could go through the children’s mind when professionals approach them.
The quote illustrates some of her dilemmas as a child. It is incredible how a well-intentioned
intervention can in fact exert tremendous emotional pressure on the child:

_Honestly because this throws me back to the time when the social workers used to
come to our house ..., they even took me here and there, to the psychologist and to the
psychiatrist ..., but I used to say to myself, why are they asking me a lot of questions
about mummy? And I used to say but why should I give them an answer, when I
wanted to live with her? So I always had this fear in me that if I tell on mummy that
she is beating me, or that she is throwing plates at me or you know ..., so these (people)
are going to tell on me and she is going to shout at me more, and mum used to yell a
lot at me and sometimes I even locked myself in the wardrobe ..., yes, but honestly I
don’t think that they ever sensed what I felt at that time because I ..., I was a very good
actress because obviously I used to realize things from what was happening... (p. 12).

Yes, deep down because at the end of the day, even nowadays I wish that ..., so

16 A social worker by profession and a senior academic lecturer at the University of Malta.
imagine when you are just a child .., you would want someone to understand you and I used to think that at the end of the day they are still going to understand and read my mind and tell mummy .., listen, stop doing that to your daughter .., and to dad, they would tell him stop threatening her because you are not doing her any good...

But .., when you are a child, you would not know .., you would know about doing certain things but you would not know how to protect yourself... (p. 13).

Similar to the clinical experiences of practitioners and authors, Harris-Hendriks et al. (2000) when working with children whose father had killed their mother, these children spoke “in code, hoping that someone will understand but fearing to be direct” (p. 3). Such a quote of course provokes a number of reflections related to professional practice in response to children in families living with domestic violence. While progress has been made in NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) teams in the UK, from seeing domestic violence as a separate issue from child protection, to incorporating domestic violence as part of their work with abused children (Hester, 2006), it is important that frontline workers increasingly become aware of the different ways children may behave in the contexts of domestic violence and the roles that they may have to play. Responding specifically to the specific context and engaging in follow-up meetings with the parents in question would shift the responsibility of disclosure of abuse from the child, and would hopefully engage the parent to seek help (Breckenridge & Ralfs, 2006).

In Malta, on the other hand, Child Protection Services and Domestic Violence services still work rather separately. The domestic violence service area leader (S. Camillieri, personal communication, October 31, 2014) has highlighted the dilemma that she and her workers face when child protection workers are involved, that is, how sometimes child protection social workers blame the mother for the inadequate protection that she may offer her children and do not prioritize providing safety for both the mother and the children. However, as already mentioned earlier, and as the participants’ quote have shown, circumstances can be particularly complicated especially when the mother is also abusing the children, when the risk of post-separation violence is high and/or when there are issues with mental health problems and also substance abuse. In the next chapter, I will continue discussing further these complex practice implications.

However, the participants did speak of helpful social workers who, initially, got
involved in instances when the father was arrested or when they made allegations of sexual abuse rather than domestic violence. In Malta, in the 70’s and 80’s in the absence of a specific child protection service (Macelli, 1998), health and social care professionals probably felt that an allegation of sexual abuse warranted more drastic measures than alleged physical abuse. Interestingly, Anita only got the attention of the social workers when she alleged that her father sexually abused her. She was then able to stay indefinitely in residential care and not return home with her mother when the latter left the shelter.

Marika who is just twenty years old felt that she could talk about her difficulties with her social workers, albeit slowly and cautiously, whilst monitoring their response to her feedback. She appreciated the fact that once the professionals got involved, the onus of responsibility to talk about the violence and get help for the family shifted from her to the social workers and the psychologist who were involved and thus she felt less burdened.

Once social workers were involved in Geraldine’s life, and she was put in residential care, she had the support of the residential care workers, the support of the other residents in care, the social workers’ support and also that of, mentors like a priest. She was also referred to a psychologist.

Again in Geraldine’s case, although help was available in her life whilst she was in residential care, it was not a straightforward process for her to get support. Geraldine recalled giving the nuns a very hard time during the day and then seeking the support of one particular nun to talk to her at night when she could not sleep. Or being offered the support of a psychologist and refusing to go until she reached a point where she felt that therapeutic support was the only option available to her: either the psychotherapy works or she was ready to end her life because she was suffering too much. Thus even though widening the system and making support available was essential for these participants, seeking, accepting and starting to avail themselves of this support was another different and essential milestone. Perhaps the fact that almost all of the participants allowed mentors, psychologists and significant persons in their lives to influence them (Bowlby, 1988) positively highlights the participants’ resilience and their ability to grow from adversity (Linley & Joseph, 2004). Participants also spoke about how psychotherapy has been a helpful and supportive process. (Morrow, Clayman, & McDonagh, 2012). This was presented in detail in section 6.2.2.4.4.

Another crucial issue that participants shared about was the lack of support that they
obtained from the Police, particularly in instances when some participants later discovered that their father was a friend with the police sergeant in question. In the context of a face-to-face community that is Malta (Abela et al., 2005; Boissevain, 1969), it is not unlikely that through friends of friends, one gets to know the particular police who would have been called by the wife and children to offer protection.

Participants like Seana recalled the hard time that she was made to go through by the Police when she went to the Police station to lodge a report against her father. She felt ashamed and that they were trying to demean her. Later she and her boyfriend discovered that the policeman knew her father and he was using all kinds of delaying tactics for her not to lodge the report:

... and the police all knew as I had taken the witness stand and if the last time (that they were involved) they really gave me a very hard time.

Even when I actually came to make the report .., the first thing that the police said to me at 1.30am was that he had a right to come to the house ..,

I told him, he had a right to be there but he did not have a right to ram down the door and break everything up. I was with my boyfriend and we were asleep. The first thing that the police told me, thinking that he is going to humiliate me was, what were you doing with your boyfriend? And then my boyfriend jumped in and told him, be careful of what you're saying, if you are going to parrot her father. Because we realized that the policeman knew my father. My boyfriend told him, we will leave and he told him we thought that this was the only place that was safe, that she is going to be safe. So I will talk to whomever I need to talk to and when he said that, believe it or not – because my boyfriend is self-employed and is into plastering and painting and he had worked with someone at the top and he mentioned his name and the whole thing changed completely. Now my boyfriend usually does not say anything and does not get himself involved in these things but when it is the right time .., thank God, we did that .., but then it took them a week to change the report because the police needed to start the proceedings because my father was not going to let me open the shop .., Yes this was recently .., and the Domestic violence law was in place. Yes, it is very disgraceful and it hurts me .., if something happens to us at night, we are not safe .., I had to close the shop (her mother’s shop) and I could not open it until my mum
Such scenarios makes one reflect about societal attitudes to domestic violence as this has an impact on how violence perpetration is perceived, whether it is be condoned or considered as a crime that needs to be deterred. In Europe, the Domestic Violence Against Women Report – EU Special Barometer 344 (European Commission, 2010) gave an indication of public perceptions on Domestic violence. Although alcoholism and drug addiction were widely considered the most prominent causes (from 12 possible causes\textsuperscript{17}) of domestic violence, it is still worrying that an average of 52% of the respondents agreed with the statement that women’s provocative behaviour was the cause of domestic violence. Such findings were present in both low-income European members where gender-equality policies might have been absent or only recently put in place- like in Lithuania (86%) or Latvia (79%) but also in the UK and Northern Ireland (63%) and Sweden (59%) (Gracia, 2014). In addition the above, coupled with other beliefs that “whatever happens in the home should remain in the home” and the fact that the Maltese police force may over-all tend towards being conservative (Azzopardi Cauchi, 2006; Laudi, 2013) may explain the above findings.

The above findings and related discussion continue to show the different ways in which the different cultural contexts continue to exert an influence not only on how the family members think that they should behave but also in the way that they see themselves as being perceived by society at large. According to these women’s experiences, living in a family where there is domestic violence is one of the most difficult, complex and heart-wrenching and crazy-making circumstances that persons have to live by. It is thus understandable that the process of meaning-making takes a lifetime and has significant ramifications into adulthood.

6.3 Part Two

Having gone into detail into the different contexts that underpin these women’s experiences, I will now highlight the three important categories and the core category, which ran across all the participants’ stories. I will first describe the three key processes and then the core category so as to make it explicit to the reader how the three processes made up the core

\textsuperscript{17} The 12 possible causes included: alcoholism and drug addiction, poverty and social exclusion, unemployment, having been oneself a victim of some form of DV, the way women are viewed by men, being genetically predisposed to violent behaviour, religious beliefs, a low level of education, the way power is shared between the sexes; the provocative behaviour of women and the media.
category. As presented earlier (see also fig 2.0), the key processes are:

- 6.3.1 Being triangulated in the parental conflict, and parentification, as a related and a relational process,
- 6.3.2 The traumatogenic effect of the violence on the child and adult development, and
- 6.3.3 Turning point/developmental processes that foster change and resilience including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption.

The core category is the following:

- 6.3.4 Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas.

6.3.1 **Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification as a related and relational process.**

6.3.1.1 **Being triangulated:** “It was time for the verdict to say who was right.” All the participants described how they often were actively pulled into their parents’ conflict—what early family therapists such as Minuchin (1974) described as triangulation. This finding supports and is supported by studies from the divorce and marital conflict literature (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Buehler & Welsh, 2009; DeBoard-Lucas, Fosco, Raynor, & Grych, 2010; Fosco & Grych, 2010) and by the work of Pat Crittenden (2008) on triangulation from dynamic-maturational attachment perspective. As Dallos and Vetere (2012) clearly explain in their article, Minuchin stated that the utilization of one child in the spouses’ conflict could take many forms. He distinguished three forms of rigid triadic processes: a) The first form involves each parent actively recruiting the child to side with him or her, with the other parent interpreting the child’s action as an attack; b) In another form, which Minuchin called detouring, the parents, rather than focusing on their unsatisfactory relationship focus on the misbehaviour of the child, by diverting all their attention towards him or her, with the child becoming the family problem; c) The third form- the stable coalition can take the form of one of the parents forming an alliance with the child against the other parent.

It is interesting to note that all three forms, in one form or another were present in the participants’ families. Some of the participants were actively recruited to take sides by one parent whilst others felt that it was their duty to get involved (Fosco & Grych, 2010), either
because they wanted to protect their mother at all costs or because they saw themselves as being the most courageous person in the family.

Geraldine recalled a step-by-step routine in the way that she was explicitly triangulated in – that once her parents would start fighting, her father would invariably ask her to act as a judge and decide who should win the argument – him or her mother:

First they used to mention Abraham Galea (name of first Maltese psychiatrist), then I would be judge. Always like that. Because in those days, I only remember Abraham Galea’s voice on the radio [Abraham Galea was a psychiatrist who became popular through radio programmes). Then he used to accuse her of needing Abraham Galea .., then she would tell him something back .., not that she used to tell him a lot. The only time she would tell him .., Then after Abraham Galea would be mentioned then I would end up being .., on hearing Abraham Galea’s name then I would say here it comes .., Here we go again, do you understand? But the one who was mentioned a lot .., not that the mental asylum was not mentioned but the name most mentioned was that of Abraham Galea. So it meant now it is time for the verdict. Do you understand? You have to give judgement. Do you understand? You have to pass judgement. Because the fighting used to have a pattern in those days (Geraldine 1, p. 40-41).

Geraldine recalled that when she had to give her verdict it was like court sentence with people taking turns to speak. But at the same time, the whole scene seemed very fast and she had to pass judgement very quickly. Geraldine recalled that it was very hard for her to decide that her mother was right. She said that her father was a very good orator, like an extremely good lawyer and he always won the arguments. As a child, the only thing that she made sense of was that: “my father was right, he was intelligent, and my mother was ignorant...” (Geraldine 1, p. 39). Moreover, whilst she admired his competence, she was terrified of him and his beatings, and consistently took his side against the mother, with whom she said that she had a rocky relationship. Being in this double-bind situation (Bateson et al., 1956), Geraldine’s focused her energy on surviving and not getting beaten by her father.

Marika, Donna, Rose, Mary, Sandra and Sara on the other hand, could not stand their mother getting hurt and got involved in their parents’ fight to protect her. A quote from Marika’s interview illustrates her process of triangulation:
I: what did you (as children) do?

P: my sisters didn’t do anything. But I was the one who always got involved between them. It’s because these things bother me. It bothers me to see my mother getting hurt and beaten. So I used to go between them.

I used to get the punches, even though I knew I would be punched. As long as I managed to separate my mother away from him. That’s what I always used to do.

I: you got his punches?

P: yes, yes I get the punches

I: So you protected her?

P: Yes

(Marika 1, p. 20).

Donna, too felt that her mother tried to be the perfect wife and mother and there usually were not many arguments going on but once her father lost his temper, he would then become violent, without any provocation whatsoever. Donna felt that it was an injustice that her mother suffered so much (Jory et al., 1997) and as she grew older, she used to be the one to challenge him to protect her mother and her siblings. Donna remembered that as young as a 7 year old, she started putting pressure on her mother to leave their father and trying to convince her that they would be so much better off without him. Marika remembered doing the same thing.

When I asked Marika and Donna why they felt that they had to get involved rather than their siblings, the participants were not sure of the reasons. Some of the reasons that they gave were the following: Marika said that she felt that it was her duty, being the eldest and having the reputation of being the courageous one in the family. Donna said that she felt her mother and siblings knew that she was competent and was able to stand up to their father and she felt that implicitly it was expected of her. This perhaps implies that the process of triangulation incorporated both precipitating and maintaining factors, which were reinforced by her family dynamics including those of the mother and the siblings and the family context.

In her second interview, which occurred three years later, Geraldine described the process of her involvement in her parents’ conflict in more detail. I am presenting it in a form of diagram (Figure 3.0) to further illuminate the different processes that may be at play in a family systems triangulation process.
Geraldine remembered specific scenes as fragments of memories as she could not remember the whole picture (Van der Kolk, 2014). She recalled a specific memory, of feeling her mother’s tummy in her back – so she reasoned that she must have been standing in front of her and trying to protect her from her father’s beatings. She remembered feeling scared because her mother seemed weak and did not physically retaliate back. Geraldine ended up either being beaten herself or both she and her mother got beaten. Geraldine also recalled trying to stop her parents from fighting by deflecting their attention onto her – detouring (Minuchin, 1974) – with Geraldine dropping her expensive prescription glasses on the floor so that they would stop fighting. She also remembered feeling herself going mad and having tummy aches (Briere & Scott, 2015). Such memories conveyed the intensity of the double binds, the danger and the helplessness that Geraldine felt herself in.

Perhaps the only way that Geraldine managed this intensity of emotions was by siding with her father (the aggressor) against her mother (Freud, 1992). She also recalled trying to “bully” her mother to submit to what father was saying so that they would stop arguing. One can thus speculate that in this family context, feeling helpless and weak, as she perceived her mother to be, was too dangerous and thus this led her to identify with her father, quite intimately, in imitating his demeanour and behaviour. As Balbernie (1994) explains, identification with the aggressor can also be seen as the “defence of turning passive into active in an attempt to gain mastery over fear and understanding through mimicry” (p. 23). More specifically, she fantasised that she would grow up to be a man indicating confusion over her sexual identity (Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1996). She also believed the her mother was weak and ignorant and the only way to stop the violence was either for her mother to speak up and take a stand against the father or to submit to him and agree to what he was saying or asking her to do (Bentovim & Davenport, 1992).
Figure 3. Double binds and dilemmas in Geraldine’s triangulation in her parents’ conflicts. The light boxes represent a summary of axial codes and the dark boxes are hypotheses around triangulation.
It was interesting to note that Geraldine’s earlier memories of trying to protect her mother had been subjugated by the more dominant story of her mother being weak and Geraldine’s siding with the father and casting the verdict about who was right or wrong in her parents’ relationship. Again, perhaps, the only way to feel safety was to completely side with the father so as not to be completely overwhelmed by the bind of being caught between her terror of her father and her love and loyalty towards her mother.

One can perhaps argue that the triangulation not only took different forms but it was also present on different levels – that is, being physically and psychologically triangulated. Perhaps the psychological triangulation, that is, speaking in one of the parent’s voice against the other, is a much more subtle form of triangulation than the other forms of triangulation and harder to untangle from and reflect about. For example, in Claire’s case, it seemed that during the interview she spoke through the voice of her mother, whilst a few sentences after, she shifted more to what seemed to be her adult daughter’s voice (from “It could be .., to make us cry):

> When we were young, he used to enjoy telling them about these things because he used to enjoy seeing us cry. He drunk a lot of alcohol- a lot of wine- he used to do shift work and he used to try and sleep during hours when people don’t normally sleep – so he drank a lot so that he could sleep and then he would enjoy telling us about the things that they did to him at home – cruel things – to make us cry. It could be that in the beginning he did not tell us to make us cry but then he realized the power that he had to make us cry (Claire, p. 15).

Surprisingly, Claire also said that it was her father who taught her mother how to take care of them as children as he came from a large family and he had taken care of a lot of his siblings, since he was the eldest. Claire also had no difficulties to ask him to child-mind her daughter, because she said that he was very good with children. But then just a few sentences later, she described the intense psychological suffering that she went through as a child as a result of the father’s psychological and physical abuse.

Farrah too was psychologically triangulated and took on herself her father’s conflict against his first wife. She was not quite so open to hear other versions of the story, for example, from her stepbrother, even as an adult daughter. Geraldine also noted that her brother was in still very much psychologically preoccupied with his parents’ conflict. She
observed how he meticulously planned his daughter’s christening party so that his parents
would be kept separate from each other and not meet. On the other hand, when Geraldine was
sick in hospital, he demanded that both parents visit her in hospital as according to him, they
both owed them getting along with each other as a consequence of the suffering that they put
them through as children, irrespective of the fact that their mother was not ready to face their
father.

*So my brother was yelling at my father, because then my mother told me ..., as my
mother was with my brother ..., my brother left home, he picked my mother up, my
mother was in the car with my father, sorry, my brother and my brother phoning my
father and telling him: stay there, in hospital, don’t leave, you are her father, just as
much as she is her mother ..., so that they come and visit me together* (Geraldine 2, p.
114-115).

According to Geraldine’s brother: “*Their parents did them a lot of wrong. Now it is
time to repair ..., They have to get along with each other ..., Because they owe it to him*”
(Geraldine 2, p. 120). Geraldine’s brother expectation of their parents to get along despite
what they went through and where they were at, made her realise that she and her brother
were very different.

Despite the fact that attempts at triangulating Geraldine in her parents’ conflicts were
persistent in her adulthood (Amato & Afifi, 2006), she keenly wished that she could be
relaxed in the presence of either her mother or her father. She did not want to keep hiding
things about the other parent. In this sense, I think that Geraldine managed to find a reflective
space to think and manoeuvre within the often sticky and difficult context of her parents’
marriage that still triggered anger, bitterness and suffering in the persons concerned. But
through a lot of psychological and spiritual work, Geraldine, as an adult managed to find
pockets of respite from the persistence of the triangulation process. This has important
implications for the practice of family therapy with adult survivors of childhood domestic
violence, as well as with parents engaged in marital conflict and their children. All this will
be discussed further in the next chapter.

6.3.1.2 Parentification. For some participants, the process of triangulation was
closely tied to a process of taking responsibility for their parents and their siblings as if they
were the parents themselves – a process referred to as “Parentification” (Boszormenyi-Nagy
& Spark, 1973; Chase, 1999; Jurkovic et al., 1991; Minuchin, 1974) as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Marika described how she felt that it was her responsibility to emotionally take care of her mother and her siblings instead of her father who had abdicated his role and instead of her mother who she saw as weak (Mullender et al., 2002). Again, Marika was not sure why she took on this role but she gave the same reasons that she gave for being involved in her parents’ conflicts:

... because I am the oldest, I feel responsible, you see? In fact I always feel the responsibility to help my mother, my sister and my youngest sister. I took that responsibility. I don’t know from where it came and how it came about but I took the responsibility because there isn’t father and I think that in my case, I did it because my dad failed to take it as a father and my mother was too weak to take care of all of us. I took the responsibility as the oldest, not financially because I didn’t earn any money but example if my mother is sad today, or if she is irritable, I try to find out what happened to her; I try to make her happy. I tell her “come mum, let us go out ...

Example, if my siblings need something, I have always bought it for them. When I started to work, I used to buy something for everyone so that I see a smile on everyone’s face. They are small things but for you they mean a lot. Example, up to the present day, I still say that before I leave home, whether I get married or not, I would like to have my own house. Before I leave home, I would like to see everyone settled. Example, I would like to see my middle sister settled with her boyfriend. I would like to see my other sister [settled] at school. I want my mother ... mother will remain the same... I don’t know (Marika 1, p. 21-22).

Donna recalled doing similar things- taking care of both her middle and youngest sister, including taking her baby sister with her to religion lessons as the father wanted the mother for him:

He was abusive too ..., he was addicted to sex ..., it’s like sometimes my mother would be asleep next to us, he used to watch a lot of pornographic movies, then he would tell her come on next to me ..., you understand .., when we started growing up, then he would tell me go grab your sister and take her away from there .., I never saw them
during sex ..., but I knew what was going on ..., my younger sister, sometimes, out of curiosity would peep through the keyhole ..., I would get angry at her, my mother really felt like an object ..., and that was it, I was always worried about protecting them ..., then when I started growing older I began to stand up to him and he disliked that (Donna 1, p. 6-7).

My sister ..., she is now 12 years old ..., she was the fruit of jealousy, my father wanted my mother completely to himself ..., it’s like he did not want her to take care of my baby sister. So I had to feed her, change her, wake up during the night to look after her, and he would tell me take her with you, even if I went to religion lessons, and it’s like if I took her with me to religion lessons there would be lots of things... (Donna 1, p. 9).

Donna, too, was not sure how she got to take on this role but she said that it was something that she grew into, since she was three years old. She also recalled making sure that the house was safe and every door was locked when her father had left the house. As highlighted earlier, Donna was not only a reference point for her mother when it came to issues of discipline and raising her youngest sibling but Donna felt that she was her mother’s only joy in her life and that she owed it to her to do well at school so that her mother would be comforted:

And I remember, I used to do well at school and I remember that I wanted to be her champion. And even during Parents’ Day, they would tell her, you have such a bright and polite daughter and they used to praise me and so on and I knew what these words meant a lot for her, especially when in her family, there were a lot of delinquent children. She would say, ‘So I must be doing something right?’ I used to feel this a lot (Donna 2, p. 30).

In a similar way, Sandra was also sensitive to her mother’s difficulty with making ends meet and she remembered that as a young girl, she would choose the lesser expensive packet of sweets so that her mother would not spend a lot of money. Sandra recalled also the many times she took care of her mother when she was depressed. Sara too as highlighted earlier took over the caring role of her siblings like a parent. However, Sara seemed less burdened than other participants, like Donna and Marika, for example, with her role and was more in touch with the fact that she had a lot of support from her family. As highlighted
earlier in section 6.2.2.3, Donna continued struggling not to take a parental role with her mother and her sisters well into her adulthood, and although she and her mother and sisters were working on interacting differently, their positions shifted back and forth across time. However, in situations of danger, Donna felt herself cementing herself and being cemented in that role again.

6.3.1.3 The impact of triangulation and parentification on the women’s development. The women acknowledged developing a sense of competence and a sense of agency with being in the middle of things (Byng-Hall, 2002, 2008). In some instances, when they got involved in their parents’ violence, they did manage to protect their mother and they did manage to stand up to their father. In this way, they got in touch with their sense of power and as Donna recalled, although she was afraid of her father, she was adamant that she would not show it. They also got validated by the sometimes implicit and other times explicit approval of their family and extended family - Marika was known as the courageous one by all her family and this bolstered her sense of identity and self-esteem.

On the other hand, both triangulation and parentification led to a loss of relationships. Although Mary said, “taking sides is almost automatic when father is terrifying and feeling safe and secure only with mother” (Mary, p. 11); she also expressed how painful it was to lose her relationship with her father (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Perhaps it is also this sense of loss that continues to propel the daughters to remain open to some connection with the father. Seana expressed the same sense of loss at the cut-off between her father and her siblings as a result of divided loyalties and alliances between the siblings and a parent against the other parent and the other sibling. As mentioned earlier, with being parentified, Donna felt that she missed being cuddled and mothered by her mother. She also lost her sibling relationship with both her sisters. She was unable to relax with her family and, in some ways, this led her to feel different from them, and feeling isolated.

Getting involved through the processes of triangulation and parentification also meant that the daughters felt very distressed and angry (Gerard, Buehler, Franck, & Anderson, 2005; Earley & Cushway, 2002). Rose observed that whilst it was very difficult for her not to get involved and not protect her mother, her involvement sometimes made the fighting worse (Fosco & Grych, 2010). Marika too felt distressed with taking on her mother’s fight and sometimes her sister’s fight with the father. She acknowledged that it was an extra burden,
which did not end when the fighting stopped. She would then be left with worrying about the effect on her sister and also sometimes worrying about herself and wondering whether she was becoming aggressive like her father, as mentioned earlier:

*It’s a lot of stress (said with emphasis). Because you would want to take control of everything that happens. Some time ago, my sister (the one after me) had a fight with my father and I went down and I tried to explain things to him and tried to make him understand. I ended up fighting with him because he is hard-headed. He does not accept that he makes a mistake. This kind of thing. So I continued fighting with him myself and then it’s like you end up with your head hurting because this is all a hassle, it’s stressful. This is an extra burden for me – because it is like you take in everything yourself. Then when they fight, you end up worrying for her* (Marika 1, p. 23).

In summary, the process of triangulation seemed ubiquitous in all the participants’ narratives and it does seem strange that so far, the process has not been much more empirically studied in systemic literature (Dallos & Vetere, 2012). In some of these participants’ narrative, triangulation was closely related to parentification, with the relationship seemingly being proportional- that is the more a person was triangulated, the more, she felt that she needed to provide for her mother and siblings’ needs. It would be interesting to investigate this relationship in future research studies using quantitative research methods in order to perhaps illuminate further such processes.

6.3.2 The traumatogenic effect of violence on the child and adult development.

6.3.2.1 “Living a different reality”. The participants’ stories conveyed a sense of living in a world that is different or disconnected from the outside reality, as a result of living and enduring a life of chronic abuse. They also described experiences that can be understood as the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Mary eloquently articulated this sense of living a different reality:

*I think that the biggest difficulty that comes with trauma is not necessarily the violence but something that can be traumatic is that the trauma is not only in you but you are in the trauma ..., it’s like ..., this experience ..., it’s not like you go through it and it becomes part of you ..., but you are like immersed in it and you do not see a different world ..., it’s like ..., it’s not as if you are swimming and you are wet but you
are underwater and so the world above the water is something that you do not see and you think that underwater is what the world is all about (Mary, p. 23).

Mary seemed to be describing the pervasive component of the trauma experiences - to the extent that as they were growing up, the women were then surprised and taken aback when discovering that what they previously thought was normal, did not in fact happen in all families and was not part of everyday life for everybody, as has been highlighted earlier. Along the same lines, Geraldine also thought that it was normal for parents to ask their children to pass judgement on their parents’ arguments. In addition, Geraldine looked at me strangely when I was shocked that she had to ask permission from her father to speak to her mother after a particularly violent episode as mentioned earlier. She told me that this was when her father had ordered her mother out of the house and he had locked his children in the yard so that they do not speak to her. Geraldine thought that it was normal for fathers to behave in this way after an argument with their wives.

Donna also described the tragic-comic scenes that they went through, as if they were living in a different world than their father’s, when he would show the need to take a rest at the Psychiatric hospital. This is similar to the children interviewed by Mullender et al. (2002) when they described living in a double reality – “where there were times of freedom and fun when it was just them (mother and children) and not just the times of control, anxiety and watchfulness when the violent partner was present” (p. 159). The following quote also illustrates the extent that the children were triangulated in the parental conflict as highlighted earlier. Donna said that they would have been secretly praying to God and saying the rosary so that He delivers them from their father. Then at the slightest inkling that their father would want to go to hospital, they would observe their mother weighing carefully her responses so that he would not realise that she too wanted him to leave. Both the children and the mother would feign sadness at seeing him go and then openly celebrate and rejoice when their father left. It is like they lived in a parallel universe:

Oh dear... (sigh)... We used to say the rosary so that he goes away. And I remembered that he had been telling her (the mother)- “take me, take me” and she told him, “Come, let me take you (to the psychiatric hospital then)- as if she was reluctant to take him. And we- as soon as they left, we put the stereo on, we started cleaning, spring cleaning everywhere, cooking: A proper party .., a grand party ..,
and when father was away, we used to want to treat mummy, we used to clean everywhere- and we used to be able to use the whole house ..., and one time, we had the stereo full on and we were dancing and singing and all of a sudden, they were back! Oh my God ..., Voomm ..., and he then would say ‘What’s happening here? They were really upset at seeing me go!!! (in a sarcastic and angry tone) Because he realised that we did not want him, but it is funny when you come to think of it ..., Actually, the truth is .., it’s tragic” (Donna 2, p. 41).

With regards to the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, as highlighted earlier, the participants described themselves in their childhood as being constantly alert and preoccupied about their safety and that of their mother’s and siblings’, not being able to sleep and needing medication to sleep, being constantly on the go and constantly worrying how they are going to escape from their home. These experiences can be understood as the fourth PTSD cluster involving hyperarousal and hyperreactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) These experiences were also coupled with the process of shutting down of emotions or being able to feel only anger instead of the gamut of emotions which can be understood as the third PTSD cluster of numbing, negative cognitions and mood (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

6.3.2.2 Remembering and forgetting. The theme or category of “remembering and forgetting” came up very often. As the participants were trying to recall their experiences, some participants commented that they were able to remember only bits and pieces and that, sometimes, it was difficult for them to remember a coherent whole:

I cannot remember what role my brother played, I cannot remember. In my mind, in the way that I remember things, perhaps he had a passive role ..., I cannot recall him ..., I think that he used to cry a lot but I don’t think that this happened all the time. I think that he used to be in a daze ..., It is like I cannot see the whole piece ..., it is not coming to me (Geraldine 2, p. 84).

and Mary too:

... yes, of pieces of episodes ..., and sometimes, you wouldn’t understand what is happening so it’s easier to see pieces ..., and there would not be that glue between them ..., (Mary, p. 20).
Rose was one of the participants who struck me with her difficulties to remember large aspects of her childhood experiences. Whilst she said that her relationship with her mother was good, she could not recall any specific instances, which illustrated such a close relationship. Her memories at times were not only fragmented but they also seemed incoherent, that is they lacked a sequence of events or other vital detail (Van der Kolk, 2014). I also observed that she was used a lot of minimisation, and distance from affect in her language (Crittenden & Kulbotten, 2007). When I asked her to describe to me what the atmosphere at home was like when she was young, she replied:

*What I don’t remember is ..., the atmosphere at that time ..., obviously I was still young ..., what I remember is that there used to be ..., even when we came to live at (name of village), there was shouting, a little fighting in the family and the like (Rose, p. 3). I also remember that there was a bit of beating ..., and ehm ..., things flying (p. 5).

At the same time, in line with Van der Kolk (2014) research on traumatic memory, Rose’s memories for one particularly violent episode which involved her, were very clear and vivid:

*I remember one episode very clearly ..., I was eating ..., we have a combined kitchen and dining room just separated by an arch. He grabbed an ornament ..., mummy’s, that her father had given her before he died; he grabbed this doll and broke it and threw it at me the ..., and I saw that it was coming in my direction ..., and so episodes like these ..., of this kind (Rose, p. 8).

Other participants recalled similar episodes very vividly too, including details like the bathroom tiles’ colour. The details sometimes were visual and sometimes they were sensory, which the participants recalled with distress. Here, I am referring to Anita, (mentioned earlier in section 6.2.1.1.3) who still could recall the beating of the green garden hose pipe on her skin, an incident which happened when she was a child and Hannah, who remembered the strength of her father’s hand on her face.

Other participants also talked about intrusive reliving of traumatic events- which is the first PTSD criterion - re-experiencing of the traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). One particular striking example was that of Geraldine locking herself up
at home for three days for fear that her boyfriend was going to come and beat her after he told her in the course of a conversation “You are right!”:

No…no…no….in front of people he would just tell you one word “You are right”. And that word for me it took me a long time to learn what it meant, even up to the moment when I was a grownup woman. It was very difficult when someone told me I was right. Because I used to say (haqq ghal Madonna- blasphemy against the Holy Mother) now a beating will follow.

Once I had a boyfriend. I do not remember what we were talking about but it was something trivial .., But I remember distinctly in the car, while he was driving and I was in the passenger’s seat ok? He said you are right. Now you must keep in mind that he had the keys to my house. He used to use the key only when he was going to come over in the evenings and I would know he would be coming. Emm…and he said, we were talking and he said you are right.

I froze and I was focusing only on the fact that as soon as I arrive, I will scoot out of the car and gas down run into my house. I fell silent so he would leave as soon as possible .., And then much later he phoned me at work

He phoned me at home and I ignored him. Then about three days after, I called him because I felt ridiculous. Then he said, ‘you suddenly left without warning just like that for no reason .., my mother and aunt got worried too’.

Then I found the courage from somewhere and told him ‘Please do me a favour, come over and we will talk.’ I told him don’t tell me ‘You are right’. Do not ever tell me that word again. I told him because for me, you are right means .., he had never raised his hand to me .., it’s true he had never done anything to me physically .., but at that instant I had thought he is going inside the house with me and then he would .., because for me you are right means a beating from hell is coming next. It means ‘I will not beat you in front of people but when we are at home you will get it’ (Geraldine 1, p. 30-32).

Geraldine’s memory triggers and subsequent flashbacks (Van der Kolk, McFarlane, & van der Hart, 2007) were distressing and had a disturbing impact on her quality of life and relationships. Geraldine also recalled being overwhelmed with pain in her head whilst
travelling to work and what kept her sane was the tremendous support of her psychologist who had discussed with her the nature of flashbacks (Briere & Scott, 2015). Geraldine associated the pain with the beatings that she got on her head whilst being dragged down the stairs by her hair by her father. The psychologist’s explanation was vital to her mental health.

Sara too experienced her memory triggers, albeit in a less intense manner than how Geraldine described hers. Sara felt sad and down only when she saw her father who she refused to have contact with and also refused him to have contact with her children. She also talked about how she experienced fear every time she heard her husband arguing with her sons and she goes about asking them not to fight and lower their voices. She linked her fear to her childhood experiences of violence especially to seeing how much her brother suffered at the hand of their father. Sara reflected that she sometimes forgets some of the things that she went through unless she specifically goes through something that triggers her memory. She is happy that she forgets, because she does not want the children to be raised in the same way that she was raised. I understood this as Sara’s determination to have a corrective script with her children.

6.3.2.3 How different individuals understood the trauma incidents. Finally, I would like to end this section highlighting the need to give importance to the individual’s meaning-making process of a trauma incidence. In Hannah’s case, for instance, she felt more distressed by the intensity of the abuse she experienced witnessing her parents’ fights rather than the distressed she felt as a result of her father’s beatings. For other participants, like Seana, her father’s emotional and psychological abuse caused her most suffering, whilst Anita was more intensely affected by her mother’s neglect and psychological and physical abuse rather than her father’s beatings of her and her mother, although these were severe and injurious. This is what Hannah said:

I: What was most distressing for you, witnessing your parents fighting or actually being abused yourself, and kind of emotionally abused?

H: I think witnessing my parents.

I: It was worse than being hit?

H: Yes, because when I experienced witnessing them fighting, like continuously for years and years, the last time I was hit I was 18, no around 15 or 16, so it was a long time ago, although I still remember how strong my father’s hand was. But still, it
was more traumatic to see them fighting and even nowadays when I see them I just can’t avoid it. I have a big tension in my muscles. It was more traumatic to see them fight..., Not just because it was constant, I think that it’s more about, what comes to my mind, the intensity, the shouting and the rude words and this I think this affected me most: this shouting, telling the worst words that you can imagine to each other and, saying bad things about each other’s family; treating each other so badly, you know that I think more than the intensity of it (Hannah, p. 20-21).

6.3.3 Turning points/developmental processes that foster change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption.

6.3.3.1 Change as a result of growing older. One significant developmental process, which almost all the participants mentioned, was the process of growing older, either as an older child or a teenager and understanding more about what was happening at home. As they grew older, they started to think about the relationship between their parents, why their father was violent with their mother, with them, and their siblings. Some rebelled against their father, confronted him, and took a stand against the violence. As they grew older, the participants’ system widened to include friends, teachers and mentors and as they interacted with these, the growing children also realised that there were other ways of being in relationships, which in turn had an impact on their development and their wish to stop the violence in their family. Such findings are supported by literature which highlights the importance of peer relationships as protective factors associated with resilient functioning in young adulthood of childhood survivors of abuse (Collishaw et al., 2007; Howell & Miller-Graff, 2014). Such new experiences also impacted their anger against the father, where they became angrier and openly blamed him for what he was making them go through. Such experiences seemed to metaphorically sow the seed of determination for a different life.

6.3.3.2 Change through observation, social comparison and feedback as the women grew older. A number of participants mentioned how, as they were growing up, they observed their teachers and modelled on them how they could be different from their mothers as girls and future women. From their teachers’ occasional comments about their personal family life, the participants as older children also realised that family dynamics at home could be different and these observations were very meaningful for them. Donna was one example:
It could be that school was so helpful for me because this was the time where I could escape from home, mentally and physically. So in that space... a lot of students say “what a pain – school!” But I really enjoyed school. It could be that I saw them as role models, no one in particular really. Role model in the sense that you see a woman, smartly dressed, like you know, with earrings, and she is in authority. So probably I used to say: Wow! Look at these!... and you know sometimes, they used to say.... Because my daughter.... - and you get a hint about what is happening at their home. And so you say, - these people are serene in their family – serenity and peace does exist. It could be that I did this in secondary school. The guidance teacher was a like a mummy to me and my gosh, I used to observe her a lot. And when they share their personal experiences with you--- you know- nothing elaborate, simple things, but for you, it is like they gave you a gift! .. even when they tell you – yes it is like that... they help you say: There are people who think in the same way that I do! Also I was proud of the fact that I did well at school, I used to feel...eh...for instance, I used to always want to help out with the books, that kind of role (Donna 2, p. 22-23).

Hannah, too, found her “news of difference” (Bateson, 1979, p. 79) in books which she read for her studies The desperation that Hannah read about in women in the Second World War resonated with her desperation about her family situation and she became convinced that she was now responsible for her happiness and she had to be careful in her partner choice so that she does not perpetuate the sadness and desperation that she felt in her childhood into her adulthood. Interestingly, this finding is supported by research which shows that exposure to literature arts such as poetry and fictional literature provide a novel context for thinking about one’s life and identity and thus support the development of coherent life stories by organising personal experiences (Mackenzie, 1989):

You know, for example, I read novels about women’s life in Second World War and I wrote my thesis about families and 2 particular books and how the family members were treated during the war and in the 18th and 19th century, and these women living their lives in total desperation because they had no option and an opportunity to live the life they wanted to. These made me realise..., that I did not want anything like that. I wanted to be happy, in my childhood my relationship with my father was not that good so I said now it’s up to me, how I choose the person I wanted to live my life with (Hannah, p. 17).
Such quotes continue to highlight the importance of the teacher-student relationships and the school system as a venue for change in a person’s life (Boyce Rodgers & Rose, 2001).

6.3.3.3 Rebelling and confronting the father and standing up to the abuse – Holding firm against the abuse and fighting the helplessness. Rose recalled that problems with her father started when she grew up and started rebelling against him as has been mentioned earlier (Section 6.2.1.1.5) The same happened with Sandra who recalled, growing up and physically feeling that she would be physically able to tackle her father and beat him instead of letting him beat her. She also trained in martial arts, specifically for this purpose. Perhaps, one can argue that with growing up, and experiencing the related physical and cognitive changes, the women were able to take a more of an active agency role rather than the helpless position that they associated with their childhood in relation to their father’s violence (Baker, 2010; Goldblatt, 2003).

It is also interesting to note what Rose had to say when I asked her what had she learnt about her childhood experiences that she would want to pass on to children who were in the same situation, The quote reverberates with her strong insistence to the children to react and not get overwhelmed with the helplessness, which is similar to an example in Walsh (2006):

> I would say ..., “React, don’t get involved in their fights ..., you have your life ..., they have theirs ..., let them meddle in their own affairs ..., let them do what they want ..., react, don’t get involved, don’t intrude ..., do something ..., I don’t know..., seek help and if you would like to do something ..., do it even if you don’t have their courage ..., get up and react but also find help to talk to someone ..., like wake up and do something ..., it’s like you would not know what to do, basically (Rose, p. 22-23).

6.3.3.4 Getting support/talking about the violence, bringing things out in the open, cautiously and slowly. All the above processes were important milestones for the participants to bring about change in their lives. However, seeking and getting support was not always very straightforward. Whilst participants like Donna, and Marika felt validated by their mother and their siblings as champions against their fathers, seeking help and support was met with a number of complicating factors: the minimisation of the violence by the mother, the shame of not having a good family like other people had, the fear of reprisal by the father who wanted to keep the violence a secret, the extended family’s fear of the father’s violence
and their reluctance to get involved, the extended family’s denial of the father’s violence and the professionals’ fear that they would be taken away from their mother by professionals, and the professionals involved with the family’s difficulties to intuit that there were domestic violence issues, besides the problems about which they had been involved for. However, the participants also spoke about helpful social workers, residential care workers, psychologists, teachers and other mentors, as has been highlighted earlier.

6.3.3.5 Naming the childhood experiences as domestic violence. Some of the participants, like Sandra and Mary, spoke about their difficulties of naming their experiences as domestic violence. These participants spoke about their inability to recognise their childhood difficulties as growing up with domestic violence, unless they had help. Mary recalled that it was not until she started working in a domestic violence unit that she realised that what she went through in her family was as a result of domestic violence between her parents and this realisation helped her to start putting the puzzle pieces together:

*I started realising what this experience was all about when I started working in the domestic violence unit and I found myself working there because I had never wanted to work in the DV ..., I wanted to work in child protection, with children ..., I did not want to work in DV. And then when I found myself in the DV unit, it started dawning on me ..., and we’re talking about a time when I had already got married and had the children and that I had done my degree and look how long it took me to see it as DV. And there I started learning ..., there I started understanding ..., when I used to read on dv, and how children experience dv, I started saying ..., oh ..., this is the same as I used to feel because I had never seen it in this way ....And I think, working in dv, reading and studying ..., it was therapeutic for me because this was a way, I could understand and when you understand, you contain.* (Mary, p. 31-32).

Such reflections perhaps illustrate the extent of the disconnection between the process of experience and the making-meaning process that is difficult for children and adults to do without help from an adult or older sibling to help them make sense of what is happening. Naming and speaking aloud about what has happened are in fact very important starting points – for the processing of experiences, which till then are internal, often “unconscious, unintentional remembrances” (Smith, 2013, p. 76).

Moving from the intra-psychic context to the cultural context, perhaps the
participant’s difficulties to recognise their experiences as domestic violence could be related to the lack of awareness of the impact of domestic violence that might have been prevalent in Malta at the time when these children were growing up, that is around 40 years ago (Vakili Zad, 2013). This lack of awareness might be important for some participants and not others. As stated earlier in section 6.2.2.5.1, Sandra told me that she saw herself as knowledgeable about the impact of domestic violence on families, but it was only until her psychologist talked about the opportunity for the research interview and having done the interview that she made the connection between what she went through as a child and domestic violence. Participants described the complexity of coming to terms with their childhood experiences as “never-ending”. As a researcher, I experienced this as an intriguing and ever-unfolding process that could easily take one’s lifetime to research in its entirety.

6.3.3.6 Entrances and exits, into and from the family system. On the level of the family system, change processes occurred every time there were significant entrances and exits from the family system. Some of these were a) the suicide of the brother in Sara’s case. After this tragic event, Sara recalled that the father stopped being violent and a few weeks later left the house for good. In a similar way, b) father’s leaving the house either because he left voluntarily or was admitted to a psychiatric hospital (in Donna’s case) or sent to prison (in Marika’s and Jessica’s case) gave the family important respite from the violence. The same happened when c) the children were admitted into residential care. Although several studies have shown that residential care impacts negatively children’s development (e.g. Browne, 2005), in the participants’ case, being admitted into residential care into safety and having the opportunity to connect with professionals who became alternative significant others was beneficial for their development. All of this has important practice implications – which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

6.3.3.7 Focusing on self-awareness and taking opportunities for self-growth. I was struck by some of the participants’ ability to reflect about their experiences, particularly their ability to be aware of themselves and their feelings and the importance that they gave to investing in opportunities for self-growth. Of course, given that most of the women (N=14) interviewed had the support of a psychologist/psychotherapist or mentor facilitated their process of self-reflection. Nevertheless, throughout their lives, most of them saw that the process of talking about their experiences and seeking support was important for them and had its benefits. When I remarked to Geraldine about her ability for self-awareness, she
teased me that this is what we psychologists are obsessed with and so we are to blame! “Isn’t this what you make us do? .., The first therapist used to tell me: I want a feeling!!” (Geraldine 2, p. 59). In fact, identifying and discriminating feelings is an important aspect of successful affect regulation and a clinician can be helpful by regularly facilitate the exploration and discussion of the client’s emotional experience (Briere & Lanktree, 2012)

Geraldine and Mary both explained that the helpful experience that they had with their first psychologist helped them seek help in the future. Geraldine remarked that two of the most important things that she had found helpful in her therapy was the fact that her psychologist went out of her way to help her (Morrow et al., 2012) and the fact that the psychologist used to explain the process of getting better on paper that showed her that the psychologist was understanding the craziness in her head (Briere & Scott, 2015). Both Geraldine and Tori explained that amongst other things, they had worked hard with their psychologists to get in touch with their feelings, especially as the feelings of that “little girl” in the past.

Participants not only spoke of the process of healing and change as happening through formal psychotherapy but also through engaging in alternative forms of therapy like meditation and reike, through engaging in sports and hobbies (Lazarus, 1999) and through connecting with mentors in residential care or significant others like grandparents and uncles and aunts. These findings are also supported by the resilience literature (e.g., Rutter, 1999) which indicates that on the whole, individuals who coped well had a repertoire of different ways of dealing with things, rather than because one particular coping strategy was more effective than others.

6.3.3.8 Reconciliation, reconnection and redemption. One of intriguing aspects of the participants’ stories was the notion of forgiveness, a process, which Geraldine, Sandra and Farrah experienced as has been highlighted in section 6.2.2.1.2. These women also reconciled with their father, which meant that they resumed their relationship with their father. This same process of forgiveness and reconciliation was not experienced by those participants whose mother had been abusive towards them, that is, by Anita and Carmen, except perhaps to some extent, by Tori, who was working on having a better relationship with her mother through psychotherapy.

These experiences of forgiveness and reconciliation that these women went through
are somewhat novel in the domestic violence literature where the focus is more likely to emphasise the responsibility of the abuser for the harm incurred rather than the forgiveness of those who were abused (James, 2007). In this sense, promoting forgiveness without regard to the abused person’s safety and without regard to the severity of the injury is seen as undesirable and problematic. Pseudo-forgiveness or premature forgiveness have been seen as dangerous to the well being of victims of abuse (Sheehan, 2007). However, these women’s stories were different: although all the women felt pressured to forgive their father at different points in their lives, as has been highlighted earlier, Geraldine, Sandra and Farrah forgave their father as part of their unique, individual experience, not out of pressure and they benefitted in personal and spiritual growth (Butler, Dahlin, & Fife, 2002). Geraldine’s detailed account of her process might help therapists to follow more closely and more carefully their clients’ unique trajectory if this is something that they would like undertake.

6.3.4 Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas. In the following section, I will describe in more detail the core category of this grounded theory study: Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas. It should hopefully now be clear to the reader, how this category was ever-present in the participants’ narratives. It was at times, articulated by the participants. At other times, the contradiction was apparent in the participants’ narratives. Hearing about these contradictions was also what I kept struggling with, as a researcher in listening to these women - how to reconcile what often were two intense experiences that were diametrically opposite to each other. The table below summarises some of these contradictions and double binds. The direct quotes in italics indicate the words of the participants. The other statements are my observations and hypotheses from the interviews.
Table 10

Summary of Participants’ Quotes and Researcher’s Observations Regarding the Core Category “Living With Contradictions, Double-Binds and Dilemmas”

Contradictions, dilemmas and double-binds

a) Love and fear in the mother “Because I used to see mum so frightened so full of bitterness and yet so full of love towards him .., that I used to try to draw a conclusion: is it because my mum really loves him or because she is afraid of him? (Seana, p. 8). “She was very frightened of him but she loved him a lot” (p.9)

b) Memories of a happy childhood vs not remembering her childhood but remembering feeling very lonely, and feeling very bad – “I rue the day that I became part of this family” (Rose, p. 21)

c) Seeing herself as feisty, defiant and fearless and trapped in a cage, having to fit to others’ wishes and denying her wishes (Jessica)

d) Being terrified of father and admiring him a lot (Geraldine)

e) Cut off and connection (Geraldine, Seana, Jessica, Anita)

f) As an adult, getting involved in a coalition with mother and siblings against father whilst also withdrawing from family of origin (Claire)

g) Repetition of love and aggression with own daughter (Farrah)

h) Wanting to protect mother and also to be protected by her (Donna, Marika)

i) Being afraid of mother but wanting to live with her and not father, as a young child (Sandra); being afraid of mother and wanting to protect her (Sandra)

j) Describing relationship with mother as good and then talking about having to cope with unpredictable and frightening violent outbursts (Sandra)

k) Murderous rage against father for beating her and understanding his beating her as disciplining her (Farrah)

l) Being convinced that her father would have been a better child minder to her
daughter than her mother when he was so violent with her whilst growing up (Farrah)

m) Mother expecting daughter to do the honourable thing and respect father when mother did her best to try and protect her from him and his violence (Donna)

n) Being told that by mother that father loved her when he was violent and abusive towards her (Donna)

The above focused codes that pertain specifically to the core category “Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas” attempt to describe and illustrate how the women experienced and lived the co-existence of two intense, paradoxical and unresolved experiences which manifested in their lives in different ways. The core contradiction seemed to be organised around Love, and Fear: How can mother love my father and be so afraid of him? My father loves me but he beats me till he almost kills me! How can my mother protect me from my violent father and then insist that I love him and respect him?

How can one understand these injunctions? Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson’s (1967) communication theory, particularly the discrepancy between the report and command aspect of communication, can help one understand these women’s experiences. In addition, the double bind theory (Bateson et al., 1956) that was initially formulated to explain a difficult interaction in families with schizophrenia delineates some of the characteristics of these communication patterns. Gibney (2006) provides a useful summary of the double bind theory:

a) That the individual is involved in an intense relationship in which he or she feels that they must get the communication right;

b) The other party is expressing two orders of messages, and one denies the other;

c) The victim is unable to comment on the contradictions (p. 50).

Bateson (1972) also highlights that these situations are continuously repeated, resulting in an individual being unable to decipher the communication and to respond to it coherently. In effect, if these theoretical concepts are applied to living in a family where there is domestic violence, one can understand some of the reasons why, as children, these women were unable to meta-understand their family experiences. The nature of the communication
with its paradoxical nature, involved intense parental-child relationships, which were essential for the children’s survival and which they could not walk away from. In addition, the contexts of secrecy and shame all played an important role in this regard.

Moreover, the terrifying, fear component and the impact of the violence – Category 6.3.2 - the traumatogenic nature of the violence, both of suffering physical and psychological personal violence and through witnessing it on loved others, also exerted an important influence on hindering the reflective capacity of the children and family members involved. From brain research, we know that in conditions of high arousal and danger, the prefrontal cortex, which is normally associated with this particular psychological function, is “bypassed” by the amygdala in the limbic system, (Asen & Fonagy, 2012) so that persons lose their capacity to think about the mental state of others and operate more in a flight-fight-freeze mode.

As has been discussed earlier in the presentation of Trauma theory in the Literature review chapter, in conditions of chronic danger and unpredictability, as happens in families who experience domestic violence, where the parents, or one of the parents is the abuser, the child loses a caregiver who can help her develop her ability to regulate her affect (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Moran, & Higgitt, 1991). More so, the chronic danger and possibly lack of adequate comforting gets into the way of experiences being transferred and processed on by the frontal lobe because the intermediary brain fear regulatory mechanics is disabled (Jonsson, 2009). This implies that the ability of the brain to store memories in a narrative format is reduced, resulting in a lack of meaning making for that experience. This also means that such experiences would be stored as sensory memories (Van der Kolk, 2007b), which are usually context–free and would be difficult for the person to process them. In effect, participants like Geraldine and Mary talked about recalling fragments of memories, and Geraldine also talked about emotional and sensory memories without a verbal account – these would be the pain sensations that she felt on the bus one day which she and her psychologist later traced to her experiences of her father pulling her down the stairs from her hair and the pain related to her head being banged on each step. Thus it is both the nature of the actual communication (double bind communication or contradiction) and in the nature of the trauma itself that exert powerful influences on these women’s lives.

How does the process of triangulation link in? From these participants’ narratives, it
seemed to me that being triangulated in one’s parents’ violence and conflict trapped the person into repeatedly experiencing these contradictions and double binds. The more intense the triangulation was experienced, the more intense the contradiction was experienced. For instance, Geraldine articulated how as a child she felt like she was losing her sanity and going mad (see Figure 3) caught between her parents. One hypothesis is that she “resolved” it or could only feel safe (Crittenden, 2008), by identifying with her father and forgetting or dissociating any experiences of attachment to her mother. In her case, she also rejected her gender as a girl and fantasied that she would grow up to be a man. Perhaps other women decided to cut off their communication from their father again to attain a position of less madness and a position of a less intense relationship. In Trauma theory language, this is what professionals also term as “avoidance” (which is the second criterion of the DSM-5 PTSD) but in these women’s experiences, for a time period, avoidance was a life-saving strategy.

Another “contradictory” facet of this experience is that amidst all the suffering, they also recognised the psychological growth, which the participants also focused on, each participant according to a specific extent (Smith, 2013). Even here the dialectic of the trauma (Herman, 1997) was apparent - suffering and growth, despair and serenity in the same interview. The participants volunteered detailed descriptions of what had been key turning points in their lives including the availability of having someone to talk to in their lives, and someone who loved them, someone who had a special place in their hearts for them, someone who went out of their way for them. Perhaps it was their mother, a grandparent, a teacher, their psychologist or a relative. All this supports and is supported by the resilience literature (DuMont, Widom, & Czaja, 2007; Ungar, 2013.). Perhaps it is in the nature of these relationships that the participants developed their reflective function despite the adversity that they experienced and because of these contexts, they could then start processing some of what they had gone through and gradually draw meaning from it. This too occurred in a spiral, back and forth process.

6.4 Part Three

6.4.1 Impact on interviewees on taking part in the grounded theory study. The following is a summary of the themes in my research diary, illustrating what emerged from my conversations with the participants during the debriefing stage at the end of each in interview. Some women understood participating in this research project as one way of
helping others in similar circumstances and others saw it as a duty - as a way of helping raise awareness of how much people suffer so that others do not have to suffer as much as they did (Cutcliffe, 2002). Others saw it as a way of validating their achievements despite the adversity they experienced.

For many others, the interview was an intervention in itself (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002; Gale, 1992), which helped them map out their experiences and helped them become aware of links and connections that they had not been aware of before. As commented earlier, for people like Sandra, she needed the interview to name what she went through as a child as living through domestic violence experiences. Some like Marika became aware of how much loved and validated they were by their extended family. Others, like Geraldine made links and connections during the interview itself. She also managed to recall additional details of her childhood experiences - what Briere and Scott (2015) refer to as “context reinstatement” (p.160). For Geraldine, having the second interview was also an exercise where she managed to keep together the complexity of contradictory intense emotions that she was experiencing: revisiting her life story and being able to feel pain and also being able to feel a sense of peace, without denying what happened. I think that in essence her statement truly represents the integration of what had been fragmented as a result of the trauma experiences she went through in her life.

Despite the positive growth-enhancing experiences, the participants also shared some of their discomfort at remembering and at times re-living the violent incidents they experienced as children (Carlson et al., 2003). Sometimes the use of humour during poignant moments in the interview helped deflect some of the intensity of the interviews (Jacobs, 2007). Others resorted to deactivating strategies as a form of defence (Mikulincer et al., 2003), for example when using minimisation in their language and shutting down some of their feelings in the interview, that is not being in touch with what they used to feel when they were young and being unable to remember. Others found themselves in a reflective mood after the interview for example: both Sara and Donna wondered whether they tend to “forget” their experiences to cope or have they truly moved on? – echoing perhaps the yearning for a new life than the one that they had gone through as children.
6.4.2 Findings from the credibility checks with health and social care professionals.

6.4.2.1 Results from the first credibility check with professionals. When I had analysed a substantial amount of the interviews (12 interviews out of 18), I presented the preliminary findings to professionals working in the child protection, domestic violence, and forensic field. I presented the tentative focused codes and emerging theoretical constructs in the form of a power-point presentation.

The professionals commented that these findings resonated with their practice, particularly the concept of family systems triangulation and the process of emotional cut-off and reconnection. They also raised a number of issues for discussion - for instance, the extent of compassion that the interviewees were able to show towards their mother. At this point in the analysis, I had interviewed participants who had not forgiven their mother for having physically abused and neglected them whilst they demonstrated more attachment with their father, even though he had abused them.

In the experience of the professionals in the group who worked in either Child Protection or Domestic Violence Services, children usually were very concerned about the safety of the mother and would acknowledge the efforts that she would have done to protect them. However, with the passage of time, in adolescence, they would start questioning their parents, for example their mothers and why she did not protect them enough. Thus, the notion of time was raised as an important concept. Some professionals also noted that in reading the participants’ quotes, it seemed as if that they were hearing the participants when they were children, talking and then they were hearing the adolescents and the adults, when the participants started to understand what had happened at home. It seemed to them that there was a continual flip-flopping between the past and the present, and then past again.

This feedback was consistent with my interviewing experience. I felt that as an interviewer, I was relating to the child in them as well as the adult and I wondered whether this had been my bias since I was a mother of a young child and could imagine very vividly what it was like for a child to go through some of the experiences that they went through. The professionals’ feedback made me realise how multi-layered the researcher’s hypotheses can be.
Another issue that came up was the issue of aggression and whether the participants had been violent towards other children or animals. I thus realised that I had not specifically asked about this, perhaps seeing the women more as victims rather than perpetrators of violence. Thus asking about women and their experiences as aggressors, was also another lead that I kept my eyes open to during the remaining data collection and analysis process.

6.4.2.2 Results from the second credibility check with professionals. This second discussion group was carried out with four senior psychotherapists who had experience in the field of working with children and adult survivors of childhood domestic violence as well as experience with working with men who were abusive to their partners in the context of a heterosexual intimate relationship, as described in the Methodology chapter.

The following is a thematic summary of the points that were raised in the discussion. I asked the professionals’ views about the research findings and also about the significance of the findings for practice. Before we started the discussion, I presented a summary of the results (Fig 2.0) and tables 4 – 9 (Appendix U, Vol 1), giving them time to go through the results and time to ask for any clarifications. I recorded our discussion and I also took down points of the main themes that were discussed.

The therapists remarked that the contradictions that the women went through really stood out for them. They could see how it made sense to have “Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas” as the core category. Through recounting different clinical anecdotes, they shared how difficult it was for them to keep in mind the notion of the man as a violent abuser and a father too; how it was easier for them to see the man as an abuser in the context of the intimate relationship. It was also hard for them to reconcile the fact the daughters had a strong attachment to the father who was abusing them.

The practitioners recognised within themselves the different phases that they went through in trying to stay with all these contradictions with their clients. They felt the need to resort to different resources to try and make sense of such experiences, for example, through reading relevant literature and seeking supervision specifically for these particular cases. Interestingly, the participants too sought the help of others – literature, psychotherapy, sports, and mentors to try and make sense of such paradoxical experiences. Such disclosures from experienced therapists continue to underscore the implications of such findings for practice, particularly for supervision and training that need to be in place to help such clients with
similar experiences like the research participants.

The notion of time was again brought up by this group of professionals too - in the context of the importance of the need for continually re-visiting facets of the experience with the clients. One therapist described the process as similar to a painter, covering the canvas with different coats of paint, whilst allowing each coat to dry before applying the other; another therapist used the metaphor of the tangled ball of wool and the therapist and client discovering different ends in the ball of wool. The other therapist said that she saw the process as being like someone watching a film and looking at parts of it, in different contexts. Again it was important for therapists to have the supervisory contexts where they could slowly be helped to integrate the fragmented and sometimes incoherent aspects of such childhood experiences that their clients presented them.

The practitioners also discussed the theme of “replicative scripts” and how best to respond to clients’ fears of such replicative scripts – how not to dismiss the clients’ fears but also help them focus on the potential for change – and the notion of corrective scripts (Byng-Hall, 1998).

6.4.3 Findings from the credibility checks with participants. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, I contacted again two participants, Geraldine and Jessica after the analysis of the grounded theory was completed. I asked them whether they were willing to give me their feedback about the results. I contacted Jessica through her psychologist so that she would have more freedom to accept or not my invitation. On the other hand, I contacted Geraldine through electronic mail as I had informally met her in a public seminar and she expressed an interest to have a look at the results of my research study. I thus contacted her again asking her whether she would still be willing to discuss the results with me. Both participants were very keen to meet me and in preparation for our meeting, I sent them a copy of Fig 2.0 and a copy of the tables four to nine in appendix U, volume 1.

From a credibility check perspective, both Geraldine and Jessica thought that the diagram represented in a valid manner their stories in the past and what life was like for them in the present. Geraldine found the diagram (Fig 2.0) a bit difficult to understand and she thought that the tables showing the categories, sub-categories and focused codes (in Appendix U, Volume 1) were helpful. She and Jessica could both recognise the focused codes that related to them and their families. Jessica also endorsed the core category. She
said that this was important for practitioners, as it had taken a long time for her psychologist to understand how she hated and loved her father!

From a participant-researcher encounter perspective, meeting with both participants again was again a moving experience and a context for further learning.

Geraldine was very happy to meet me and over all she felt a big sense of gratitude towards me doing this research and for accompanying her on her journey, given that I had interviewed her twice. When she also read some of her words, in the quotes in the beginning of this chapter, she started crying and part of me felt guilty for upsetting her. I wondered whether I was ethically doing the right thing. However, when I asked her what was upsetting her, Geraldine spoke about being sad for her father and what he went through. We spent time talking about her relationship with her father and how happy she is that he is supportive of her. She was also very happy that I contacted her because she felt that in this way she came in touch with a sense of gratitude that she had lost – that she was in a happy place in her life because of all the people who had helped her on the way. So this meeting was meaningful for her.

Meeting Jessica was also an emotionally intense encounter! After discussing the results, Jessica was keen to tell me that that CID (Criminal Investigation Dept) in the Police force had opened the case of her mother’s murder following some new information that she had given them. She believed that despite the fact that her father had served his time in prison for her mother’s murder, he did not act alone. Jessica believed that only if she discovered the truth, her mother’s spirit could truly rest. She also told me that her grandmother’s words before she died was that there was someone out there who was responsible for the murder of her daughter. So Jessica believed that she needs to go through this investigation and has the support of some of her siblings. Jessica told me that she was keen to share this with me and when the opportunity came by, she thought that it was just serendipity. Jessica feels that she has progressed a lot in her life. She now has a good relationship with her ex-husband and believes that most of their problems were due to her immense anger that she harboured inside as a results of what she went through in her childhood. Jessica was happy to have met me again and would like me to send her a text when I graduate.

These two accounts illustrate some of the complicated ethical dilemmas that can arise in research contexts especially when interviewing participants about their experiences that
involved trauma-inducing responses, in this case, whilst carrying out the credibility checks. It was important for me to have the opportunity to discuss these dilemmas in the supervisory context (Vetere, 2012). After discussing the above with my supervisors, I came to the realisation that again there are no easy resolutions to these complex dilemmas. It is important to consult and to decide on a participant-by-participant basis (Sammut-Scerri et al., 2012).

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter gives the reader a comprehensive, in depth picture of the never-ending process of understanding that 15 women shared with me as part of a grounded theory study. I have attempted to represent and illustrate with quotes, how they tried to make sense of their complex family dynamics in the context of domestic violence, including how these experiences have impacted their child and adult development, their intimate relationships and their parenting.

The category “Living with contradictions, double binds and dilemmas”, was presented as the Core Category which sought to illuminate the continual contradictions that they had to struggle with, in making sense of their experiences. Their childhood experiences and other cultural contexts were presented as the contexts to understand their adult experiences and these in turn gave meaning to their childhood experiences in an iterative process. Their stories showed that domestic violence in families could take many forms. In this study, the participants talked about the physical assaults of the father on the mother, on the parents being mutually emotionally violent, on the siblings being violent with each other, on the parents being physically, emotionally and psychologically abusive to the children and also some of participants themselves being aggressive with their partners and/or children.

The women’s stories also illustrated the importance of caring and supportive networks and how these helped the participants to move from a survivor position to a more reflective position about their families. Some women also spoke about their experiences of compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation with the parent who was abusive in their childhood. Throughout this chapter, there were many references to how such results could be helpful to practitioners, researchers, supervisors, trainers, and policy-makers. The focus of the next chapter will in fact be to discuss these implications in detail.
CHAPTER 7.0

DISCUSSION

7.1 Orientation to the Chapter

Following the extensive Results chapter, rather than give the reader a summary of the findings, I will now present the implications of the findings for practice, training, supervision and personal and professional development (PPD). The chapter will also discuss the implications for policy and service development. The key findings will be highlighted as part of the discussion of the implications of this research study’s findings. I will also include a critical review of the study outlining its strengths and limitations and I will end the chapter with suggestions for future research.

7.2 Implications for Clinical Practice, Supervision, Training and Personal, Professional Development (PPD): The Need to Manage Intense Contradictions and Holding Complex Dilemmas when Working with Violence

As has already been discussed earlier in the Introductory chapter, unfortunately, the domestic violence field is conceptually characterised by what seem to be two opposing camps (Shlonsky et al., 2007): the camp where professional practice is mainly informed by the gender paradigm, reflecting the assumption that men are abusive in order to control and instil fear in women and the other camp, that of family violence researchers who take a more gender-inclusive approach and who are more likely to take into account the motivation of both partners and other factors when looking at intimate partner violence (Lawrence, 2014).

These two fundamental assumptions about the understanding of domestic violence inform the philosophies of care, including who is seen as the client, what kind of explanatory frameworks are used to understand the problem and hence what kind of interventions are offered. Both in the United Kingdom as well as in Malta, social welfare services for “women as survivors/victims” and “men as perpetrators of domestic abuse” tend to be separate and take a gender perspective (Hester et al., 2007; Foundation for Social Welfare Services, 2012). Both services are offered with the goal of prioritising the safety of women and children. Whilst one cannot but not agree with the paramount importance given to safety, and the zero tolerance to violence, the segregation of services and consequently the kind of intervention that is offered does not seem to allow space for the complexity of intimate relationships in
domestic violence situations. Obviously such philosophies and work contexts influence practice: the kind of positions that practitioners can take with their clients and what kind of services they provide.

This research study’s participants gave a strong message that despite all the abuse that the women experienced at the hands of their father both in their childhood and adulthood, they still wanted to have a connection with their fathers and this was important for them. For them, he was not only a perpetrator but he was also their father and they had to continually contend with their attachment bond to him, finding it at times strongly emotionally overwhelming to do so and needing help to manage strong emotions of love, fear, terror, and sadness.

One of the main implications for practice when working with adult survivors of childhood domestic violence is the need for practitioners to manage the constant contradictions and dilemmas that are presented by the clients. Practitioners need to respond to these paradoxical experiences, rather than keep them out of awareness (Lawrence, 2014). Otherwise health and social care professionals could collude with the belief in the over-all badness of the perpetrators and not understand the adult survivors’ attachment with their parents who were also abusive (Kaufmann, 2002). Practitioners might also be unable to hear some of the horrific suffering that these adults went through as children and detach themselves from what the clients might be saying in order to protect themselves from perceived attacks on their beliefs such as a safe-world assumption (Janoff-Bulman, 2002). These positions are not congruent with the research participants’ experiences of what they found helpful in their journey of trying to make sense of their childhood experiences of domestic violence.

In addition, some participants like Anita, and Carmen, not only were they victims of their fathers’ violence but also of their mothers’ violence and they struggled to understand how their mothers, who were supposed to love them, also abused them. Some, like Carmen, yearned strongly for their mother’s affection and grieved the loss of the love they felt that their mother never gave them. Practitioners who solely subscribe to notions of gender-based violence - with patriarchy as the primary cause of intimate partner violence would perhaps be hard-pressed not to marginalize these stories of connection with the parent perpetrator in dealing with these contradictory experiences (Lawrence 2014).
In addition, narratives of women being aggressive with their partners in either homosexual or heterosexual relationships might also be minimised (for example, Sandra’s story), privileging the suffering that these women might have experienced in their family of origin but not their responsibility for later violence. Practitioners would thus be ignoring the numerous research studies that indicate that bidirectional intimate partner violence is common across different populations, even though all aspects of women’s perpetration of intimate partner violence are not symmetrical to men’s perpetration of intimate partner violence (See Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012 for a review). Other participants were aggressive with their own children (for e.g. Farrah) and viewing the participants in the victims’ position would not allow space for them to accept and manage their own capacity for aggression, even though being aggressive would be the exact experience they would not want to replicate with their children. In such situations, they might not be offered a service in their own right.

7.2.1 Embracing an integrative theoretical framework and using systemic theory as a meta-theory. Epistemologically, one of the ways that can facilitate the holding of complex dilemmas together is through embracing Systemic theory as an overarching integrative framework (Vetere, 2006; Vetere & Cooper, 2008). Such a framework would allow the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives – psychological theories, the moral and legal perspectives as well as the feminists’ view of intimate partner violence. The practitioner and researcher would need to keep these theoretical frameworks in mind both as separate and connected discourses (Cooper & Vetere, 2005).

This need for a multiplicity of perspectives was already underscored in the work of Goldner, Penn, Sheinberg, and Walker (1990), and then later by Goldner (1998, 1999). The following quote is clear in its message—that a single, unitary explanatory framework that explains violence is limited:

What the feminist perspective brings to the table is a fundamental, ethical and political framework with which to view abuse and victimization. On these larger issues, and on the question of safety, there must be no compromise or ambiguity. But having established the moral bottom line, a zero tolerance for violence and a commitment to safety, accountability and equity above all else, there should also be room for many voices and approaches to this grave and complex problem (Goldner,
Other family specialists such as Dutton (2006), Hamel (2005) and Hamel and Nicholls (2007), George and Stith (2014) and Lawrence (2014) have advocated for a similar position. All these scholars stress the need for practitioners to move away from “either/or” positions, that is, that situate men as almost always being only violent perpetrators and women as almost always being only victims. Grappling with the complexity of a systemic both/and position is more in tune with the perceived participants’ experiences in this study.

At the level of therapeutic practice, in terms of psychological theories, the findings have indicated that it is useful for practitioners to draw ideas from an integrative framework (Vetere, 2012) that is relational in nature, in their formulation of their clients and their families: to use ideas from attachment theory (Mikulincer et al., 2003), trauma and complex PTSD (Ford, Courtois, Steele, van der Hart, & Nijenhuis, 2005) narrative and systems theory (Dallos & Vetere, 2009) and resilience and posttraumatic growth framework to understand family relationships where there is violence (Morris, Shakespeare-Finch, Rieck, & Newbery, 2005)

7.2.1.1 Drawing from attachment theory. More specifically, the findings have brought home some of the critical tenets of attachment theory: that is that attachment fulfils a basic need for safety and protection and that the strength of attachment bonds does not predict the quality of the attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). This therefore begins to explain the paradoxical attachment of the daughter to the attachment figure, even if that same attachment figure is the source of terror and fear. The findings also highlight the importance of the internal representations or working models of close attachment that begin in childhood and which eventually guide the formation of social relations outside the family (Bowlby, 1973). Such theoretical premises help practitioners to start understanding the links the participants made between their childhood experiences of their relationships with their fathers and mothers and how the participants began to understand their intimate relationships with men and other significant others. In the same way, attachment theory can also help explain the different strategies of affect regulation (Mikulincer et al., 2003) that the participants shared about their experiences. Bowlby (1969, 1973) posits that in instances when the significant caregivers are unavailable and/or unresponsive to one’s needs and hence proximity-seeking does not diminish or relieve distress, other secondary attachment strategies
are activated: hyper-activating strategies and deactivating strategies (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988).

Hyper-activating strategies include strong and insistent efforts to elicit care, like clinging and controlling responses. This is one way of understanding Marika’s behaviour. She felt a great need to take care of everyone in the family and to get to know about what is going on with everyone in the family. On the other hand, deactivating strategies are those kinds of behaviours where proximity seeking is not given importance and there is a reliance on the self to handle distress alone. Such behaviour was demonstrated in instances by Geraldine who recognised in herself her ability to shut down her emotions and not feel or by Rose who locked herself in her room and often hit things in an effort to calm herself down after witnessing the abuse on her mother or after being verbally abused by her father. According to Mikulincer et al. (2003), hyper-activating strategies include other behaviours such as being constantly on the alert and preoccupied with threats and danger. On the other hand, deactivating strategies involve suppression of painful thoughts and repression of negative memories. Both hyperactivating and de-activating behaviours were disclosed by the research participants in this study.

7.2.1.2 Being guided by Trauma theory, memory work and a narrative perspective.

In order for practitioners to have useful road maps in their journey with their clients, where fear and terror hold such a prominent place in these participants’ narratives, it is also useful that clinicians have an appreciation of memory work, trauma theory, and a narrative perspective, in addition to attachment theory. On reading the findings, one can certainly note that Van der Kolk’s (2014) statement “traumatized people simultaneously remember too little and too much” (p. 179) rings true. Participants spoke about not being able to remember specific incidents and yet could recall other precise events with crystal clear details, including the colours of things in the room and the participants’ location in space in relation to other people. Participants like Geraldine and Sara also spoke of particular memory triggers, which then sometimes provoked a traumatic enactment (Herman, 1997) for example, Geraldine’s locking herself in her house for 3 days, thinking that her boyfriend is going to come and beat her after he said to her the words: “you are right”. These were the same words that her father used to utter before a horrifying beating.

If one looks at attachment theory and takes into account the hypothesis that one’s internal working models of our attachment relationships are held in different memory systems
(Dallos & Vetere, 2014; Tulving, 1985), as described earlier in the literature review chapter, one can understand the proposition that in conditions of chronic danger, threat and lack of comforting from their care-givers, the integrative memory structures of the brain, that is the frontal lobe and hippocampus (Jonsson, 2009) are bypassed by the flight, fight, freeze responses of the amygdala system of the brain. This means that experiences – of abuse and others that make up the significant other relational context - are not processed and are possibly stored as fragmented emotional and sensory memories. Thus memories result in being incoherent and fragmentary, without a narrative that would help make meaning of those particular experiences.

According to this hypothesis, flashbacks experienced by clients are in fact these fragments of experiences, which have yet to be processed and integrated (Van der Kolk, 2007). In this sense, clinicians not only need to help clients deal with the actual distressing experience of the flashback but also help them process their flashbacks by exploring possible connections and meanings these might have with the over all narrative of the person’s life (Meichenbaum, 1996). This also means that what was dissociated or split off can start to be integrated “within the conglomerated, ever-shifting stories of autobiographical memory” (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 180).

In helping the clients process their experiences, therapists need to be mindful of what has been called “the window to tolerance (Jonsson, 2009) or “therapeutic window” (Briere & Scott, 2015). This is the psychological midpoint where clients can process their memories without too much emotional activation that would then invoke avoidance or deactivating strategies, which in turn would block processing, similar to what possibly happened when domestic violence events were overwhelming to the child.

The participants have also highlighted the important role of psycho-education in their therapy – which has also been recognised as an important component of trauma therapy (Allen, 2005) as well as the benefits of psycho-education in their other contexts in their life, not only in therapy. The participants mentioned the reading of psychology books and non-fiction literature, and attending courses in psychology as having helped them acquire new perspectives on relating with others. Such findings encourage clinicians to invest more in such tools as resources in the therapeutic process, taking note however that such resources need to be carefully adapted for the individual client (Briere & Scott, 2015).
Arguably, the participants of this study had already started processing some of their experiences with help and thus could share their narratives (in construction) in the research interviews. In the same way, therapy can provide broader meaning and context to the clients’ experiences. Past events are repeatedly explored in therapy in a recursive spiral (Courtois, 1999) where the issues addressed are returned to in subsequent phases and hence clients’ descriptions become “detailed, organised and causally structured” (Briere & Scott, 2015, p. 159). In fact, studies by Pennebaker and Francis (1996) have shown that the greater use of causal and insight words such as “because”, and “realise” have been related to lower post-treatment anxiety. In addition, increased coherence was found to be directly associated with a reduction in post-traumatic symptoms (Amir, Stafford, Freshman, & Foa, 1998). Thus developing a coherent narrative is also integrative - both in structuring and ordering of the story with a beginning, middle and an end and also in helping clients engage multiple memory representational systems of cognition, affect, and behaviour (Singer & Blagov, 2004). In this way, therapists can help their clients to develop the capacity to mentalise (Fonagy & Target, 1997), that is to help them to think about the events that they went through and process them (Bragin, 2005).

The participants have also highlighted that the recursive spiral where past events are revisited occurred not only in therapy, but as part of their daily life too. As one participant stated – “the process of understanding is never-ending”. Thus, naming the experiences as childhood experiences of domestic violence was under-scored as an important process which led them to start making links between their present behaviour and their past childhood experiences. Thus according to the participants, the naming process represents an important step in the processing of the women’s experiences and therapists need to be mindful of this, when working with these clients.

7.2.1.3 The therapeutic relationship and the therapist as containers of dissonance and paying attention to examples of “agency” and resilience. One of the essential components of successful therapy appears to be a good working alliance between the client and therapist (Beutler & Harwood, 2002; Lambert & Barley, 2001), that is a relationship that is characterised by the therapist’s compassion and attunement and where clients feel understood and accepted. Several research participants mentioned the importance of a compassionate clinician. According to these participants, the fact that the therapists went out of their way to help them was very meaningful to them. The therapist’s availability to be part
of the journey of psychological growth was one of the many factors that gave the participants the courage to continue pursuing the therapeutic sessions even though many painful memories were being brought up and some felt as if they were going mad.

However, remaining a consistent and enduring object in the face of some of the clients’ distressing and fragmented experiences can be challenging for clinicians. Therapists need to be able to recognise, contain and integrate incongruent information; recognising that someone can both love and hate another person (Lawrence, 2014), whilst also managing their own intense emotions around violence. This is where supervision would be helpful to the therapists.

In addition, containing dissonance also implies both responding to the suffering of these women as children and adults, and also validating their sense of agency and their ability to carve out a life different than their parents. Participants in this study strongly emphasised their need not to replicate their family of origin script (Byng-Hall, 1998) and feared the spectre of intergenerational transmission of violence. At the same time, these findings underscore the fact that these participants were prime examples of women who had survived all odds, who managed to have significant relationships that were meaningful for them and who as adults also fulfilled some of their childhood dreams and goals. All this has implications for therapists’ supervision, training and personal and professional development. All of these issues will be discussed shortly.

7.2.1.4 Using systemic psychotherapy as an intervention with adult survivors and child witnesses of interpersonal violence. These findings have highlighted the usefulness of early family therapy systemic ideas (Dallos & Draper, 2010) - focusing on patterns and processes in relationships over time, taking an inter-generational perspective on family processes, looking at triangles or triads as the fundamental unit of analysis (Vetere & Dallos, 2003) and examining communication processes like double-bind, and triangulation. These systemic ideas have emerged as key processes in this research for working systemically with adult survivors of childhood domestic violence. Although social constructivist and social constructionist ideas about families such as the use of language and the impact of cultural contexts were clearly important, I was surprised by how relevant the early systemic ideas were for the understanding of some of the complexity of family relationships in the context of domestic violence, concurring with authors such as Dallos (1997), Vetere and Dallos (2003)
and Dallos and Vetere (2012) about the need for the current family therapy field to appreciate these enduring ideas.

7.2.1.4.1 Paying Therapeutic Attention To Interpersonal Processes such as Triangulation And Parentification. All the women described ways in which they were drawn, or drew themselves into the conflict with their parents. They also talked about the great distress that they experienced as their contradictions and dilemmas intensified, and how sometimes the violence between their parents and themselves got worse with their involvement. This strongly implies that triangulation is an important process that therapists need to explore with their families, when there is domestic violence.

The participants described different forms of triangulation both physical and psychological triangulation. The process also was present across the life span of the clients: that is in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The participants described how the more severe the violence, the more they felt the need to intervene. Again this underscores the importance of therapists asking about this process, possibly more so when there are adolescents in the family. As adolescents, the women had felt a need to take a more active role to stop the perpetrator from continuing to spread fear and terror in the family.

Similar reflections can also be made about the process of parentification, which was related to the process of triangulation. In exploring such patterns, therapists can ask about gains and losses that their clients experienced such as feeling a sense of competence at having a pivotal role in the family dynamics and/or a sense of loss around losing their childhood or their relationships with their siblings when they related to them more from a parental role rather than as siblings.

The participants also described how processes like triangulation and parentification were long standing challenges, which they regularly had to re-visit especially in their relationships with their family of origin. Two of the participants, Geraldine and Donna also spoke about how they were able to find pockets of respite space from being triangulated in their parents’ conflicts through a lot of psychological work in psychological therapy and also through other alternative therapies like meditation, yoga and mindfulness.

This implies that therapists can help create a reflective space for clients to think about how best to position themselves and manoeuvre the sticky and difficult contexts of marital
conflict, even when the parents have separated and the children are adults. Therapists can also keep themselves informed of research and clinical studies that have looked into how meditation, and mindfulness have been helpful methods for trauma-related distress (Briere & Scott, 2015).

7.2.1.4.2 Looking at the impact of cultural contexts. The participants have raised the issue of how different canonical narratives (Bruner, 1990) about gender, religion and family influenced their being daughters, their beliefs about mothering and fathering and their beliefs about what is acceptable behaviour in the eyes of significant others as has been presented in the Results chapter. For example, some believed that they had to forgive their father to be looked at as “good daughters” by their family and by society in general. Others believed that women are more capable than men to be partners and parents Therapists may need to unpack these beliefs, exploring with the client how these beliefs have been taken up (Dallos, 1997), whether or not they fit with their preferred view of themselves in relation to others or whether they are paying the cost of having to adhere to such norms.

7.2.1.4.3 Doing family and conjoint couple work: Benefits and challenges. In engaging in therapeutic work with families where there was/is violence, safety in relationships is the first priority. This is along the lines of the therapeutic interventions proposed by Cooper and Vetere (2005), where the referrer is the “stable third” in the therapeutic process and continues to be part of the process. In fact, there is no policy of confidentiality in the aftermath of violence or where violence is suspected. In this safe context, thus it is possible for practitioners to ask about a wide range of violent relationships in the family including siblings who are violent to each other, parents who are violent to their children and adult children who are violent to their older parents (Cooper & Vetere, 2005).

The findings have highlighted that there is a lot of scope for doing therapeutic work with siblings, especially when these have been supportive in childhood and still are supportive to each other in adulthood, as in Anita and her siblings or Jessica and her youngest sister, At the same time, the results have shown that in therapy, there needs to be space for hearing different siblings experiences, including the experiences of those who were/are seen as withdrawing from their family, such as Marika’s middle sister or who might have been physically abused by their siblings like Seana or Marika’s youngest sister. Doing sibling work in fact needs to be carried out when it is clinically relevant and congruent with the
needs of the client and the overall treatment goals (Aymer, 2010). It is also important for therapists not to be reluctant to take an ethical and moral position regarding the women’s use of aggression in their relationships and to hold them responsible for their actions (Cooper & Vetere, 2005).

Including fathers or mothers in therapy especially when adult children express a wish for reconciling with either of their parents also has its challenges. Timing remains of the essence and was also raised as an important variable for these participants. When the women’s experiences of physical or psychological abuse was still very much present in their mind, the women were too angry to even consider their father’s family of origin’s experiences of abuse and how these experiences could have had an impact on his parenting. On the other hand, for participants where abuse had stopped a number of years ago, knowing what their fathers went through as a children, helped them begin to make sense of their fathers’ behaviour.

Whilst the participants appreciated therapists and significant others mentioning possibilities of reconciliation, the women did not want to feel that they were again oppressed or forced to do something that they did not want to do. In the circumstances that clients express a wish for reconciling with the abusive parent, the therapist would also need to see whether the parent who has abused the child is ready to take responsibility for the harm incurred and whether the parent in fact would be interested in working at reconciliation. Other responses that may be part of the family as a trauma-organised system (Bentovim & Davenport, 1992), such as mother’s minimization of father’s abusive behaviour may also need to be kept in mind by the therapist doing family work with the adult survivor, siblings and the parents.

At the couple level, the findings have shown both the impact that the childhood experiences of violence had on the women’s intimate relationships and also how the intimate relationships could also be an important resource for the individual’s coping strategies. In this respect, it may be useful for the clients to invest in couple work (Stith, Rosen, McCollum, & Thomsen, 2004). At the same time, the findings have also drawn practitioners’ attention to issues of shame and secrets (Cooper & Vetere, 2005). For example, Claire kept her childhood experiences of violence a secret from her husband and was probably ashamed to tell him about what she and her family went through. Thus in such cases, couple work would not be
indicated.

Along similar lines, some of the participants who were parents, such as Carmen, Jessica and Sara were uncertain whether or not to tell their children about their childhood experiences of violence and if they had to tell their children, what to tell them. Some of the mothers’ dilemmas were about protecting the children from the knowledge of such experiences, protecting the relationship of the children and the grandfather or grandmother and issues of loyalty to the family of origin. Thus it is important for practitioners to provide contexts where parents can talk about their beliefs about what they think is in the best interest of their children and the consequences of keeping the secret and also of talking to the children in developmentally appropriate ways about their mothers’ childhood experiences.

7.2.1.4.4 Working therapeutically with children as witnesses and survivors. In recalling their childhood memories of experiencing violence, participants highlighted how much they had appreciated significant others such as their mother, or their grandparents or a trusted teacher who offered them experiences of love, respect and opportunities for building their self-esteem when they were children. This implies the importance of practitioners supporting the child’s significant relationships including the attachment relationship between the mother and the young children where appropriate.

In such cases, it may be necessary to have both conjoint and individual sessions with mother and children. These individual sessions may offer the parent the opportunity to process some of the difficult experiences she might be going through without the presence of the child and to seek more help. Similarly the children in these families with domestic violence may be helped to cope with some of their overwhelming experiences without feeling that they have to minimise their suffering, out of loyalty to the family, or not to worry the mother as some of the participants felt that they had to do as children.

As mentioned earlier, many participants talked about supportive others in their extended family – grandparents or aunts and uncles; others talked about meaningful relationships with their teachers, sport coaches and other mentors. Such findings continue to emphasise the need for therapists to draw on existing supportive networks that might be forgotten in the contexts of domestic violence, which many times can be overwhelming and complicated to deal with. Such practices ensure that even if the family is in dire difficulty, that the child is connected to other systems that can provide him or her with meaningful and
positive relational connections. (Rutter, 2007; Walsh, 2003)

If in the context of working with family members, domestic violence is suspected, then the onus of disclosing domestic violence needs to rest on the adults’ shoulders, with the adults working collaboratively to ensure that help is obtained and that the victims have a safety plan that they can use in crisis situations. In such circumstances, children and their families need to be helped so that they resume their daily routines as much as possible (Cooper & Vetere, 2005) as this is conducive of their development and supportive of their resilience.

7.2.2 Supervision as a supportive, reflective space. In doing therapeutic work with childhood “witnesses” of domestic violence, the supervisory relationship, characterised by a respectful and collaborative practice (Goolishian & Anderson, 1992) and the mutual generation of ideas (Anderson & Swim, 1994) can offer supervisees a reflective space—a “stable third” to explore some of the tensions that may arise in this kind of work (Cooper & Vetere, 2005, p. 15). As has been mentioned before, listening to sadistic accounts of physical and psychological cruelty is emotionally taxing for anyone doing this work and having the opportunity to recount or share such upsetting emotions and having one’s supervisors normalise such responses helps extend the therapists’ ability to bear with such emotions (Wilson & Lindy, 1994) and be containers for such emotions.

7.2.3 Supervision as a context for monitoring personal beliefs and personal experiences around violence. In such supervisory contexts and even during PPD sessions, it may be helpful for therapists and supervisors to interrogate their beliefs about violence and how any personal experiences of being abused or of being aggressive might affect their capacity to empathise or take the perspective of the other (Lawrence, 2014). Perhaps supervisees might find themselves caught up in feeling over-responsible for the client especially during instances in therapy where she or he might appear as being very vulnerable. Supervisees might also find themselves becoming impatient and irritated with the client when she or he talks about helplessness and hopelessness or might get caught feeling powerfully angry, blaming and judgemental to the perceived perpetrator and keenly determined to put right perceived injustices, when such emotions might not be in tune with where the client is (Lawrence, 2014).

Effective practice requires that these complex emotions are unpacked and connections
are made as to how these personal experiences and beliefs are affecting the therapeutic process so that therapists are able to remain present and compassionate when working with different forms of family violence (Hanks & Vetere, 2015). Supervisors too might also need to be mindful of their need to over-protect their supervisees, thus inadvertently forgetting about the supervisees’ resilience and competence as professionals. Monitoring boundaries in the supervisory system is also important so that supervisors and supervisees can remain supportive and supported, without feeling overwhelmed as a supervisor or un-sustained, as a supervisee (Vetere, 2012).

### 7.2.4 Training that prioritizes systemic thinking as an integrative framework.

When working with family relationships in the context of domestic violence, it is also helpful if supervisory and training contexts prioritise integrative theoretical positions, with systemic theory as the meta-theory, providing the over-arching integrative framework (Vetere, 2012) so that clinicians are better equipped in their formulations and interventions. In such contexts, trainees not only reflect on their preferred/un-preferred choice of theories that reflect their practice and why they make these choices but also can position themselves within an epistemology of theoretical practice (Dickerson, 2010). Moreover, such training would hopefully give professionals the means to respond to women, men and children’s needs for support, protection and the need for challenging abusive behaviour in parents.

### 7.2.5 Prioritizing inter-professional training.

Prioritizing integrative theoretical positions in training contexts is also facilitated when training of different disciplines say, family therapy, psychology and social work, takes place in combination and also when inter-professional collaboration is taken as best practice (Johnson, Stewart, Brabeck, Huber, & Rubin, 2004). In the same way, working from a multiplicity of perspectives and using systemic theory as an integrative framework would also form a crucial component of the training curricula of different professionals who therapeutically work with families with domestic violence. It would also be important to include an appreciation of children and family’s experiences of domestic violence in the training of professionals who are in daily contact with children for e.g: teachers and youth workers, who often could be the first persons to whom the children disclose their experiences.

In addition, personal and professional reflexivity would continue to be underscored in the training of social welfare professionals, given that the therapists and social workers are
the more powerful agents in the client-professional relationship and because it is in such a context that possibilities for growth and change take place (Friedlander, Escudero, & Heatherington, 2006).

### 7.3 Implications for Policy and Service Development

**7.3.1 The need to invest more in violence prevention.** The findings strongly support the need for policy makers to prioritize strategies that focus on the prevention of intimate partner violence. Experiencing domestic violence has serious short-term and especially long-term effects on the lives of family members as has been amply illustrated by the study’s participants. The women also hoped that in participating in this research study, they would help continue raising the awareness of policy markers on the plight of children caught in the midst of couple violence, with the hope that others would not need to suffer as much, and as long as they did. Unfortunately, according to the Global Status Report on Violence\(^\text{18}\) Prevention (WHO, 2014), which reflects data from 133 countries and representing 88% of the world’s population, shows that although countries are beginning to invest in prevention, not enough is being done to address the key risk factors for violence. The report also identifies 7 evidence-based strategies that have demonstrated that violence is indeed preventable. These strategies are:

1. developing safe, stable and nurturing relationships between children and their parents and caregivers;
2. developing life skills in children and adolescents;
3. reducing the availability and harmful use of alcohol;
4. reducing access to guns and knives;
5. promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women;
6. changing cultural and social norms that support violence; and
7. victim identification, care and support programmes (Executive summary, p.4)

The study findings concur with the WHO report’s strong calls to national governments to scale up violence prevention programmes, to enact stronger legislation and more enforcement of laws relevant to violence prevention and also to provide enhanced services for victims of violence.

\(^{18}\) The WHO report (2014) defines interpersonal violence as “violence that occurs between members, intimate partners, friends, acquaintances and strangers and includes child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and elder abuse” (Executive summary, p. 1)
7.3.2 The need for professionals from different disciplines to ask about violence and to take into account all kinds of violence. The findings also support policies and practice guidelines that highlight the need for practitioners to routinely ask about intimate partner violence not only in child mental health services but also in adult services, which might not focus specifically on violence such as maternity services, Accident and Emergency Departments and General Practice. The participants’ narratives, for example, Donna’s, whose father was under the care of a psychiatrist, clearly illustrated how children and families with domestic violence can fall in the gap between services as nobody asked about his violent behaviour nor took some kind of action against it. In addition, the findings also add support to research by (Johnson, 2006) that not all violence is the same and hence the importance for practitioners to ask about all kinds of violent behaviour.

A recent qualitative study by Hultmann, Moller, Ormhaug and Broberg (2014) indicates that clinicians have negative feelings and are ambivalent about routinely asking about interpersonal violence. As the participants recalled, few of the adults who they were in contact with realised what they were going through, because over all they seemed well functioning and perhaps they did not fit into the professionals’ “victim” picture of a dysfunctional child witnessing violence at home.

In addition, as adults, they were reasonably well-adjusted women, who initially did not seek a service because of childhood experiences of domestic violence. Then they started talking about their childhood experiences of domestic violence as they developed a relationship with their workers. Yet these experiences had had significant impact on their childhood and adult development. Thus, if professionals were to ask about domestic violence more frequently and more openly, children and adults going through such experiences might access the necessary help earlier.

7.3.3 The need for domestic violence services and child protection services to be more family-oriented and systemic. The results have well illustrated the aforementioned overlap between child abuse and domestic violence in families with domestic violence. Yet, as has been earlier mentioned, the Child Protection Services and Domestic Violence Services both in the UK and in Malta are separate services and more importantly have a different and a primary victim mandate. Child Protection Services, mainly focus on the individual child’s safety, whilst the emphasis in Domestic violence services is on the individual’s woman’s
safety. Such approaches can be effective in crises situations, especially when risk, which at
times might be life threatening, needs to be managed. But once a degree of stability is
attained, then all family members need to get help for their troubled situations – and this is
where the split between services can be counter-productive for family members to get help.
In addition, the split within the Domestic violence service in looking at women as victims and
men as perpetrators as discussed earlier also becomes problematic because it does not leave
practitioners space to address the complex relationships in a family where there is domestic
violence.

7.3.4 Current practice challenges. Starting from the split between the Child
Protection Services and Domestic Violence Service: as the reader might recall, one of the
participants, Sandra, who had come in contact with social workers and a psychologist from
the child protection services because of her father’s repeated threats of kidnapping,
remembers being very careful what to tell the workers, for fear of reprisal; at the same time,
she was also afraid to tell them that her mother often beat her because she was afraid that they
would take her way from her and she wanted to stay with her mother.

Moreover, despite the fact that the parents were separated, the child was still
“witness” to her father assaulting his ex-wife during one of the many fights that they still had
when he visited their home. The end result was that although the child stayed with the mother,
she was still in danger from intimate partner violence; the father was not challenged about his
abusive behaviour towards his ex-wife and the parents did not get help regarding their
parenting difficulties. Presumably the practitioners might have been lulled into thinking that
both the mother and the child were “safe” because the couple were separated, when in fact
post-separation abuse of children and women is very common (Holt, 2013). Incidentally,
Sandra also does not mention whether the mother sought help from the Domestic violence
services.

Arguably, since the time when Sandra and participants like her were children, there
has been increasing recognition of domestic violence as a child protection issue, certainly in
the UK as a result of legislation such as the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Featherstone &
Fraser, 2012) and even in Malta (D. Camilleri, personal communication, October 31, 2014).
National policy groups in the Child Welfare Agencies in the United States have also issued
strong recommendations to routinely screen for domestic violence among all reported
children (Casanueva, Smith, Ringeisen, Dolan, & Tueller, 2014). However, there are several practice tensions around this issue. Firstly, there is Children’s services’ struggle to cope with the huge amount of referrals if every domestic violence case is considered a child protection case (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012). Secondly, as mentioned earlier, workers are often caught between the support needed by the victimised parent and the need to protect the child (Fusco, 2013); thirdly, families with domestic violence are also challenging because the workers feel that their personal safety is often times at risk too (Hughes & Chau, 2013).

The end result is that the onus of the responsibility is often times unfairly placed on the mothers when they themselves are struggling to cope with their own adversities in the family. Instead of feeling empowered in their parenting, they might be filled with fear that either their children will be taken away from them, or worse, that they will be indicted for not protecting their children from the father (Moles, 2008). This further alienates mothers and they might hide more and more the abuse that they experience by their partners (Davies & Krane, 2006), ironically to the detriment of the safety of their children.

The fathers too might be left in the periphery, which unfortunately seems to be still the current practice in parenting interventions across the globe (Panter-Brick et al., 2014). In domestic violence contexts, not dealing with the abusive fathers might actually suit the fathers. Cooper and Vetere (2005) in fact highlight a number of relevant reasons why men might be “invisible” to social services, amongst which:

1) They do not want to be blamed or held accountable;…2) they may believe that they can avoid child benefit payments;…3) they may wish to avoid the process of scrutiny and shame;…4) Their partners may agree that they will stay on the periphery of the family and will return when the court case is closed (p. 83)

Not working with the fathers might also suit the workers who might be concerned about their own safety. It might also suit the mothers who might be afraid of their husbands and may not want to “rock the boat”, and/ or they may be the view that parenting is their responsibility (Cooper & Vetere, 2005). However, as the results from this study have shown, fathers who are abusive to their partners and children do not “disappear” from their families-their children and their partners are still emotionally attached to them and struggle to make sense of their behaviour, in a context of yearning, loss and disappointment.
Thus it is important that services do not stop at the level of risk assessment and management but continue in their efforts to engage men, women and children in getting support for these complex difficulties. In the following section, I will be discussing ideas for service development for families that will engage men, women and children in collaboration about the complexities of relationships in the context of domestic violence.

7.3.5 The need for more therapeutic services for families with domestic violence.

7.3.5.1 Working with men as perpetrators and fathers. The results continue to add support to policy changes in the last decade or so, including some growth in developing interventions with men who are violent towards their women partners and who are fathers (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012). Some of these include the “Caring Dads’ programme (Scott & Crooks, 2004) which has a both/and philosophy, although this programme has also been criticised that it does not address sufficiently the issue of violence by men on women. In fact academics and practitioners interviewed by Featherstone and Fraser (2012) about their perceptions of practice interventions with fathers who were engaged in domestic violence, were of the view that an integration of both approaches would be more suitable.

7.3.5.2 Systemic services for families with domestic violence. The results also add support to the development of services that provide systemic interventions with families, such as for example, the service developed by Cooper and Vetere (2005) which unfortunately are still not wide spread therapeutic interventions (Featherstone, White, & Morris, 2014). Such services would engage the adults with a non-violence contract and have a continuous programme of assessment, including regular consultation and review with the referring agency acting as a “stable third”. Always keeping in mind issues of safety and responsibility, adults would also find the context to explore issues of blame, shame and anger both in their present lives and even in their own experiences of children. Working with the children themselves is also important as has been discussed earlier in section 5.2.1.4.4. Based on the results of this research, I concur with Featherstone et al. in stating that there is an urgency to offer local services - voluntary and statutory that engage with men, women and children in ways that combine therapeutic and safety interventions.

7.4 Critical Review Of The Study

The findings in the previous chapter need to be interpreted in the context of the
strengths and limitation of this study, which will be now discussed.

7.4.1 Approaches to ensure the credibility of the study. I have endeavoured to support the credibility and trustworthiness of this study in a number of ways, using guidelines appropriate to qualitative research and which can also be applied to grounded theory studies. Various scholars for example, Henwood and Pidgeon (1992), Elliott, Fischer and Rennie (1999) and Yardley (2000) have come up with guidelines for assessing qualitative research. However, there is as yet no consensus about what are the best criteria (Coyle, 2007). My own guidelines are largely consistent with that of Coyle (2007) who drew up a list of recurrent themes among the criteria that have been developed for assessing qualitative studies. These are: (a) the provision of contextualised accounts of participants; (b) detailed accounts of the analytic process; (c) an account of the researcher’s “speaking position” and how this has influenced the analysis; and (d) finally a consistent grounding of the interpretation in research data. In addition, I also thought that it was important to pay attention to: (e) the coherence of the data; (f) resonance with the readers; and (g) to providing credibility checks (Elliott et al., 1999).

7.4.1.1 Contextualised accounts of participants. I have tried to give a “thick description” of the context of the participants by giving information about their age, birth order in the family, current relationship status including the presence of children and information about their employment status. The different kinds of violence they witnessed and experienced and their own position regarding reconciliation with their abusive parents which emerged in the course of the interviews was also depicted. I have also indicated who was currently attending psychotherapy, who had done so in the past and other kind of support that they might have or might have had in the past so that the reader can get an idea of the opportunities that participants might have had to process their experiences, with support.

In terms of socio-economic contexts, although I did not collect data about income level or information about social class from the research participants, from some of the participants’ stories, I could understand that living in poverty was also part of their family of origin experience. This was the case for participants like Anita, Geraldine and Carmen who had also been in looked-after care as children. Other participants had a working class background, which I deduced from the information that they gave about their father’s work whilst others came from a more middle-class background. Thus the sample represented a
mixture of participants in terms of different socio-economic backgrounds, different family of origin experiences and difficult educational backgrounds. Some participants had also managed to be socially mobile from their family of origin socio-economic status. Perhaps one explanation rests in their ability to seek and find help from their supportive networks.

I have also sought to present lengthy quotes of the participants’ interviews in order to contextualise as much as possible their accounts. Furthermore, the findings pertaining to the participants’ recall of their childhood experiences of violence can, as earlier indicated be taken as a context for understanding their adult experiences. In addition, the different cultural contexts around religion, gendered beliefs and contact with professionals were also presented in detail.

Finally, interviewing three participants twice, also helped with getting richer data and a more nuanced understanding of the participants’ experience of their childhood domestic violence and of the impact that these experiences had on their family of origin relationships, on their relationships with their significant development and on their child and adult development. Charmaz (2001) in fact points out that unfortunately, grounded theory studies have come to be identified with one interview. On the other hand, she argued that “multiple sequential interviews” (p. 682) help researchers in a number of ways: (a) researchers have the opportunity to build denser and more complex analysis by going back and checking with participants about new areas that are being uncovered; (b) interviewees can feel more comfortable and trusting with a second interview and hence the researcher can get closer to the researched phenomenon; and (c) through these extended interviews, the researcher can also witness how the story of the participants evolves with time, as has in fact happened with Geraldine’s story who was interviewed twice with a gap of three years in between. Thus, having second interviews can lead to the construction of a denser, more complex analysis.

7.4.1.2 Detailed accounts of the analytic process. The different steps of the data collection and data analysis process were described in detail with exemplars provided in the appendix of the line by line coding, the focused codes, the further focused codes, axial coding and the construction of a “theoretical framework” incorporating a core category and the key categories. I have also included examples illustrating the constant comparison process and the writing of memos which helped me continue to push the research forward from a description of categories to an understanding of possible ways of looking at the relationship between the
categories

7.4.1.3 An account of the researcher’s “speaking position.” In line with conducting a constructivist grounded theory study, I made explicit my preferred theoretical frameworks that were brought to bear on the data collection and analysis process. The writing of memos alongside the coding of the transcripts whilst coding, the discussions of each coded transcript with my supervisors as well as the three reflexivity interviews also helped me become more aware of my role as a researcher and how I was impacting the data during the interviews, during the interpretation of the data and during the development of the “theoretical frameworks”.

7.4.1.4 Grounding of the interpretation in research data. I have taken the following steps to ensure that the categories truly emerge from the data:

(a) I have engaged with the existing literature only in as much as it helped me in the development of the research question, in order to make sure that the topic is not already well developed (Willig, 2008); (b) data collection and analysis started almost immediately and took place in an iterative fashion, as explained in the methodology chapter; (c) The exemplars of the different stages of coding in the appendix can further help the reader observe the iterative conceptualisation; (d) The use of “in vivo” codes, that is, using the participants’ one words as codes and writing the codes using as much detail as possible, especially in the earlier stages of the coding process also helped to prevent the premature closure of the developing “theoretical framework”; and (e) the extensive and lengthy participants’ quotes in the results can further help the reader see how the core category and the key categories emerged from the data.

7.4.1.5 Providing credibility checks. The design included various credibility checks to obtain the view of others about the quality of the analysis. The professionals’ feedback about the analysis as well as the feedback from two participants (member checks) about the findings was included in the Results chapter.

7.4.1.6 The coherence of the data. Each transcript and each different level of coding was discussed with my supervisors who contributed a “third” view on the interpretation of data and also challenged me to make links with theory and personal and professional experiences, as has been discussed earlier in the methodology chapter. Disagreements were
mostly around my tendency to default to the use of academic, formal language, perhaps as a way of distancing myself from the distressing accounts or perhaps as a way of coping with the voluminous data that were being generated in the interviews. Sometimes I found it hard to process the great amount of data that the interviews were generating and wished that somehow I could find a way of progressing faster in the data analysis. But alas there were no short cuts!

7.4.1.7 Resonance with the readers. The wish to contribute to a research project that is useful to practitioners was one of the motivating factors of this study. This stems from that the fact that I am a practitioner myself, besides being an academic and also because I believe this research is also a continuation of paying attention to notions of reciprocity and “giving back” to the research participants for their contribution. For this reason, the implications to clinical practice, supervision, training, policy-making and service development were discussed in detail, in the hope that such a study stands a chance of influencing change that is beneficial to participants and others like them (Coyle, 1996). The close link with practice was also kept through my supervisors, who are both senior clinical psychologists and family therapists with extensive experience in the field, with the principal supervisor having set up and managed a domestic violence service. Through the research process, I have also kept close links with professionals in the field through the credibility checks in the research design. They have always been consistent about the relevance of the findings to their work.

7.4.2 Limitations of the study.

7.4.2.1 Limitations of constructivist grounded theory as methodology. In addition to the critique of the methodology as discussed in section 3.12 of the methodology chapter, it is important to add that the research interviews represent to a large extent a ‘picture’ of what the participants were thinking and could recall at a given point in time. The extended interviews with three of the participants did in fact show how useful it would have been to track processes over time, especially when memories about particular experiences are fragmented and sometimes lack narrative coherence too. In a similar way, the interpretation of the data is one possible construction of the data, constrained by the interaction of the participants and the interviewer at a particular point in time. Such limitations could be addressed in future research by comparing and contrasting the results of similar grounded theory studies about the same topic.
7.4.2.2 Issues related to the sample.

7.4.2.2.1 The participants’ gender, having the women as sole informants and their cultural context. The research was based on interviewing Maltese women participants and presumably the presented set of interconnecting hypotheses might be gender-specific and not have as wide a theoretical applicability, had the voices of adult male participants survivors of childhood domestic violence, been included too.

Taking into account that Maltese society has a strong family orientation (Abela et al., 2005) and that taking care of the family is considered the business of women, as has been discussed in the Results chapter, one can hypothesise that daughters more than sons might be feel more pressurised by their mother or indeed by religious beliefs to forgive the father and “forget” his abuse for the sake of keeping the family together. Perhaps this process might not come out as strongly with male participants.

Also having the women as sole informants of their experiences and their family dynamics, might have limited the study because this may have led to both under-and over-reporting of their individual and family experiences (Holt et al., 2008). One can argue that interviewing other family members and/ or the participants’ parents would have illuminated further the complexity of relationships. In addition the use of retrospective data especially in quantitative research studies has also been criticised because of inaccuracies with recall and after-the-fact assignment of meaning to memories (Thornberry et al., 2012). However, in this qualitative research study, importance was given to what the participants remembered and how it impacted them.

Similarly, conducting these interviews in a different cultural context might not yield so many references to religious beliefs around the indissolubility of marriage and the importance of honouring one’s parents. Indeed, this might even happen if the same study was to be repeated in a few years’ time in a Maltese context. As has already been noted, Maltese society has seen the introduction of divorce in 2012 and has increasingly become more secularised (Abela, 2013) in the last decade or so. When I initially started this research study, I hypothesised that the cultural context would have had a more important influence on the findings. However, on interviewing Hannah as a form of disconfirming evidence as has already been pointed out in the methodology chapter, I realised that the themes that emerged

19 Hannah was originally from an Eastern European country and married to a Maltese man.
were very similar to those of the Maltese participants and Hannah. One could of course argue that Hannah’s Eastern European context might have been similar to the Maltese context.

7.4.2.2.2 Sample size and theoretical saturation. As discussed in the Methodology chapter, I recruited participants through health and social care professionals. Thus participants could process with them any memories that were triggered in the interviews or any reflections that they might have had following the interviews. This decision, which privileged ethics, limited the extent of available participants. It also might have contributed to a sample bias -given that the participants were all volunteers. In having contact with health and social care professionals, they might have been more reflective and/ or more resilient or more troubled than other participants who have not been in contact with such professionals. In addition, one can also speculate that fact that the majority of them (14 participants out of 15) were attending psychotherapy or had attended psychotherapy or alternative forms of support had an impact on the results, that is these participants were able to connect to help that was available of them and this again might be a sample bias.

In terms of the size of sample, one needs to note that the aim of this grounded theory study was theoretical generalization and not statistical generalisation. Still, given the vastness of the topic, having access to more participants would have given me the possibility of exploring other theoretically significant categories in more depth such as the adult women’s relationship with their significant others including the notion of corrective and replicative scripts over time.

With respect to theoretical saturation: this is a concept that provokes a number of debates and as with all novice grounded theory research, it was a concern that I kept thinking about and discussing. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), saturation is reached once categories and their properties are sufficiently dense and data collection no longer generates new leads. However, as Breckenridge and Jones (2009) point out, saturation is not reached when the researchers “knows everything” (p. 120) about a particular topic but when they are confident that the categories are saturated enough, or “thick enough” to have explanatory power to present a substantive theoretical framework and to be useful to practitioners.

In terms of theoretical saturation, given the vastness of the topic, I find it hard to claim that all the categories were saturated with 18 interviews. But I think that I can confidently claim that enough data collection was done that enabled the fine-tuning of theoretical
constructs to be able to make a contribution to under-theorized areas, for example, in the area of family triangulation in the context of domestic violence in systems literature. The same can be said about the illumination of the complex family of origin relationships in the context of violence.

7.4.2.3 Issues related to the gender of the research team. The researcher and the supervisory team are also women and this may have created some “blind spots” in the way that issues around the social construction of gender and violence were interpreted. For example, would a male researcher have interpreted the participants’ experience of domestic violence – around male dominance and a female victim in the same way? Would he have picked up more quickly and asked more readily about the daughters’ aggression towards father and/ or towards significant others?

On the other hand, being a woman researcher might have helped the participants be less defended talking about male violence (Hollway & Jefferson, 2007). In the same way, perhaps a male interviewer might have had a more cautionary style of interviewing and might have been more reluctant to explore in more depth sensitive issues. Perhaps in having the same gender as the father who was the perpetrator in many of the interviews, a male interviewer might had had the inclination to distance himself more strongly from the father, in order to be seen as empathic to the daughter.

7.5 The Way Forward: Ideas for Further Research

The following are suggestions for further research that have emerged from the findings.

7.5.1 Parenting by fathers who are abusive. The findings have again thrown light on the daughters’ yearning for a connection with their father despite the domestic violence context. More research needs to be carried out on parenting by men who were abusive and this would continue to add to the scant literature to date on the topic (Stanley, 2011). Longitudinal research tracing the father-daughter relationship in domestic violence family context, across time would be illuminating to the family scholars, researchers and practitioners. Including the mother’s perspectives and that of the siblings if any, would also be in tune to the complexity of relationships that have been shown in this study.

Such research could also throw light on how participants manage any processes of
reconciliation and/or forgiveness if any; similar to what was experienced by some of the participants. This again would add to the under-researched topic of reconciliation in domestic violence contexts.

Another interesting theme that came out of the participants’ experiences was some fathers’ redemptive process through grand parenting. This is again an under-explored area in the extant research and it would be interesting for future research to look into ways that men have found to be good-enough grandfathers when they would have been abusive as fathers (Holt, 2013)

7.5.2 Looking further into processes like triangulation and parentification. As has been earlier highlighted in the Results chapter, the process of triangulation seemed ubiquitous in all the participants’ narratives and yet it is under-researched in systemic literature (Dallos & Vetere, 2012). It would be interesting to look at the predisposing, precipitating, protective and maintaining factors of this process from a quantitative research perspective using multiple regression analysis, as it would further the understanding of practitioners of the mechanisms underlying this key process that impacted the participants’ relationships in childhood and adulthood.

As presented in the Results chapter, for some participants, the process of triangulation seemed related to the process of parentification. It seemed that the more the participants were involved in their parents’ conflict, the more they took on a parentified role in the family with respect to their mother and their siblings. However, whilst all the participants talked about the process of triangulation in their family, not all were parentified. Thus it would be interesting to look into more depth into this tentative hypothesis and through a quantitative research study, check whether this is a statistically significant relationship. In this way, such a quantitative study could form the basis for further in-depth exploration of such processes.

It would also be interesting to conduct psychotherapy process research (Dallos & Vetere, 2005) and to explore in detail with participants what they experienced as having helped them to draw themselves out of these processes like triangulation and parentification in their relationships, given that the research participants talked about their struggles to take a different position in their family of origin and even in their intimate relationships.

7.5.3 Focusing on the language. Although I have paid attention to the language used...
in describing childhood experiences of domestic violence, it would be interesting to submit the transcripts to a discursive method of analysis. Such a study would throw more light on how language was used to position oneself in research interviews about domestic violence. It could also show more explicitly social constructions of masculinity and femininity, power relations, discourses about responsibility for violence and lack of responsibility, amongst others. Such a study could further inform public health campaigns targeting the prevention of domestic violence as well as educational campaigns aimed to raise awareness about the dynamics of domestic violence and its impact on family members.

7.6 Concluding Thoughts: Research Achievements and Contribution to Knowledge

The study gives a unique and compelling view into the complexity of living and growing up in a family with domestic violence - into what it is like to live with intense contradictions of love and abuse, where the need for connection by the children to the abusive parent continued to be present in the data. It throws light into the corners of literature that have not been so well lit and expanded understanding of this intricate living situation. It has put at centre-stage a three dimensional view of children and adults struggling and striving with complex experiences and also showing growth through adversity and resilience. Knowledge obtained from this study is valuable to practitioners, who work with clients with childhood experiences of domestic violence in helping them understand and manage this complexity both clinically, theoretically and personally.

The study in its theoretical paradigm embraces complexity and draws and integrates theories that are often disparate in the domestic violence field: Attachment, Trauma, Systems theory and Feminist thinking.

It gives an empirical contribution to concepts like family systems triangulation that is somewhat absent in the systemic literature and adds to the empirical literature on parentification and the siblings’ different experiences in the same family where there is domestic violence.

The study has also contributed in further illustrating how grounded theory as a methodology and Systemic Thinking can provide supportive frameworks to research complex psychosocial problems (Dixon, 2007).

Finally, it is my hope that domestic violence services would develop in such a way
that practitioners and policy makers would better engage with the complexities of relationships in domestic violence contexts; that the focus would not only be on gender-based violence but that importance would be given to all different forms of violence in a family; that practitioners would think about how in desperate situations, we all have the potential to be victims and perpetrators of violence in relationships. At the same time, together with violence, we also need to keep in mind the transformative strength of attachment bonds with significant others, the healing power of supportive networks and the resilience to overcome adversity.
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319


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partner violence and child maltreatment. *Partner Abuse, 3*(3), 358-378. doi: 10.1891/1946-6560.3.3.358


APPENDICES

VOLUME 1
APPENDIX A

Historical Development of Grounded Theory

Background To The Birth of Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is associated with the work of two American sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strass in the 1960’s, who during their research programme on the experience of dying patients in American hospitals encountered the difficult dilemma of how to explore a phenomenon that at the time was not openly acknowledged. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, diagnoses were not normally shared with patients. Glaser & Strauss (1967) were also faced with the positivist dominance of social research of the time and hence the inappropriateness of using such methods to study this phenomenon. This context provided the impetus for them to propose a qualitative inquiry that could move beyond descriptive, anecdotal, unsystematic study – which was how the scientific community critiqued qualitative research at the time (Charmaz, 2006) - and provide the researcher with rigorous analytical guidelines that could categorise qualitative data (Hall, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2013). In fact, the often cited seminal text “The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) presents a conceptual explanation and justification for Grounded Theory, a critique of the hypothetico-deductive method to test theory and the proposal of a method of developing or “discovering” theory inductively from the data presented.

The Rift: Different Strands Of Grounded Theory

With the publication of another seminal text by Anselm Strauss and his student Juliet Corbin, in the 1990’s entitled “Basics of Qualitative research: Grounded Theory procedures and techniques”, it became clear that there was a conceptual rift between the original proponents of this approach. Glaser felt strongly that Strauss & Corbin (1990)’s approach went against the original formulation of Grounded Theory on a number of key concepts, notably on the issues of 1) Induction, Deduction and Verification and 2) Coding procedures and theory construction vs theory discovery. As Glaser explains in his (1978 and 1992) texts, induction is viewed as the key process in Grounded Theory with the researcher moving from the data, seeing patterns in the same, and developing insights from this process, which lead to theory. He emphasises the importance of avoiding trying to fit new ideas into preconceived frameworks and tolerating the confusion until concepts became clearer and emerge (Heath & Cowley, 2004). On the other hand, although the concept of emergence
remains important in Straussian Grounded Theory, there seems to be more emphasis on the process of deduction and verification, with the suggestion that experience and literature is used to extend the analysis. Whilst acknowledging that this process might be helpful, the novice researcher however, might also run the risk of confirming extant knowledge rather than being open to what is emerging from the data.

The second fundamental issue, which Glaser and Strauss disagreed upon, concerned the Coding procedure as part of the data analysis process. In providing detailed guidelines to the Grounded Theory process, Strauss & Corbin (1990) present a paradigm model that would aid the researcher in the process of axial coding. This framework includes causes, intervening conditions, and consequences that would explain the phenomenon, the context, the actions and the interactions. Researchers are strongly encouraged by Strauss and Corbin to use such a model so as to have a theory that has clarity, depth and precision. Glaser (1992) strongly opposed the use of such a model, seeing it as a way of forcing the data into a preconceived model. In the 2nd edition of their book, Strauss and Corbin (1998) present a less prescriptive stance with regards to the coding paradigm, stating that it is an analytic stance that may suggest linkages between codes and helping achieve complexity and completeness of the theory. In this sense, perhaps, one can deduce a movement towards the classical Grounded Theory approach as espoused by Glaser. There are however, more subtle differences and similarities between the approaches. (For a fuller review of a comparison between the two approaches, see Heath & Cowley 2004; Walker & Myrick, 2006)

The Social Constructivist Turn

A reading into the philosophical underpinnings of original Grounded Theory approach is also fraught with debates around the subject. Glaser has been consistent in his writings in that in his view Grounded Theory does not have any philosophical underpinnings (Glaser, 2011). However, other scholars who engage in his work and that of Strauss, position traditional Grounded Theory on a positivistic/post positivistic continuum (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

As highlighted earlier, Glaser and Straus (1967) aimed to provide a sound basis to qualitative research at a time when positivist research dominated sociological inquiry and hence versed their terminology in this same positivistic tradition, possibly to gain the respect of other researchers at that time. For example, in Glaser & Strauss’
(1967) work and that of Glaser’s (1978), the authors seem to draw from realist form of positivism when they aim for context-free theoretical statements that have explanatory power or when they claim that the validity of a theory can be determined simply by going back to the data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). In contrast, Strauss, with his background in symbolic interactionism and later Strauss & Corbin’s (1994) work seems to acknowledge more openly that their version of Grounded Theory involves the researcher doing interpretive work. Strauss (1993) also seemed to acknowledge that there is no one truth but that the external world is a symbolic representation (Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2007).

However, it was not until Charmaz’s distinction between “objectivist” and “constructivist” Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2000, 2002, 2006) that the epistemological shift that challenged the social inquiry field, that is, the social constructionist challenge became manifest in the development of Grounded Theory.
Interview Guide: Pre-pilot

Introduction:

I would like to interview you about your views about this interview schedule.

The aim of the interview schedule is to try and “capture” the view of Maltese women who witnessed domestic violence in the family they grew up in and their understanding of how these experiences may have impacted their relationships as adults in connection with being intimate in relationships and parenting experiences.

I would like to ask you to carefully go through these questions below and imagine that you are answering them.

- Which questions would be helpful to help you in your reflections?

- Which questions would you find challenging / distressing to answer, or difficult to understand?

- What would it be like for you to answer the below questions in conversation with the interviewer?

Please feel free to take whatever time you need to express yourself. In addition, please feel free to let me know if during the interview, you feel uncomfortable talking about a certain topic and we will stop or take a break according to what would help feel most comfortable.

Family where you grew up, composition: co constructing the family genogram/childhood experiences
1) Could you start by helping me get to know your family, its composition, how many were you, where you lived at home and so on?

2) What was life like at home? A happy memory? A less happy memory?

3) When you think of your childhood, what words/picture come to mind? What is one predominant feeling that you remember, in general?

4) Relationship with father, mother: what was your relationship to your parents as a young child, if you could start as far back as you can remember?

5) If you were to choose 5 adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother, starting as far back as you can remember- what would they be? Are there any memories that are associated with the words that you chose?

6) Now I would like to ask you to for 5 adjectives or words that reflect your childhood relationship with your father, starting again as far back as you can remember in early childhood?

7) I wonder if you could tell me, to which parent did you feel the closest and why?

8) When you think of the relationship between your parents what comes to mind? What would have been a common argument/fight between them?

**Coping strategies:**

1) What worried/upset you most, as a child? How did witnessing the fights between your parents affect you as a child? During the fights, how did you react? What did you do? And your brothers and sisters?

2) What was particularly difficult for you to manage or deal with, as a child?
What would have been helpful at that time, to help you and your siblings?

3) With whom did you confide? Who comforted you? Who was there for you to take care of your needs?

4) How did you make sense of what happened as a child?

**Relationships outside the family**

1) What was your relationship with your siblings, grandparents, extended family? Any other relationship which was important to you while you were growing up?

2) What was school like for you? How were school, teachers, friends helpful/not helpful?

3) Looking back, if you were to speak to a child who you know is witnessing domestic violence, what would you say to her?

**Present relationships with family members.**

1) Looking back, how do you think that such experiences have influenced your relationships with your mother, father, siblings, whilst growing up?

2) Why do you think your parents behaved as they did in your childhood?

3) How do you think that such experiences have affected your mother’s, father’s parenting?

4) What is your current relationship with mother? Father?
5) When you think about these experiences, in what way do you see that they are an influence in your life?

**Current relationships**

6) As a child and/or a teenager, when you thought about having an intimate relationship/ marrying someone, what were some concerns that you had?

7) How did your childhood experiences influence your beliefs about relationships and about men and women?

8) What did you learn from these experiences which you feel help you in relationships with the men and women in your life?

9) What are some of the challenges that you face in your current relationships with significant others, which you link to your earlier childhood experiences?

10) In what way do you see that these experiences are NOT an influence in your life? In what context, if at all, do you feel free of these experiences? How is it different?

11) What/ who has helped you grow in your relationships with others?

12) If your partner or significant other were here, how would he or she describe you in relationship?

13) Insights you would like to pass on to other adults who have had childhood experiences of dv. Any particular thing which you feel you learnt above all from your own childhood experiences?
Interview Guide

Introduction:

The aim of the interview schedule is to try and “capture” the view of Maltese women who witnessed domestic violence in the family they grew up in and their understanding of how these experiences may have impacted their relationships as adults, in connection with being intimate in relationships and parenting experiences.

I would like to ask you to carefully go through these questions below. Our conversation will touch upon the questions outlined underneath. However, please feel free to use these questions as “guides” to our conversation and not as questions that necessarily need all to be answered.

Please feel free to take whatever time you need to express yourself. In addition, kindly let me know if during the interview, you feel uncomfortable talking about a certain topic and we will stop or take a break according to what would help feel most comfortable.

Family where you grew up, composition: co-constructing the family genogram/childhood experiences

1) Could you start by helping me get to know your family, its composition, how many where you, where you lived at home and so on?

2) What was life like at home? A happy memory? A less happy memory?

3) When you think of your childhood, what words/picture come to mind? What is one predominant feeling that you remember, in general?
4) Relationship with father, mother: what was your relationship to your parents as a young child, if you could start as far back as you can remember?

5) If you were to choose 5 adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother, starting as far back as you can remember- what would they be? Are there any memories that are associated with the words that you chose?

6) Now I would like to ask you to for 5 adjectives or words that reflect your childhood relationship with your father, starting again as far back as you can remember in early childhood?

7) I wonder if you could tell me, to which parent did you feel the closest and why?

8) When you think of the relationship between your parents what comes to mind? What would have been a common argument/ fight between them?

You as a child:

1) What worried/upset you most, as a child? How did witnessing the fights between your parents affect you as a child? During the fights, how did you react? What did you do? And your brothers and sisters?

2) What was particularly difficult for you to manage or deal with, as a child? What would have been helpful at that time, to help you and your siblings?

3) With whom did you confide? Who comforted you? Who was there for you to take care of your needs?

4) How did you make sense of what happened as a child?
Relationships outside the family:

1) What was your relationship with your siblings, grandparents, extended family? Any other relationship which was important to you while you were growing up?

2) What was school like for you? How were school, teachers, friends, helpful/not helpful?

3) Looking back, if you were to speak to a child who you know is witnessing domestic violence, what would you say to her?

Present relationships with family members:

1) Looking back, how do you think that such experiences have influenced your relationships with your mother, father, siblings, whilst growing up?

2) Why do you think your parents behaved as they did in your childhood?

3) How do you think that such experiences have affected your mother’s, father’s parenting?

4) What is your current relationship with mother? Father?

5) When you think about these experiences, in what way do you see that they are an influence in your life?

Current relationships:

6) As a child and/or a teenager, did you have any thoughts/concerns, when you
thought about having an intimate relationship/ marrying someone? If yes, what were these thoughts/ concerns?

7) Do you think that your childhood experiences influenced your beliefs about relationships and about men and women? If yes, in what way?

8) What did you learn from these experiences which you feel is useful in your relationships with the men and women in your life?

9) What are some of the challenges that you face in your current relationships with significant others, which you link to your earlier childhood experiences?

10) In what way do you see that these experiences are NOT an influence in your life? In what context, if at all, do you feel free of these experiences? How is it different?

11) What/ who has helped you grow in your relationships with others?

12) If your partner or significant other were here, how would he or she describe you in relationship?

13) Insights you would like to pass on to other adults who have had childhood experiences of dv. Any particular thing which you feel you learnt above all from your own childhood experiences?

Reflections on the interview:

Which questions did you find helpful to talk about your experiences?

- Which questions did you find challenging / distressing to answer, or difficult to understand?
• What was the whole experience like for you?
Second Interview Guide – Geraldine

Further questions on Triangulation: Geraldine

1) *You said that you were raised to believe that a man is stronger than a woman, that he has power … he is dominant and that the woman is weak. You also said that you always identified with your father and modelling yourself on him.*

   If you look back, what do you think led you to identify with your father? What was their relationship like at that time?

   How did you look at your mother? And what was your relationship to your father like?

   And how was your brother involved in this?

2) Could you take me through what it was like for you to be placed in a position of judge?

   What was the role of your brother?

   And what happened after you came up with a verdict?

   From an adult perspective, what is your explanation about why father asked this of you?

   In what other ways were you made to take his side?

   How did you continue getting involved? Do you think that there was a
beneficial aspect of getting and remaining involved? How did this process of getting involved, stop?

And what helped you not get involved?

Did you find yourself involved where she is again involved in conflict? If yes, how? If not, why not?

3) “My mother was a very weak individual. My mother was weak to an exaggerated extent”

You described your mother as seeing her as very weak? What was it like for you to see your mother like this? What impact did it have on you?

4) You also said that she used to make you very angry. What made you very angry with respect your mother? You had mentioned that you felt let down by your mother – as if her love was not unconditional when she used to tell you, with your father and you got a beating from him. Is this how you felt mostly let down by her?

5) Other participants spoke about how they themselves became aggressive with other people? Did this happen to you?

6) You also described how today, you have become more tolerant each other whilst before you could not see eye to eye over anything. What help you and your mother have a better relationship?

7) Can you take me through your relationship with your brother – and what it is like now?

8) You also spoke about how your father used to speak to you a lot whilst
growing up- about his masonry projects, about your mother and how he had girlfriends – which made you think, at that time, “This is cool- where is the generation gap?”. Do you think that the fact that he spoke to you like this had any impact on the way you understood the violent behaviour towards your mother? Did you think that she somehow was to blame and that she deserved to be beaten?

9) At the time when you were growing up, one of the nuns drew your attention to the fact that your father was telling you things that were inappropriate for you to hear, and although you initially did not accept what she said, you later reflected on her feedback. What did you think helped you take in her feedback? One way could have been ignoring what she told you.

10) In your first interview, you also spoke about **you never disclosed what happened at home**. What stopped you from talking? If you had talked to your grandparents, what would have happened?

11) And then you also said that as you grew up, **there was always someone in whom you could confide in**. What was the first time that you reached out to speak about what happened at home? What helped you reach out?

12) You also spoke about how now you have learnt **how to take care of yourself**….Who were the significant persons in your life you helped you learnt how to take care of yourself?

13) You also spoke about always having faith..when growing up, and believing that what you went through, led you to being the person that you are today. Can you tell me some more about this, that is who do you think helped you have this faith that your experiences are going to help you grow as a person?
Second Interview Schedule - Donna

Interview 2: Donna

1) (p.4 of Maltese transcript) “I used to get involved in their conflicts…. It happened so often that I then got used to it……. How did you get involved? Can you take me through the process? And what kept you getting involved?

2) (p.5) “even my dilemma was how to protect… I could not protect my mother that much”. How do you explain how you took on this role, even when so young? And why did she think that protection was important? How did she know that that was the task?

3) (p.5 below) Referring to father interrogating her: can you tell me some more about this? Your mother managed to stand up to him on that day….

4) (P.6) : “when I started getting older, I began to stand up to him more and he disliked it”- can you take me through this process of how you started to stand up to him as you grew older? And what helped you take this position? Who else had this quality in your family? Who else noticed that you had this quality? If there had been an older sister, who would have taken over your role, do you think that you would have still got involved in the conflict?

5) (p.6) Referring to mother telling her to not get involved: did she feel like she was her mother’s champion? How did she have the strength to defy him?
Was it because she was not afraid of him? Or she knew that her mother would defend her if he beat her? (Get her to give a specific example, a particular memory of the 2 sides of parentification/triangulation)

6) What is her relationship with fear? And how did she manage that?

7) (p.7) “Growing up and growing angrier” – Can you tell me some more about this?

8) P.8 “…it’s like something inside you, I think you would be so… desperate but it’s like there is no other way out”. Can you tell me some more about this?

9) P.8 Mother going to Merha Bik – What helped the mother leave? What is a one-off or a process?

10) P.8 “going to Merhba Bik – indunajt li hemm tfal ohrajn… What she thought the impact that the father tried to isolate them was?

11) P.9 “dejjem jew jiggieled ma xi hadd jew joqghod jaghmel storja… kollox minn that… Haad ma kien ikun jaf”/ he was also arguing with someone or having a tantrum but nobody knew anything. Can you say a bit more how he used to do this? Hadd ma kien ikun jaf xejn…. x’ kien jigr li kieku tkellimt?/ Nobody knew anything – what would have happened had you spoken up?

12) P.10 Subtly coerced by father not to talk: Can you say a bit more? Why do you think that he did it?

13) P.11 Sister dependent on her… What were some of the losses and gains of you being responsible for your sister, for you? And for your sister? How
does your sister see you?

14) P.11 I know that if I don’t take action myself, I know that certain things will not get done…. Can you tell me some more about this? Do you still hold this belief? To what extent has it been confirmed by your experiences? And to what extent has it not been confirmed by your experiences?

15) P.13 Always trying to make that mother aware that there was no positive thing associated with the fact that father was with them. Did your sister have the same or a different view?

16) P.14 in one way or another, I managed to overcome it- it is like it was enough for me to divulge my problem. Besides listening to you, do you think that the counsellors could have offered you more support e.g. involved your mother more, that is helped me more or referred her to other services for help?

17) P.20 Believing in an innate force that helps her to be resilient; when unpleasant things happened, I did not let them get me down, I fought them. What was the positive side to taking action, being feisty? What was the negative side? (did being feisty empower her and gave her access to a sense of competence and an urge to fight back? How was it like with your middle sister?

18) What was your sister’s relationship to your father like? Why do you think that he picked more on her? How was “being more rebellious by nature” helpful/unhelpful for you? How did it impact the relationship with your father, mother and siblings?
Second Interview Guide – Marika

Further questions on Triangulation:

1) (p.4 of Maltese transcript) “I used to get involved in their conflicts…. It happened so often that I then got used to it…… How did you get involved? Can you take me through the process? And what kept you getting involved?

2) (p.5) “even my dilemma was how to protect… I could not protect my mother that much”. How do you explain how you took on this role, even when so young? And why did she think that protection was important? How did she know that that was the task?

3) (p.5 below) Referring to father interrogating her: can you tell me some more about this? Your mother managed to stand up to him on that day….

4) (P.6) : “when I started getting older, I began to stand up to him more and he disliked it”- can you take me through this process of how you started to stand up to him as you grew older? And what helped you take this position? Who else had this quality in your family? Who else noticed that you had this quality? If there had been an older sister, who would have taken over your role, do you think that you would have still got involved in the conflict?

5) (p.6) Referring to mother telling her to not get involved: did she feel like she was her mother’s champion? How did she have the strength to defy him? Was it because she was not afraid of him? Or she knew that her mother would defend her if he beat her? (Get her to give a specific example, a particular memory of the 2 sides of parentification/ triangulation)
6) What is her relationship with fear? And how did she manage that?

7) (p.7) “Growing up and growing angrier” – Can you tell me some more about this?

8) P. 8 “…it’s like something inside you, I think you would be so… desperate but it’s like there is no other way out”. Can you tell me some more about this?

9) P.8 Mother going to Merha Bik – What helped the mother leave? What is a one-off or a process?

10) p.8 “going to Merhba Bik – indunajt li hemm tfal ohrajn…What she thought the impact that the father tried to isolate them was?

11) P.9 “dejjem jew jiggieled ma xi hadd jew joqghod jaghmel storja… kollox minn that… Haad ma kien ikun jaf’/ he was also arguing with someone or having a tantrum but nobody knew anything. Can you say a bit more how he used to do this? Hadd ma kien ikun jaf xejn…… x’ kien jigri li kieku tkellimt?/ Nobody knew anything – what would have happened had you spoken up?

12) P.10 Subtly coerced by father not to talk: Can you say a bit more? Why do you think that he did it?

13) P.11 Sister dependent on her… What were some of the losses and gains of you being responsible for your sister, for you? And for your sister? How does your sister see you?

14) P.11 I know that if I don’t take action myself, I know that certain things will not get done…. Can you tell me some more about this? Do you still hold
this belief? To what extent has it been confirmed by your experiences? And to what extent has it not been confirmed by your experiences?

15) **P.13** Always trying to make that mother aware that there was no positive thing associated with the fact that father was with them. Did your sister have the same or a different view?

16) **P.14** in one way or another, I managed to overcome it - it is like it was enough for me to divulge my problem. Besides listening to you, do you think that the counsellors could have offered you more support e.g. involved your mother more, that is helped me more or referred her to other services for help?

17) **P.20** Believing in an innate force that helps her to be resilient; when unpleasant things happened, I did not let them get me down, I fought them. What was the positive side to taking action, being feisty? What was the negative side? ( did being feisty empower her and gave her access to a sense of competence and an urge to fight back? How was it like with your middle sister?

18) What was your sister’s relationship to your father like? Why do you think that he picked more on her? How was “being more rebellious by nature” helpful/unhelpful for you? How did it impact the relationship with your father, mother and siblings?
Appendix O

Ethics Approval Documents From Surrey Research Ethics Committee

Clarissa Sammut Scerri
Psychology
17 February 2009

Dear Clarissa

Maltese women’s understanding of how witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew up in, has impacted their relationships as adults, with a special focus on coping strategies and resilience - EC/2009/08/FAHS

On behalf of the Ethics Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the submitted protocol and supporting documentation.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 17 February 2009.

The list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee under its Fast Track procedure is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the project</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed protocol</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheet for participants</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questionnaire/interview schedule</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protocol submission proforma: Insurance</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Malta REC confirmation of approval</td>
<td>17 Feb 09</td>
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This opinion is given on the understanding that you will comply with the University’s Ethical Guidelines for Teaching and Research.

The Committee should be notified of any amendments to the protocol, any adverse reactions suffered by research participants, and if the study is terminated earlier than expected with reasons.

You are asked to note that a further submission to the Ethics Committee will be required in the event that the study is not completed within five years of the above date.

Please inform me when the research has been completed.

Yours sincerely

Aimee Cox (Miss)
Secretary, University Ethics Committee, Registry

cc: Professor T Desombre, Chairman, Ethics Committee
27 May 2010

Dear Clarissa

Maltese women's understanding of how witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew up in, has impacted their relationships as adults, with a special focus on coping strategies and resilience - EC/2009/08/FAHS

I am writing to inform you that the Chairman, on behalf of the Ethics Committee, has considered the Amendments requested to the above protocol and has approved them on the understanding that the Ethical Guidelines for Teaching and Research are observed. Please be advised that the Ethics Committee is able to audit research to ensure that researchers are abiding by the University requirements and guidelines.

If the project includes distribution of a survey or questionnaire to members of the University community, researchers are asked to include a statement advising that the project has been reviewed by the University's Ethics Committee.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 17 February 2009.

Date of approval of amendment to protocol: 27 May 2010

The list of amended documents reviewed and approved by the Chairman is as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cover letter of 13 May 2010 &amp; email correspondence requesting another set of interviews.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Glenn Moulton
Secretary, University Ethics Committee
Registry

cc: Professor S Williamson, Chairman, Ethics Committee
Appendix P

Ethics Approval Documents From the University of Malta Research Ethics Committee

To be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee
We have examined the above proposal and advise

\[\text{Acceptance} \quad \text{Refusal} \quad \text{Conditional acceptance}\]

For the following reason(s):

It comply with ethical fund raising requirements

Signature \[\text{Signature}\] Date \[16/11/08\]

To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee
We have examined the above proposal and grant

\[\text{Acceptance} \quad \text{Refusal} \quad \text{Conditional acceptance}\]

For the following reason(s):

Signature \[\text{Signature}\] Date \[9/1/09\]
EDU/142/08

Ms Clarissa Sammut Scerri
c/o Room 244
Department of Psychology
Faculty of Education

Wednesday, 14th January 2009

Dear Ms Sammut Scerri,

Re: Dissertation Project Proposal

This is to inform you that the University Research Ethics Committee has approved your Research Project Proposal: Maltese Women’s Understanding of How Witnessing Domestic Violence in the Family that They Grew Up in, has Impacted their Interpersonal Relationships as Adults, with a Special Focus on Coping Strategies and Resilience.

Enclosed please find the signed approvals of your proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Lilian Spiteri
Secretary
for Dr J Fenech
Chairperson
Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education
Tel: (2340) 2918

cc. Prof Arlene Vetere (University of Surrey)
Dr Angela Abela (University of Malta)
Appendix Q

Ethics Approval Document From the Foundation for Social Welfare Services
Research Ethics Committee

25th February, 2011

281, Limoncella
Triq il-Garni,
 Mellieha, MLH 1617

To whom it concern,

Clarissa Sammut Scerri’s request to conduct research within the services of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services has been reviewed. The research aims ‘to examine Maltese women’s understanding of how witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew up in has impacted their interpersonal relationships as adults, with special focus on coping strategies and resilience’.

After reviewing this request, the Research Office has given approval for the researcher to conduct the research with Agenzija AppoGG.

Although the Research Office has approved the research, the service providers and participants still retain the right to refuse any research request.

Regards,

Christine Marchand-Agias
Research Executive

Foundation for Social Welfare Services
2, Braille Street,
Santa Venera,
SVR 1690

INTEGRATING:
Agenzija AppoGG
Agenzija SEDQA
Agenzija SAPPORT

Tel: 2295 9000 Fax: 21 225364 URL: www.appogg.gov.mt
Tel: 23885110 Fax: 21 441029 URL: www.sedqa.gov.mt
Tel: 21 451868 Fax: 21 453164 URL: www.support.gov.mt

Foundation for Social Welfare Services
3, Braille Street, Sta. Venera, HMR 11, MALTA
Tel 23885113 Fax: 21441029
APPENDIX R

Information Sheet for Participants

Brief description of the project:

I am interested in exploring in detail how women survivors of childhood domestic violence understand how such experiences have impacted their relationships as adults, particularly the impact of family violence in the area of intimate relationships and in their attitude towards parenting. I am also interested how such experiences have led to the development of resilience and coping. This study has been reviewed and has been given favourable ethical opinion by the University of Surrey and University of Malta research ethics committee.

I would like to emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers but that your views, whatever they are, are important to me as I believe that you are the expert of the experiences that you went through as a child and how these have impacted your relationships as an adult.

Potential benefits of the project

This is an under-researched area and to date there are no studies that focus on the women’s survivors views on how family violence has impacted their relationships.

In the Maltese context, there are very few research studies on Domestic violence as a whole. For this reason, I would like to use the results of this research to continue to raise the awareness of professionals, policy makers and the general public about the effects of domestic violence on children, in an effort to improve existing therapeutic services and also to have more focus on prevention work.

All this will not be possible without your valued participation and input.

Obligations and commitment of participants in the study:
If you accept to participate in the project, I will ask you to:

- Go through the interview schedule with the list of questions before our meeting and reflect on it
- Meet for an hour – an hour and a half either on the University of Malta campus or in a rented office space in a private practice setting, depending on your preference
- I will need to record our conversation through a digital recorder so that I will have a reliable note of what we talked about.
- Our conversations will be transcribed

Rights of the participants

a) You have a right to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason and there will be no consequences of this decision whatsoever.

b) You have a right to anonymity. No real names and if names need to be used, they will be pseudonyms of your choice.

c) The signed consent form will be stored in a safe place

d) The digital recording will be downloaded on my laptop which is password protected and will be stored in a password-protected file. The transcribed conversations will also be stored in a password-protected file.

e) I may need to show excerpts of the transcribed interviews to my supervisors: Prof Arlene Vetere and/ or Prof Angela Abela. In this case, identifiable information will be removed so that your anonymity is preserved.

f) In case of any complaint or concerns about any aspects of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed to Prof Arlene Vetere, Principal Investigator on a.vetere@surrey.ac.uk. Or 0044 1483 682911
Appendix S

Consent Form

• I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on ….. Maltese women’s understanding of how witnessing domestic violence in the family that they grew up in, has impacted their interpersonal relationships as adults, with a special focus on coping strategies and resilience: Piloting the design of the interview schedule.

• I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigator of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been advised about any discomfort and possible ill-effects on my well-being which may result. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

• I agree to comply with any instruction given to me during the study and to cooperate fully with the investigators. I shall inform them immediately if I suffer any deterioration of any kind in myr well-being, or experience any unexpected or unusual symptoms.

• I consent to my personal data, as outlined in the accompanying information sheet, being used for the research project detailed in the information sheet, and agree that data collected may be shared with other researchers or interested parties. I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) (UK) and with the Data Protection Act (2001) Malta.

• I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.
I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer (BLOCK CAPITALS) ........................................................

Signed ..............................................................................................

Date ..........................................................

Name of researcher/person taking consent (BLOCK CAPITALS) ........................................................

Signed ..........................................................

Contact details: ..........................................................

Date ..........................................................

Name of supervisor (BLOCK CAPITALS) ........................................................
Name of supervisor (BLOCK CAPITALS) ..........................................................

Signed ..............................................................................................
# Appendix T

## Tables Showing the Details of the Participants’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birth order</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 3 siblings</td>
<td>Care worker in residential care</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; of 2</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 4</td>
<td>Professional in caring profession</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; of 2</td>
<td>Sales executive</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 3</td>
<td>Media executive</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; of 4</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Separating and in a steady relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; of 5</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 3 half siblings</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; of 2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Only child</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; of 3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 3</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; of 4</td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 4</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; of 3</td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Interview Number</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Partner Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1st of 3</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1st of 3</td>
<td>Care worker</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>Student in caring profession</td>
<td>In a steady relationship</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Eastern European Participant married to a Maltese
- The number 1 denotes first interview with participants
- The number 2 denotes second interview with participants
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Exposed to physical assault: father-only on mother; mother-only on father or mutually violent parents; Exposed to emotional violence</th>
<th>Experienced Physical and emotional abuse by father, on participant</th>
<th>Experienced Physical and/or emotional abuse by mother, on participant</th>
<th>Position on Reconciliation and Forgiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Yes - often sadistic physical and emotional violence from father towards mother; emotional violence from mother to father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse by father</td>
<td>Emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td>Reconciliation – good relationship with father and mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Yes, father-only physical assault and emotional violence</td>
<td>Physically abused by father; Retaliated with aggression during teens</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Does not want to reconcile with father; close relationship with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>History and Abuse Details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Yes, father-only physical assault; mutually emotionally violent parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father; Physical and emotional abuse is still ongoing as an adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oscillating between feeling murderous, rage, feeling guilty, cutting off from father and taking up opportunities to connect with him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, physically abused by father; Retaliated with aggression during teens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical and emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reconciled with both (late) father and mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault leading to the mother’s murder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father; Emotional abuse by father is ongoing as an adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oscillating between anger, disappointment and wanting to keep connection with father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Abuse Description</td>
<td>Current State Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Father only physical and emotional assault;</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse and neglect by father; cut off from mother; keeps distant from father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother emotionally violent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Step-father only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse and neglect by step father; no reconciliation with her (late) mother but mother would have liked her to ask forgiveness and to hug her but mother did not do so</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Father only physical assault</td>
<td>No abuse indicated; has given up relationship with father; close connection with mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Witnessed father holding gun to mother; Mutual</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional abuse by mother; attempting to build relationship with both parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>emotionally violent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Father-only Physical and Emotional Assault</td>
<td>Other Abuse Details</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Severe physical and emotional assault by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Reconciled with father during his terminal illness before he died, good relationship with mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severe physically and emotionally abused by father; Emotional abuse is ongoing</td>
<td>Cut off from father but does take up opportunities to connect; angry with both parents for what she had to go through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Severely physically and emotionally abused by father;</td>
<td>Cut off from father. Close relationship with mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Father's History</td>
<td>Mother's History</td>
<td>History/Impact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Father-only physical assault; parents mutually emotionally violent</td>
<td>Physical and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>Physical abuse by mother but not considered as severe as that of father No longer angry with father and has developed empathy for him but is not close to him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault Emotional assault on mother is ongoing when mother opts to meet him</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse Indicated Oscillating between cut off and connection with father; deep down wishes for a connection but keeps her distance to protect herself; good relationship with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault on mother</td>
<td>Severely physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse Indicated Cut off from father but does take up opportunities to connect; angry with both parents for what she had to go through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Type of Abuse</td>
<td>Severe Physical or Emotional Abuse</td>
<td>Emotionally Abused</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Yes - often sadistic physical and emotional violence from father towards mother; emotional violence from mother to father</td>
<td>Severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse by father</td>
<td>Emotionally abused by mother</td>
<td>Reconciled with both her parents; has a more understanding relationship with father than with mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Father-only physical and emotional assault</td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abused by father</td>
<td>No abuse indicated</td>
<td>Oscillating between cut off and connection with father; deep down wishes for a connection but keeps her distance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reference to definitions of physical, emotional, and sexual violence have been made in the Introductory Chapter*
Table 3
Attendance to Psychotherapy Sessions or Alternative Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currently in psychotherapy or alternative form of therapy</th>
<th>Attended psychotherapy in the past 4yrs</th>
<th>No psychotherapy</th>
<th>Mentoring relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seana</td>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Anita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tori</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika</td>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Like Reike, yoga and meditation*
## Appendix U

Table 4

*The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Category of Childhood Experiences in the Context of Family Violence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Focused codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1.1 Father-daughter relationship: Growing up in the shadow of a violent father and dealing with dynamics of fear, love and retaliation.</td>
<td>6.2.1.1.1 Witnessing the horrible physical and psychological abuse by their father on their mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.2 Being sadistically physically and psychologically abused by father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.3 “Because at the end of the day, he is still your father... you cannot break the bond between you and him, even if he were a monster, you cannot”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.4 “And there were moments when I wished him dead”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.5 Daughters retaliating with aggression against their father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.6 More complex dynamics with father: Befriending her to silence her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.1.7 “He wanted to give me a good upbringing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1.2 Mother-daughter relationship in childhood: Dynamics of love, abuse, protection and betrayal</td>
<td>6.2.1.2.1 Feeling loved by mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.2.2 “But why doesn’t she leave? Why doesn’t she stand up to him?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.2.3 Mother’s minimizing of father’s violent behaviour and not protecting the children enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.1.2.4 Mother as perpetrator of child abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 6.2.1.3 Sibling relationships in childhood: Protection, abuse, witnessing triangulation and support

- 6.2.1.3.1 Witnessing their siblings being physically and psychologically abused by the father
- 6.2.1.3.2 Siblings being aggressive with each other
- 6.2.1.3.3 Siblings: Sources of support
- 6.2.1.3.4 Siblings’ different experiences in the same family

### 6.2.1.4 Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult: Extreme coping, extreme consequences and with some support

- 6.2.1.4.1 “Living in Hell”
- 6.2.1.4.2 Worrying for herself and her siblings’ well-being
- 6.2.1.4.3 Desolation and loneliness
- 6.2.1.4.4 “You don’t want other people to think that you are coming from a bad family”
- 6.2.1.4.5 Sources of support and ways of coping

---

#### Table 5

*The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Category of Experiences in Adulthood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Focused codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2.1 Daughter-father relationship in adulthood: Dealing with anger, fear and bitterness and a sense of betrayal, together with possibilities of forgiveness, redemption and transformation</td>
<td>6.2.2.1.1 Cycle of cut-off and connection with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2.1.2 Transformed daughter-father relationships: Forgiveness and reconciliation</td>
<td>6.2.2.1.3 “Bad Fathers, good grandfathers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2.2 Daughter-mother relationship in adulthood: Persistence of anger and sadness, love and protection of the mother and witnessing the mother’s transformation</td>
<td>6.2.2.2.1 “The relationship with my mother is complicated”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2.2.2 Transformed daughter–mother relationship</td>
<td>6.2.2.2.3 Losing mother: A pervasive sense of loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.2.3 Sibling relationship in adulthood: The persistence and significance of early family of origin roles

6.2.2.4 What these women go through as individual adults: Legacies of trauma experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience

6.2.2.4.1 “I am afraid that I will repeat my parents’ mistakes”

6.2.2.4.2 “Trying to make sense came much later, as an adult”

6.2.2.4.3 Processes that hindered the participants’ understanding

6.2.2.4.4 Suffering and resilience

6.2.2.5 The women’s understanding of the impact on their intimate relationships: Childhood survival strategies, trauma legacies, and fear of replicative scripts make relationships hard but relationships can be transformative too

6.2.2.5.1 “The fact that couples attack each other – for me it is normal”

6.2.2.5.2 “How the relationship with my father affected my relationships with men”

6.2.2.5.3 Marriage as a form of escape

6.2.2.5.4 “Looking for a man who was completely different than my father, with help”

6.2.2.5.5 Secrets and shame regarding childhood experiences of domestic violence in intimate relationships

6.2.2.5.6 “It feels like you are trying to make a mountain move” - Trauma legacies and challenges in relationships including managing one's anger and aggression

6.2.2.6 Piecing together the puzzle: Remembering and understanding more the impact of their domestic violence experiences with becoming a parent and struggling with replicative and corrective scripts with their own children

6.2.2.6.1 “I am determined that my children will have a happy childhood” – the challenges of corrective and replicative scripts

6.2.2.6.2 Mothers' dilemma of what to tell their children about their own childhood experiences of domestic violence
Table 6

*The Focused Codes That Make up the Sub-Categories in the Cultural Contexts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-category</th>
<th>Focused codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6.2.3 Cultural contexts: Gendered beliefs, religion, limited professional response, secrecy and shame | 6.2.3.1 The impact of normative and cultural expectations on women and men regarding family dynamics including abuse  
6.2.3.2 Beliefs around intergenerational transmission of abuse and other professional discourses that come in the way of children seeking help and professionals and other adults giving help |

Table 7

*The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 6.3.1 Being Triangulated in the Parental Conflict and Parentification as a Related and Relational Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key category</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 6.3.1 Being triangulated in the parental conflict and parentification as a related and relational process | 6.3.1.1 Being triangulated: “It was time for the verdict to say who was right”  
6.3.1.2 Parentification  
6.3.1.3 The impact of triangulation and parentification on the women’s development |

Table 8

*The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 6.3.2 The Traumatogenic Effect of Violence on the Child and Adult Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Category</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 6.3.2 The traumatogenic effect of the violence on the child and adult development | 6.3.2.1 “Living a different reality”  
6.3.2.2 Remembering and Forgetting  
6.3.2.3 How different individuals understood |
Table 9

The Axial Codes That Make up the Key Category: 6.3.2 Turning Points/Developmental Processes That Foster Change and Resilience, Including Reconciliation, Reconnection and Redemption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key category</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2 Turning points/ Developmental processes that foster change and resilience, including reconciliation, reconnection and redemption</td>
<td>6.3.2.1 Change as a result of growing older</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3.2.1 Change through observation, social comparison and feedback as the women grew older</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3.2.1 Rebelling and confronting the father and standing up to the abuse - Holding firm against the abuse and fighting the helplessness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3.2.4 Getting support/talking about the violence, bringing things out in the open, cautiously and slowly</td>
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<td>6.3.2.5 Naming the childhood experiences as domestic violence</td>
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<td>6.3.2.6 Entrances and exits, into and from the family system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.3.2.7 Focusing on self-awareness and taking opportunities for self-growth</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3.2.8 Reconciliation, reconnection and redemption</td>
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</table>
Transcript with Hannah:
I: Would you like to tell me something about yourself, your family, family composition?

H: I was born 27 years ago in a small country in (Eastern European country), there are about 100,000 people living there, my parents are quite young, my mum 53 and my dad 55, I have a sister, she is 30 years old now, she has a baby. 
She is 2 years old. Shall I go into detail into what they are doing?
I: What was life like at home?

H: There are four years between my sister and me. She was always supporting me. She used to take care of me, she was my second mum kind of. My mum is a very successful woman, I think it’s important what they are doing, sort of, for my parent’s relationship. She is very successful woman and she works in an insurance country company and she is one of the tops in the country and she loves what she is doing. My father had worked for 30 years in the book industry, like a Manager in a shop and higher …., then the

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<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Line-by-line coding</th>
<th>Memos and initial codes</th>
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<td>Understanding that parents’ marital relationship is affected by the fact that wife is more successful in her work than her husband</td>
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company got bankrupt and he was fired and then it was very difficult to find another job but he managed but he then he was fired again but now finally he managed to find a job but now if I can say it... now, at the moment he is not successful as my mum and this affected their relationship. But growing up as a child they both tried their best to raise me up and my sister; they always worked hard so we always had everything, family holidays every year, so I cannot complain about that. My mum is very sensitive woman and she shows a lot of affection, my father doesn’t show it at all, I can tell you that. Even when we were children it was hard getting some kind of affection out of him. Especially the fact that we were girls, not that boys don’t need but girls I think that we liked to get affection, more. My sister, when she was growing up she has very similar character to my father. It means that, she is very hard-headed and a very strong personality and she always says what she thinks – that’s why they don’t match with my dad and it caused a a lot of trouble. I have bad memories you know sometimes my father believed in giving punishments like... you know... sometimes he hits my sister and even me sometimes and even me but as I grew up, I saw him giving these kind of punishments to my sister, but I think now that I am an adult, I reflect on this thing I just what she is doing.

3.9) My father used to work for 30 years in the book industry, like a Manager in a shop and higher ..., then the company got bankrupt and he was fired and then it was very difficult to find another job but he managed but he then he was fired again but finally he managed to find a job but now if I can say it... he is not successful as my mum.

4.9) Growing up as a child, they both tried to raise me at their best; they always worked hard so we always had everything so I cannot complain about that.

5.9) My mum is very sensitive she shows a lot of affection, my father doesn’t show it at all, I can tell you that. Even when we were children it was hard getting some kind of affection from him.

6.9) My sister, when she was growing up she has very similar character to my father. It means that, she is very hard-headed and a very strong personality and she always says what she thinks – that’s why they don’t match with my dad and it caused a a lot of trouble.

7.9) I have bad memories you know sometimes my father believed in giving punishments like... you know... sometimes he hits my sister and

Acknowledging that own parents did their best to work hard so that she was provided for materially (Despite all the physical abuse from father, participant is able to acknowledge her parents’ positive contribution to her upbringing)

Drawing out difference between mother’s and father’s behaviour towards her and sister: mother is sensitive and shows a lot of affection, father doesn’t show it at all)

Sister saying what she thinks about being hard headed means clashing with father and causing a lot of trouble

Having bad memories of father beating sister
became a bit quiet I think that I didn’t say my opinion for a long time because I didn’t want to get into trouble like my sister ended up

I: Did you actually witness your father being aggressive with your mother?
H: Yes with my mum, I have long memory. I was still very very young.
I: How old were you?
H: Maybe about six or seven, something like that. I remember I was at my grandparents’ house About 20 years ago, we had these pig killing and we used to do this during the winter and store the meat for the next year but these family occasions always ended up in trouble because my father did not have a good relationship with his parents and neither with sister. So anyway, I don’t remember exactly what happened but i have this picture that my father was shouting at my mother and my grandma and my mother said something and he hit her on her face and my grandma tried to stop him because he was so aggressive. That i remember. But mostly what I remember when growing up he became verbally aggressive, just ...I can’t even explain how aggressive. You know...It was more emotional abuse.

8.9) Did you actually witness your father being aggressive with your mother?
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10.9) But mostly what I remember when growing up he became verbally aggressive, just ...I can’t even explain how aggressive. You know...It was more emotional abuse.
Feeling abused by father’s verbal aggression towards her and towards her mother

I: Did he put you down?

H: Not not just me, seeing that your parent’s relationship is not worth a penny at all, it’s not good. They fought every day and calling my mother words, and still calling my mother worst names you can imagine. It was hard...... But when I was a teenager then I spoke out as well and I didn’t have a so good relationship with my father.

I: So you told me that when you were young you’ve learnt to be silent and not to speak...

H: But after I’ve changed!

I: But when you became a teenager you spoke..

H: Yes because even nowadays I cannot tolerate that he treats t my mother, I’m sorry for expression, like a piece of shit. I am sorry but that’s how he treats and even now, I’ve been begging my mother to divorce him, since 10 years and she will never do it. I know that she will never do it because, they got married when she was 18. There’s a reason why and now they don’t talk too much, any time they talk they fight. So, I have experienced these kind of things. Or when I was 14 or 15, you know,

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Or when I was 14 or 15, you know, (hesitant) ... (nervous giggle) he hit me. Ok he had a reason: because I was a very quiet child but then as an adolescent...Ok I always tried to do my best to be perfect but that was the time when I kind of became a bit of a rebel you know and sometimes I did not tell them the exact truth, you know how it was, and one day he caught me and told me that I was lying, I don’t know about exactly what about, I was 15 or something, when he caught me, that’s when he hit me a lot and I went to school with the finger prints on my face. Mainly this was my childhood, but you know, on the other hand even my father, as I said, he always tried to provide everything but only material things you know, not emotions, and I would give up all the things so that he will be a little kinder to us.

I: So, when you were a child what upset you most, what distressed you most?

H: Hmmm ...that we didn’t get any love from him. Not even the fact......I was scared of him. Now I still ...now I am not scared. I can recall this feeling... As a child I was scared, remembering being hit at 14yrs; going to school with finger prints on face. Justifying father’s beating because she had changed from being a quiet girl to being rebellious.

15.9) Or when I was 14 or 15, you know, (hesitant) ... (nervous giggle) he hit me. Ok he had a reason: because I was a very quiet child but then as an adolescent...Ok I always tried to do my best to be perfect but that was the time when I kind of became a bit of a rebel you know and sometimes I did not tell them the exact truth, you know how it was, and one day he caught me and told me that I was lying, I don’t know about exactly what about, I was 15 or something, when he caught me, that’s when he hit me a lot and I went to school with the finger prints on my face. Mainly this was my childhood, but you know, on the other hand even my father, as I said, he always tried to provide everything but only material things you know, not emotions, and I would give up all the things so that he will be a little kinder to us.

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17.9) So, when you were a child what upset you most, what distressed you most?

H: Hmmm ...that we didn’t get any love from him. Not even the fact......I was scared of him. Now I still ...now I am not scared. I can recall this feeling... As a child I was scared, because I remember how strong his hand is, that is how was I felt mostly.

Mentioning father providing all the material things that she needed (perhaps participant feels the need to show that father was not such a bad man – loyalty towards father).

Being ready to give up everything (materially) so as to have father being a little kinder.

As a child, being distressed most by not receiving any love from father.

Also being very scared of father.

Recalling the feeling of fear as an adult;
recalling the strength of his hand.
Appendix E

Constant Comparison Between First Four Interviews

Similarities and Differences between S1, M1, G1 and R1

Understanding relationships in the family of origin systems:
With parents:
Relationship with mother: at one end of the spectrum, mother is seen as weak and child is angry with mother, wanting her to stand up to father. At the other end, there is the parentification of the child, where the child protects mother against father, fights with father instead of mother (R1).
The process of triangulation was/is present in all the 4 participants. Triangulation is still very much present for S1 who (together with mother) is still being physically and psychologically abused by father. She wants her life back but also feels like “a bouncing ball – bashed against the wall and then rebounding”. What is “new” is that the abuse is still happening.

From these stories, it seems hard to see the mother as a person in her own entirety or complexity. The mother is coming across as being protected by child (at times), fearing and loving her husband, protecting child (up to a certain point), keeping violence a secret or minimizing the violence. I wonder whether these women as children saw their mother as keeping the family together, whether she was available emotionally or not, or was she mostly devastated by the impact of abuse on her and the children. I wonder who took care of the cooking in the family or the children when they were sick? (These are prompts that I might ask). I would be interested to ask more about this relationship (mother–daughter) and how the women think that their relationship with their mother has affected their adult relationships, particularly relationships with their partners. For example did mother and daughter talk about relationships of women with men? Did mother tell daughter “what to look out for” when choosing a partner? In S1 we learn how she tries to make sense of mother’s relationship to father –“she loves him so much, yet she is terrified of him”. To date, this relationship does not seem to make sense for the daughter and I wonder what implication does this have on the way the daughter deals with her own relationships, with her family members and also with her boyfriend?
S1 and M1 seemed able to take on an empathic position with mother, or at least they were able to take the position of inquiring about what it must have been like for mother. R1 was unable to take either of her parental position and G1 seemed more identified with the father rather than her mother. How do these daughters manage to be empathic with their mothers: is it about having earlier relationships that were attuned to their needs? What is the daughters’ understanding of this process?

M1 talks about being silenced by her mother about what happens in the house. S1 too. M1 feels that this made her lose her voice and made her confused about what she could actually talk about. S1 found it very difficult to seek help for her father’s abuse. This has implications on how professionals offer help to these families. Can we help the child through child protection services without involving the mother and empowering the mother? (This category will be discussed further down below)

Since violence was kept a secret, mother probably must have felt alone, with no one to turn to for help. A case of “it is better to endure instead of risking further beating and shame and embarrassment from her own family”? Here, I connect with the idea of Maltese society’s beliefs around gender; and also about men and issues of power and authority: “Women told to put up with the beatings because they are lucky to have diligent husbands: (G1);” He is your father. You must submit to his authority” (S1). It is especially in this interview that we learn about the woman’s guilt at not having a relationship with her father and cutting him off for her safety and sanity. She repeatedly feels the need to reassure herself that he does not deserve a relationship with her and finds it within herself to keep giving him opportunities to connect – to the point that then she puts herself in a position to be abused again by him.

Relationship with father: For G1, M1, and R1 their relationship with father deteriorated with adolescence. This was not present in S1’s story. I am interested to explore whether this pattern was present in other women’s relationship with their father and also ask about the women’s understanding/ explanation of this change in
their relationship with their father. In all the four interviews, the relationship with the father is marred by the father’s anger, by the father’s use of violence on the mother, on the women, and on the siblings. Two out of the four women actually spoke about “wishing him dead”. These women were physically abused very violently, witnessed shouting, anger and physical assault, and were often forced (G1 literally) to take sides. They had to live in a house where unpredictability reigned and where they never felt safe and felt that there was no protection whatsoever from father’s violence. The father’s violent and abusive behaviour was central to the relationship with them, although at times, there were some moments of respite – of good moments in the family (R1). What was different with S1 is the sense of loss that she experienced when her father left the house, despite the fact that she was glad that there was no reconciliation planned between her parents. On the one hand, I am reminded of the strength of attachment to one’s parents even in the context of abuse. I am also reminded that violence occurs in the context of “normal” family everyday situations which may not be violent and I am also reminded of the strength of the triangulation so that perhaps S1 feels that her father in fact left her like he left her mother.

Father and intergenerational patterns of abuse: all the four women talked about knowing or eventually discovering as adults that their father had also been harshly abused by the grandparent. Sometimes this was a well –kept secret in the family and extended family. S1 and M1 took on this information to try and make sense of father’s violence but S1 spoke very strongly about how precisely then the father should have not repeated the same pattern with his own family. G1 at the time of the interview was too angry with her father and she did not want to entertain any possible understanding of his violent behaviour as she felt that this, in some way minimized his moral responsibility of his behaviour.

Understanding other relationships in the family of origin:

M1 described the ferocious rage that existed between her and her siblings, which perhaps describes aspects of the sibling relationships in the other families as well. However, whilst in M1, and G1 the siblings protect each other from the father’s physical abuse, emotional cut-off between siblings is present in S1 and R1’s families. With S1, there is also the intergenerational transmission of abuse, in the brother
beating the sister. In R1’s family, the woman gets involved intensely in the marital conflict (as does S1 and G1) but in R1, the sibling gets abused more than she does and there is emotional cut off – everyone is left to fend for himself or herself. I wonder about the dynamics of “who gets picked on” that explains who gets physically abused and who does not? Who gets triangulated and why? And what helps siblings protect each other and offer support to each other rather than venting out the anger on each other?

We also get to know that in S1s’ families, father also beats brother but the brother stands up to him and father stops the beating. So is it also a question of bullying the vulnerable until the victim stands up to the abuse? Also what helps explain the physical abuse amongst the siblings? Is it a question of modelling? S1 could not explain why her brother did this to her. Also what helps explain how relationships deteriorate to the point of emotional cut off? Is this one of the ways to maintain some sort of sanity in the midst of violence in one’s intimate home environment? Is this the impact of the triangulation in the marital conflict?

Understanding the family relationship with extended family:
It seems that in general in these families of the women interviewed, the relatives offer more help to the children rather than to the mother. The mother either is told that she is now married and needs to solve her problems within the marital home or the mother does not tell her own mother/parents about the violence because she does not want to worry them but also perhaps because of the shame and humiliation associated with being abused by your own husband.
From the perspective of these women, they were not sure to what extent their extended family knew about the abuse and to what extent they were ready to put their neck out for them and support them. In the case of S1, at first, the expectation was that she obeys her father and she feels that at that point, her aunts and uncles were quite detached from her. Only when they saw in person what her father did to her during a recent assault in the house, did the uncle feel obliged to protect his niece and his sister (the mother).

The maternal grandmother was a very important figure in at least the lives of two of
the four women. For S1 she was the only source of protection. G1’s grandmother gave her the love that her own mother could not or would not give to her. I wondered then about the role of a significant other in the stories of these women and how this relationship then impacted other significant relationships in the future lives of these women?

Understanding the relationships to the wider system:

I wondered about what professionals need to keep in mind when family members living in the context of domestic violence seek their help: S1 really highlights how complicated seeking help can be. She talks about the keeping the violence a secret because of the humiliation, shame and anger. She talks about a teacher noticing that she was not okay but when the teacher did ask her if everything is okay in the home, she did not disclose any information. It was only after another beating did her anger against her father push her to report him to her. But when the teacher asked her whether she wanted to proceed further, S1 told her mother, somehow her father got to know and she got another beating. So I wonder what S1 might have found more helpful as a girl? Would it have been helpful had the teacher spoken to the mother and referred her to the Domestic violence service so that both the mother and the daughter would have got support

R1 spoke about having a supportive relationship with her teachers who counselled her about different ways to deal with her father’s anger. So this had been helpful to her and she recalls her teachers as being key significant people at that time in her life. G1 also spoke about significant others such as her therapist and later the residential care workers who supported her and helped her cope and come to terms with the father’s abuse. But G1 also spoke about the complicated ways that professionals tried to go through, to actually take her away from the home. This involved the parish priest and involved her escaping from the house at the point that she thought that she was going to be abused. In her case, the father also got to know what was being planned as he knew a lot of people and he stopped abusing her and tried to make friends with her! I think that in future interviews, I need to ask the participants what kind of help would they have found useful whilst growing up and to ask them too what they think professionals should need to keep in mind when helping children who witness and are
being abused by their parents in the context of dv.

The participant’s individual process:
What was the impact of the abuse, both as a witness of abuse and also of a victim? In the interview, G1 talked about learning automatically how to block her feelings and her need to slowly become aware of what she was doing; R1 found it difficult to remember certain episodes of her childhood, M1 talked about remembering a fragmented experience and also finding herself looking for a “proper” mummy and daddy who would give her the safety, protection and security that she needed. R1 felt that the impact of the violence on her was pervasive: it impacted how she thought about herself and others, and about how she interacted with people especially her issues of low self esteem and seeing herself as not being competent and good for nothing. S1’s narrative was full of traumatic memories about being beaten as a child and also suffering mental pain as a result of the psychological abuse she suffered and is still suffering at the hands of her father. M1 too spoke about the pervasiveness of the trauma: how you are “totally immersed in it, like being “underwater”. G1 also experienced distressing memory triggers associated with certain words. So for example, the words “You are right” immediately provoked in her an automatic fear and panic that she was in for another beating.

What was helpful for these women? M1 talked about therapy and how it showed her that relationships can be different than the one that she was used to in the family that she grew up in. S1 talked to herself about taking the positive from adverse situations and coping by going on and going out of her way to help others. R1 coped by involving herself in sports, an area where she felt that she could be competent. M1 also spoke about going off and finding her own space in their big family home away from her parents’ fighting. She also talked about how important it was for her to name her childhood experiences as being domestic violence and also to be able to talk about violence in a straightforward way as it reduced fear and it helped her make sense of what she went through. G1 also talked about it was important for her to have someone she could confide in.

However, G1 talked about a process of identification with the masculine which none
of the other women talked about. Whilst growing up, G1 saw herself as growing up into a man, so she shaved her face to grow a beard and it was very hard for her to cope with her bodily changes that came about in adolescence that clearly distinguished her as a woman. In fact she had to learn how to be a woman, to dress and act like one. The other participants did not talk about a similar process and it would interesting to find out if any other interviewed woman talks about this. The only other possible similar process that I found was that around sexual orientation where R1 talked about “hating men and boys thanks to her father”. In fact, she came out as gay to her family. At the same time, at the time of the interview R1 felt that her sexual orientation was still fluid and she was at the point of possibly considering boys as dating partners and giving them a try.

Understanding adult relationships:
What stands out clearly for me at this point in the data collection is S1’s disclosure that inspite of the fact that her boyfriend was never violent with her, she was afraid that “the devil that is in my father, will appear in him”. This to me the powerful impact of the dv experience on these women’s relationships and the burden that they are carrying into their relationships. Also S1 does not feel that her boyfriend can really understand the depth and pain of her suffering as a result of her childhood experiences and so she feels that she cannot trust him totally and feels that he does not understand her totally. I think that S1’s interview was the most detailed so far into the complexity of the impact of the violence on the women’s intimate relationships. S1 also talked about going out of her way to help others and doing this to feel like she is good for something. At the same time, I also got the impression that she was able to maintain her boundaries and not stretch herself out to the point of not taking care of herself to take care of others.

The other participant who talked a little about her relationships was M1 who as a young woman wanted to be able to have a different relationship with her partner than what her parents had and at the point where she feared that she was repeating the same pattern, she almost despairs. M1 talked about how she had to re-learn about how to manage her relationships differently, for example not walking away from conflict and learning how to manage it. Therapy had helped her become aware of
how her safety defence mechanisms were in fact keeping her stagnant in this area and how she had to put away the mask and do things differently.

I believe that the impact of dv around intimate relationships still has a lot of facets that deserve further exploration in future interviews. This also includes questions around how these women manage to not to repeat the same patterns of managing interpersonal relationships. Issues around parenting have still not been explored and also what was it like for these women to raise daughters and sons and whether there was any difference related to gender and their experience of an abusive father. Also did they experience intergenerational transmission of abuse, perhaps in the way they dealt with the children?

In Conclusion:
There are potential fertile grounds that need further exploration. I am inclined to say that the interview with S1 did not yield new and different themes per se but I think that the information analysed from her interview added to the “flesh” and to the complexity of the experience. It remains to be seen whether these categories are also found in other future interviews and whether themes like the one highlighting the impact on gender identity and sexual orientation come up again.
Mapping of G1 initial codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1 Blocking out feelings</td>
<td>You need to understand the family context; Shift to speaking English to “distance herself” and manage the questions brought up by the interview. H: her relationship to the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2 Expressing different thoughts and feelings in another language – dual languages English/maltese Charlotte Burck’ thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3 : Trauma memory trigger</td>
<td>Isomorphic process; Part of re-learning process: “and You are right—it took me a long time to learn what it meant…I used to say…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4 Coping Resilience</td>
<td>Learning – how to be in rel; how to be a woman; Going through shit: it is not all for nothing! I always had faith… lead me to being the person I am today; Believes in equality that is fair and just; formed my opinion and formed my position through grand-parents; Doesn’t blame self; Process of change-starting to change, listening to feedback from other people; There was change from seeing women as only good enough to be used. There was always someone I could confide in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5 : Connecting with professionals for help:</td>
<td>Process of silencing: they couldn’t get help soon enough; Father beat mother in front of police; no legislation; professionals not taking responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6 : Gender identity; Masculine behavior = power; Tragedy to accept that I am a woman; wanted to be a man because of the dominance; Shave my face so I would grow a beard; grew up to believe a beard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GK : Rel with siblings/protecting siblings; Secret</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G J : Minimising father’s violence against her (and her mother); Others minimizing this: fear you couldn’t prove it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G K : Rel with siblings/protecting siblings; Secret</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>G K : Rel with siblings/protecting siblings; Secret</td>
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Appendix F
G A  
Mother’s beating different from father

G B  
Mother telling father she had been naughty at school, knowing that she would get a beating; Process of silencing; she didn’t disclose for fear of further beatings; could not speak out Loyalty; Lack of protection; betrayal; H: survival: everyone for himself

G C  
Father told child to judge the mother: Triangulation; Child taking

G D (a)  
Seeing the mother as weak: wanting the mother to stand up to father; getting angry with the mother

G D (b)  
Changes in mother since leaving father; She sings/whistles; she has an opinion

G E  
Mother telling father she had been naughty at school, knowing that she would get a beating; Process of silencing; she didn’t disclose for fear of further beatings; could not speak out Loyalty; Lack of protection; betrayal; H: survival: everyone for himself

G F  
Father calculated violence Stopped beating when guidance teachers sent for him; starting making friends with her!

G G  
Relationship with grandparents: What did they know? What were they told? Grandparent giving the love a mother could not/did not give? Different rel with grandparents: getting peace; Intergenerational patterns of violent parenting: grandma didn’t give cuddles; Ritual of feast

G H  
Father’s rise from rags to riches? Shame?

G I  
Sexual abuse by father

G J  
Learning how to be a woman: clothes/shoes affects her sense of herself as powerful e.g. wearing heels (H: why do women wear high heels?) Did not acknowledge I was a woman

G K  
Using foul language in interview – Connection to...
Reflecting more on rel with father than mother;
Why? Lack of curiosity? “taken for granted” aspects of a mother’s love?
H: is father’s love not subject to these same “taken for granted” assumptions?
H: we expect mothers to protect-what do we expect of fathers?

Relationship With extended family;

Intergenerational patterns of violence in parenting and couples;
Grandmother didn’t give cuddles.

Women told to put up with the beatings because they are lucky to have diligent husbands
Process of silencing ;
Women
Appendix G

1st Level Focused Coding

G1 list of categories

Understanding relationships in family of origin system:

Relationships between participant and parents

- Father told child to act as a *judge* to assign blame/ Triangulation / forced to take sides
- Sexual abuse by father
- Minimising fathers’ violence against her (and her mother);
- Mother’s beating of child different from father
- Mother telling father she had been naughty at school, knowing that she would get a beating
- She didn’t disclose for fear of further beatings could not speak out/ Issues of loyalty
- Seeing mother as weak/ wanting mother to stand up to father
- Father’s calculated violence/ stopped beating when teachers sent for him/ started being friends with daughter

Other relationships within the family:

- Lack of protection/ Betrayal
- Survival: everyone for himself
- Protecting siblings/ then emotional cut off with brother
- Changes in mother since leaving father: she sings, whistles and has an opinion

Understanding relationships in the extended family system and wider systems

- Other’s minimising father’s violence/ fear you couldn’t prove the violence
- Process of silencing / She didn’t disclose for fear of further beatings
- Intergenerational patterns of violence in parenting and couples
• Relationship with grandparents: grandma giving the love the mother could not/would not give/feeling peaceful with grandparents/ Also what did they know? What were they told?
• Women told to put up with the beatings because they are lucky to have diligent husbands/Process of silencing/women staying
• Connecting with professionals for help: they could not get help soon enough/father beat mother in front of police/no legislation; professionals not taking responsibility
• As an adolescent, then found help in therapist and in residential care
• Hypocrisy/blasphemy/sacrilege in father’s behaviour: abusive at home, pretending to be humble/gentleman publicly
• Supportive relationship with extended family: aunt used to take her away for the weekend

The participant’s individual process
• Reflecting more on relationship with father than with mother: we expect mothers to protect children—what do we expect of fathers? Is father’s love not subject to these “same taken for granted” assumptions?
• Blocking out feelings
• Expressing different thoughts and feelings in another language
• Identification with the masculine, means power and dominance/Tragedy to accept that I am a woman/I shaved my face—wanted to grow a beard/Identification with aggressor/Balbernie’s illusion of safety
• There was always someone I could confide in
• Using foul language in the interview/connection with the masculine
• Had to learn how to be a woman/clothes, shoes affects her sense of herself as powerful
Resilience

- Learning how to be in relationships/ how to be a woman
- Having faith that all the “shit” I went through was not all for nothing but led me to being the person I am today
- Believes in equality that is fair and just/ Formed my opinion and my position through grandparents
- Doesn’t blame self
- Process of change: starting to change, to listen to feedback from other people
- There was a change also from seeing women as only good enough to be used
- There was always someone I could confide in

Understanding adult relationships

- Traumatic memory trigger/ Isomorphic process: part of the re-learning process: “You are right – it took me a long time to learn what it mean...I used to say a beating will follow
Appendix H

Constant Comparison Process: Looking at Patterns Across Seana’s Sandra’s, Jessica’s, Mary’s, Rose’s and Geraldine1’s Interviews

The Process of family triangulation, where the daughter is drawn or inserts herself in the conflict between the parents, again appears in the 6th participant’s transcript. It is interesting to note the “thickening of the description” (Geertz, 1973) of this process across all the six participants’ stories.

One woman (S2) remembered that already as a three year old, she had tried to hold daddy away from mummy and told her father not to touch her mother. Another daughter (J1) became her mother’s protector and even went with her mother to the toilet because the mother was terrified that her husband will harm her. She became hyper vigilant about mother’s safety and could not be able to go to sleep, unless she checked that mummy was okay. She was “most aware” of her mother’s fear of her father and his wish to harm her and every time something bad happened, the mother used to want her daughter next to her. This daughter thinks that although their mother was close to all the four siblings, she was the one that used to understand her the most and was closest to her. She was also the only one, amongst the siblings who took on the role of the mother’s protector. Perhaps given that she was the most understanding of the mother, she was the one better “positioned” to have an alliance with the mother against the mother and to be drawn in the conflict?

The same process of triangulation happened in R1’s family where the daughter fought with the father instead of the mother whilst her older brother did not get involved in the fights and locked himself in the room. On the other hand, both G1 and her brother were asked by her father to judge and assign blame either to the father or to the mother after their fights. It would be interesting to explore with the future participants their understanding of the difference between them and their siblings, when present, in terms of their involvement in their parents’ fights and what explanations they have for this difference.
In the case of S2, she was not only involved in her parents’ fights, defending the mother against the father but she was also the family mediator between her parents and her parents and her brother as S2’s brother got caught in the parental conflict but he sided with the father against the mother. S2’s understanding was that her brother was manipulated by the father and positioned himself against the mother to the point that all communication between the mother and son stopped. It is interesting to take note of the fact that S2 believes that her brother thinks that he was more exposed to the violence than she was, as their parents had protected her more given that she was younger. S2 does not really hold this view but believes that this difference between her and her sibling is due to a difference in personality. It would have been useful had I explored this difference more in the interview.

Communication between the family members also used to go through S2 as she tried to mediate the conflict between them, so for example, if her mother wanted to say something to her brother, the mother used to say it to S2 and S2 would relay the information to her sibling. It seems that S2 held quite a pivotal role in the family.

S2 also describes herself as having been the mother’s carer (similar to J2) since she was 4 years old, because the mother suffered bouts of depression especially after the parental separation. S2 played the role of mother’s carer well into adulthood despite the fact that the daughter suffered from continual, violent emotional and psychological abuse by the mother. Then this relationship started changing when the mother started getting psychological better and the daughter–mother relationship became more reciprocal. (I will go more into this below).

Whilst looking at the process of triangulation, one also needs to keep in mind that this process occurred in the context of different forms of abuse by the family members on each other: of witnessing the abuse of one’s mother and often that of the siblings by the father, in addition to being physically, psychologically and emotionally abused by the father and also by the mother. Therefore one can perhaps conclude that the process of triangulation was further exacerbated by these abusive contexts.
What was it like for the daughter to live in this family environment, which environment also ironically included happy memories too? Where the physical abuse was still happening by the father on the mother and/or on the daughter at the time of the interview, the daughter felt like a bouncing-ball being bashed against the wall-and-rebounding. This is where S1 felt that she was constantly yo-yoing between intense emotions of fear, guilt, rage and anger, against, and because of the abuse of the father. J1’s and G1’s understanding of their feelings of being full of anger and feistiness was “because of the things that were happening”.

J1 describes her process: how she has great feelings of rebellion and rage, which then have to be kept somewhat in check by having to submit to whom is more powerful, which then leads her to taking a stand. I wonder whether this is the process that pushes these women slowly forward at taking a position away from victimhood and whether anger as an emotion is one of the catalysts for the change. J describes this process as happening to her in abusive contexts, both in her family of origin where the father was abusive and then in her nuclear family when the husband was abusive. At these instances, she feels trapped, like being locked in a cage and she finds herself yearning and determined to have a different life.

It is also during these moments that she finds herself remembering her childhood experiences, connecting to her feelings of having lost her childhood because she had to take care of her of the family and her siblings after she lost her mother, who was murdered by her father. This is similar to what S1 has also said about feeling like she had to postpone her dreams, having had to mature quickly and not remain a child.

Tied to the processes described above, S2 also talked about a series of emotional cut-offs/estrangement and then reconnection between the family members which gave me the impression that the emotional cut-off was one of the ways of coping with the roller-coaster of emotional upheavals and possibly happened when it was no longer possible for the family members to remain connected. This is however my understanding of the emotional cut-offs and not the participants. What came
across in the participants is the sense of despair brought about by the suffering as a result of the abuse, as a result of the emotional blackmail by the parents on the children, the former desperately wanting them to take their side and the children’s intense need to maintain a bond with both parents, even when they were both abusive in their regard.

At times however, these dynamics were excessively “too much” and the cut-off took place: “I cut off all contact because he had told me “why do you take things from the fridge? … and silly things like this… things that for me did not make sense. At the end of the day, I don’t need any of them. I said to myself, now I have my own place and I ignore everyone else, each to his own” (S2 line 36.6). The cut-offs also involved all the family members, as can be seen through this quote: “Then I went through a time when daddy lived alone, my brother lived alone and I was living with mummy and nobody wanted me with them because daddy wanted his independence, my brother had his girlfriend and he did not want me to live with him and mummy threw me out and I ended up living in the car and I used to go and shower at my friends’ house” (S2, line 32.6). There was a similar emotional cut-off between the siblings in S1’s family. Here, the estrangement happened between S1 and her brother after he had started beating her and between her sister and her mother, after she took the side of the father against the mother and went to live with him.

As I already noted above, the cut-offs were also sometimes then followed by the emotional reconnection, until the cut-off happened again. Sometimes the reconnection occurred because the parent was ill, as in the case of S2. Sometimes it happened because of the daughter’s belief in relationships and never wanting to give up the bond “I am the kind of person that rarely gives up and I try to do whatever is possible…” (S2 line 42.6). Sometimes it happened because of guilt (S1-“how can I treat my father in this way, line 144.4), accompanied by doubts “So you start saying to yourself, I did something wrong. Let me see what I did wrong” (S1 line 147.4), and feeling pressurised by the extended family especially and from the wider social context, to honour and submit to father’s authority (Influence of religion). But the women also spoke of their wish and the longing to have a relationship with their
father, highlighting the permanency of the bond: “You cannot break the bond between you and him, even if he were a monster... you cannot” (J1, line 130.5).

Continuing the reflections around the women’s relationship with their father: S2’s relationship with her father deteriorated with adolescence as happened in G1, M1, and R1 and their relationship with their father. S2 talked about how she started rebelling in adolescence when she started to understand the situation between her parents. Perhaps this explanation can also fit with the other three women above. Future interviews could focus on this aspect of the father-daughter relationship. Furthermore, S2 understood her rebelling as a way to punish her father for not being part of her life after the marital separation. She continually challenged his authority because she felt he lost his right over her with his estrangement from her when he had stopped seeing her after a long-drawn, litigious custody battle. J1’s rebellious battle was against her father was not focused on adolescence but she explains it as her way of getting revenge for her mother’s death. My understanding is that she felt that she could displace all her anger and sense of loss targeting her father’s girlfriend rather than her father. Perhaps in future interviews, it would be useful to ask about what happens in adolescence but not become constrained by this life stage only and ask about instances when the daughter starting taking a stand against the abuse by the father and challenging him.

Coming back to J’s relationship with her father, it was important for J1 to maintain the bond with her father, and as an adult woman and then as a mother herself, she tried to leave the past in the past and gave her father the opportunity to enjoy his grandchildren. S2 and her father also managed to have a good relationship before he died. S2 thinks that this is due to the fact that her father stopped trying to control her (line 38.6) and that he admired the fact that she had made it in life career-wise and he valued her more. Her success was of great satisfaction to him (line 40.6). S2 still misses her father in her life and feels like part of her is missing (line 41.6). Thus it seems that when the abuse stops, if there is the willingness from both sides, it is possible to repair the relationships. S2 has mentioned the theme of forgiveness in connection with her relationship with her parents but in the interview, I did not
explore it in more detail. I wonder whether the theme of forgiveness can throw some light on the complexity of the process of reconciliation between the family members. Perhaps, if this theme appears in future interviews, I can explore it in more depth.

Connected with the daughter’s relationship with the father is the process of the daughter’s identification with the father and with the masculine that was encountered in G1, a process that in this case, had dire consequences on the daughter’s establishment of her identity as a woman. Perhaps along the same theme, we can understand J1’s tom-boyishness as her part of her identification with the father. Interestingly, in relation to men, S2 sees herself judging men as being inferior to women. She sees herself as more intelligent than a man especially from the way that she used to communicate with her father and brother and finds herself always trying to manipulate men. She understands this pattern of relating as characteristic of her relationship with her father when trying to out-manipulate him to get what she wanted it and avoid being emotionally black-mailed by him. S2 thinks that this was one of the reasons why it was difficult for her to find a man with whom she could go out with. In addition, she also worries that a man would also want to be with a woman just for sex and she thinks that this is as a result of having been sexually abused by a family friend during her teenage years.

S2 also talked about her relationships with women but during the interview, she was adamant about not wanting to define her sexual orientation as being gay, straight or bisexual and during the interview she said (with a smile) that one day she also might find her “Prince Charming”. In some ways, S2’s story is similar to that of R1’s who talked about “hating men and boys, and not being able to stand them.... thanks to my father” (line 95.2). R1 saw herself as gay and had had one or two lesbian relationships. At the time of the interview, however, R1 felt that her sexual orientation was still fluid and was considering both males and females as possible dating partners and wanted to give men a try.

Along the same continuum when continuing reflecting about these women’s intimate relationships with men, in this case a heterosexual relationship, between S1
and her boyfriend, there was the shadowing of the violent relationship with the father. S1 was afraid that “the devil” that is in her father will appear in her boyfriend “because after all, he is a man” (line....) even if her boyfriend was never violent but actually stood by her side and supported her at the time of her father’s physical and psychological abuse. Nevertheless S1 believed that her boyfriend could not fully understand the depth and pain of her suffering and so she felt that she could not trust him.

Along the same lines, J1 echoed her understanding of the link between her childhood experiences and her marital difficulties. She understood that it was difficult for her husband to understand and the extent of her anger in their relationship: “ and he could not understand that I had spent up to 20 years being mistreated and downtrodden; not being able to say anything and feeling the anger accumulating... and then all of a sudden, you have to become an adult” (line 243.5) In this respect, it seems that these powerful beliefs present additional challenges to the building of these women’s intimate relationships with significant others. This has implications for professionals working with couples where the woman has childhood experiences of witnessing domestic violence and/or has experienced physical abuse by the father.

From a systemic perspective, one cannot look at the relationship of the daughter and father without considering the daughter’s relationship with the mother, especially in the context where the mother herself was being subjected to (often horrible) abuse. What comes across again with the 6th transcript is the interrelation between complex influences and I get the feeling that so far, I am only succeeding in getting snapshots of these dynamics.

So what where the similarities and differences in the process of mothering so far? In the previous constant comparison write up, I spoke about my hypotheses about the attachment between mother and daughter and how this seemed to have implications on the extent that the daughter was able to take an empathic position with the mother. I wrote that when the mother and daughter seem closely bonded (as in J1), the daughter in turn seemed to be able to take an empathic position with the mother
or at least she is able to take the position of thinking about what it must have been like for her mother. Where the mother and daughter bond was conflicted or shadowed by the process of triangulation and complicated by the identification of the daughter with the father’s aggression and dominance as in G1, taking this empathic position was difficult for the daughter. I wondered whether then this constrained the daughter in a cycle of anger and hurt in her adult life with unhelpful consequences on the establishment and maintenance of relationships in adult life?

At the same time, in due time and with help, G1 managed to change her relationship with her mother from one of scorn towards her weakness in relation to the father’s aggression to one of connection and to a certain extent understanding of each other’s point of view. G1 appreciated her mother’s “resurrection” to having a life when she separated from her husband and I think that this helped continue liberating the daughter from the consummating influence of the family violence. With S2, there seems to be a variation on the continuum of the mother–daughter relationship. S2 talked about choosing the safety of her mum and wanting to stay with her in the midst of a turbulent and painful separation process. At the same time, S2 described how she suffered to a great extent because of the mother’s violent psychological and verbal abuse which she hurled at her. S2 stated that she was very afraid of her mother when she was young. One time, her mother called her “devil’s spawn”. Another time, the daughter found all her things out in the street after a fight with the mother. The daughter–mother relationship was also influenced by the mother’s depressive episodes where the mother seems to have suffered a mental breakdown, experiencing periodic violent outbursts and periods of illness. At that time, S1 became the mother’s carer and put aside her need. However, she often had to endure her mother spending months not talking to her and she used to suffer a lot.

Yet the daughter who is now an adult, has a good relationship with her mother and she thinks that what helped them was the fact that she showed her that “I am neither judging them (her parents) nor had those feelings, those grudges against them and I think that this helped us a lot… it’s like I forgave them and I understood their mistakes and ultimately they did mistakes… because they did mistakes because
of their own immaturity” (line 43.6). This is the theme of forgiveness that was mentioned earlier on. S2 also reasoned that she was alone in the world and she had to fend for herself in every possible way. Perhaps what we see her are references of an individual’s internal resources and this woman’s resilience.

When I asked this woman what she things helped have this strength and this insights, she did not know how to answer. So it seems that in the face of adversity, she relied on herself and “marched” forward! In fact there was a lot of similarities between the 5 participants’ stories and the S2 in terms of the theme of resilience. I will be touching upon this theme further on in this narrative.

Going back to the mother–daughter relationship, S2 spoke about how the mother has recognized her mistakes in relation to her daughter and has told the daughter about how guilty she felt that her children had to suffer because of the parents. I would think that the mother’s taking responsibility for her abuse also helped her and her daughter to re-connect with each other. When faced with her mother’s sense of guilt, S2 tries to console her mother and dismisses her own suffering: “…I always tell her that I don’t have any grudges and that I feel that they did not do things that have affected my personality…” (Line 62.6). At one point, during the interview, S2 recognised that she tends to dismiss being affected by her parents’ violence but then realised that she did get in fact hurt and offended by both her father and her mother’s insults and physical abuse. In future interviews, I would still be interested to ask more about this relationship, especially about these women’s understanding of how their relationship with their mother has affected their adult relationships. So far the link, if these women have made a link is not clear to me.

Moving from a family-of-origin focus to the inter phase with the wider system, similar processes have been talked about by the women. One process is that of being silenced. So the daughter as a young child is silenced by the mother to not to talk about what happens at home (M1). G1 speaks about the same process where both the daughter and the mother are silenced in different ways not to talk about the violence: the mother is expected by the family to deal with her marital problems within her own
family because she is now married and the daughter is silenced because she is too scared of getting a severe beating from the father. The same happens with S1, who kept the violence that she and her mother were suffering a secret because of the humiliation, and shame that she felt at being abused. Only after another beating, did her anger against her father push her to report him to her teacher at school. But when S1 told her mother about this, the father got to know and he became even more defiant and gave S1 another beating.

G1 also spoke about how professionals were disempowered by the father’s violence and the complicated ways that the professionals went through to actually take her away from home. S2 spoke about being very careful what to say to her father and mother when she went to her father’s visits. She also presented social workers and psychologists with a false affect, feigning happiness because she was afraid that she would be taken away from her mother and also because she was afraid that her mother would become more physically and verbally abusive after the professionals left. As a child S2 recalls that she wished the professionals would have read her mind and told her mother to stop abusing her. This process again highlights the complicated dynamics that professionals need to be aware of when giving help to such children experiencing violence in their family. For me, it underlines the importance of working with the parents and hopefully engaging them to the point that they would be able to trust professionals to help them with their very challenging and painful difficulties.

Another process that was apparent in the five transcripts analysed was the lack of support or the limited support from the extended family system and from the Police. In the case of J1, there was no support to the family regarding the father’s violence. In actual fact, the daughter had to and still has to fight the father’s extended family’s denial of the mother’s murder and domestic violence and the father’s responsibility for this. The daughter understands this as the family protecting themselves and their children’s reputation. S1 talked about how her extended family initially blamed her for her conflict with her father. They told her that he was her father and so she was expected to submit to his authority and obey him, no matter what. It was only when one of her uncles personally saw the physical abuse that she suffered did he support
her after her father assaulted her in the middle of the night when her mother was abroad.

In S2’s case, there was no mention of the extended family but she mentioned the feeling of stigma that she felt at school because she was the only one whose parents had separated and she was seen as a bad influence to the other children and so she was ostracised. There was also a lot of spill-over from the conflictual marital relationship in the school system when her father used to visit her at school, possibly during the long custody battle. Thus whilst the parental separation was visible to many at her school, S2 still kept silent about what really happened in her home. S2 was open to some support from one of her teachers but again she was careful not to disclose about the violence. R1, and J1 also mentioned teachers who helped them in their school years whilst for 2 other women, G1 and S1, the maternal grandmother was a very important figure in their lives. The grandmother was S1’s only source of protection and G1’s grandmother gave her the love that her own mother could not/ would not give her.

What else was helpful for these women in their process of trying to cope with the traumatic experiences? One of the things that was mentioned in the previous interviews was the importance of naming childhood experiences as domestic violence and being able to talk about violence in a straightforward way, as it reduced fear and helped her (M1) to make sense of what she went through. In a similar way, S2 experienced the actual research interview as what helped her label what she went through as a child, as domestic violence. She realised that she was knowledgeable about domestic violence as a topic but she lacked the connection that these were her experiences. In the interview, she also made a link between how violence in the past affected her present relationships and she started coming to terms with, or at least acknowledging, the different forms of violence that she went through. As J1 said in her interview, the process of trying to make sense never stops and there are different ways through which this process can happen. M1 talked about therapy and how it showed her that relationships can be different than the ones that she had in the family that she grew up in. G1 talked about the importance of having someone that she could
confide in. S1 talked to herself about taking what is positive from adverse situations and coping by going on, and going out of her way to help others. S2 believes that she has learnt from observing other people in relationships, by continual self reflection, by going to therapy and also keeping a reflective journal.

What complicates the process of trying to make sense of the traumatic experiences? S2 again brought up the issue of remembering and forgetting: remembering only a few things vaguely and then other things very well. This is similar to what M1 referred to about remembering a “fragmented experience” and R1’s difficulty to remember certain episodes of her childhood. S2 also spoke about having horrible memories of her father’s beating her and her trying to escape the beatings. She also remembers her father’s threat of abandoning her in a children’s institute as one of the worst traumatic experiences that she remembers. This remembering of traumatic experiences was mentioned by all the six participants according to their unique circumstances. Furthermore, G1 experienced distressing memory triggers associated with certain words which had pervasive repercussions on her intimate relationships. I think that all these distressing characteristics of traumatic experiences as told by the women who went through them hindered their processing. This is similar to what is explained in the trauma literature.

Despite the traumatic memories, S2 was still open to looking into some of her experiences and reflecting on the impact of her childhood experiences on her relationships. She saw herself as being submissive and justifying other people’s behaviour as the way she was affected by her childhood experiences. She spoke about her acceptance of abusive behaviour in relationships because she feared being abandoned, being left alone. She also thought that not having the experience of a reciprocal, give-and- take relationship did not help her. She also understood her reaction of not hitting back when attacked as a childhood innate reaction to violence, which violence she could not make sense of, as a child. At the same time, she also spoke about retaliating with aggression when sensing abandonment in her intimate relationship and then feeling guilty about what she had done. Out of all the participants interviewed so far, S2 was the most reflexive on her relationships. It
would be interesting to look into more detail at these processes that S2 talked about if they emerged in other women’s interviews. It would also be of interest to me to continue interviewing women who manage or who have managed to understand the impact of their childhood experiences, who have made a difference between these childhood experiences and their own experiences and not repeat the same patterns of managing interpersonal relationships.
Appendix I

Constant Comparison interviews 1 - 9

An Attempt at further analysis: an attempt at further focused coding and axial coding through constant comparison of 12 participants’ transcripts:

1) I attempted to look at possible categories that capture how the participants saw/understood their life at home

I looked through the following focused codes/ or categories:

- Memories of continual fighting – fighting about everything
- Feeling unsafe and having no protection from father’s violence
- I rue bitterly that I am part of this family
- Unpredictability – situation was never safe
- Being hyper-vigilant for mother’s safety
- Lack of protection – everyone for himself
- Living in fear of doing something wrong
- Living in a tense atmosphere with unpredictability – will I find food today?
- Life was hell – no-stability – going back and forth between grandmother’s home, home and residential care
- Thanking God that she is still alive
- Violence did not happen every day and not everyday is the same

I thought that a higher order category that could capture these codes could be:

*Living in danger and with fear - unpredictability in the context of the family: “Violence did not happen every day and not every day was the same”.*
2) Then I looked at the data that talked about the participants’ understanding of their relationship with their father.

These are the focused codes that emerged:

- Being physically abused, emotionally and psychologically abused / Memories of horrible beatings that got worse when mum left home/ being physically and emotionally abused as an adult / Feeling unsafe and having no protection from father’s violence/ most frightened of father’s anger and remembering the fear as an adult
- Witnessing father assaulting mother and becoming this aggressive beast.
- Being stuck in a loop of cut off and estrangement and then reconnecting and cut off and being estranged etc
- Feeling rage/ wishing him dead / feeling guilty of having such feelings/ attempting connection with father’s repentance – experiencing father’s abuse – emotional cut off / feeling guilty ( I wondered whether theoretically this can tie in or parallels the cycle of abuse (Lenore, 1970) which attempts to explain the behaviour of men who batter: tension building – incident- reconciliation/ honeymoon period/ - calm –tension building)
- Good relationship with father as a child that changed drastically in adolescence
- Taking sides against father – most painful
- Maintaining a bond with father whilst feeling rage
- Wanting to maintain a bond with father as an adult but cutting off when father attempted to be domineering
• Trying to leave the past in the past – giving father the opportunity to enjoy his grandchildren

• having a poor relationship with father as an adult/ giving up on changing the relationship as attempts at bettering the relationship were not reciprocated

• Father only getting love from grandchildren and loving grandchildren – redemption through grandchildren – men not being good fathers but being good grandfathers.

In terms of higher order categories, I thought of the following:

_Oscillating (flip-flopping) between attachment and cutting off with helplessness, striving to maintain the attachment bond and feeling rage against father in the context of dissonance with family and cultural norms._

Incidentally in the interview with Sara, the interview before the last, there was a passing reference to a *dissonance within the self* – in the participants’ realization that she has inherited half of the genes from her father so that part of her is/ must be a bit like him. Perhaps this links to be identification process that the girls go through in the context of their family and can be one way of explaining the identification of G1 with her father. Perhaps this was the only way that she could survive in the context of extreme abuse and in the context of a weak attachment with her mother, whom she considered weak too.

_In addition_, I also looked at the process of triangulation in more detail:

It seems that 2 different strategies of triangulation took place in these women’s life:

a) for some, they were involved in the conflict through the active drawing in by the father – for example in G1’s case : being told that she is responsible to decide who is to blame either the father or the mother

b) or involving self to protect mother (and this is found in early childhood) and because
of not tolerating the abuse – (A way of taking a stand against the abuse differing from mother’s position) and this latter process happened mostly in adolescence.

The higher order category would be the following:

**Triangulation into the parental conflict: Being actively drawn in, by one or both parents or involving self, sometimes to protect the mother. Triangulation seems more intense in adolescence.**

The process of triangulation can be seen in its different variations. At one end of the spectrum is the daughter’s identification with the father. In between there is the daughter as the scapegoat of the family, where she is blamed by all the family members in an effort to avoid conflict in the house and the daughter as the communication mediator where family members talk to each other through her. Whilst at the other end of the spectrum, there is the identification of the daughter with the mother and fighting father instead of the mother

**Hypotheses:** If the child has taken on the role of a parent – in some respects a mothering role towards the mother and the siblings, and the more severe the marital conflict in terms of negativity and a feeling of danger, the more there is triangulation and the more the person feels herself in a loop, focusing inwardly in the direction of the family of origin and is able less to focus outwardly to other systems.

If this process of triangulation is intense, the participants feels that her needs are not being met and wants “out” – “wants her life back” but is thrown again into the loop with the next abusive incident towards mother and/or self.

I have attempted to illustrate the above processes in diagram no 7 and 8 below.
One hypothesis is that it is more likely that a person would try “out” in adolescence and this process is shown in the diagram overleaf.
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Further questions:

a) What makes X take a particular role in the family? One participant said that she does not know – perhaps she said, it is because she is the eldest. And that she was always a person that got involved in her family life – so is this about birth order or how a child is raised according to the birth order?

b) Another women did not get involved because she was terrified that she gets hurt and her brother was the one who protected the mother and got involved in the fights. Perhaps too, it depends on the kind of relationship that she has with her mother. The closer that a girl is with her mother, the more likely that she takes a side against the father. On the

c) Also, I don’t know what is the process by which a person decides not to get involved or not to get involved anymore? One participant said that as a child she decided to keep quiet and not get into trouble like her sister. Perhaps if someone takes on the major protective role, it is easier for the other siblings not to get involved. At the same time, what is the process through which one decides not to get involved anymore?

These are questions for future interviews.

3) I also looked at the focused codes when participants talked about their relationships with their siblings:

- Impact of dv on siblings: brother beating sister
- Sibling caught siding with father against mother – triangulation/ difference in sibling’s experience – brother thinks that sister was more protected than he was
- Siblings’ cut-off/ estrangement and then reconnection
- Not feeling close to sibling
- Ferocious anger between siblings
- Close bond between siblings/ alliances between two of the siblings and conflict with eldest sister/ change of sibling relationship in adulthood
• Protecting siblings/ then emotional cut off with brother
• Taking over the parenting role with siblings and running of the house
• Believing that support and love from siblings made the whole difference to her and to her siblings’ survival
• Supportive and loving relationship with sister who took care of her like a second mum

It seems to me that sibling’s relationship is still somewhat underdeveloped. I wonder what can explain the process of how some siblings are and remain closely bonded to each other whilst others are cut off and estranged from each other?

I wonder whether there is a parallel process between what goes in the parental relationship and child- parent relationship that then is mirrored in the siblings’s relationships in some cases.

Also what the role of the mother and father is in terms of supportive the siblings’ relationships or splitting the siblings?

These can be questions for future interviews if this is an area that I will focus on.

**Mother – daughter relationship:**

The following are the focused codes/ categories dealing with the above theme. In addition, below, I also attempted to map these codes according to a developmental framework in the form of a table.

The focused codes/ categories in table 1.0 start from participants who had a loving bond with their mother and descend in the order of difficulty in the relationship between mother and daughter as a result of the mother’s abusive behaviour. I have done this with the aim to try and see contrasting facets of this relationship.

**Sandra**

• Not wanting to leave the safety of mother/ choosing the safety of mum
• Cut-off from all family members/ living alone in the care/ “At the end of the day, I don’t need any of them…each to his own”

• One and off mother-daughter relationship/ mother’s change of mood and violent outbursts/ daughter’s suffering because of emotional cut-off from mother/ Being appreciated by mother for not being angry and not blaming parents for their mistakes

• Parents’ attempt at reconciliation/ Parental communication maintained because of children’s behaviour/ Not wanting or accepting that parents were trying to be friends after so many years of marital separation and violence

What helped daughter have a good relationship with father and mother/ ?? resorting to

taking an analytic role / parentification

Seana

• Relationship with mother: my world revolves around her
• My mum protected me, up to a certain point
• Mum wanting grandfather (husband’s father) to intervene?
• Protecting mother : I don’t want to leave her alone; I am stuck and I want my life back

Rose

• Protective relationship with mother and also ambivalent
• Witnessing violence: sadistic hurting mother through child
• Getting involved / being affected by parents’ fighting “Sometimes I used to get into the middle of the fight

Mary

• Mother silencing her : losing her voice; confused: so what can I talk about
• I cared so much about my mother
Jessica

- Closely bonded with mother/protection of daughter and siblings by mother/continuing bond after her death
- Protecting mother and being hyper-vigilant about her safety/parentification
- Wanting revenge for the loss of her mother
- Remembering and suffering: having traumatic memories of mother’s abuse and her and brother’s abuse, days before and after murder
- Wanting revenge for mother’s death
- Suffering the loss of a mother/dealing with father’s relationship with another woman straight after the murder/echoes of loss of mother in her relationship with her children

Geraldine 1

- Mother’s beating of child different from father
- Mother telling father she had been naughty at school, knowing that she would get a beating
- Seeing mother as weak/wanting mother to stand up to father

Carmen

- Being estranged and cut off from mother after mother’s refusal to leave her abusive husband when daughter left home and went to police station/not speaking to her for 15 years/reluctantly going to see her on her death bed/going to see mother only so as not to feel guilty
- Feeling let down and disappointed by reunion with her mother on death bed/would have liked mother to ask for her forgiveness and to hug her/mother reverting to insulting daughter again/daughter stopping all contact/not wanting to be humiliated and embarrassed in public
• Being brought up by mother, grandfather and aunt who took care of her like a mother/ also going back and forth from her home to a residential home with the birth of each sibling/ feeling a sense of despair when getting to know that she might need to spend time in care because mother was getting married to her boyfriend

• Having an explanation for being placed in care: that mother felt that she could not take care of us.

• Witnessing the physical, sexual and psychological abuse of mother and witnessing mother ‘s husband’s infidelity/ being exposed to adult’s (males and females’) sexual intercourse explicitly in front of mother and daughter/

• Taking over the parenting role with her siblings and the running of the house when mother got pregnant or otherwise indisposed (parentification)

• Asking mother to accompany her to police station and report stepfather together or else go their separate ways/being told by mother to think about her (mother’ s situation) and how much she is going to be beaten-

• Taking a parental role towards mother/ offering to work as the breadwinner if mother leaves the abusive step father.

• Getting no protection or support from mother

• Being unable to understand how her mother was able to take the witness stand against her/ her only explanation was that her mother was cold and heartless/ accepting that her mother was a weak woman

Anita

• Being physically and emotionally abused by mother/ blaming self for abuse, as being a quiet girl who let her mother to vent out on her/ Mother’s abuse worse than father as it was continuous/ suffering the most as one of the eldest siblings in a family of 7.

• Coping with mother’s frequent departure from their home and subsequent increase in father’s drinking/ feeling better when mother left as she was very disorganised and chaotic
• Believing that support and love from siblings made the whole difference to her/ siblings as adults have settled down, despite the suffering that they went through/ eldest sister suffering sexual abuse from father

• Relationship with mother as an adult: giving all the anger back to her/ not forgiving her/ confronting mother with lack of support/ mother not accepting her version of events/ then accepting mother as she is – with resentment and anger/ not being able to remember any conversation with mother.

• Hannah

  • Understands that parents’ relationship is affected by the fact that mother is more successful in her career than father
  
  • Drawing out difference between mother’s and father’s behaviour: mother is warm, sensitive and shows affection whilst father does not show any affection at all
  
  • Loving relationship with mum, who used to show a lot of affection towards her/ Being mother’s confidante but then getting fed up with mother for not leaving father and giving up

  • Begging mother to divorce father

<p>| Table 1.0: Mapping the mother–daughter relationship across participants |
|---|---|---|
| <strong>Child</strong> | <strong>Adolescent</strong> | <strong>Adult</strong> |
| Hannah: Loving relationship with mother | Being mother’s ally/ confidante | Loving mother but wants a different connection – does not want to hear mother talk about fights anymore |
| Sandra Wanting the safety of mother as a child but also was physically and emotionally abused as a child by mother | On and off relationship with mother | Reconciliation |
| Seana | Loves mother and is taken up | “I want my life back” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relationship with Mother</th>
<th>Conflict Description</th>
<th>Current Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protected by mother up to a certain point, by mother’s conflict with father: “my world revolves around her”; daughter urged to respect father despite his abusive behaviour</td>
<td>Rose Good relationship with mother</td>
<td>Fights father instead of mother</td>
<td>Mother still very important but no longer gets into fights with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Good relationship with mother</td>
<td>Fights father instead of mother</td>
<td>Mother still very important but no longer gets into fights with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Daughter closely bonded with mother and siblings; protecting mother from violence, Traumatic loss of mother through murder by father; wanting revenge for mother’s loss; Traumatic memories of mother’s and siblings’ abuse</td>
<td>Continuing bond with dead mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldine 1</td>
<td>Feels unloved by mother; saw mother as weak; used to get angry with mother for not standing up to father</td>
<td>Reconciliation with mother; can see how mother has changed after separation from father</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Feeling betrayed by mother for not protecting her from step-father’s abuse and for choosing to stay with him</td>
<td>Estranged from mother and cut off</td>
<td>Attempts at reconciliation on mother’s death bed; failed attempt; regrets not having had a mother’s love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Being physically and emotionally abused by mother, which was worse than father’s abuse in that it was continuous</td>
<td>On and off relationship with mother</td>
<td>Giving back all the anger; accepting mother as she is but with resentment and anger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following statement is my attempt at higher order category, characterizing this relationship from the daughter’s perspective.

**Expecting mother’s protection from violence and her loyalty against father; feeling betrayed if mother is abusive to daughter leading to emotional cut-off, anger and estrangement together with attempts at reconciliation; when daughter and mother are strongly attached and relationship is not marred by abusive behaviour, even if mother’s protection from violence is up to a certain point, according to daughter, there seems to be a stronger alliance between mother and daughter, that is characterised with attempts by daughter, in adolescence and adulthood to disengage from parents’ marital conflict and from being mother’s confidante/ally to “get her life back”**.
Continuing with the constant comparison process

Understanding relationships with extended family and wider system

I have put together all the focused categories related to the above theme. At the end of this document, I have attempted to come up with some higher order categories (in bold)

Sandra

Understanding relationships in the extended family system and wider systems

- Lack of external support/ Police responses unhelpful
- (Recent) support from extended family
- Losing my grandma- losing my only protection
- Loving and supportive relationship with grandma
- Emotional cut off between grandfather and father (son) and the family

Mary

Understanding relationships in the extended family system and wider systems

- Feeling different from other people: unable to invite other children to the house
- Father’s mother was more important than his family
- Intergenerational patterns of abuse; what gets repeated and what doesn’t

Carmen

- Feeling that she could only partly confide in her aunt about what mother’s husband ‘s abuse
- Having no grandparents who could help
- Having no support from teachers/ feeling unable to confide in anyone in the residential home for fear that mother’s husband would harm her.
• Feeling that she was less than her peers, in the fact that they had a caring mother and she did not

• Missing school for about 2 years in secondary school when mother had another baby

• Going to aunt’s house for safety/ finding support from uncle and aunt/ feeling very much loved by her uncle and aunt/ believing that they loved her so much that they did not want her to get married/ seeing this as a form of selfishness

• Feeling stigmatised and teased at school because she felt labelled as one of the ones with “unknown father”.

• Threatening suicide with police and relatives if they force her to return to mother and step father’s house.

• Feeling distressed at being questioned by the police a number of times and having to face the questioning alone without any support from the relatives

• Policemen taking about 2 months to involve social workers/ contact made only through police’s man personal informal network.

• Discovering that her case was known to the social work agency since she was 7 years old./ unable to remember any social worker’s intervention except for one time/remembering mother made scene and children were not taken away/ would have wanted social workers to take them all away so that they would stop suffering.

• Finding support from social worker to enter into residential care at 16 years of age/ to find employment

• Spending weekends at aunt and uncle whilst living in care/ being supported and protected by uncle from stepfather’s harassment

• Feeling uncle and aunt as intrusive when she started preparing to get married with boyfriend/ understanding their behaviour as coming from their immense love they had for her
• Estrangement between husband and uncle due to uncle’s insulting her husband and not wanting him as her boyfriend/ not understanding her uncle’s behaviour towards her boyfriend/ uncle refusing to walk her down the aisle during her wedding/ feeling wretched as a result of conflict with relatives/ remembering mother’s humiliation and rejection/ not being able to forget their words and actions towards her/ having to change all her wedding arrangements including date

• Choosing to leave her relatives’ house after 9 years due to conflict between boyfriend and uncle and becoming homeless again / finding support from boyfriend’s family

• Involving the police to pick up her belonging from her uncle’s house

• Finding support from her mentors regarding the wedding ceremony

• Dealing with continuing threats from uncle’s side after leaving their house

• Attempting to resume connection with relatives after the birth of the first baby/ rejected by aunt/ then managing a re-connection and maintaining the connection/ not talking about the past/ reaching a compromise with husband over maintaining connection with aunt and uncle

• Having strong feelings about any signs of favouritism amongst her children from parents-in-law/ confronting mother and father-in-law about their favouritism towards sister-in –law/ believes relationship with parents in law got worse when children came along

• Refusing to offer any care of mother-in-law who is suffering from dementia/ Getting on well with father-in-law

• Not having much of a relationship with sister-in-law
Hannah

- Finding support in talking to a good friend but it did not lessen the worry
- Not talking about parental fights with extended family even though they knew/knew what is going on.
- Keeping the family secret: father having a good reputation with the outside world.
- Intergenerational transmission of beliefs about women: “you have to bear the life you were given”
- Intergenerational transmission of violence (through the males- mother’s father and mother’s husband)
- Having a good relationship with grandfather but not disclosing distress about parental fights
- disclosing about parental violence only with a few select people/ feeling that no-one could solve parents’ problems
- Understands keeping violence as a secret as a way of keeping away from “unpleasant” topics/ burying head in sand/

Geraldine 1

- Other’s minimising father’s violence/ fear you couldn’t prove the violence
- Process of silencing / She didn’t disclose for fear of further beatings
- Intergenerational patterns of violence in parenting and couples
- Relationship with grandparents: grandma giving the love the mother could not/ would not give/ feeling peaceful with grandparents/ Also what did they know? What were they told?
- Women told to put up with the beatings because they are lucky to have diligent husbands/ Process of silencing/ women staying
• Connecting with professionals for help: they could not get help soon enough/ father beat mother in front of police/ no legislation; professionals not taking responsibility

• As an adolescent, then found help in therapist and in residential care

• Hypocrisy/blasphesthy/ sacrilege in father’s behaviour: abusive at home, pretending to be humble/gentleman publicly

• Supportive relationship with extended family: aunt used to take her away for the weekend

Anita

• Escaping the chaos and abuse at home by going to grandmother’s but finding sexually abusive grandfather/nowhere is safe/ but feels more able to cope with grandfather’s abuse than with abuse and neglect at home.

• Understanding grandmother’s lack of support through intergenerational transmission of violence: knowing that her grandmother had to deal with her husband as her mother had to deal with her father.

• Feeling inferior to other children/ feeling the worst off than other children/ being neglected – even her physical needs of cleanliness and hygiene

• No memories of any teacher who noticed her or who expressed any concerns in childhood

• No support from home re: schooling/ understands this because father was illiterate.

• Having no connection with paternal grandparents/ some limited support from father’s sibling who was willing to step in for her Holy Communion celebration.

• Professionals: tiptoeing around perpetrator when they came to secure her admittance into residential care/ understanding the professionals being careful of how they approached her violent father/
• Having had many home visits by social workers as a child/ coping with going back and forth from residential care to home when mum left home and then returned.

• Getting support from friends in residential care/ learning how to speak the social workers’ language to convince them to keep her in care

Rose

• Not close with extended family: we meet only in weddings

Seana

Understanding relationships in the extended family system and wider systems

18. Lack of external support/ Police responses unhelpful

19. (Recent) support from extended family

20. Losing my grandma- losing my only protection

21. Loving and supportive relationship with grandma

22. Emotional cut off between grandfather and father (son) and the family

Jessica

1. Support (limited) from mother’s family of origin / no social services

2. No support re father’s violence from his extended family

3. Involvement of father’s extended family in taking care of siblings after murder

4. Cut-off with maternal side of the family as a child/ reconnections as an adult

5. Fighting and dealing with father’s extended family’s denial of mother’s murder and domestic violence and father’s responsibility for it/ Brother pressurised to protect father in Court

6. Having (limited) support from teacher at school.
Higher order categories:

- **Some support to daughter from grandparents: especially the grandmother – the mother’s mother; no support from police**

- **Support to daughter from professionals in the context of school or residential care/ Becoming mentors to daughters in adolescence. Minimizing of violence by professionals/ tiptoeing of professionals around abusive father. Seeking help and giving help is complicated.**

- **All the above happens, in a context of silence, and keeping the violence a secret- out of fear of getting further beatings and out of loyalty and shame, to protect one’s family and one’s reputation “so that others do not know what kind of family you are coming from” and having an understanding of intergenerational transmission of abuse –through the males – could be in both father’s and mother’s family, often an emotional cut off between father and his father and the father’s side of the family.**

- **And in the context of an understanding of intergenerational transmission of beliefs about women: that women need to bear the life that they have with their husbands; that once married, they need to deal with their problems inside the home; that married women should be happy to have diligent husbands, even though they are abusive.**
### Attempt at Axial Coding – Mary

| As an adult, what helped her make sense of her childhood | • Realising that her childhood experiences involved domestic violence only when she ended up working in |
| As an adult, trying to make sense of why there was conflict between her parents as an adult and taking an intergenerational perspective to understand her family Dynamics | • Understanding as an adult that for her father, his mother was more important than his family and this was a huge source of conflict between her parents.  
• Remembering her grandfather — father's father as too being irritable and not tolerating young children running around  
• Understanding with hindsight the period where father was going through his bipolar episodes: where he would talk a lot, spend a lot of money and would be very friendly and then his depressive periods which used to be disastrous where he used to be very irritable and where he would not talk to anyone  
• I did not make sense of what was happening |
| Overwhelmed and confused by what was happening, as a child- my main aim was to protect myself and at times protect my siblings; Making sense of what happened came much, much later, as an adult |  
• I did not make sense of what was happening |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>experiences was realising through working in a DV unit and reading, that what she experienced as a child was what children go through when they experience dv. Making sense of what happened came much, much later, as an adult through studying psychology,</th>
<th>a Domestic violence unit. Before, she saw this as consequences of mental illness. Then it started dawning on her the it was dv.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading about dv and how children experience dv and discovering that this is how she felt and feeling very surprised by this</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding it therapeutic that she worked in DV and reading and studying about DV as she could understand her experiences and hence being able to contain them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling distant from father and losing the relationship</td>
<td>Having a very good relationship with father, always with him; remembering him taking them out for walks, taking her to visit the relatives but the relationship worsened when she grew up and started to understand a bit more what was happening at home</td>
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<td>that she had with father as a child as she started to understand more what was happening at home and siding with the mother against the father</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling safe and secure only with mother and taking her side is almost automatic when father is terrifying and continuously being aggressive</td>
<td>Father was always irritable, anger and one had to be really careful and aware of his mood to see how you had to behave</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Mother was more available to talk, more caring so it is</td>
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</tbody>
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but it is also extremely painful to take sides and losing the relationship with father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural to take the side where you feel more safe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being very afraid of father as he used to be very angry and shout a lot and being preoccupied with his needs only at the exclusion of anyone else's needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remembering very clearly episodes (which she has never talked about with anyone) where he used to shout and hurl insults so it was automatic that you kept your distance from him</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A saving grace for her as a child was that she was able to move away from her parents' fights because they had a big house. Seeking refuge on the terrace and losing herself in her thoughts and imagination and being good at school

| • |

Feeling confused as a child when told by mother to keep what happens in the home a secret and not talk about the fighting at home

| • Remembering saying to herself, "now what are the things that I can talk about and which are the ones that I cannot talk about?"
| • Remembering deciding to not to mention any thing about what happens at home because she cared a lot for her mother and out of loyalty for her |
| Feeling very frightened by the fighting and the intense shouting, the screaming and crying; I never saw my father and mother speak quietly or happy | • Understands this episode as the beginning of when she started to lose her voice  
• Feeling very frightened by the fighting and by the intense shouting and verbal abuse and father hurling things in the house  
• Being beaten by father and also witnessing the physical abuse of brothers |
| Feeling a sense of shame about their house that it was different than that of other people because father neglected doing any maintenance work | • Feeling different than other people: being unable to invite friends over |
| Remembering a home where there was a lot, a lot and a lot of anger; there was a lot of unpredictability and danger | • |
| Remembering the ferocious rage between the siblings, where they would fight and then go and turn each other's room upside down | • |
Witnessing father's physical violence on mother and mother's verbal abuse of father till the present day when she visits the parental home

Seeing very clearly the link between her childhood experiences and the way she looks at relationships having worked on this a lot in therapy

Feeling immersed in trauma: Impact of trauma: you are totally immersed, like being in an underwater world and not knowing that there is a different world "above the water". The trauma is in you

• You would not have the awareness of what you are bringing in into a relationship and you realise this only when you find yourself with the same problems again and you can only say these things with hindsight only.
APPENDIX N

Theoretical Coding
Childhood experiences of love, terror and violence: extreme contradictions as a context for understanding adult development and adult relationships
Re: relationship with father Growing up in the shadow of a violent father: admiration, fear and retaliation

**Having good memories of a good relationship with father** as a child which changed as she grew older and started to understand what is happening more at home, rebelling and becoming aggressive towards him (Rose, Mary), standing up to him as a teenager and noting the same pattern in brother.

**Remembering mother’s terror** of father and always being controlled and coerced by him (Seana, Jessica, Claire, Donna)

**Imitating father in nearly everything as a young child** (G)

**Witnessing very frightening scenes of power and control by father on mother** and father being violent on himself and on things and feeling very distressed as a child (Claire, Ger, Sara, Rose, Mary, Donna)

**Not having any relationship with father** – “we came last for him in the list of priorities” (Sara)

**Hypocrisy/blasphemy/sacrilege in father’s behaviour**: abusive at home and pretending to be humble/a gentleman publicly (G, Seana)

**Being horrified and suffering at witnessing her father’s physical and verbal violence on siblings** (Sara, Jessica, Marika, Donna)
Continually yo-yoing between wanting to reconnect with father and being let down and cutting-off in instances when the abuse is still going on;
(Seana, Marika)

Suffering multiple abuse by mother (Tori) or father and/or getting hurt by father whilst abusing mother
Anita, G, Rose, Sandra

Wishing that father is dead as a child (Seana, Rose, Farrah, Hannah) and then feeling guilty for wishing so (Seana), whilst acknowledging or “understanding” her father’s aggression on her as discipline (Farrah)
Re: relationship with mother

Taking sides with mother but it is painful to lose relationship with father
Mary

Remembering being constantly worried for mother who was suffering under father’s hardship (G, Donna, Rose) and feeling like she was grown up and that nothing could scare her (Jess)

An on and off relationship with mother – relationship is very good but then is stunned by mother’s unpredictable violent outbursts
(Sandra)

Being raised to believe that her mother was weak and ignorant
(G)

Remembering mother’s terror of father and always being controlled and coerced by him
(Seana, Jessica, Claire)

Understanding mother not seeking help from her family of origin to protect them from father’s violence
(Jessica)

Continually battling denial/ minimization and justification of violence by mother (Seana, Marika, Donna) and/or by extended family (Jessica, Sara) with a lot of anger and frustration

Loving relationship with mum who tried to make up for father’s violence by being present for her children - Jessica

Perceiving Mother’s smacking not as abusive as that of father as it was tempered with a lot of care from mother
(Claire)
Protecting mother and taking care of her (Jessica, Rose, Marika) after realizing that her mother is psychologically weak (Donna, Ger) but feeling frustrated and angry with mother’s helplessness and fear to stand up against father’s abuse or for refusing to leave him - and then putting a stop to being mother’s confidante

Loving/ protecting mother but feeling betrayed/ outraged by mother:

- when she does not side with her or when she tells father of her misbehavior and father ends up harshly abusing her (G)
- when mother pressures her not to press charges against father (Marika)
- when mother takes witness stands against daughter (Carmen)
- when she did not protect her from father because mother was always afraid of father (Seana, Carmen)
- when she continually covers up for father and how abusive he was (Donna)
The sibling relationships:

- As a child, feeling responsible for younger siblings and instinctually trying to protect them all the time and noticing its impact on the sibling and sibling relationship (G, Anita, Carmen, Mary, Donna)
- Being protected by eldest sibling (Sara, Hannah) and sibling coming to her rescue (Farrah)
- When growing up, cutting off from brother to cope with hurt and anger in the relationship (G)
- Strongly bonded – her only source of support (A, Jessica, Sara) but feeling misunderstood by the other siblings who were not exposed to the violence that she had been exposed to (Claire)
- Ferocious rage between siblings (M),
- Remembering siblings’ distress as a result of being physically and psychologically abused by father (Donna)
- Siblings taking father’s side against mother – because they didn’t see the violence she witnessed against mother (Seana)
- Siblings taking mother’s side against father (Mary, Claire)
- Sibling closely bonded with mother and fighting all the time with her (Claire)
- Witnessing the same sister being mother’s protector and not being able to focus on her own life. (Claire)
- Witnessing siblings’ abuse by father (Seana) and experiencing it as a form of silencing (Hannah)
- Never talking about what was happening with siblings – it was something that we could not discuss between us (Jessica)
- Feeling angry at siblings’ helplessness and lack of rebellion against father and his partner, like she was rebelling (Jessica)
- Noticing that sister is more able than her to challenge father (Claire)

As a child, not being able to make sense of parents’ fighting and of father’s violence towards her and her mother (Ger, Mary, Seana, Rose, Jessica)

As a young girl feeling overwhelmed and definitely not knowing what to do (Rose), feeling confused as to how best to behave (Mary) – my main aim was to protect myself and my siblings (Mary)

Worrying for herself, who is going to take care of her, when mother is sent away by father (G) or when mother is sick (Donna)

Living in hell: a carer for father and her siblings whilst being emotionally and physically abused by father as a young adult (Jessica)
Feeling humiliated, angry, betrayed and blamed for being beaten by father, by police and not finding any support from them; (Seana)
No support from police – mother beaten in police station by father (Ger,

My childhood - an ugly past, full of violence and beatings (Marika)

Feeling very frightened by the unpredictability and the continual fighting, intense shouting, screaming and anger (Mary)

Blaming self and feeling that she was the one who created most trouble as she got beaten the most (Sara, Hannah)

Being distressed by conflict between mother and father’s extended family which was a source of parental conflict (Sara, Mary)

As a child, anger and resentment at lack of family-wide acknowledgement of the suffering and abuse that she has gone through (Carmen,

Grandparents and relatives as a secure base (G, with limitations (A, Seana, Marika) and good friends, mentors in residential care (G) and boyfriend (Seana) and extended family and being let down too (Carmen)
Finding no support from social workers as there were none in the late 70’s and 80’s (Jessica)

As an adolescent, feeling let down by social workers when discovering that they knew about her family situation and did not intervene throughout her childhood years

Feeling ostracized by peers at school because of her troubled family background, despite some support from teachers (Sandra)

Re: professionals: showing a happy face and being cautious what to disclose because she feared social workers would take her away from her mother and she feared mother’s anger too (Sandra)

Not finding support from shelters as they did not accept older children (Donna, Jessica)

Despite the number of professionals involved with her father, no one realised that there was DV going on (Donna, Carmen)
Triangulation: Being involved in parental conflict – thought that this was normal, not sure why she was the one asked to intervene (G) MORE COMPLETE IN HIGHER CATEGORY SECTION

being triangled in Putting oneself in witnessing siblings taking
father against sides with mother
the conflict (G)

By parents (G)

• As a way of getting control of the violence; (Ger)
• Not being scared to get in the middle of a fight (Ger, Marika)
• Protecting mother at the cost of being beaten herself (marika)
• Feeling hurt by continuing divided loyalties between siblings, and alliances between siblings and a parent
• against another sibling and another parent (seana)
• Very difficult not to get involved but getting involved makes the fighting worse and makes her feel distressed and angry (Rose)

Parentification : acting as a parent to one’s parents and one’s siblings (Jessica, Donna, Ger, )
(Link to whether you protect or are protected by siblings)

Rebelling at the fact that her parents were trying to get along during her O levels exams – this was too strange for her (Sandra)

Coping with exposure to violence:

• Not every day was the same; (Ger)
• Losing oneself in the house (Mary)
• Being protected by siblings or protecting your siblings (Mary, Ger, Sara, Jessica,
(to think about in discussion)
• We can never be a normal family – we were never a normal family but we coped (Seana)
• The danger did not end with separation: being exposed to father almost killing mother as a child (Sandra)

Entrance and exits from the family system:

• Suicide of brother (Sara)
• Murder of mother by father (Jessica)
• Father leaving the house (Sara, Donna)
• Father sending mother away (G)
• Father being sent to prison or admitted to Psychiatric hospital (Jessica, Marika, Donna)
• Children living like nomads from one house to another when father was in prison (Jessica)
• Children being admitted into residential care
Living immersed in violence as a child and growing adult: Extreme coping and extreme consequences in the midst of some support.

Kept the violence secret:
- For fear of reprisal (Seana, Ger, Jessica, Carmen, Tori, Donna)
- For fear of being judged by others for not having a good family (Hannah, Marika)
- Out of embarrassment, shame and anger towards father (Seana, Marika) – why me? What did I do to deserve this? (Seana)
- Out of being ashamed of having such a family (Hannah)
- Out of loyalty to the family (Hannah, Marika)

Taking a stand against her step father through court on her own and remembering feeling very distressed (Carmen)

Wanting to take control and wanting to be involved in everything that happened in the family (Marika)

Numbing and shutting out emotions (G.,)

Sad and suffering bullying at school from peers (Seana, Ger, Rose, Sabrina)

Ferocious rage between siblings (Mary,)

Worrying about siblings’ well being and about her basic needs (Marika, Mary, Seana, Jessica, Sara, Carmen, Donna)

Marrying young to escape the violence, going out as a form of escape (Sara, Jessica,)

Shame: that there is violence in her family (Seana, Mary)
Postponing own dreams, surviving means escaping from home  
(Jessica, Sara, Seana)

Feeling so alone, feeling like she had no one to talk to and nowhere to go because she was terrified and scared (Anita, Carmen), except for support of teachers (Rose, Sandra) and to some trusted professionals (Tori)

Postponing own dreams, surviving means escaping from home  
(Jessica, Sara, Seana)

Wondering what she has done to deserve so much suffering? (Carmen)

Feeling distressed as a child because of being exposed to the continual fights of parents, by the intensity of the negativity and because of not receiving love from father (Hannah, Donna)

Losing herself in her thoughts and imagination and moving away from the fighting in a big house or playing outside (Mary, Donna)

Praying to God for deliverance from father (Jessica)

Finding support from extended family but having to fight for it at great length (Carmen)

Cutting off relationships with father and siblings to cope with overwhelming emotions and so as not to appear that she is taking sides with one parent (Seana, Ger, Sara, Tori)

Keeping quiet about her needs, feelings and wants out of loyalty to her family (Seana, Jessica) And also rebelling and seeking revenge for the loss of her mother, (Jessica); Protesting where she has some power – refusing to call her step father daddy (Carmen)

Coping through immersing herself in schooling and studying and coping through having a special rel with teacher; forgetting one’s sadness (Jessica, Donna, Mary, Marika, Donna)

Witnessing siblings’ entanglement in parents’ refer to triangulation box
Coping with traumatic experiences with defiance – you did not break me as much as you wanted to;
(Seana, Jessica,

Finding support, a sense of achievement and joy through hobbies and sport in secondary school
(Rose, Donna)

Connecting well with teachers in secondary school and finding psychological support
(Rose, Donna, Jessica)

Recurrent yearning and longing as a child for a different life than the one that she was living
(Jessica)

School as a source of self esteem and a reason to continue living in the midst of adversity; also a source of revenge against those who did not support her in her suffering
(Jessica, Donna Marika)
Amidst all the family turmoil, having a deep ambition to prove to herself that she can achieve academically (Sandra)

Feeling neglected, with no one to take care of her, unless she does the things for herself; feeling like you were just a number to your parents (A, Sandra, Carmen)

You missed your childhood and adolescence
- A sense of security (Mary)
- A sense of belonging (Mary)
- A sense of being seen for who you are
- Doing certain things that everyone else does as a child (Seana)
- To have fun and not having to be responsible for one’s father and siblings (Jessica)
- The opportunity to continue studying beyond secondary education (Jessica, Sara)

Seeking help finally from a teacher at school but not knowing what made her speak out against the abuse (Donna, Rose and Sandra)
Processes or Turning points that help bring about change and/or foster resilience

Understanding violence as losing control (Sandra)

“Trying to move the mountain”: the value of therapy:
• Challenging the way you behave in relationships (Ger)
• How to manage conflict differently (Mary)
• Therapy experienced as very very supportive (Jessica)

Bringing things out in the open and discussing

Feeling humiliated, angry, betrayed and blamed for being beaten by father, by police and not finding any support from them; (Seana)
No support from police – mother beaten in police station by father (Ger,)

as an adult, needing to observe other women and learn how to sit, talk and walk like a woman - which was very embarrassing (G)

Connecting with professionals for help but left it up to her to decide what action should be taken, in the context of no child protection services and no dv legislation (G,)
Seeking help from professionals but trusting them very slowly (Marika)

Change from being influenced by family/social expectations to giving priority to what is important to her as a person (Ger, Sara, Jessica)
Developmental Processes that help bring about change throughout the life span and foster resilience

1. Growing older, rebelling and becoming physically and verbally aggressive towards the abusive parent as a way to stop the violence – Being angry and using anger to take a stand against father’s abuse and abuse from others

2. Holding firm against father’s abuse by keeping in mind that he was not going to change, by withstanding pressure from mother to give in to father and by withstanding cultural discourse/ pressure related to daughtering about honouring your father at all costs.

3. Feeling validated by family members to be mother’s champion

4. Protecting mother and siblings out of a sense of fighting injustice

5. Bringing things out in the open, slowly, and cautiously and discussing change.

6. Change happening through feedback, through observation of others and by social comparison in the context of social support, (someone to challenge the way that you behave in relationships and to do it differently) including psychological therapy (therapy gives you the ABC but then you need to continue)

7. The naming process: recognizing with shock that one’s childhood experiences are those experienced by children living in families with violence / Labelling as abuse any such behaviours as early as possible
8. Support and validation from others at different stages in one’s life

9. Exits and Entrances into the family system as Turning points: Sibling’s suicide, father moving out of the house, reaching her limit in being able to take more abuse and deciding to escape from home and seek help from police; being admitted into residential care: feeling safe and loved; father going to prison;

10. The importance of fighting the helplessness by seeking help and taking one small step at a time

11. Becoming a parent and reflecting: making sense of her childhood and what she went through

12. Focusing on self-awareness and taking on opportunities for self-growth (studying psychology reading literature about women who lived in desperate circumstances, alternative therapies); taking a pro-active approach instead of a victim position; becoming aware of contradictions within herself

13. Personal growth and change in the older parent

14. The most important thing is to be loved as this is how she was then able to show love

15. Re-positioning oneself differently with one’s parents from the position of daughter to adult
Adult women with childhood experiences of violence: Legacies of traumatic experiences, survival, learning, transformation and resilience – a context for understanding self, relationships with family members, with intimate partners and with one’s children

Making sense of what happened in her family as a child came later, as an adult (Mary)

It is painful and shaming to talk about the experience of witnessing violence and being abused (Mary)

Intergenerationally, the importance of knowing who and where you have come from re: biological father (Carmen)

As an adult, it was important to develop a sense of identity different from mother/father - as an another way of making sure that there would not be the same repetition of abusive patterns; determined to be happy in her life (Seana, Hannah, Marika) (Carmen, Donna, Sandra, Hannah)  Higher order ??

Realising that her childhood experiences influenced her career choice which was made fuelled by her anger and her need to give something back (Donna)

Believing that the impact of her childhood experiences are never-ending and will continue to affect her for the rest of her life (Donna, Hannah)

Going through changes from being strong and angry to coming in touch with her vulnerable side (Donna)
As an individual adult

Fears that she has inherited or learned an aggressive personality style (Marika, Rose, Sara)

Experiencing great distress and wanting to end it all (Ger, Seana, Rose, Tori)

Having a problem with expressing feelings as an adult except for angry, and linking it how she was brought up as a child not to be in touch with what is going on at home/Blocking out feelings and emotions to cope, feeling completely emotionally numb (G, Sara, Tori)

The pervasive impact of violence: it affected everything! (Rose)

Traumatic memory trigger – freezing with fear when hearing the same words that used to be uttered by father before a sadistic, cruel beating and experiencing flashbacks with boyfriend / Seeing father is a memory trigger (G, Seana, Sara)

Remembering as an adult and suffering: the vivid traumatic memories of witnessing her mother’s beatings and her being beaten and feeling that her memories are shameful and hard to believe that they are part of a reality, remembering when seeing father and feeling down (Seana, Jessica, Sara)

Cutting off from father to cope with overwhelming emotions (Sara, Marika)

Losing hope and wishing she were dead but then changing her mind and finding meaning in life (Seana)

Coping with not sleeping well, ruminations and despair with the help of work (Seana)

Suffering from psychological pain – “that I am good for nothing” – worse than physical pain (Seana, Rose)

Taking up studying to stop her brain from thinking about her husband’s murder

The understanding of family relationships of love and abuse came later in life and with help (Jessica, Ger, Seana, Mary, Rose)

As an adult, acknowledging that it was very difficult for her as a child to stop the abuse on her and on her mother (Seana, Ger,
“A life stolen by violence:
• Sadness, anger and feelings of anguish for not having stood up to her father’s abuse earlier and then her life back (Seana)
• Anger and the unfairness and injustice of having lost her childhood and her mother (Jessica) and making a link between her rage and her marital difficulties ‘
• Anger and a sense of unfairness of not having a family, esp the support of a mother and feeling that she is alone in the world; all that she has is through sheer effort (Carmen)

Persistent flashbacks of seeing her mother being beaten and thinking that she is crazy (Jessica)
As an adult daughter in relation to her family

The continued persistence and intensity of family systems triangulation:

- Continues to get involved in In family of origin (Jessica, Ger, Seana, Sara) (Sara: realizing that mum might be interested to reconcile with father and threatening her that she would leave from hom)
- And in her own nuclear family (Jessica) (But participant does not make connection between f-o- o triangulation and triangulation in nuclear family)
- Getting involved in a coalition between mother and siblings against father whilst also stating that she is withdrawing from her family (Claire)
- Continually monitoring the status of parental relationship – and getting angry at mother who is still hopeful that she and husband will re-unite (Tori, Sara, Donna)

Losses as a result of parentification:

- Losing the sibing relationship
- She cannot relax with her family
- Losing being physically cared for by her mother

Ambivalent relationship with mother: Feelings of anger and sadness around mother’s lack of protection of her as a child, and also being burdened with having to protect her and also acknowledging the support that mother wants to give her now, whilst wanting/ needing to protect her from father (Seana, Donna, Marika); whilst trying to re-position herself as a daughter to her mother rather than a parent to her mother

Worrying about the long term difficulties of living in a house where there is violence on herself, her sisters and her mother (Marika)

Not being able to understand why father is violent with her (Seana)

Resuming contact with extended family relatives which had been cut off (Jessica, Carmen, Tori)

Wanting to retain connection with her father through her children, for the benefit of all the parties concerned and to compensate for the loss she experienced as a child (Jessica)

Seeing father is a memory trigger and she cuts off all contact with him; having no relationship with father – the less she sees of him the better (Sara, Donna)

Ambivalent relationship with mother: Feelings of anger and sadness around mother’s lack of protection of her as a child, and also being burdened with having to protect her and also acknowledging the support that mother wants to give her now, whilst wanting/ needing to protect her from father (Seana, Donna, Marika); whilst trying to re-position herself as a daughter to her mother rather than a parent to her mother

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Seeing father is a memory trigger and she cuts off all contact with him; having no relationship with father – the less she sees of him the better (Sara, Donna)
Protecting mother and protecting siblings but feeling frustrated and angry with mother’s helplessness and fear to stand up against father’s abuse or for refusing to leave him/ or for not breaking all connection with him- (Marika, Hannah, Donna, Seana) in both cases, violence has continued

Feeling that it was her duty to reconnect with her father after cut-off from him when he became seriously ill (Sandra)

Feeling happy for her mother as seeing her transformation and at seeing her get her life back after she left her father (Ger)

Anger and resentment at lack of family-wide acknowledgement of the suffering and abuse that she has gone through (Carmen, Jessica, Seana – to some extent)

Using minimization language – like – being taken over by something, blanking out and not taking responsibility for the violence (Marika, Farrah, Rose)

Being aggressive in one’s intimate relationships, with one’s siblings and with one’s children (Ger, Sandra, Rose, Marika)

As an adult, now that she has processed what she went through, she can understand her parents’ mistakes (Tori) and has reconnected with her mother (Sandra)

Experiencing forgiving her father as a profound spiritual experience; not knowing how it came about and also wondering whether she was going mad! (G)
Sibling relationships in adulthood

- the continued significance of early family of origin roles (Jessica, Donna)
- sisters cutting off communication with father (Marika)
- Perceiving her sister’s unhappiness and feelings of shame as a result of situation at home (Donna, Marika) and worrying about her sister’s well-being and long term effects of being exposed to violence
- Feeling let down by sister for not supporting her taking a stand against father (Marika)
- Having been a carer for sister, she cannot relate to her as a sister
- Never talking about their childhood experiences – afraid of becoming emotionally distressed (Donna)
- Still taking care of sisters even as an adult
- Youngest sister being abused by middle sister (Donna)
- Siblings having different positions wrt to father: oldest sister still trying to work out her relationship with father; middle sister feels it is her duty to maintain contact; youngest sister – uses contact with father to get material things;

Siblings having different positions wrt to father:

- Oldest sister still trying to work out her relationship with father (Donna)
- Middle sister feels it is her duty to maintain contact (Donna)
- Youngest sister uses contact with father to get material things (Donna)

Feeling wonderful with the renewed relationship with her father; feeling validated by him and respected for who she is and not needing to be different to get his approval (G, Farrah, Sandra)

Meeting father and noting with surprise how much he had aged and how fragile he is (Ger); felt the need to connect with father when he became very ill (Sandra)

Acknowledging as an adult, that she loved her father a lot and regrets that he is unable to see what she has managed to achieve in her life (Farrah)

Reconciliation with father: when she perceived him as trying to understand her, when he acknowledged his mistake and was genuinely sorry (Farrah, Sandra)

Shifting back and forth between her conscience and doing what is true to her needs and beliefs – with regards to keeping a connection with her father; acknowledging her yearning for a connection with father but knows in reality that she cannot afford to have a relationship with him so far (Donna, Seana)

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As a partner in an intimate relationship

Having the need to be always right in her relationships and being aggressive (Ger, Rose) as an echo of how father was in control over her and everything in her family of origin (Ger, Needing to keep herself in check continuously so that she does not engage in these power struggles (Ger)

Difficulty in trusting that others will be there for you and finding it difficult to accept that she would be in need of help as an adult (Donna, Seana, Rose)

Relationships with men/boys: thanks to my father, I ended up hating men (Rose, Donna); not having a good role model of a functioning male in her family but then enjoying the company of boys later on in life

ReL with boyfriend/partner: feeling supported but not always understood and doubting herself – am I relationship material? (Seana)
Believing that no one can really understand you even the man who loves you (Carmen): social isolation in an emotional world.

Struggling between wanting to focus on her own life but feeling guilty when doing this, and drawn feeling responsible/protective of others e.g. mother (Seana), children (Jessica) (Jessica, Seana, Ger)

Keeping her mouth shut with abusive husband for the benefit of son (Jessica)
Not having the awareness of what you are bringing into a relationship – you realize this only when you find yourself with the same problems again (Mary)

Looking at men as inferior – always trying to manipulate a man, like she did with her father; afraid that a man would only use her for sex (Sandra)

Wanting and having a corrective emotional/relationship script – wanting to find a completely different man to her father and marrying that kind of man (Claire, Hannah)

The impact of a supportive intimate relationship: from being very angry and very aggressive to being able to being calmer and being able to show her emotions more, despite being vigilant about how boyfriend behaves (Marika)

Feeling joyless, un-validated and unloved in marriage and finding support from another man (Jessica)

Feeling distressed at telling boyfriend her story fearing that she will be stigmatized because of her family background Carmen, Marika

Experiencing memory triggers of father’s violence when hearing some of her husband’s words or seeing husband quarrel with her son, and becoming afraid but then managing to appraise them as not serious because of the context of a loving relationship with husband (Sara) (Jessica)

Feeling happy with husband and never regretted that she married; feeling understood and not blamed and getting support about her childhood experiences (Carmen, Anita, Hannah)
As a parent to her children

Survival tactics in childhood like aggressiveness and rebelliousness make adult relationship hard; always struggling to manage her bad temper and feel unable to talk about what bothers her in rel. (G, Rose, Marika)

Feeling very scared when experiencing echoes of family of origin experiences in her own marital relationship/ intimate relationship (Hannah, Donna)

Feeling so upset that although not wanting to replicate parents’ story, she found herself in similar circumstances (Mary, Sandra)

Keeping the violence in the family of origin a secret from her husband because she is ashamed of it (Claire)
As a parent to her children

Not knowing how and what to tell her children about her childhood experiences of violence because they are still overwhelming and/or to protect the children (Jessica, Carmen, Sara)

Living her childhood through her children

Determined that her children will have a different life than the one that she had. Being very protective, doing everything for them; determined that her daughter will be a happy child and not burdened by adult problems, believing that raising her children well is her priority in life. (Jessica, Carmen, Claire, Farrah)

Intergenerational pattern of children being exposed to their parents' violence and mother being very distressed about this and sensitive to the children's position. (Jessica)

Not knowing how and what to tell her children about her childhood experiences of violence because they are still overwhelming and/or to protect the children. (Jessica, Carmen, Sara)

Determined that her children will have a different life than the one that she had. Being very protective, doing everything for them; determined that her daughter will be a happy child and not burdened by adult problems, believing that raising her children well is her priority in life. (Jessica, Carmen, Claire, Farrah)

In adulthood, remembering more and more her childhood experiences as a result of becoming a parent; having a 6 year old daughter and understanding the different emotions that she felt and witnessed as a child. (Claire)

Afraid of replicating parental script in abusing children if she is also unhappy in her marriage like her mother; taking up dominant discourse in Psychology - having been abused, therefore I will be abusive. (Tori, Farrah)

Believing that despite the violence with her daughter, her daughter appreciates her care. (Farrah)

Afraid of replicating parental script in abusing children if she is also unhappy in her marriage like her mother; taking up dominant discourse in Psychology - having been abused, therefore I will be abusive. (Tori, Farrah)
The process of resilience: learning, surviving and transformation

Active prevention of harmful parental scripts / adamant not to repeat history/ motivated to have a different life (Seana, Rose) for her and for her children; determined to be happy in her life (Claire, Marika)

What to look for in a man (Sara); deciding to make partner choice with her head instead of with her heart (Claire)

Active prevention of parental scripts / not to repeat history/ motivated to have a different life (Seana, Rose) for her and for her children; determined to be happy in her life (Claire, Marika)

Helping others and feeling useful and good with herself (Seana)

Learning about non-abusive relationships and how to look after oneself (Sandra, Ger, Tori); learning about her being capable of loving someone, with the development of a same sex relationship (Sandra, Rose); Learning what it is like to be part of a family (Carmen)

Shifting of beliefs about women: that they should be downtrodden to beliefs about equality, with the help of her grandmother/ not taking on the beliefs that women are submissive, that have been transmitted intergenerationally (G, Sara, Hannah)

Learning about non-abusive relationships and how to look after oneself (Sandra, Ger, Tori); learning about her being capable of loving someone, with the development of a same sex relationship (Sandra, Rose); Learning what it is like to be part of a family (Carmen)

Experiencing a memory trigger and realizing that she needs to make a difference between her past and present relationships; Talking about her memory trigger with boyfriend (Ger)

Support and validation from others at different stages in her life; investing in your life e.g. mentors, professionals Anita, Carmen

Appreciating her self-awareness and taking on opportunities for self-growth; values a proactive approach instead of that of a victim (Ger, Anita, Ger)

Experiencing a memory trigger and realizing that she needs to make a difference between her past and present relationships; Talking about her memory trigger with boyfriend (Ger)

Feeling courageous and strong to keep on going in the face of adversity but being unable to say what helps her to be courageous and to seek help and continue to persevere and move on. (Ger, Marika, Sandra/Donna) wanting to become stronger and not feeling guilty for things she’s not responsible for (Seana)

Strength comes out of own suffering and that of her mother (Jessica) finding the positive from adversity; feeling proud of herself that she has made it, despite the adversity; (Seana, Marika, Ger, Sara)

Feeling courageous and strong to keep on going in the face of adversity but being unable to say what helps her to be courageous and to seek help and continue to persevere and move on. (Ger, Marika, Sandra/Donna) wanting to become stronger and not feeling guilty for things she’s not responsible for (Seana)
Aspirational scripts:
- Looking forward to the future
- Promises to herself whilst growing up to raise her family in the best way possible (Seana, Sara, Donna)
- When you are rock bottom, you will then rise to the top (Seana) and the lower you are, the more courage you will have to rise again,
- This is your life – unless you take care of it, nobody else will (Seana)
- Believing that everything passes (Sara)
- Looking forward to the future (Sara)
- Always believing that she can have a better life than her family members have had (Donna)
- Believes in an inner innate force that helps her to be resilient (Ger, Donna)

Coping with traumatic experiences with defiance – and feeling powerful -you did not break me as much as you wanted to; (Seana, Jessica, Donna) Jessica links to to hyperstage as a child

Reflections on parenting and not repeating the script:
- That parents should not blame their children for their marital conflict
- Parents should respect their children’s views
- That you make your children feel comfortable so that they can communicate

Making up for lost childhood and adolescence: taking up studying and going out with friends (Sara, Farrah)

Experiencing forgiving her father as a profound spiritual experience; not knowing how it came about and also wondering whether she was going mad! (Ger)

Becoming aware of contradictions with herself: her rebellious part and her need to please others; Deciding to give importance to what she thinks is right for her (Ger, Jessica)
Living in Hell: the terror in childhood

- Living in dread, with sadness and feeling lonely (Rose, Ger)
- Having no one to talk to (Anita, Rose)
- Feeling continually afraid and constantly pre-occupied including at night, that father will kill mother. (G, Jessica)
- Living with unpredictability (A, Seana, Jessica)
- Constantly seeking protection
- Feeling confused and not understanding what is going on between her parents (G, Seana)
- Feeling neglected (G, Sandra, Seana, Carmen, Anita)
- Having to be a carer for siblings and father in the context of continual verbal abuse by father (Jessica)
- Being sadistically beaten and exposed to violence towards mother (Sara, Carmen), violence, that is maximally designed to hurt people; also being exposed to other women having sex with step father in the house, all this whilst he is sober and in full mental capacity (Carmen)

Extreme coping

Extreme consequences

Triangulation

Parentification

Always searching and longing for a proper “mummy and “daddy” – now and in the past; a wish to be acknowledged, comforted by a parental figure (Mary, Carmen, Marika, Donna)

Seeing your parents fight will always affect your life (Hannah, Ger, Jessica, Donna)

Feedback, observation and social comparison in the context of social support.
Impact of normative and cultural expectations on women and men re: family dynamics and abuse:
- Pressure to respect and forgive father/ or to forgive and forget- (Sara) influence of church
- Married women should stay put
- Married women should be happy to be married to diligent husbands. (Ger)
- Pressure to keep the family together (Ger)
- Men are more powerful than women and always get what they want (Claire)
- That sexual abuse is more damaging than physical and emotional abuse and exposure to violence (Sara)
- That women are more capable than men of being partners and parents (Sara)
- That women should have jobs that are socially appropriate for women acc. to father (Farrah)
- Father gave more importance to his sons as future breadwinners than to his daughter (Farrah)
- That children should always keep contact with their father (Donna)
- The common assumption that abused children will end up abusing their children

When violence goes outside the family, that’s when help gets mobilized but still not a lot happens

You cannot understand the impact of violence in families
- without understanding the family context and
- without taking into account the stresses and the strains that the families goes through (apart from the violence)
- The legacy of intergenerational shame on nuclear family and extended family
- The legacy of intergenerational violence (Hannah, Marika, Claire, Donna)
- Secrets and shame – another context for violence to thrive (Ger, Claire, Farrah, Hannah)
Fear of (her or her siblings) replicating the parental scripts of abuse and active prevention of harmful Parental/relationship script (Sara, Claire, Marika, Hannah, Sandra, Tori, Donna, Mary)

Life events and family life cycle changes: the passage of time

Limited disclosure of abuse to trusted adults and professionals as a child, and who provided limited or no support

Kept the violence secret:
- For fear of reprisal (Seana, Ger, Jessica, Carmen)
- For fear of being judged by others for not having a good family (Hannah, Marika)
- Out of embarrassment, shame and anger towards father (Seana, Marika) – why me? What did I do to deserve this? (Seana)
- Out of being ashamed of having such a family (Hannah)
- Out of loyalty to the family (Hannah, Marika)
- For fear of being taken away from the mother who was physically abusing her (Sandra)
- For fear that her boyfriend will leave her or his family will not accept her (Carmen)

Different cultural and professional discourses that come in the way of children seeking help and adults giving help:
- The fear that professionals will take children away from their parents
- The belief that “whatever happens in the home, should remain in the home”
- The belief that if you get involved in family affairs, you end up in a worse place than before
- Only family members know exactly what is going on in the family
- No one should break the family apart
Looking back as an adult trying to make sense of:

- Why there was violence in the family (Jessica, Seana, Anita, Claire, Sara, Hannah)
- Why their mother stayed with their father (Seana, G, Claire, Sara, Marika, Hannah, Donna)
- Their parents’ family of origin background and how they fit as a couple (G, Jessica, Claire, Seana, Mary, Hannah, Donna)
- Why her mother did not speak up about her difficulties in her marriage (G, Jessica, Seana)
- Why mother did not protect her children (Marika, Seana, Donna)
- Why her father wanted her to be Judge and come out with a verdict as to who was right, either him or her mother (G)
- Why she used to side with her father and think that her mother was weak and ignorant (G)
- How bullying her mother to accept what father was saying so that they stop fighting, made her more submissive (G)
- One’s childhood experiences and naming these as dv experiences (Mary, Sandra)
- Why father was violent after discovering the secret of father’s childhood experiences of abuse by his own father (Seana)/ after discovering that father was cruel to his siblings too (Sara)
- Why father abused her (Sandra, Ger,

**Triangulation:** Being involved in parental conflict – thought that this was normal, not sure why she was the one asked to intervene (G):

- Being triangulated with by parents/ putting oneself in the conflict/ witnessing siblings taking sides with father against mother
  - Having to deal with emotional pressure from father when daughter actively showed him that she was taking mother’s side (Marika, Donna, Sara)
  - As a way of getting control of the violence; (Ger, Marika)
  - Not being scared to get in the middle of a fight (Ger, Marika)
  - Protecting mother at the cost of being beaten herself (marika, Farrah, Ger, Hannah, Jessica, Donna)
  - Feeling hurt by continuing divided loyalties between siblings, and alliances between siblings and a parent (Seana)
  - Very difficult not to get involved but getting involved makes the fighting worse and makes her feel distressed and angry (Rose, Donna)
  - Experiencing crossed-generational coalition - getting to know information from mother that is usually only known to couple sub system (Claire)
  - Taking the place of brother in defending mother after her brother died and being the leader amongst her siblings to get back to father (Sara)
  - Noticing her younger brother’s use of violence towards father to protect mother (Sara)
  - Taking sides is almost automatic when father is terrifying and feeling safe and secure only with mother (Mary)
  - Believes that she is the most courageous of her siblings and it is her role to get involved in her parents’ fights (Marika)
  - Father enlisting her “help” as a 3 year old to get to know information about mother and child feeling very distressed about it (Donna)
**Tensions/ contradictions/ dilemmas/ double binds, distortions and extremes**

- Extreme suffering and finding positive from adversity
- Angry with herself and not having stood up to her father’s abuse earlier and acknowledging that as a child, it was very difficult to stop the abuse
- Confused at seeing mother very frightened of father yet full of love towards him (Seana)
- Memories of a happy childhood vs not remembering when her childhood but remembering feeling very lonely, and feeling very bad – “I rue the day that I became part of this family” (Rose)
- Seeing herself as feisty, defiant and fearless and trapped in a cage, having to fit to others’ wishes and denying her wishes (Jessica)
- Being terrified of father and admiring him a lot (Ger)
- Cut off and connection (Ger, Seana, Jessica, Anita, )
- As an adult, getting involved in a coalition with mother and siblings against father whilst also withdrawing from family of origin (Claire)
- Repetition of love and aggression with own daughter (Farrah)
- Wanting to protect mother and also to be protected by her (Donna, Marika)
- Being afraid of mother but wanting to live with her and not father, as a young child (Sandra); being afraid of mother and wanting to protect her (Sandra)
- Describing relationship with mother as good and then talking about having to cope with unpredictable and frightening violent outbursts (Sandra)
- Murderous rage against father for beating her and understanding his beating her as disciplining her.
- Being convinced that her father would have been a better child minder to her daughter than her mother when he was so violent with her whilst growing up (Farrah)