

**Silent screams:
A study on the journey of abused women**

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Table of contents

Table of contents	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
<i>Silent screams</i>	ix
Chapter one	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition:	3
Personal narrative:	5
The mission of the research:	7
Chapter two: Literature review	9
Women abuse.....	9
To stay or leave.....	12
Children witness violence and interventions	14
Parenting challenges as single mother:	15
Chapter three: Methodology and Method	19
Methodology	19
Origin of the ecological perspective—Family Systems Theory	19
Through a feminist lens	22
Method	24
A qualitative approach: In-depth interviewing.....	24
Selecting the participants	27
Data analysis.....	28
Ethics.....	30
Chapter four: Jennifer’s story.....	31
Interviewing Jennifer:	31
Jennifer lived with an abuser	34
Jennifer’s decision to leave.....	45
Life in shelters	47
Jennifer moved on	53
Chapter five: Maria’s story.....	60
Interviewing Maria	60
Maria lived with an abuser.....	61
The decision to leave.....	68
Life in shelters	70
Moving on.....	74

Chapter six: Agnes' story	85
Interviews with Agnes.....	85
Living with the abuser.....	88
The decision of leaving.....	92
Life in shelters	96
Moving on.....	103
Chapter seven: Discussion.....	108
Living in an abusive relationship.....	108
The decision to leave.....	110
Life in shelters	111
After shelters.....	111
Moving on.....	113
Chapter eight: Implications, recommendations, and reflections.....	115
Implications for counseling.....	115
Individual.....	115
Institutions	118
Societal.....	119
Recommendations: Face the problem.....	119
Personal change.....	119
Institutional change.....	120
Societal changes.....	121
Research suggestions.....	122
Reflections	123
Bee House.....	126
References	127
Appendix I: Consent Form.....	137
Appendix II	139
Appendix III.....	140
Appendix IV.....	141
Types of abuse	141
Physical.....	141
Sexual.....	141
Verbal.....	141
Financial/economic.....	142
Emotional/psychological	142
Social.....	143

ABSTRACT

This study examines the life history of three abused women who are also mothers. The study is dedicated to advocacy for women and provides a channel for the readers to understand the lives of the abused women and their children. This study will explore the process of living in, as well as leaving the abusive relationship. The research will document the complex steps through which women pass as they make positive changes in their lives. The voices of three abused survivors speak to this issue through in-depth interviews.

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As I reflect on all the supports I have received while writing this thesis, I wish to conclude that this thesis is a joint effort of a whole community of people who care about the society, the community, the individuals, and especially the ill-treated women.

Silent screams

***The voice of violence
Never changing through the years
The voice that cries for
All the hits and tears
--Silent screams***

***The voice that stresses
And twists with all the pain,
The voice that is muted
By the thunder and the rain
--Silent screams***

***The voice that weeps for help
That loon can seem to hear
The voice that yells for safety
From all the things it fears
--Silent screams***

***The voice that needs to be heard
Yet not knowing how to speak
The voice that needs to find
The freedom that it seeks
--Silent screams***

***A voice that needs to tell
The violence it harbors
A voice that will go public
And will be silent no more***

--A resident of second stage housing--

Chapter one

Introduction

This study examines the life history of abused women who are mothers as well. The study is dedicated to advocacy for women and provides a channel for the readers to understand the lives of the abused women and their children. This study will explore the process of living in as well as leaving the abusive relationship. The research will document the complex steps through which women pass as they make positive changes in their lives. The voices of three abused survivors speak to this issue through in-depth interviews.

The study will validate their journey from being victims to survivors. They survive in spite of instability, and that is their triumph! They are on their way “to just be me” (a poem, Freedom, a resident of a second stage housing). To gain this freedom, the abused women must find the courage to speak truthfully about their experience, to be heard, and to be acknowledged in the public domain.

Another objective of this study is to open up a dialogue between feminist and non-feminist researchers. The third objective is to derive recommendations for policy concerning support for abused women and their children.

In Cermak’s forward (as cited in Somers, 1992), he stated, “the universal human impulse is to deny abuse, whether you perpetrated it or suffered it. But the price of silence and denial is far too great” (p.25). Remaining silent is precisely what the perpetrators of abuse want their victims to do, for they know that something is wrong and they are terrified. Therefore, “when we promote silence, we continue the trauma” that the victims come to believe, “I am bad for wanting to speak” (p.26).

Abuse happens in different forms such as physical, sexual, verbal, financial/economic,

emotional/psychological and social abuse (Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of women, 1997). Since the three participants of this study suffered mainly verbal, financial/economic, social and emotional abuse, we will explore these forms of abuse in detail.

This study will also explore the transformation process as the women struggle with the experience of abuse and its aftermath. The study provides a chance for three women to talk about their lives as mothers before, during and after abuse. Talking about the abuse may enable them to recognize and reconstruct the events that preceded their escape. At the same time, through this study, the researcher and the reader will understand the changes of the family dynamics from the mothers' perspective during the transition. The mothers will describe their children's emotional, social and physical responses after encountering domestic abuse, directly or indirectly. How does witnessing domestic violence affect their children?

Lastly, Evans (1988) states that it is a difficult time for women to re-experience their painful past but, hopefully, the healing will happen for "it gets worse before it gets better"(p.175). For this reason, I encourage you to read on. You may not have been treated in exactly the same abusive way. But, however you were treated, you may feel the way these women felt at the hands of such abuse. If the personal stories here strike a chord, then this study will have served its purpose. The therapeutic process has begun for any abused women who are interviewed or just only reading the study. The agency counselors may also gain deeper insight into the families in women's shelters after reading this study.

During the last five months, I spent many hours with each participant collecting data. I experienced a whole gamut of emotions. At times, I wept with them because the emotions were so raw. It was painful going over and over all the feelings, the fear, and the heartache that comes from revealing the truth about oneself and those who one loved the most. It takes

a lot of courage. The participants were generous enough to go public with their innermost thoughts and feelings because they recognized that, by sharing, others might be led out of their suffering and despair.

I thank all the participants in this study for sharing so openly and honestly. They welcomed me into their homes and shared their private lives. This study belongs to them and I appreciate their trust in me to tell their stories. We hope that, together, we can impact change, provide a deeper understanding of abuse, and make a contribution.

I am grateful to all who participated in this study. I have tried, wherever possible, to preserve the language the participants themselves used to describe reactions, feelings, and emotions.

Definition:

1. *Abuse*: Webster's Dictionary defines abuse as: to use badly or wrongly; to ill-treat, injure; to call (somebody) foul names.
2. *Women Abuse*: Any behavior that is designed to control and subjugate women through the use of fear, humiliation, and verbal and physical assaults (Engel, 1990). According to a working definition of a Boston counseling program for men who batter: "Violence is an act that causes the victim to do something she does not want to do, or causes her to be afraid." Further on they note "violence need not involve physical contact with the victim, since intimidating acts like punching walls, verbal threats, and psychological abuse can achieve the same results... Yelling, swearing, sulking, and angry accusation" is violence if it coerces or frightens another person (Adams, 1988, p. 191-192). Abuse also includes sexual abuse, economic deprivation, and social battering (Duffy & Momirov, 1997). Abuse exists in all communities and cuts across all socio-economic, ethno-cultural, and religious lines.

3. *Emotional/psychological abuse*: The same Boston counselling program defines it as “behavior that directly undermines... self-determination or self-esteem,” and becomes “particularly powerful” when added on physical violence (Adams, 1988, p. 191-192). It includes any behavior or interaction between individuals that intimidates the victim and makes her afraid. The abuser can be playing mind games, not telling her what he is doing, lying, or ignoring her. He may walk away from a discussion and refuses to deal with issues. He may put her down and talk about her faults.
4. *Sexual abuse*: Any sexual activity/behaviour perpetuated by the abuser without her consent, for his own sexual gratification. It threatens her sense of personal safety and her sense of self-worth. Sexual abuse includes sexual put downs, comparing her sexually to others, all the way to forcing certain positions or forcing her to have sex (rape).
5. *Financial/economic abuse*: It is when the abuser exerts control over the victim by creating financial dependency on him and/or financial hardship that limits her options. He may control her by not paying the bills and refusing to give her money for groceries and clothing. He may also forbid her to work outside the home or take her money or her pay cheque. She is not allowed to take part in any financial decisions.
6. *Social abuse*: Any behaviour that causes public embarrassment and/or social isolation. The abuser may make a scene in public embarrassing her in front of her children, her family or her friends. Social abuse occurs when he does not let her see her friends or is rude to her friends. He may be nice to others but changes his personality when with her. He does not take responsibility for the children or turns her children against her. He compares her unfavorably with other women and denies her feelings.

A detail description of emotional/psychological, sexual, financial/economic and social

abuse is listed in Appendix iv.

7. *Witnessing domestic violence*: It must include "multiple ways in which a child is exposed to adult domestic violence, including directly viewing the violence, hearing it, being used as a tool of the perpetrator, and experiencing the aftermath of violence" (Edleson, 1999. p. 844).

Personal narrative:

From my childhood experience, a Chinese cultured view of parenting and nine years teaching as a resource teacher, I have developed a passion for helping abused families. I want to fully understand their needs, challenges and sorrow in order to provide the appropriate support for them. Furthermore, through my effort, hopefully some abused children, or the children who witness abuse, will break the intergenerational cycle. Lastly, I wish I could lead the abused families to experience some hope.

As I reflected on my childhood experience, verbal abuse was the normal way of communication that my father used until three years before his death. I cannot remember if my father and I had any meaningful conversations except when he was struggling with kidney disease.

I would usually hide under the table when my father was using sticks or belts to punish his children. One day, he even held a cleaver in his hand and chased my sister as he yelled that he was going to kill her. As a ten-year-old girl, I blocked him so that my sister had time to run away from him. Miraculously, he did not hurt me instead but, my sister did not come home until I found her in the corner of the stairs late at night.

My mother and father also had countless fights. Although I never saw any physical fights, I heard a lot of frightening arguments. I hated my father at that time. My father was a police officer and he reminded us that his aiming skill was very good. He successfully

scared us badly at all times especially when he came home with a long and angry face.

There were many days that my mother had no money to buy food for a family of eight. My elder brothers and sisters told me that, sometimes, they did not even have shoes to wear to school in the deep winter. We suffered economic hardship for at least fifteen years due to my father's gambling addiction.

Due to my personal experience with childhood abuse and hardship, I feel that I have greater understanding of the abused families. With God's grace, my mother pulled through those painful years. God also gave me hope and helped me to rewrite my life's script so that I was able to break the intergenerational cycle. My mother's family of origin, as well as the people of the church helped us by providing food, money and prayers. I was, and am, very grateful for their support. I feel that I needed to help the abused families in return for both God's and others' kindnesses. I also hoped that I could be a model to other abuse victims who broke the cycle.

I was a resource teacher in a preschool for nine years. I helped many nonverbal students to articulate their feelings. Almost half of my special needs students were from abused and broken families. In my opinion, the delay in cognitive and social skills experienced by these students may not have been due to biological reasons but rather environmental problems. Although I really wanted to assist them, their academic demand was so great that I did not have enough time to address the real problems. It was heart breaking to witness so many students walking out of my classroom with shattered emotions and wounded spirits.

The mothers of these children generally had a lot of emotional pain and faced economic difficulties. The medical professionals sometimes told them that they were inadequate parents. What a double jeopardy life! What they needed were people who could

understand them and genuinely support them.

As I am a counselor of many abused families in second stage women housing, I want to be effective and helpful. In order to do this, I chose to find out from the experiences of women about the phenomenon of woman abuse, parenting issues within violent homes and the process of decision-making about staying or leaving.

The mission of the research:

I am a veteran of abuse. Women and children have an absolute right to live free from any form of abuse such as physical, sexual, verbal, financial, social and emotional abuse. What are their rights? The highlight of the Declaration of Rights, which is written by Nova Scotia Advisory council on the Status of Women (1997), is as follow:

I am not the cause of my abuser's abusive behavior.

I have the right to feel safe.

I do not like or want to be abused. I do not have to take it.

I have the right to raise my children in safety

I can make changes in my life if I want to.

I recommend that you read the full declaration of rights from appendix-III since it is “the right that ought to be self evident but that is seldom acknowledged at all” (Jones, 1994, p.5).

From the statistics of a transition home survey of Canada, 75% of abused women were admitted with children. Almost half of these children were under five years old. Furthermore, almost 25% of these women revealed that they were protecting their children from psychological abuse (Statistics Canada, 1992/93). How do the women handle abusive relationships and, at the same time, parent the toddlers? How hard must it be for abused women to take care of youngsters anywhere from age one to five when that person is

homeless? In order to fully understand the hardship of the mothers' lives, this thesis is devoted to describe their lives and challenges.

Reviewing the lives of these children is another mission of this study. Very little research addresses the context of children's lives. Children may observe the abuse directly by seeing their father (or another intimate partner of their mother) threaten or shout at their mother. From the mother's perspective, how did their children respond to the act of abuse that was directed to their mother by their role-model, their father?

Thirdly, from my personal knowledge as well as Schechter's research (1982), organizations that shelter and support abused women and children find it harder and harder to find funding when the policy-makers and the general public have not read the personal accounts of the lives of the abused women and mother of children who were abused or witnessed abuse. Through reading this study, the police, courts, hospitals and social service agencies may even change their view that "the victims' behavior is crazy and provocative"(p.27).

Chapter two: Literature review

Women abuse

With the contemporary women's movement, women abuse came out of the closet in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Canada (Duffy & Momirov, 1997). In 1978, Macleod's social research showed that about 15,000 women across Canada stayed in transition houses each year. In addition, an estimated 12,000 women requested assistance from transition houses but did not stay there (MacLeod, 1980). By 1985, 42,000 women were accommodated at the 230 shelters across Canada and almost every shelter had no more room to accommodate them, so they needed to turn a large number of women away (MacLeod, 1987). In her research, she also found that there was no way of knowing how many abused women were unable, or unwilling, to contact a shelter or how many are able to use other forms of escape from a violent relationship.

The fact sheet on Woman abuse reveals that, 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner (Nova Scotia Family Violence Prevention Initiative, 1999). In Nova Scotia, there are approximately 1,000 women and 850 children using the province's ten transition houses. Through the crisis lines, 18,000 women have asked for help. The women abuse is one of the most prevalent social phenomena of this century.

I plan to explore the situation through the ecological perspective that is explained in detail in chapter three. Women abuse is a complex situation that has nested social and psychological factors that exert direct and indirect influence on the women's behavior. It is important to study the context. Edleson and Tolman (1992) cite the overlapping systems to explain intimate violent behavior. The individuals' personal history and their construct are

overlapped with the interaction of the family, friendship, workplace, and other personal networks (Microsystems). When looking at the meso-system, the abused women's social environment, the family system, the history of those networks and the meaning they make of them are inter-related. The larger community, the society and cultural blueprint also directly or indirectly interact with the women.

The women's emotional, physical, behavioral, interpersonal and cognitive strengths and limitations are the factors at the ontogenetic level. There are numerous variables that are potentially important to examine. Low self-esteem, disability, unemployment, dependency and pregnancy are the negative variables that may put women in a vulnerable position. Holly (1996) adds that, the more women hold the traditional beliefs and attitudes, the greater the probability that they will be abused. The traditional women believe that they need to depend on their husband. They stay at home and raise children while their husbands work as breadwinners.

From an ecological perspective, the women may be involved in numerous personal networks, at the center of which may be the abusive partner. If a male is under 25 years of age in a common-law relationship, his income is less than \$15,000, he has less education than high school and is unemployed with addiction problems and an abused victim himself in childhood, then he is prone to become an abuser (Holly, 1996).

Another important network for the women are the children. Children's responses to witnessing their mother being abused by their father will vary according to their age, sex, stage of development and role in the family (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990). The extent and frequency of the violence, the repeated separations and moves, along with economic and social disadvantages are other factors that affect their responses. Hart and Brassard (1987) found that infants who are raised in an environment of wife abuse might have their basic

need for attachment to their mother significantly disrupted. Routines around sleeping and feeding may become far from normal. Clearly, the infant will recognize this distance and the lack of availability of his or her principal caretaker. Subsequently, shame is developed and rooted beneath the cerebral cortex mechanisms (Cook, 1991). Cook also states that insecure attachment and high levels of internalized shame is a predisposing factor for the later development of addiction such as alcoholism.

In a wider ecological network, the extended family, friendship circles, workplace networks, neighborhood or community groups, and religious groups are networks in which the abused women may interact. The minimal interaction in, or even isolation from, the network is one of the tactics of the abuser to dominate and possess the victims (Holly, 1996). Social networks play a major role in supporting abused women most of the time. According to the number seven issue of Newsletter of Family Violence Prevention Initiative (1998), 44 % of women that are abused in relationships go to their friends and families for support.

At the meso-level, the policies and procedures that govern law enforcement, prosecutor's offices, courts, hospital emergency departments and child welfare agencies are contributing to the women's lives, directly or indirectly. When Zorza (1995) comments on the enforcement of protection orders, she states, "all protective orders are useless unless the police, prosecutor, judge, and entire criminal justice system enforce them" (p. 162). She also points out that the cooperation of the social service system and women's advocacy groups is needed as well, in order to end the cycle of violence.

The societal and cultural blueprint plays an important role in the abused women's experience. In general, the society accepts violence against women in mainstream culture "as portrayed in court decisions, the media, entertainment, advertising" (Edleson & Eisikovits, 1996, p.117). The historic tradition of women as men's property, both literally

and figuratively, has influenced society. It is unacceptable to go outside the family to tell someone the family problem. Everybody needs to treat the family problem as a secret. If the woman internalized all the culturally sanctioned blueprints for her life, these blueprints may become obstacles to her escaping from the abuse. Furthermore, the social system tends to blame the mothers for being dysfunctional parents who neglect to protect their children (Peled, 1996).

To stay or leave

According to Choice (1997), the decision of staying or leaving the abusive relationship in general is based on the resources and barriers at a personal and/or structural level. The women perceive themselves as having no control over their circumstances although they desire a harmonious relationship. When they decide to leave and start to look for jobs, apartments and/or affordable child-care, they may come across a lot of disappointment and barriers. These setbacks may lead them to question whether they still think they can leave the relationship and whether leaving is worth further efforts. The structural resources for leaving may take the form of money, education, employment, and the availability of a domestic violence shelter or friends to stay with. Furthermore, ineffective assistance from social service agencies and the legal bond of marriage may also serve as other structural barriers

There are few empirical studies on abused women's stay/leave decisions, although the question "why does she stay?" is familiar. Strube (1988) has summarized four theoretical approaches suggested by different theorists: 1) the theory of learned helplessness, 2) psychological entrapment, 3) reasoned action and/or planned behavior, and 4) the investment model.

First, according to Walker (1978), the theory of learned helplessness is a cognitive

deficit that leads to an affective deficit or depressive state that further feeds into the women's motivational deficit. Second, Brockner and Rubin (1985) suggest the psychological entrapment theory. According to this theory, the women have invested so much time, energy and emotional involvement to attain the goal of a congenial and nonviolent relationship that it becomes too much to quit. At this point, they feel entrapped.

The third theory is the reasoned action/planned behavior approach (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen & Madden, 1986). The women will leave their relationship if they can project a positive outcome, along with the positive regard of significant individuals, such as their mothers. These women need to perceive that leaving is within their control.

The last theory is the investment theory (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) in which the women look at their satisfaction, quality of alternatives and irretrievable investments in their relationship in order to decide if they should abandon their years of emotional, physical and/or economic investment.

Choice (1997) examines these four theories and suggests that the women, in general, will ask themselves "Will I be better off" if I leave the current relationship. They also will question if they can handle their, and their children's, lives successfully without their partner. Strube and Barbour (1983) note that the abused women report having remained in their relationship for the sake of the children, believing that staying would, in some way, benefit their children and family life. Studies show that, when the women find the costs of staying become too severe, such as endangerment of their children, they will leave the abusive relationship (Hilton, 1992; Pfouts, 1978; Snyder & Fruchtman, 1981). It may constitute a last-straw event or turning point that serves as the impetus for women to decide to leave (Rosen & Stith, 1995).

When the women decide to stay/leave, they strongly consider the resources and economic factors. Abused women's unemployment has been associated with staying in or returning to, an abusive relationship (Choice, 1997). Community resources are needed for the abused women. Receiving ineffective assistance may serve as structural barriers that limit abused women beliefs in their ability to leave their relationships (Bowker & Maurer, 1987). "the abused women who have a solid base of personal and structural resources available to them, and few barriers to overcome, will likely feel in control of their circumstances and believe they can leave their relationships successfully" (Choice, p.306).

Children witness violence and interventions

From Edleson's (1999) point of view, there are three major types of problems that are associated with witnessing domestic violence. The first is behavioral and emotional functioning, and the second is cognitive functioning and attitudes. A third category of associated problems cuts across the other two and provides evidence of longer-term development issues for child witnesses. Silvern, Karly and Landis stated "parental spouse abuse remained significantly associated with poor adult adjustment even after the effects of child abuse were statistically eliminated" (1995, p. 45).

From the perspective of the learning theory model (Deblinger, Mcleer, & Henry, 1990), witnessing wife abuse presents children with an unconditioned aversive stimulus, which induces painful emotions. In the trauma experience, many stimuli such as sights, sounds, location, or thoughts and feelings, associate with the conditioned aversive stimuli. In their daily lives, victims are confronted regularly with many conditioned stimuli that can evoke distress (Peled, Jaffe, & Edleson, 1995).

Fantuzzo, DePaola, Lamber, Martino, Anderson, et al. (1991) found that child witnesses of domestic violence exhibit more aggressive and antisocial as well as, fearful

and inhibited behavior. They also show lower social competence than other children do. Furthermore, children who witness violence are found to show more anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, and temperament problems than children who do not witness violence at home (Marker, Kemmelmeier, & Peterson, 1998).

Psychological trauma often relates to witnessing threats or violence against others (Figley, 1985). According to Silvern and Kaersvang (1989), witnessing abuse of the mother by another caretaker is one well suited to the traumatic stressors that traumatize children.

Parenting challenges as single mother:

In the introduction of her book, Arent (1993) comments on parents as the managers of children. They make an endless number of decisions. Some children will applaud their parents' decision while others will bring on protests, big and small, loud and soft. As parents, their influence is powerful, their caring is essential, their rewards are both questionable and great (Arent, 1993). Raising stable and healthy children in unstable times demands great efforts. The parents' role as family manager is very crucial and challenging.

If parenting in a healthy family that consists of a father, a mother and children, is very challenging, how challenging will it be when the family has only a mother and children? As Arent (1993) suggests, the divorcing spouses need to provide stability to their children. Are there any reasonable and workable ways for divorcing spouses to provide stability to their children especially when the reason for divorcing is that the father abuses the mother? The children of the family that is going through divorce are prone to display depression, anger, loss of concentration, confusion and fear of commitment (Arent, 1993). How can an abused woman help her children to heal when she is badly injured physically, emotionally and spiritually?

Scarcity of financial resources is one of the parenting challenges. As Arent talks about

money and homelessness, she states, "those who cannot afford to buy, who are entrenched in marginal economic survival, are devastated by fear, bitterness, sorrow, and jealousy" (1993, p.188). In a study of 492 court-ordered records, Rettig, Christensen, and Dahl (1991) found that the court-ordered awards met only 58% of the children's income needs when measured against poverty-level support. In Nova Scotia, a single mother with a child lives \$6,987 below the Low Income Cut Off (Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card, 1999). According to the report, female-headed one-parent families continue to experience the highest rate of child poverty in Nova Scotia.

Deprivation of living accommodations is closely related to scarcity of financial resources. Without a home, it is a grim battle to keep the children's bodies and spirits alive. It is a constant struggle to ward off illness, anger, and depression for a female-headed one-parent family (Kozol, 1989)

Domestic abuse poses significant parenting challenges for both victim/survivors and abusers. Henderson and Hilton state that many abused women are almost in an impossible situation where, on the one hand, their emotional and physical resources are depleted while, on the other, they are aware of their children's growing needs for support following their exposure to the violence (Henderson, 1990; Hilton, 1992). Since they feel that they are losing control of their relationship with their partner, the abuser, child rearing may be one of the few things the abused women may perceive themselves as having control over.

In order to support the women's survival process, building upon their perception of child rearing, Hughes and Marshall (1995) suggest that parenting counselors need to handle the parenting intervention with respect, be empowering, and be acknowledging of their struggle. Bilinkoff (1995) also advises the parenting counselors to address issues of using power and control, making up for the absent father, using the children as confidants or allies,

and dealing with their perception of her children's similarity to their father. Mathew (1995) then suggests that parenting counselors help the women to expand their knowledge of child development. The women also need to work on the shame, the ability to have empathy for their children's experience of the abuse and the commitment to nonviolent parenting.

Children's feelings and thoughts about their abusive parent are an important focus for intervention and children need to be allowed to express them in a nonjudgmental environment (Peled, 1996). Wile (1924) suggests, "The child is not the problem. The solution to their difficulties is only attainable through a modification of the social milieu" (p. 473). They need the society to know it is not their fault.

Peled (1996) comments on reaching out to children through school programs and media publicity for prevention purposes. The school programs usually include one or more strategies such as affective education, skills education, values education, family life education and/or violence education. These programs may help children to discover that many others share their experiences and there are people who can help them and their parents. Raising awareness and empowering all students to respond to violence in their community, and in their own lives, possibly represents one of the most effective actions a community can take to reduce the incidence of violence (Sudermann, Jaffe, & Hastings, 1995).

The children also need to lessen their feelings of loneliness and shame. Therapeutic intervention to meet their needs will set up a group for them, facilitate children's discussions of their experiences with violence, and expose them to books and movies whose protagonists are children of battered women (Peled & Davis, 1995).

After examining the literature on the phenomenon of women abuse and children witnesses of violence, the leaving or staying issue, the parenting challenges of mothers who

are abused, and the interventions for the children, I agree with Stark and Flitcraft's (1988) suggestion. According to them, empowering the abused women is the best means to prevent the cycle of abuse. Although we cannot assume that all abused women are potentially good mothers, and that empowering them is the best way to protect children, we need to avoid the common injustice that happens when we hold abused women solely responsible for their children's well being and protection (Peled, 1996).

Chapter three: Methodology and Method

Methodology

According to Neuman (1997), research methodology is “what makes social science scientific”(p.60). In choosing particular philosophical assumptions and methodological approaches, social researchers gain knowledge about social phenomena. I have chosen an ecological perspective and feminist methodology to study the journeys of three abused women. Because the journey of each woman is inseparable from her surroundings, I show their experiences by adopting an ecological perspective. Since techniques and practices of feminist research give authority to the voice of women, this study also illuminates of the power imbalance between males and females in some families. This authority of voice is one of the reasons I chose a feminist methodology for my study. Another reason is that feminist research values subjectivity and personal experience. Thirdly, I concur with the argument of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) that women learn and express themselves differently than men. Fourthly, the purpose of this study is to improve the lives of women abuse survivors who are mothers.

Origin of the ecological perspective—Family Systems Theory

The ecological perspective is derived from Family Systems Theory (Fine, 1990). Family Systems Theory is rooted in both General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) and Cybernetics (Ashby, 1961). While General Systems Theory is based on the biological system, Cybernetics focuses on the mechanisms that keep a system in a dynamically balanced state. The contribution of General Systems Theory enhances Cybernetics, and *vice versa*. Gradually, these two theories merged to create Family Systems Theory (Fine, 1990).

“Wholeness” and “hierarchy” are the two basic characteristics in Family Systems

Theory. “Wholeness” means that a system cannot be understood when broken into its component parts. It also means that a change in one part of the system will stimulate change in other parts.

“Hierarchy” refers to the hierarchical subsystems of which each family is composed—generally, the parental, sibling, and marital subsystems (Minuchin, 1974). According to Melson (1980), these healthy subsystems live together intimately and have long-term reciprocal relationships. Each family member is viewed as a purposeful, open, equal, information-exchanging and resource-transforming system.

The ecological perspective helps to illustrate the function of the family system. A spider web symbolizes the ecological system of the earth. All the threads making up a system are interconnected, and the action of any one part affects all the other parts. Similarly, the actions of an individual create crucial effects on the environment. In this study, the family lives of the three participants are like spiders’ webs. Every thread has an essential relationship to every other thread. A disturbance in one part creates a ripple effect in another part. Since the abusers create disturbances, the women and the children suffer from the ripple effect of abuse. According to Family Systems Theory, a system may be defined as “an entity with component parts or units that may be constrained by or dependent on the state of other units” (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1980).

Bronfenbrenner (1976) has described four different levels of analysis from the ecological perspective. First, the *microsystem* is an immediate setting containing the individuals who engage in specific activities as part of their roles during specified times. On the micro level, this study will show how abusive men affected women. Second, the *mesosystem* captures the idea that there is continual interaction between and across the various system levels. Third, the *exosystem* refers to the broader environment in which the

microsystems are embedded—example, the neighbourhood or the social welfare systems—which indirectly affects the development of the family members. Fourth, the *macrosystem* refers to the overarching political ideologies, cultural traditions, and social values which characterize a particular culture and which often articulate through social policy. In this study, I have researched the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem of the three women. Each system is linked to the others in terms of mutual influence.

From the ecological perspective, “the family is a goal-seeking, purposive, adaptive system and focuses on the processes by which family violence occurs and is maintained” (Steinmetz, 1987, p.748). In order to unlock the dynamics of violent interpersonal relationships in the family, communication may be the crucial factor to examine. When the couples do not engage in “a mutually assertive type of communicating, egalitarian leadership, successful negotiation, positive and negative feedback loops, role sharing and role making, and rule making with few implicit rules and more explicit rules” (Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1983, p.63), then family violence may occur. Although Systems theorists have focused almost exclusively on positive communication, this study acknowledges the negative feedback loop between the abusers and the women.

Systems theorists tend to view people as equal participants in human relationships. However, men have been granted more power within society and the family (Fine, 1990). For this reason, it is appropriate to look at the journeys of the abused women, not only from an ecological perspective, but also through a feminist lens. The interpretation of the interaction between a husband and wife needs to acknowledge and account for the possibility of a power imbalance. If the power imbalance is ignored, women will continue to be treated unfairly.

Through a feminist lens

Through a feminist lens, women's experiences are valued. This means that women's experiences need to be incorporated into the ongoing research process (Tomm, 1989). Feminist researchers "use multiple research techniques. Feminist methodology attempts to give a voice to women and to correct the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science" (Neuman, 1997, p.80). The philosophy behind feminist research is that women learn and express themselves differently than men.

The women's movement has influenced feminist research immensely. Women struggled for the right to be educated in the first wave of the women's movement in the United States. McCormack (1989) pointed out that "liberation from sexist knowledge was equated with a liberation from liberal social science and its logic" (p.13). Smith (1974) said that "the women's movement has given us a sense of our right to have women's interests represented in sociology, rather than just receiving as authoritative the interests traditionally represented in a sociology put together by men" (p.7). During the first wave, there were small workshops, lectures and articles in newsletters that advocated a feminist research approach versus the "authoritative and traditional" (Smith, p.7) research approach. At first it was like an underground movement, but soon many women became innovative in their approach to research. Later, politically active feminist researchers received more attention as they carefully deconstructed old myths and reconstructed new social and political structures (Hanan, 1989).

In the so-called second wave of the women's movement, women strove for additional educational goals, such as the right to criticize the accepted body of knowledge. Feminist scholars argued that quantitative research, the dominant mode for undertaking research, inhibited a sociological understanding of women's experiences (Maynard, 1994). Women

were struggling to obtain the right to create knowledge and the right to be educators and educational administrators (Reinharz, 1992).

In this study, I emphasized the process-oriented, empathetic, humanistic and inclusive sides of the women's social lives. I used conversational interviewing in order to create empathic connections between the participants and myself. As Neuman (1997) states, "feminist researchers are not objective or detached; they interact and collaborate with the people they study. They fuse their personal and professional lives" (p.81). This statement concisely describes the methodological approach that I practised in this study.

I believe that research on the abuse of women has political and personal consequences. I also believe that researchers will come to a better understanding of the problems when they realize the problems are a result of prestige, funding, findings and feelings. A great deal of the prestige status can be traced to the privileged position of positivism and masculinity in our culture. Research that provides hard data is the most highly regarded in the intellectual tradition of this society.

As I study different methodologies, I am aware of the tension between feminist and non-feminists researchers. I agree with Yllo's (1988) argument that "the tensions, hostilities, and sometimes open conflicts can also be counterproductive, especially when the many sides stop talking and listening to one another" (p.29). Hostilities do not achieve anything except the creation of another power struggle. My hope is to encourage dialogue between feminists and non-feminists through this study.

I investigated the phenomenon of abuse with an interactive approach and assumed the findings were transactional and subjective. The "soft/feminist" paradigm was employed instead of the collection of "hard/masculinist" data (Yllo, 1988, p. 34). The lives of the women who had been abused were not numerically coded. Data were collected through

in-depth, in-person discussions with women about their lives and the abuse. Since the interviews were not rigidly structured, the women were able to bring in information that they felt was helpful in making sense of what had happened to them. The connection I felt to the women could not be simulated by the computer or represented by statistics. Moreover, this subjective comprehension did not hinder my research; rather, it was an important component of my analysis (Yllo 1988). I expanded rather than limited the inquiry and went where the women led me.

Method

A qualitative approach: In-depth interviewing

Spradley stated the reasons for using in-depth interviewing:

I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them.

Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley, 1979, p. 34)

In this study, I relied on a qualitative research format to explore the experience of women while they were in abusive relationships and afterwards. As Kvale (1996) explains, “the qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge” (p.2). By talking with the three women, I explored how they understood their world and their life. This research used semi-structured, in-depth interviews because I was interested in the stories of the women as mothers of children who witnessed abuse. As in Kvale’s “miner” metaphors, I dug data or “meanings out of a subject’s pure experiences, unpolluted by any leading question” (p.3). The valuable facts and meanings are “purified by transcribing them from the oral to the written mode” (p.3).

According to Watkins (1985), the root of the word “story” is the Greek word “history,”

and it means one who is “wise” and “learned” (p. 74). “Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process” (Seidman, 1991, P. 1). Every word that the participants used in telling stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987). Their concrete experience helped to access the social issues.

I have used the stages that Kvale suggests in the book *InterViews*. First, I formulated the purpose of an investigation and described the concept of the topic. Second, I designed the study and the consent form for the participants to sign. At this point, I took into account the moral implications of the study. Third, I interviewed three participants using a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal relationship between the participants and myself, the researcher. The interviews are described in detail in a later section. The rest of the stages are described in the data analysis section.

I chose individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews that used women-centered narratives and life histories (Zinsser, 1992). There were four themes to guide the semi-structured interviews. I interviewed each participant three times. The theme of the first interview was the experience of living with the abuser. During the second interview, I asked the participants to tell their stories both about the decision to leave and their life in a shelter. In the last interview, the participants were encouraged to talk about their life after they left Bee Housing. Each interview lasted at least one and a half hours. One woman was interviewed four times. The interviews were held at the participants’ homes or at a location chosen by the participant.

In the first interview, I explained the purpose of the research and the interviews to each participant, and then I read the consent form with them. I also provided an opportunity to ask questions before the consent form was signed. All the participants signed the consent form and the counsellor at Bee Housing was made aware of the progress of the interviews in

case the participants needed her support after the interviews.

Taylor and Rupp (1991) suggest that the participants are the informants or experts. I utilized an open-ended format in order to allow new questions to emerge in the course of the interview. I used a pocket-sized tape recorder to tape the interviews. The tape recorder was put between the participant and me. During the interviews, I used introductory questions such as “Please tell me about...”, “Could you describe in as much detail as possible a situation in which you...?” Sometimes, I asked them to walk me through the incidents. Specific and indirect questions were also used in the interviews. For example, I asked “What did you do when you felt ...?” or “How do you believe your children regard to your decision?” I tried to stay away from interpreting questions because I did not want to fall into counselling mode.

After each interview, the participant and I had a debriefing time (when the tape recorder was turned off). I provided a chance for the women to talk about their feelings, thoughts or questions about the purpose of the interview and how it would be used. I used the time to mention some of the main points that I had learned from the interview (the informal “member check”) as well as to express my appreciation for her trust and forthcoming.

As Heron points out, “since language is the primary tool whose use enables human construing and intending to occur, it is difficult to see how there can be any more fundamental mode of inquiry for human beings” (Heron, 1981, p. 26). However, the dynamics of race, social class and the intersection of the agendas of interviewers and interviewees have an impact on the interview situation (Phoenix, 1994). My experience was quite similar to Phoenix’s. As a Chinese researcher, I felt that the participants at the beginning of the interviews questioned my ability to understand English. There is the

possibility that, for the white participants, having a Chinese woman in their home, perhaps for the first time, had an impact on how forthcoming they were. After a while, the participants stopped asking me “Do you understand?” and we carried on the interviews with rapport.

I followed the steps that Kvale (1996) suggested in *InterViews*. I absorbed all that the participants said; I reflected some statements back for clarification and expansion but always accepted them. These steps are also used in counselling, and I did have some difficulty in switching my role from counsellor to researcher, especially during the first few interviews. I had to remind myself constantly to assume a researcher role when I interviewed the women. Sometimes, the participants were badly in need of counselling during the time when I interviewed them. In those cases, I had to remind them of the purpose of the meetings and of the availability of their counsellor. At times, I used the debriefing period at the end of the interviews to allow the participants to dump out some of their “emotional garbage” because it was necessary to respond to their immediate needs.

The second data collection method involved gathering the poems or artworks of the participants, who were artistic and poetically inclined. As DeShazer (1986) articulates, “poetry is above all a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe” (p.138). This method is intended to provide a wider range of ways to understand the abuse experience, especially when the participants are able to use these other forms of communication to express their emotions and feelings.

Selecting the participants

I wanted to know more about the life of women who had been abused and their families. To gain a broad range of understanding, I wanted to interview women of different

ages and somewhat different socio-economic backgrounds. Their children were at different age levels as well. I wanted to find participants who were aged 28 to 58 with children between the ages of 4 and 25. The three women were from different social classes based on their ex-partners' incomes. Their experiences of abuse were primarily emotional and economic, and their husbands/partners were the abusers. They all suffered from abuse for long periods of time.

As I was formulating the purpose and planning the design of this study, I had a chance to get to know the executive director of a transition house for women who had been abused and their children. She suggested three ex-residents of the shelter who fulfilled all of the criteria that I had set for the participants in the study. The women had already been out of the shelter for six to twelve months. The director also helped by making the initial contact with the three women. I then made an individual appointment with each of them to discuss the possibility of their being a participant in my research study. The three women agreed without any hesitation.

Data analysis

After tape-recording the interviews, I transcribed the recordings into written texts. Although the tape recorder was in a good condition and the conversation on the tape was audible, the transcribing process "involves a series of judgments and decisions" (Kvale, 1996, p. 163). When I was transcribing, I faced questions such as "Where does a sentence end?" "Where is there a pause?" "What makes the participant pause?" "Should I record the tense voice?" Sometimes, I had to listen to the tape repeatedly until I felt that I had transcribed the conversation correctly and reliably. Transcription validity was another standard that I needed to ensure. Transcribing involves interpretation and selection of the content. Kvale suggests the researcher ask: "What is a useful transcription for my research

purposes?” (p.166). Since I was fully aware of my research purposes, I knew whether certain sections of the conversation were useful or not. I conclude that the transcriptions of the recordings are reliable and valid.

After I transcribed the conversations into written data, I needed to find the meaning of the many interesting and complex stories. I used file cards to write down key words for the themes in the conversations. Gradually, I created categories, and ultimately I created four major themes: living with an abuser, the decision to leave, life in a shelter, and moving on.

Are the data trustworthy? In qualitative research, the integrity and interpretations of the researcher are real issues (Neuman, 1997). Neuman also points out that the researcher needs to check for internal consistency. The researcher has to make sure of the participants' honesty and that the participants are telling their firsthand knowledge of the events. I tried my best to be faithful to the stories that the participants told me. I carefully listened to the recordings and transcribed the interviews. There are great volumes of transcripts for each participant's stories. The stories are their firsthand knowledge of events that had happened recently. I also cannot see any reason for the participants to lie to me; therefore, the data I gathered is trustworthy.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested five major techniques to make sure the data are trustworthy. I used the “member checks” technique (p. 314) for this study. Lincoln and Guba point out that the “member checks” technique is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p314). “Member checks” means that the researcher needs to “play back” the summary of an interview to the participant—“immediate and informal checking.” Formal checking is also essential. The researcher provides a copy of the study to the participants and then arranges a session with the participants so they are able to air any disagreements with the researcher. I used the informal and formal “member checks” after I

had finished writing the stories. The informal member check happened during the debriefing of each interview. The participant corrected part of the summary and I made notes on the correction. I also gave participants a copy of the study to read and encouraged them to correct their stories and give suggestions to the study. They all approved their stories, with two minor changes from one participant.

Ethics

Before the interview, I read the consent form with the participants and answered their questions. They all signed the consent form. The ten audiotapes of the interviews were locked in my cabinet after I listened to them and transcribed them into written text. In order to ensure the confidentiality of data and participant anonymity, I created pseudonyms for each of the participants as well as for all the proper names in the study.

Chapter four: Jennifer's story

Interviewing Jennifer:

We set up the interview at Jennifer's home. Her children were with their father on that day. Jennifer invited me into her clean and tidy living room. Since I knew her from few coincidental occasions, we talked casually for a while. I was very nervous for this was the first interview of this research. My hands were even shaking as I was setting up the tape recorder. Jennifer was quite tense, but we did fine after a while. I explained the topic, goals, and her rights as a participant to her before she signed the informed consent form. We then had a one and half hour interview.

After three weeks, we had the second interview at my office because Jennifer believed it was quieter than her home on that day. Her children were home with the babysitter. Jennifer and I were more relaxed when we were doing the second interview. She asked if she could talk about her current struggles concerning the lawyer. Of course, yes! We had a 45-minute interview since Jennifer had to go for another appointment.

The final interview happened three months after the second one. We were both students, as well as being mothers, and were very busy at the end of the school term. On top of it, Jennifer had gone through a very tough time with the judicial system on the custody of their three sons, property division, child and spousal support since she left her husband. Her struggle shifted from home to court and lawyers' office. The struggle intensified after the second interview. Jennifer told me that she just could not revisit the painful experience when she was struggling with all kinds of stress. I totally agreed with her. I even asked her if she wanted to stop being my research participant but she told me she still wanted to continue to be a participant, but she needed time.

We had the last interview at her home, where her two children (pre-schoolers) were playing with Play Station games and watching movies. They also had a little boy, Brian's friend, visiting at that time. Jennifer was multi-tasking, for her youngest son asked for juice, the little friend wanted another sandwich that had less honey, Brian couldn't turn on the Play Station, the dog was barking constantly, and the phone was ringing, I was waiting (one more task!!!). I believe that is her normal day's life, because she handled all the tasks calmly and orderly. We had our interview right in the middle of all these happening. What a great experience!! I deeply admired Jennifer's multi-tasking ability!

The healing

Where once dwelt shy, hopes, naïveté',
Lies an ache... no, a pang of sorrow, compressed.

Time, that vacuumous cavity
Has left a shriveled, princess-pea in my breast.

I balk and I sheer, slyly sidestep depression
As anger comes on, blows in like a storm.
Breathe it all in, squeeze it into aggression
Tears freely flow as I give it new form.

Pouring my purpose into children's small hands
Their basest expressions recall his attack.
Fear grabs hold daily as we save our own lives
Repeat it, affirm it: we can never go back!

Jennifer, 2000

Jennifer grew up in beautiful North town. She is the middle child of five, in a middle class family. Her parents created a happy and harmonious family, although they needed to move to different towns due to relocation of her father's job. Her father is a stationary engineer while her mother is a homemaker. They are a happily married couple. Jennifer describes her mother as the leader of the family especially to the kids, although her father is the boss. Jennifer thinks that her parents' communication style is quite healthy. On the contrary, her husband, Darren, has a violent father and an alcoholic mother. Darren is the third youngest child of twelve siblings. Darren had a rough childhood.

Jennifer is a smart, beautiful, friendly and independent woman. She made high marks in high school and she also graduated from nursing school. She recently went back to university as a student and makes very good grades, even in the face of a lot of stress.

Jennifer lived with an abuser

Jennifer and Darren married eight years ago. They have three sons and their ages range from three to seven. Abuse happened early on. Her lonely and rough ride starts after Jennifer graduated from nursing school. Darren built a power plant for a big company in V country. He sent her a ticket and she joined him in V country. She has not worked in nursing since then. A month later, Jennifer was pregnant. They got married in V country with a civil ceremony. Jennifer told me many times that she was very lonely after they get married. She said

...Immediately he changed. I was not his girl friend anymore. He did not have to impress me. I was so isolated and he was never around. I was alone in this country. I was not able to speak the language. He would stay out. He would leave at six o'clock in the morning and he would stay out most nights till 10 o'clock at night. After work, he will go with his buddy he works with to bars get something to drink and who know

what else he did.

The lonely journey was going on endlessly. When Jennifer was pregnant, she started feeling really horrible. She lost a lot of weight. She reasoned that it was

...partly psychological and partly physical because I didn't feel really well.... My husband was never around. I didn't have any support system at all. I have nobody to talk to. I didn't have any friend. I knew one girl who was a girl of one of my husband's buddies. She didn't speak English.

Jennifer cited another story that happened during the government coup of V country. Jennifer and Darren lived in the same area as of the president's residence. There was an armed guard and the rebel forces came and stormed the whole presidential area and took it. Darren did not go home before the 10 o'clock curfew. Jennifer said that

...I heard some gun shot. I didn't know what to do. I heard people were killed for not stopping for the soldier. It was a dangerous time. I felt really isolation and I felt like I was trapped. Anyway finally he came home at eleven thirty or so. He just laughs it off.

Jennifer was so weak when she was five months pregnant that she needed to go back to Canada for six months. Darren was not with her when their first child was born. According to Jennifer, his buddies, his work and possibly other girls were more important than Jennifer. He abused her socially.

After Jennifer gave birth to Ryan, she joined Darren in T country. Things weren't quite well. She lost weight again. Darren was verbally abusive to her. He criticized how she looked and laughed in her face. Jennifer recalled, ... "He was telling me that I was big a girl and just laughed and kind of made fun of me." He also falsely accused Jennifer.

... he said that I was complaining all the time and no matter what I said he took it as a complaint. If it was something to do with our relationship, "could you do this?" it was

a complaint. Whenever I asked for what I wanted, he took it as a complaint or that I was too demanding.

She found it was very hard to carry on a meaningful conversation with him when he always falsely accused her. At the same time, she was in a non-English speaking country. Who can she talk to? In addition to having no one to talk to, the family had moved to at least three countries and four cities. It seems to be a subtle way of social abuse. She could not maintain friendships in her hometown or overseas for each stay was not longer than a year. It was a way to isolate her and the children. Due to isolation and non-supportiveness from Darren, Jennifer was very unhappy and unsettled when the second child was born.

Jennifer needed to travel a lot for health reasons. When Jennifer needed his assistance, he did not offer any. One time, she was five to six months pregnant. For medical reasons, she needed to fly back to Canada with Ryan but Darren did not accompany her. What a challenge for a five months pregnant mother to take care of a sick toddler and travel for more than twenty eight hours alone.

Jennifer described Darren as a heavyweight boxer that had never lost a fight. He has a strong personality. He needed to do things fast therefore he was a very good worker from the employers' point of view. On the other hand, he was poor in terms of his interpersonal skills. Jennifer stressed on that he is an alcoholic.

According to Jennifer, he also lies a lot. Jennifer found Darren lying to her all the time. Gradually, she could not trust him at all. He lied about their wedding arrangements. Jennifer described the incidents

... when we got married in V country, he came home told me that we were going to get married, we're going to this really nice chapel and the judge had the long robes on....The judge had on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.... so right from the very beginning

I couldn't trust him.

From Jennifer's story on the issue of trust, although she did not catch him while he was cheating on her, she was not able to trust him at all. Another issue that troubled Jennifer was his rage. He just snaps and goes into a rage. He, one time, could not wait for the plumber to come and fix the toilet.

...He got really mad so one day, he went in and it wouldn't work and he got really, really mad, he went in, took the toilet, broke it right off the pipe, walked over to the edge of the building and tossed it down. And he said to them (the plumbers), "get me a new toilet".

Darren is an alcoholic. Jennifer repeatedly mentioned about Darren's drinking habit; how the drinking affected their relationships, and what the behaviors were after he drank.

Abuse of alcohol was co-occurring during episodes of wife abuse.

...I remember one night he got really intoxicated and he came home. He said he couldn't take it anymore because I was complaining all the time. I was just not being what he wanted me to be and he gets really in a rage. He said, "I'll jump off the balcony" and we were on the eighteenth floor. He also said "and if I do that, we all have to go" meaning that we would all go over the balcony if he did, we all would. And so that scared me enough so that I tried hard to fix things.

The situation was not improving but instead got worse. She recounted one of her experiences while he was driving.

... Things started getting worse and worse. I remembered one time when we went to a restaurant and he drank quite a bit - he always drinks and drives - and he drank quite a bit and on our way home, he would drive and the streets were really narrow, some of the side streets especially, and he would just bump right up the street. He would just go

so fast that I would be hanging on to both sides of the car and he was just driving like that quite a lot just to, I think he was doing that to just scare me. He was constantly mad at me for just not being what he wanted me to be.

According to Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, making a person afraid is within the classification of emotionally abusive behavior. The above episode demonstrated how Darren made Jennifer afraid.

She was so scared that she “tried hard to fix things”. Jennifer further described one of the four threats that happened in T country. He told Jennifer that he was going to buy supper from a very expensive restaurant. He then got drunk while he was buying the supper. He phoned Jennifer to tell her that the restaurant had prepared only one supper and that he needed to wait. When he arrived home the episode continued in front of their eldest son.

... He came in and he just started raging about me calling him a drunk ... He was going on and on and he was really mad at me so during our meal, I calmed him down. I just told him, "I didn't do that, I didn't call you a drunk". I had to speak to him really calmly and like touching him and rubbing his back and making sure he understood that I didn't mean it. He sat down at the table and we put the food all out and he had about eight inches paring knife and anyway, he was using this as a steak knife. As we were talking, he started going on and he stood right up and said, "I can't believe you called me a drunk in front of everybody there!" ... Ryan was in the living room. Ryan stood right up and said, "you two be good!" He could see us there and anyway, Darren stood up and he had this knife in his hand and he was holding it really, really threatening me and I was trying to calm him down. He came right over to me and he was right in front of me kind of brandishing this knife. I was really conscious of Ryan and I moved myself, my body, between Darren and Ryan so that Ryan wouldn't see that if Darren stabbed

me. It was out of the bottom of his hand now and he had it up high like this (Jennifer put her right hand up, pretended holding a knife and motioned it against my chest in order to show me how Darren threatened her), and I was just so afraid, I really thought I was going to die that night. I finally calmed him down and he wanted to kill himself and he also said, "if I die, we all die!"

The following afternoon, Darren told Jennifer about the laws concerning divorce in T country.

... the man gets everything! The woman doesn't get anything! The man gets the kids! ha ha haaa!" and he was laughing all about it and thought it was great fun. And it just started to scare me, ... to scare me so that I would be the good little wife. And not putting any demands on him, I don't know exactly what I was doing wrong but maybe I was not doing anything wrong and he just kind of had to control me.

Since Jennifer needed to travel a lot but she was never able to keep her passport and she had no money of her own, she felt that she was trapped. She recalled

... he always had all the money, we (herself and children) never had money, I never had my passport. I was always just depended on him. Well, if I was going out, he would give me some money to take with me and most of the time I would have to ask him and he would give it to me, but I would always have to ask, I just didn't have money of my own.

Jennifer also talked about Darren's sexual life as she was talking about how she thought that Darren was glad "to get rid of her". Although she did not talk about how she found out, "Darren was having a really interesting time exploring the "Barbara shops" (prostitute shops). It seems that he had been sexually abusing Jennifer by sleeping around. She described

...in T country they have two types of barber shops. One you could get your hair cut and the other you could get whatever you want. He was having a really interesting time exploring these places.

...Darren came home for about a week. There were pictures with a bunch of girls. There was a girl that I was really suspicious... there was a bar there was a sign; it was like a symbol of a vagina. The name of the bar was Fuck Bar. He brought home a picture of himself in front of the bar

...He may have had a girlfriend. I know that when we got down to another country, the girls would call the apartment and hang up when I answered the phone.

Jennifer decided that she needed to do something to protect her children and herself after the following episode happened. Jennifer suspected Darren planned to leave her behind in a strange island and take the kids with him. They went to S island to find a house to live if Darren decided to accept the job offer. One afternoon, Jennifer accidentally got a message from the hotel that three plane tickets were ready to be picked up for Mr. George,

... There were four of us, but there were three tickets ready. He said, "oh, they must've made a mistake, it must've been some other George" but this is in S island... this is a Scottish name and like, how many George's are there going to be at this hotel?

Anyway, I felt, although he's denied it in and out, upside, black and blue, all throughout the years that he was planning to leave with the kids and leave me there, I really think he was planning to do that. But he backed out at the last minute.

She was stuck. She did not want to leave her children. She also did not have money or passports. How could she leave this abusive relationship? Since she had to stay, it would be easier if Darren took some father's responsibility. As I asked her to describe the interaction between the father and the sons, she said, "up till this point, Darren had never or might bath

the kids twice. I am the one who took care of them.”

Her children are her priority as well as the center of her life. Since she is raising the sons by herself, the challenges are quite overwhelming especially when Darren abuses her in front of the children. Jennifer tried to protect her son, Ryan, when Darren was threatening her life. As Darren pointed the knife at Jennifer, she was worried her child would see the murder. She said, “I moved myself, my body, between Darren and Ryan so that Ryan wouldn't see that if Darren stabbed me,”

Finally, Jennifer cued into the abuse cycle. She remembered the things that she learned from nursing about the cycle of abuse. She also went to see a counselor after an anxiety attack. She recalled

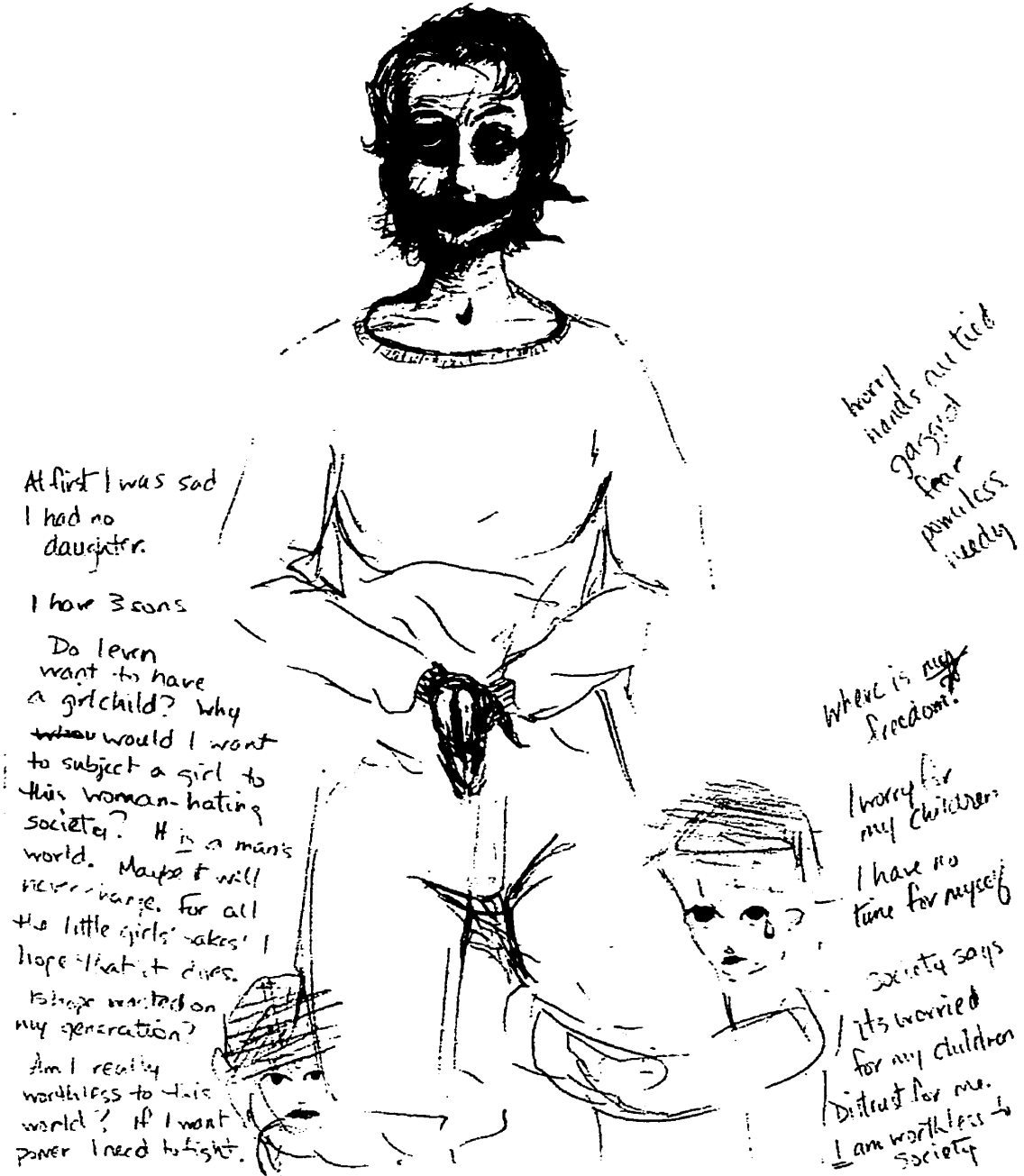
... I can really see the cycle. At first, I didn't realize it when it happened to me. When he came home, the cycle was happening and then I can see myself to do whatever things I could to stop it or to deter, calm him down. I remember I had made a fancy supper. I was waiting for him to comment on it and he said it was good but you don't have to make fancy meal every single night. He is pissed off and I could feel more tension was building and so the next night I make corned beef hash. It was a very simple meal. I made so much that we can have it for the next night. So when we have it the next night and he got all upset cause we have the same meal all over again He didn't want it any more. Everything I did then was being picked on, I can see the cycle is happening and I was nervous.

Jennifer's counselor told her “that sounds abusive”. This was the first time Jennifer could put a label on what was happening. She believed that it was control and abuse. Even now,

...I compare it to situations other women have been in who are beaten physically all

the time and they still stay and I find what I've gone through was a lot less and it's just not as serious or something. But then again, there were times when I thought I was going to die.

From the interviews, I determined that Darren mistreated her with both obvious and subtle behavior very early on in their relationship. It seems Jennifer was not aware that the types of abuse (emotional, social, financial, verbal and sexual abuse) that she experienced were as serious as physical abuse. She had no physical scars but psychological scars. No one could say which abuse was more serious than the other.



Jennifer's picture 1999

She drew a picture during that period of time. She described for me that her hands were tied, her mouth was gagged by her abusive ex-husband, the judicial system and the hate-women society. She also wrote as following:

... At first I was sad I had no daughter. I have 3 sons. Do I even want to have a girl child? Why would I want to subject a girl to this woman-hating society? It is a man's world. Maybe it will never change. For all the little girls' sakes' I hope that it does. Is hope wasted on my generation? Am I really worthless to this world? If I want power I need to fight" on the left side of her picture. On the right side, she wrote, "where is my freedom? I worry for my children. I have no time for myself. Society says its worried for my children. Distrust for me. I am worthless to society."

Jennifer's decision to leave

There were three factors that made her decide to leave. First, Jennifer's children are very important to her. When the knife incident happened in front of the children, she felt that was bad enough for them to leave

... the deciding factor was that this happened in front of the kids, this is going to affect the kids. It's bad enough that it happening to me, but if you're affecting the kids then, we're gone, we're out of here. I think that was the deciding factor.

Secondly, she was scared and was unwilling to live like that anymore. Jennifer was afraid and she said, "if I ever went back there (B country) I wouldn't return. So I said, "no, I'm not going back" and so we were at my parents' place.

Thirdly, she believed marriage was supposed to be mutual respect and love. She had kind of come to terms with what he was doing. She was confronted with, does she trust him or where was the relationship going or if he was ever going to change? At that time he was forty years old and things were not getting better. Her marriage was not fulfilling her belief in marriage therefore she decided to leave.

Jennifer decided not to take another moment of abuse. On the night he was drunk and he went to sleep. She called her sister and she suggested that Jennifer contact the women's shelter, N Society "... because she knew that I was afraid. So I call N society, they told me I could be involved in an abusive relationship. They said, 'Have a plan. Start to pack.'" The options for Jennifer were quite limited. They told Jennifer that she could go to either the N Society or C shelter,

... or I thought I could just go to my parent's house, then I thought Darren could go. My father is getting old and his mother got a heart attack at the age of eighty six so I don't want to do that to my father for he will fight. So I don't want to burden my parents so I

went to the further away shelter for if I go to the close by, Darren will follow me. He will follow me like five minute on my tail type of thing because he was suppose to be home at three.

Jennifer has limited choices after she leaves her home. First, she did not want to jeopardize her father's health. Second, she needs to consider their safety. It was at the dangerous stage. When women leave their abusive partners, their partners might become so angry that they could lash out toward their partners without any sense. Jennifer decided to go to the shelter further away for her and her children's safety. Since the decision had been made, it was time for action.

When Jennifer was describing the process of leaving, her body was quite fidgety as if she were escaping again. Her plans were very complicated for she needed to consider a lot of elements in hers, her children's and even her pet's lives.

... The next day, I packed and I packed for I wanted to get ready, then I kept thinking Darren would find this bag that I pack. He will be very upset and he will try to take the kids from me. So I didn't want to take this chance. Anyway, so I went to the shelter in Port H.

Jennifer also arranged a shelter for the dog. She felt that the person who helped her to arrange the shelter for the dog "could tell there was something wrong. I tried being natural, but apparently I was being all nerved up. Anyway, so I brought the dog up to them and then I went to the shelter in Port H."

When she was looking for the shelter for her dog, she felt that she needed to be natural though she knew the lady in the bookstore. What a job! What was the reason for "being natural"? Was it for keeping the family secret or for safety sake? I did not ask Jennifer in the interview. I leave it to the readers' interpretation.

While Jennifer fled from the abusive relationship, she still needed to take care of her two young children. She packed not only clothes; she especially packed their favorite toys to bring to the transition house. She recalled, "I took the blocks because they played with those all the time, I didn't want to just get a teddy bear for them to hold on for security, but we got those too."

Life in shelters

From the time Jennifer and the two children left home, they lived in many places. Their transition period was quite long, but to Jennifer, it was quite normal because she had been moving from country to country when she was with Darren.

... I went to the shelter up North and then I went to my parents' house and plus the kids went to A town and back and then we moved to Bee Housing. That month was normal, because that's what our life was. We were in A country, then we moved to V country, then we moved back to A country, then I moved to M town with my parents, then we moved to T country, then four months later we were in A country, then a couple of months later we were back in V country, we were always going back and forth.

Moving to all these places in a month isn't normal, but it was familiar. Like, airports became very familiar to us and I got really good at packing, a lot of experience.

Jennifer and the boys went to the shelter in Port H. The place was brand new and all the people who stayed there all had duties to do. It was very nice as Jennifer described

... I think my boys really enjoyed it because they treated it like a vacation, and the train went by, we could see the train go by behind the house. Every time the train went by, they wanted to get up and look out the window. We had a fairly big room and we were the only family in the room.

She had a few concerns while they stayed in the first stage shelter. She was a little

nervous about people stealing things although it did not happen. Then, she was also kind of concerned because she cried a lot. The children needed to know the reason for not going home anymore. She told them “your dad doesn't treat your mom the right way like he was yelling at mom.” The emotion of this family was just like riding on a roller coaster. There were excitements as well as sadness.

After ten days to two weeks staying in the first stage shelter in Port H, they went to stay with Jennifer's parents. One afternoon, she received the summons from the court that stated the children would spend ten days with their father. Her lawyer advised her to comply or else their father could charge her with kidnapping.

It was a long nightmare to Jennifer when her children went to spend ten days with Darren. She was so worried that she went to Willow House for support. Willow House is another first stage abused women's shelter in another city. They spent only one night in the shelter for it was too “rough, the room we were in was packed, there was no space at all, during the night, there was an argument outside the hall and that scared me and I went back to my parents' house.”

This section of their journey was quite rough as well. The uncertainty of their lives was just like waves, one after the other. She felt that she might be quite withdrawn from people, because all the experiences she had gone through in her life were very painful. The counselors in the first stage shelters were supportive but she could not remember what they said. She seems to have internalized her emotions, which is quite normal in the initial stage of leaving an abusive relationship (Enns, 1997).

Her lawyer came to see her in the shelter and she found her lawyer's suggestion was helpful. She advised her to make a life plan (short term as well as long term) in order to establish credibility in front of the judge. She recalled

... the lawyer told me from the legal point of view, I need to make a life plan even the next year or next few months or next few years, what I want to do, so that I'll know where I am going and if this comes in front of a judge I'll have credibility and I am not just running.

Making plans is great for anybody but why did she need to make a plan in order to prove to the judge that she was not "just running". The fact that she was able to make the right decision in fleeing from an abusive relationship should be enough to establish credibility.

From this point on, Jennifer had some positive experiences. The timing was just right and Jennifer had a duplex to move into in Bee Housing, the second stage women housing. According to Jennifer, "the second stage housing is definitely beneficial. If you had to go straight out there on your own, I think I might've gotten into a depression if I hadn't gotten the support I had." The counselor, Mary, was also helpful to her because she could have counseling sessions that "they helped me sort out things. I think it was also definitely beneficial." She went on to talk about the positive experience in Bee Housing.

... I found the best thing about living at Bee Housing was that there were things that I could do with me family. During the summer, a girl would come and she would help us do activities... it was company for me and it was someone to help me take out the kids. Because when you're pregnant out to here, it's kind of hard to get the energy to take the two little ones anywhere, so she helped a lot. Also, the different activities, they had parties every now and then, the Christmas parties; they helped to make Christmas really special. Christmas and those times would be really hard if you just had to do it all alone and Bee Housing was just excellent, I can't say enough good about those times.

Jennifer also remembered that her youngest son brought her happiness and sometimes the dog provided some opportunity for her to release her frustration. It was helpful when she found ways to appreciate life and ways to release the frustration appropriately.

... When I was still living at Bee Housing, I was really happy. I was pregnant with him (The third son) when I was first there and I think he made it so happy. Sometimes my dog is my outlet, if I'm feeling really angry, I'll just yell at the top of my lungs "SHUT-UP!!"

On the other hand, Jennifer also experienced painful struggling. She cried a lot especially when she found out that she was pregnant. She felt that anytime she got into any situation that was not desirable, it was always compounded with something else and then something else and it just seemed like nothing is ever simple.

...I was going through a lot of pain at first, emotional pain, and I felt really alone because my parents just went to D City and my sister wasn't really there for me. She even criticized me for not taking more toys for the children.

At the end of talking about this compounded undesirable situation, Jennifer concluded "that's life in general". She counseled herself and normalized her undesirable situation.

There were challenges/concerns during the transition time. First, she did not have any money except the cash from their RRSP, \$1,200. She paid rent and bought the necessities with this money. Her lawyer had also arranged for her to take part of the division of the properties from her house. She described

... he gave me a little pile of stuff and he put in the garage and he told me that I had half of it, which was really stretching your imagination... I did an inventory later and I had \$5000 worth of stuff and Darren had like, \$62,000 worth of stuff. So there's a big difference.

Jennifer faced poverty as soon as she left her abusive husband. On top of her financial, and emotional problems, she also needed to face another problem, and that was stigmatism. As she applied for social assistance, the caseworker asked her to look for a job. Jennifer described her feeling, "It doesn't feel nice to go on social assistance... people (her caseworker) say, you need to look for a job..."

How could Jennifer go to work when she was the sole caregiver of three young children (including one new born baby)? Where was the Child Support when the father was earning one hundred thousand dollars or more annually? Why did they need to be on social assistance? Jennifer had an incident to illustrate her frustration.

... when social assistance called and said, "your husband is working here and gets whatever amount and he should be paying you" and I said, "yes, I have a lawyer on it" and she said, "you know, you're not entitled to this money because he is supposed to be paying such and such amount of dollars" and I said, "well, what am I supposed to do about it? I'm doing everything I can" and she was saying, "you have to do this and you have to do that and you have to fill out forms... And I said, "well, why can't you do some of this? I don't know how? It's going to cost me money to have a lawyer do extra work, where am I going to get the money?" and she was saying, "You have to get a legal aid lawyer"

What a double jeopardy! Was there any way out for Jennifer? They even thought that ... I was trying to rip them off, they thought I was cheating and trying to get their money where I didn't really need it, even though I did need it, I felt that I was being labeled as a cheater. I suppose that was her job, lots of people would cheat and try to get as much money as they can. ... I understand that but they don't have to treat everybody or anybody like that. ... You can't just assume that they're just doing this

because they're sneaky, there's got to be a reason. Everybody deserves respect, they're human beings... I could've felt less like a second-class citizen. When you are on social assistance, people look down on you, and there is a stigma attached

Jennifer had a bad experience with the caseworker. She said,

...Mostly it was the people from social assistance themselves, they treat you like dirt ...I use to hate dealing with her. She would talk down to me... She would call me dear and I would say, "please don't call me dear, I'm not your dear"... using this tone of voice that makes me feel like I'm beneath her. The counselor of Bee Housing reminded me "you have to remember to be polite to these people because they can cut you off."

These caseworkers seem to have power to control the social assistance recipient's life.

They could be rude to the recipients but the recipients were not allowed to fight for their rights or else the social assistance would be cut off.

Another concern was her children. She said, "I don't want to mess them all up from divorce or whatever is happening, I want them to be the healthiest they can be. " Her emotional and physical resources were depleted while; on the other hand, she was aware of her children's growing needs for support following their exposure to abuse and divorce.

Jennifer started to deal with the court system in this part of journey. There were a lot of routine changes in this family. First, the judge ordered that the children go with their father for ten days. Second, they started having every second weekend access to their father. Third, their father wasn't paying any money.

Jennifer was quite sad as she was talking about the first time the children had been away from her for any length of time. Jennifer was just afraid that he would take them, because that night, he told her "you will NEVER get the kids". Finally, they came home. Jennifer said, "they survived, ten days!" with a relief expression on her face. She went on

and described the comment that her second child, James made after he came back from his father's house. She recalled, "James, he was two and he would come up to me and hug my legs and say, 'I'm SO glad to see you mommy' and he said this four times a day for about a week."

The children missed their mother a lot. They might also feel insecure. It was a challenge when she needed to take care of fearful, and high anxiety children, Jennifer was living in fear of her husband taking away her children at the same time. When she was talking about the fear. She said

...I even went so far as, I had the kids fingerprinted and photographed and I had their passports and I called the immigration Canada...I called in and made sure that they know that I'm the only one with their passports and if he has passports and tries to get another one for them, it's not valid and if he takes them, he's kidnapping them. I kind of alerted them and then I told him that, so he would know.

Jennifer moved on

After staying in Bee Housing for more than a year, Jennifer's former lawyer suggested she moved to a house that matched her ex-husband's status. They were looking for a house that had a backyard and it was close to the university, because Jennifer planned to study at university. Finally, she found a house:

...that was the cheapest rent with a backyard and with a family area and not right on a busy street. It was kind of a risk because we had to go to court after we moved to see if we had enough money to cover the rent.

In discussion of their present experience with the neighborhood, Jennifer felt that her neighbors discriminated against them. The neighbors in Bee Housing had called them "welfare bum". The neighbors, they had now, had stopped talking to her after they found out

that she was a single mother. The other neighbor gave a splash pool that the garbage collector did not collect to Jennifer by putting it on their front lawn.

The experiences were very discouraging and hard to believe. It seems the neighbors are unfriendly, unsupportive and even discriminative.

Although Jennifer had already left her abusive husband, he still manipulated her in many subtle ways. First, since the children go to visit their father every other week, Jennifer finds that he still uses all kinds of different ways to hurt her financially and emotionally. He works overseas. He works five weeks and goes home five weeks. When he just comes home from overseas, he is really nice. He treats her really well. He gives gifts to her. But as times goes by, reality kicks in. He becomes very mean and rude to Jennifer when he picks up the children.

Secondly, he did not show up for the divorce pre-trial. Jennifer heard that

...He has a relative down in S town that was stabbed to death. He and his brother got a detective to find the murderer... He sent some money down there and I heard that he killed the murderer, not my husband but his buddy that he sent down. If he is able to do that then I don't know what does that mean, I feel unsafe. Things just happen and it's not predictable anymore. It's fear I guess.

After more than a year, the fear is still real to Jennifer. She said that she was a suspicious person but if he could send someone to kill the murderer, he could do it again.

Thirdly, he still hurts her financially. Darren went to T town and did not show up for pre-trial, therefore, he did not sign the financial statement release. Her lawyer needed the document to send to the bank. Jennifer concluded his behavior as being:

...Obviously money is more important than his kids; otherwise he will be up here and seeing his kids rather docking the books, whatever. He is doing for money down there.

Now it seems like the worse case scenario is possible.

Jennifer felt he'd rather pay \$48,000 for his legal fees than his kids. She said, "If he gave me that money, he thinks that I will get that money. He is fighting tooth to nail for not to give us money, or as little as possible." The family also faces a lot of uncertainty since Darren might stop paying the Child Support.

The following story is about Darren's absence from the pre-trial. He was scheduled to sign a document in front of the judge.

...he said that he will be four days late, so four days is up. Now it is two day later, and two days is up, we still haven't heard from him yet. Now, the unpredictability is back. He is doing this stuff again... The kids are getting disappointed now. He was supposed to pick them up yesterday but he didn't. He supposed to pick them up today but I don't know if he is going to pick them up. Now the kids are very upset. I don't know if he is going to disappear from the face of the earth.

It was very hard for her to give a reasonable explanation to children for their father's absence especially when Jennifer herself does "not know if he has disappeared from the face of the earth." Jennifer was "torn between wanting to protect the children from all the hardship and needing to rely on her children as the only human source of support available."

Jennifer's lawyer gave her a hard time during the legal battle. After the four days of trial, the lawyer showed up at her house at ten o'clock. At first, she did not know it was him. Jennifer did not open the door. Instead, she called out "who is it?" and he didn't say anything. Jennifer was very scared for she had just had an argument with the lawyer the day before. Jennifer described the argument

...He called and sounded so weird, as if he was trying to brainwash me or something.

It felt like so much pressure or stress or something and he said, "you need to trust me

right now, which means give him money, or else you're never ever going to have a healthy relationship with anybody, these things needs to be dealt with RIGHT NOW" and he kept saying this over and over again, until I was in tears and it was just not normal.

Jennifer almost called 911, but then she thought it's not really an emergency. As she looked harder, she saw his car drive away through the other window after a while. She said, "that to me, is harassment."

The lawyer was the second man that Jennifer dealt with after leaving the abusive husband. The lawyer seemed to be quite manipulative of Jennifer but she had to keep him because the court case was going to end soon.

Jennifer has been fighting for the divorce settlement battle for three years now. She commented "and hopefully our divorce will be finalized and I will feel good for I will have a bit of closure." The closure of this battle was really needed after three years. As of the last conversation with Jennifer, her battle did not end in March,2000 because her lawyer decided to quit two weeks before the final trial.

When Jennifer was very frustrated with her lawyer, she asked if she could vent it out before the interview started. After she finished, she said

...now, in order to keep my life possible to live, I just have to push everything to the back of my mind and not to address it. I can't just go to any body and talk about it. Not everybody wants to listen to it. I have somebody depend on me and I have to go to school, I have to keep myself functioning.

She had a deep sense of commitment to her children and her study from what she said in this segment of conversation. She implied that her children were the most important people and then her studying. She felt that she had to ignore her personal needs in order to

be functioning for the children.

The lawyer kept demanding payment two weeks before the final trial and Jennifer did not have money to pay. Jennifer decided to look for another lawyer but she could not find one. Her health was in a bad shape at that time, too. She talked about the rage inside her during those days especially expressed when she was driving

... The rage inside me I was just I thought many times that for about ten minutes, I would just slam the brakes sign and just let what will happen, happen. (She was talking about road rage experience.) And I just about did it, but then I thought, oh my God this is just crazy I'm out of control, this is not a smart thing to do but I was just at that point where I was just so enraged I didn't give a hoot. I just didn't care...I was just like an animal...I could've ripped an animal apart with my teeth. That's how I felt for about a whole week, and it scared me. But at the same time, it felt like, it was cleansing in a way, cause I just let it out of me, I just let it surface.

The rage was real for Jennifer's experience. She was overwhelmed by the unfair incidents that happened to her one, after the other. Her experience was similar to a person who has a pressure sore, which was covered by a thick layer of scar. The sore does not heal for there is no fresh airflow reaching the wound. The sore will start to heal when the scar dissolves. The more often the wound is exposed to fresh air, the quicker the sore will heal. Jennifer's emotional sore was covered by the daily duty as a mother and a student.

As she let herself feel rage, she said, "it was cleansing in a way, because I just let the harmful feeling out of my body". She allowed the scar to dissolve. She gave herself permission to express her rage for it seems to be healthier than pushing everything to the back of her mind and not to address it. It was quite dangerous to have the road rage but once she realized that she was out of control; she stopped herself.

How did she gain back control and stop herself from either killing herself or the man who was racing a car with Jennifer in the small highway? She said, "I do my best. I try regularly to take few minutes everyday to sit back and that is the time for myself. I turn on the soft music and relax and let my mind go blank, to meditate. I find it is helpful."

What is her method to guide her children? She felt that spending a few minutes with each of the children was very important. She said "making the effort to spend few minutes individually with each of the children, especially when they are acting out."

As a whole, Jennifer and her children smiled more than when I met them the first time. They are healing, regardless of the lawyer' and husband's harassment.

...I am kind of going forward, and trying to do the best. I can be with the kids and doing the best I can with school, because I want to continue on with my school and try to penny-pinch here and there and just do the best I can and still be able to afford programs like hockey and things like that for the boys.

Jennifer found a lawyer to take over her case after making many phone calls. She said "I trust this new lawyer."

Jennifer had mentioned she was happy when she was in Bee Housing. She looked for things that made her happy instead of looking for sad things and stayed sad for the whole time. This life quality had passed onto her children.

... They can handle more than you think. They find their way to handle their fear. The younger child will pretend that he is dinosaur and scar the fear away. The second child will growl it away. I told them that no matter what I will love you.

Jennifer concluded, on her nine year journey, that she believed she grew stronger emotionally. She didn't realize how strong she was until she went through all the turmoil and survived and "survived stronger now than I ever was before. I know way more about

myself now, like about my limits and what it takes to stretch the limits.” Jennifer also felt that

...I’ve become more spiritual in ways as well. Because going through that, you have to have faith that it’s going to come out on the other end and you have to have faith.

There are good times and bad times and you just have to weather through the bad times and know that the good times are going to come again. That’s what I’m hoping for.

Now, she enjoys going back to school and gets very good grades from the last two terms. She concluded her nine years’ journey as follows:

...My journey in the last nine years has definitely been like a roller coaster ride but I think that’s what life is like anyways, maybe not such dramatic ups and downs. My ride is a little leveling out now. I think there are still big ups and downs, sometimes. When I first went to Bee Housing, I was just in such a crisis. I guess now I don’t feel as threatened by Darren anymore. Maybe I’m hoping that he’s trying to forget too and trying to move on, because that would impact my life as well. I hope he finds another wife, and learn that he can’t treat women that way, too. And, if he does learn that, then all the better for my boys because then they can learn something from him as well... I see them punching each other, which may be normal for boys in our society, but I still try to teach them that it’s not normal for anybody to treat anybody that way. I think the way a lot of women are treated is a reflection of society.

As the study of Jennifer’s journey was ending, it was a pleasure to witness her growth emotionally and spiritually. Although she still had a lot of challenges, she seems to have a strong desire to over-ride them.

Chapter five: Maria's story

Interviewing Maria

Maria and I had a wonderful time when she shared her life's story with me. We had the first interview in her home and the second and the third ones in my office. The first interview was held in the afternoon when her son was at school. We had the whole apartment to ourselves for the interview. It was good because the experience that Maria was talking about was a very sad one. If her son was home, she may not have talked so freely. We had two hours interview on that day.

The second and the third interviews were held at my office as I mentioned before. The interviews occurred every other week. Although I didn't need to answer any phone calls, the ringing was disturbing. Maria was able to ignore the phone and it was great. She was very emotional at some points of interviews and I did not know how I should respond since I am a counselor to the women. I held myself back until the debriefing. It was quite challenging to ask appropriate questions for the research.

After a month, I found that she had changed physically and emotionally. She agreed to have the forth interview.

Maria is an optimistic, sensitive, active, responsible and friendly woman. She and her husband married more than twenty years ago. Three children were born of this marriage, although she experienced miscarriages many times. The first two girls are independent and reside in a different city. Now, she is living with her only son who is going to graduate from high school soon. The children are very important to her, especially when they were young.

Maria is the oldest in her family that "is never close". Her parents both died of cancer. The siblings died when they were quite young. Her stepmother died last June. On top of it

all, her mother-in-law had treated her poorly since she married Dan. According to Maria, Dan was a jealous husband but Maria loved Dan whole-heartedly even when he called her names. She gave birth to a baby girl six months after they got married. Due to Dan's demand, Maria went back to work while she was taking care of their baby.

A few months later, Maria was very ill and her mother-in-law took care of the baby in another province. It was fine until her husband told her that their baby was sick and she was in the hospital. Her mother-in-law lied to the hospital saying that the baby's mother had given up the baby. Maria almost lost her baby. The story continues...

Maria lived with an abuser

In discussions with Maria about her abuse experience, Maria emphasized the abuse happened gradually and slowly in her life. She described, "most abuse doesn't start overnight, it eats away and starts slowly."

First, Dan abused her sexually. He put her down and compared her sexual ability to others. "He told me that sexually, I was no good anymore. I was no good to him. My husband figured that I was not good sexually and he used a lot of sex toys. I felt dirty. I felt ashamed." He exerted his control over Maria, which led her to feel guilt and shame. One type of abuse always leads to another type of abuse. He abused her sexually and this led to emotional abuse.

He has minimized her contribution to the family ever since the children were young. He also degraded her in general. As she talked about the life when the children were young, she recalled,

...I had worked on and off for a year when the kids were young, but it didn't mean anything to him. *Nothing!* I brought up the kids, but that was nothing. He told me that my life was worth nothing. (in tears) He also told, me point blank, that every thing that

I had ever done over the years was worthless.

At one point, he also said that he worked all the time and she sat around and did nothing but take up space. How could a mother sit around and do nothing?

They had a business and the office was in the house. He said she did not help him while she had a part time job. Although she was not business inclined, she answered the phone, greeted the customers, and gave out receipts. He expected her to conform to a business role, even though he knew that she was not business inclined. He made her to prepare for the GST every three months, which is not enough time for her. She spent all summer preparing. He also wanted her to take over all the paperwork of the business, along with all the financial dealings. She told him, "I was no good at math. I can't do all the incoming and outs well." He said, "don't tell me that you can't. There is no such word as can't. You don't want to do it because you don't want to help me." "... got to the point that I couldn't say 'no' to anything. (Long and loud sigh) It was more than I could take. He said that I was stupid. I was not worth anything."

He degraded her while forcing her to manage the business that she had no interest in, or training for. It seemed to be a dead end situation. He, then, even overpowered her emotions and said, "if you say 'no', it gives me the right to hurt you." She waited a week and asked him, "you didn't mean that, did you?" He said, "you are damn right I did."

As the cycle of abuse happened, he isolated her socially. She said, "I was not allowed to do anything. I couldn't be with my friends. I couldn't go for a coffee. I couldn't go shopping."

Maria was in a dark cloud of abuse and it even sneaked into her dreams.

...I used to have a dream that I could just float away. For a long time, I was afraid to go to sleep at night. I dreamt that Dan slept on one side of the bed. I could still see his

mother was on the other side of the bed. He had a sharp knife and said that he could strip off my skin. I was afraid; it was so real. I still can see that dream in my mind.

Strange. (Again sighed loudly)

He also chose his family of origin and friends over Maria and their children:

... He always has time for friends (and) even strangers. He is always too busy (for me and the children). This family doesn't mean anything to him. I had terrible time with him. If we went out for a drive, it was wasting gas. He said, "I could be doing something else."

This is a very clear example of emotional abuse. He put Maria and the children in a very low position in his social life. About two years ago, he didn't talk to Maria for a long time. When he did talk to her, it was the time for name-calling. He said, "you are stupid." He also said, "You are crazy"; "You are cold". She said,

... I couldn't do anything right, I was no good in bed and I was not good out of bed, I couldn't talk right. He didn't know what I was talking about. I couldn't walk right. I couldn't dress right. I was a bad mother and a bad wife. I am hopeless.

Maria felt all he saw were negative things. How could Maria stand up for herself? She questioned Dan's love in one of the interviews. She put it like this..

... The man said he loves me. How can he love me if he can't see any of my emotion? ... somebody tells you he loves you but hurts you so badly. He thought that I was a robot. He controlled the remote control. I stopped being angry. I stopped trying to feel. I stopped trying to be different.

When she stopped being angry or tried to feel, she was blocking her emotions in order to survive.

He also verbally abused his children as Maria described,"he was very hostile with the

kids. He shouted, 'shut up' or yelled 'get out of the car' at them."

Furthermore, he forced her into isolation. His way was quite subtle. Since Maria was hard of hearing, she had to stay near the phone in order to get the phone calls. She recalled ... it was beautiful outside, but I couldn't go outside because I couldn't hear the cell phone. I was hard of hearing. I had to be right in the house until he said that I could go out after supper, in the yard or something. I thought I was in jail. Sitting in the kitchen, looking out at the beautiful summer and I couldn't go out. It was the jail and it was not my house." (Long pause, with scrunching forehead)

He also withheld all the finances and Maria did not have any money. Every time when Maria needed money to buy things, she needed to explain what the money would be spent on. She talked about that issue as follows

...I didn't have any money. I had a certain amount of money or a cheque to buy groceries. Sometimes I bought cigarettes. He would ask, "Where in hell does the money go? How come the groceries are so expensive? Where the hell did you get this time. We can't afford it."

At the end of the first interview, Maria made a clear and concise summary on her experience of being abused. She said, "nobody sees any bruise, everything seems to be fine to other people, but inside my heart there is a big hurt but people don't believe me." Over many years, emotionally, she had a very deep wound from emotional/psychological and verbal abuse that was inflicted by her husband. Since there was no bruise, nobody had considered charging him.

Maria and Dan were married for thirty years. They argued quite often, to the point that they decided to separate. It lasted for a year. As Dan put down Maria's sexual ability, he told Maria that she was "not good in bed and not good out of bed." There was a void in her heart

and her husband did not even care about it. Maria met a man who was in a high position at work and she made “the worst mistake in my life. It had always hurt” her. Her boss at work made her feel good. She recalled,

...I wanted to prove myself, but I ended up pregnant. He offered an abortion, but I couldn't do it. (in tears) He called me every name going and he forced me to tell my oldest daughter that I was pregnant by the other man. (a very long pause) She was fifteen at the time. He kept yelling at me and said, “tell her, tell her”. I told her and hurt her so bad. At that moment, she hated me, she cried and cried. I was ashamed.”(Her face was very red and her body was shaking.)

This incident hurt the family very much. Maria did not blame anybody for her mistake but herself. Is that the end of the story?

Dan degraded her sexual ability as well as other abilities. Who gave him that right to repeatedly degrade his own wife? This was an extra-marital affair which involved Dan and Maria, as well as the man. It did not concern their eldest daughter. It was not necessary to ask her to do anything. It was unfortunate that her father told her to tell Maria that she loved her. Maria sighed and said, “she didn't love me at that moment. She was so hurt. I understand that I kept telling her, ‘you don't have to do that.’ I was totally shot, to the point that I was numb.”

Maria described her feelings clearly. When a person is in deep pain emotionally, he or she becomes “totally shot and then numb.” Since she had eleven heart-breaking miscarriages in fifteen years of marriage, she did not want an abortion. After three months, she had a miscarriage. Maria was very sad and recalled, “(In tears) I was not allowed to cry!” My husband said, ‘I don't understand why you feel sad.’

Four months after the extra-marital incident, Dan found a way “to get even”. He set her

up for a threesome. The family went to his co-worker's home. Everybody was drinking, but Maria drank very little. The whole evening, Maria watched Dan drinking and dancing very closely with his co-worker, singing and looking into each other's eyes. She then found out that they were arranged to stay over night. Maria and the children were told to sleep in the host's bed. Maria described

...My husband realized that I was not interested. I made my mistake and I am suffering for it and that was enough. My husband and his co-worker were sitting nose to nose on the sofa. I decided that I had enough. I was going to bed. After half an hour, Dan came to bed. He was quite angry with me because I wasn't very nice to the host. So, while we were talking, the door opened and his co-worker's husband came in. I told him, 'you are in the wrong room' but he got on top of the bed. He was trying (to put) his hands under the covers on me. My husband was sitting right beside me, but he didn't do anything. I said, 'Hey, what are you doing here? Dan, do something here.' Finally, my husband said, 'Hey, Joey, wise up.'

Maria then got the kids up (2:00 am) in the morning and walked home. Dan warned Maria that she had to be nice to those people, for they were his friends. After a long pause, she then said, "we broke up. I didn't go with his friend."

Dan set the threesome up and their children were with them. Maria needed to bring the children home at two o'clock in the morning. The children walked home in the middle of sleeping.

Maria's heart was broken. She decided to break up with Dan. When she was talking about the break up, her voice was trembling.

As Maria started to plan to leave her abusive husband, she realized that she had no resources to rely on. She was traveling her lonely journey because Dan deliberately isolated

her for a long time.

...I did not know where to go. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't go to my friends because they had their own problems, and I couldn't go to my family. I have been away from my family since I was fifteen years old. Only friends that I had were his friends. There was nobody to talk to. My husband's family did not respect me from the beginning anyway. I never had support. I couldn't go to my parents (died). I had no way of traveling. I had no money. I didn't know anybody to call.

To Maria, her children are the reason to live. They had a lot of sickness. She thought that things would get better if she tried harder. Maria explained the reason she stayed. She explained, "I stayed for them (her children). My eldest had an operation when she was six. She was sick all the time. I always told myself, things would get better. "

Maria miscarried eleven babies. She thought that she needed to pay more attention during the pregnancy stage. It became evident that Maria seemed to compromise her well being in order to make sure her children had their father. She also needed Dan's support. She recalled the days when she was pregnant with the second daughter,

... We got back together when I was pregnant with my daughter. I almost lost my daughter when she was born. She was overdue. She had severe asthma, along with 54 allergies when she was six months old. I never slept through the night. I slept a few hours here and there in order to take care of my second daughter while my husband was working.

Maria was a very hard working mother. Since she needed to take care of a very sick child, she was exhausted. She had to give up a lot of sleep. Two years and three months later, her son was born. She had two children, running back and forth between her home and the doctor's office. When they were healthy, she tried to work, keep the house going, keep

everyone clean and healthy because Dan was very demanding, similar to his mother. When Maria's son was six months old, she found that he had a heart problem and asthma. Maria recalled those days

... The doctor thinks that when he got older, he may have to have a bypass (thirteen).

He got tired and sick easily. I had two babies in the carriage and a daughter who was six years old. I had two sick kids in my hands, where could I go?

Yes, how could she leave with three young children especially with two sick children?

Where can they go or stay?

The decision to leave

The situation got worse and they argued all the time. The tension kept building up and

“... everybody had to walk on tiptoes. At times, I got tired and accepted the fact that no matter what anyone said, it was not important what I had to say. No matter what I did, no matter how hard I tried; it was never going to be good enough. It was a long time before I realized these things.”

The literature agrees that takes a long time to recognize the pattern of abuse. Maria recalled, “One day, I realized that I was just living to get through each day so I could die. I just get old and die.”

The children watched their parents fight all the time. For the sake of the children, Maria really wanted to leave the abusive relationship. Her emotional and physical strength were very weak by then. She gave an account of her emotion and physical strength after a long pause,

... I wanted to stay out of fire and I got up and felt rage, my head felt so heavy. I was so wiped out. I kept thinking, I can't face tomorrow. I can't face a day. (a heavy sigh) I sat in the front room and made myself a cup of coffee. I made sure that I slept until the

next day.

Maria took a lot of pills all at once. She did not want to live because the abusive husband was hurting her and the children too much. She revived her memory on the attempted suicide incident.

... Husband found me between the bathroom door and the top step of the basement but I don't remember anything. (In hospital) I kept hearing a voice, "What did you take? Why did you do it?" I said, "peace". He (husband) was mad at me when he came to see me in the hospital. When he came to see me in the hospital I told him, 'go home'. I ended up staying in the hospital because I didn't want to go home. "There was no meaning there." (Stare at the ceiling for a long time) "I just felt nothing. Nothing. He said, 'Are you sorry that it didn't work? (suicide) I looked at him and said, 'yeah, I am.'

What was the reason for Maria to attempt suicide? She just wanted to stay out of fire. Maria must have been in great despair when she tried to kill herself. She loved her abusive husband deeply. During the last three months before moving out, her daughter told her that they knew their father was not easy to live with. Maria was very sad that her child understood her more than her husband.

Maria was a very devoted mother. Although she did not get any affection from her dead parents or her husband, she found ways to learn and demonstrate the affection to her children. Her married life and parenthood were very challenging. She struggled until she gave up and tried to take her life.

Maria met helpful staff in the hospital. At that time, her concentration ability was very short and she cried a lot. She looked back on those days

... I just almost put my life in somebody's hand. I couldn't keep the same thought in my

head longer than two seconds. All I could do was cry. I was there for seven or eight days. It was fun. It's a strange thing to say. I met a few people and had a good laugh.

(Laugh) I got some sense of humor at that time. I was alive. We felt like teenagers. We giggled and giggled. (Long laugh)

At the hospital, the doctor told Maria to go home but she told him that she didn't want to face the angry husband. She couldn't take it. She was afraid that she would do something that she would really, really be sorry for. She said, "maybe I would hurt him. (Sigh) I just couldn't go home."

During Maria's stay in the hospital, Dan did not tell the children where their mother was, although her eldest daughter asked Dan about her mother. He told his daughter four days later. They had difficulty to handle the fact that their mother was missing especially since they witnessed the fights between their parents.

When Dan first went to visit Maria, after transferring to the hospital, he looked at her and said, 'you God damned coward, you run away from reality. You can't take your responsibility.' Maria told herself, "...In the back of my mind I kept telling myself I had been taking my responsibility, but I can't take you."

While Maria was in the hospital, they had an appointment with a psychiatrist but Dan walked out of the appointment. The psychiatrist told her that "you were married to this man and you lived for so many years? You are stronger than you think." The nurse and the doctor told her that she deserved a medal of bravery. These are very important confirmations for Maria. She talked about these confirmations in few other conversations.

Life in shelters

Maria went to Willow House after the nurse in hospital suggested it. She felt that she had been so lucky because she was able to have a roof over her head. She stayed there for

five weeks without kids. As she recalled,

... The first week I cried a lot. I could go to the back of the house and see the apartment that Dan and I had when we first got married...I made a few friends in the Willow House. I still didn't know where to go. I was still foggy with my own emotion. So then, somebody told me about Bee Housing and before I knew it, everything was arranged. It was good because I couldn't think. I couldn't take care of my personal stuff. I couldn't focus. It's strange.

She had a lot of surprises after moving to Bee Housing. She didn't have anything to begin with, but in the end, she had all the necessities. She even got a groceries voucher from the staff of Bee Housing. She wondered,

...How come these people helped me? My God, where does this come from? I didn't work. My husband told me I was nothing. They all went to all this trouble for me. They all cried and laughed with me. They helped me to get groceries and I didn't do anything. After I moved to Bee Housing, they gave me chair, bed, table, couch, radio and dishes. What have I done to deserve all this? How am I going to repay all this?

By now, Maria was sure she was not going back to her abusive husband. She wanted to be independent and she said, "I don't care if it's pension I don't care what it is. I am not going to be totally dependent, having to ask for every dime and every cent. I can go for coffee if I have a friend (with slow and firm voice)."

Maria felt relief that she didn't have to worry about where to stay the next day. She knew that for that month she had a place to stay. She recalled,

...I know I have a roof over my head. I have some money in my pocket. There was somebody that I could call if things got really, really bad. There were other people in the house and I had all the stuff to start out with. I couldn't believe that I might be

worth something. I am so grateful. I was so lucky. I've had so much help. I felt like I was a baby learning to talk again, trying to walk again, trying to think, I was allowed to do something if I wanted to."

After her self-esteem was beaten down badly, she could say that "I might be worth something." Everybody is worth to have some help from family, friends and even strangers.

Gradually, Maria could keep her thoughts together for a length of time, although she still felt guilty sitting down for a cup of coffee. But slowly and surely, she could go to talk with somebody and she could go for coffee without feeling guilty. She described,

...I don't have to watch the clock and I don't have to be back within five minutes.

Freedom! I think the first time I would walk and walk and walk, visit every museum, every art gallery, every park. I had everything. As long as I have enough bus fare and a cup of coffee, I will be gone. I even talk to strangers, even say hello. It was so nice to take a bus, sit and watch people.

Her emotion was in a process of healing. As she thought back, she felt that she must be worth something. She remembered,

...I worked in the hospital and I got along well. I can't be that stupid. I must be worth something. They will rehire me at the airport, all I have to do is give them a call. So I must be worth something there. So why did Dan tell me that I was no good?

What a different conclusion on her accomplishments than when compared with the time she was in her abusive relationship. Her emotion ups healed when there was a supportive environment and a safe place to stay.

The counsellor and the residents of Bee Housing were very important for Maria's healing. She explained,

...I couldn't have done it alone. If I had gone to some other place like an apartment

building and was isolated and had nobody to talk to. If I didn't have the girls in the house, sometimes just for a hug, a cup of tea or just to cry with. There is so much pain that you can't put words to it. But it was just nice to have someone to laugh with and don't need to explain it to them.

Her emotions were very strong after she left her abusive husband. The pain was beyond words. Maria tried to help herself get better by talking to the residents and the counselor of Bee Housing, and by crying with the same group of people. She even used laughter to smooth out the wounds. Sometimes she questioned herself, she stated, "Is that right? I didn't know things from right or wrong. I am not sure, so it is nice to be able to talk to the counselor. You need that reassurance. It was okay to feel confused." Yes, it is nice if there are places that allow us to release anger and pain, as well as giving reassurance.

As I asked Maria to describe her experience in Bee Housing, she had a happy face and started,

... "It is a good memory. I found companionship. It was nice to have other females around. We were like family. I was the Mom. If somebody were down, we would go see if we could help. I was really, really down one time. My husband and I had a really big argument over the phone. It was so bad that I actually got sick for two days. I remember the girls hadn't seen me for a while. They tapped on my door and ask 'Are you okay?' Half an hour later, another tapped on my door, 'I brought you a cup of tea.' Somebody brought me a piece of cake. At nine o'clock that evening I had four or five girls came to see me and ask, 'have you eaten supper?' That was the first time in my life that I can remember somebody doing something for me. They care. They really care.

Maria went on her story about the life in Bee Housing especially when she was

experiencing depression, and/or “chronic posttraumatic stress disorder”-her family doctor’s diagnosis. She recalled

...Bee Housing saved my life. I know that. Before I came to Bee Housing I couldn’t think. There were times I would still wake up in the middle of the night and I would be crying. It was nice to know that there was someone at the other end of the phone that I could call up and somebody would talk to me. Nobody was going to get angry with me. I was allowed to have my own feelings.

A non-judgmental counselor, who listened to the residents, was very helpful. Last year, Maria was very sick and needed to stay in hospital. Her eldest daughter came to help. Her younger daughter, her son and her ex-husband went to visit her. All the girls from Bee Housing went to visit her. They were the friends that she made after she stayed in Bee Housing. It made her feel good when they went out of their way to visit her. It also made her feel good that the residents kept their eye on her son, who was living in Bee Housing too. She went on to tell the rest of the incident,

...I was surprised my daughters came to see me. I was still their mother. I was surprised and amazed that my family came to visit me. They thought about me and I wasn’t used to that. They brought some of my clothes and an extra toothbrush.”
It was a happy ending for now.

Moving on

Maria, her daughter and her son felt that it was the right time to move out from Bee Housing. She and the eldest daughter felt some of the residents were leaning on her too much. She was getting to the point that she was taking on many other residents’ problems but she was not able to handle hers. At the same time, Maria still needed to maintain emotional support from Bee Housing. She said, “I only moved out, I still needed to keep the

lifeline (visit the office). I was terrified to move out and totally isolate myself. I could come down and talk. I needed reassurance.”

Maria’s life started to settle. However, she had a difficult time with her son. She felt that she needed some time and space to fight her little battle. She continued

...I needed some privacy to fight my little battle. I needed some time and space to face things in my own way. I found that people knocking on my door in some ways was an intrusion, taking away my time. I decided to move out. Everybody gave me a going away party. They cried and I cried. They were sort of my family.

One of the battles that she needs to fight is her children’s anger. This was a big challenge to Maria, after she moved out. She knew that the fights between her and Dan hurt the children very much. She recounted,

...My youngest daughter didn’t want to talk with me for a while. She was angry with me. My son was angry with me. A few friends that I did have didn’t want to talk with me anymore. My kids were angry with me for leaving. As I said, they were pulled in different directions. On one side, they would say, ‘Mom, you can’t go back there’, on the other side they resented the fact that I am not going back. They felt pulled between their father and me. If my daughters went home, I wasn’t there. Everything was different.

Maria had a very clear picture of the situation that her children were in. Anger is a strong emotion. Why are they angry with their mother? Although they were able to be totally independent, except the third child, the stability that Maria provided had changed after she moved out. They might have missed the stability so much that they were angry with their mother who took it away.

Their father might have degraded Maria in front of the children as well. The children

might feel that they had to take sides. It was devastating because they might feel that they betrayed the parent whom they love or respect by taking sides. This no-win situation might trigger anger as well.

One time, the child asked, 'do you hate all of us?' and she answered,

...no, I don't hate. I thought the world of your dad for years but he took every good thing that I had and threw them back in my face. I don't know what I feel right now. I just know that I can't go back home right now.

She said, "I tried to explain that I love them all, but that I am tired of being hurt" She started to cry and I stopped the interview for the day.

Maria's children asked her "do you hate all of us?" Mother don't hate their children From the children's perspective, they might really wonder if their mother hated them so much that she refused to come home.

Within three months, Maria's youngest daughter and the son moved out from home. The only person left at home was Dan. The son did not want to stay with Maria at first because he was still angry at her and said, "it's your fault". He stayed with his older sister for two weeks but the sister couldn't handle him. He moved in with Maria but hardly talked to her. She bought him all the necessities. Her youngest daughter stayed with her for two months so that she could go to a local university. She then quit because she found school very, very hard.

Maria's son wasn't doing well after Maria left home but in the past six months "he started doing better. Peter made new friends and they all seem to be good people. He can be very mature at times. He can verbalize things and at other times he can be very negative."

Maria's younger daughter, Mary, was angry with her for a long time. She did not talk to Maria and she found that it was hard to stay with her mother and Peter. After two months,

she moved in with her boyfriend and his family.

The older daughter blamed herself. She had seen the abusive incidents and experienced parental stress more than the younger siblings. Maria thought that she could have understood her mother's pain more, instead she was angry with her. She felt pulled between parents. She didn't want her parents to talk about each other. Maria recalled one of the mother and daughter conversations as follows,

...She said, 'it's still our faults.' I said, "No, it's not your fault at all. Its just things came about and went on for years and years and, finally, it got to the point that we just broke. I could not go on.'

The children blamed themselves for their parental stress. Maria initiated a few concessions so they could communicate as a family. She explained to her daughter that it was not their fault. It was between her and Dan, only. Both of them had a meaningful conversation as such, otherwise; the daughter would further internalize the problem.

Maria felt very bad. She thought she had hurt her children. After Maria talked about the responses of her children, she sadly said, "I felt very bad. I've got my home. I've got my family and I just walked out on my family. I also felt bad that I didn't have any choice. I hurt my children."

Her sense of guilt and shame was very strong. She seems to think that she destroyed the family she had built. Did she walk out on the family or did her husband drive her out of the family? Is it possible to live under the same roof with the abusive husband? Maria felt she did not have any choice but to leave the abusive relationship.

Maria faced poverty, health and social life challenges after she moved out of Bee Housing. Poverty was one of the most difficult challenges to deal with. Maria's ex-husband asked her for a divorce but she told him, "I can't afford one. I got married and changed my

name. It's not the name that hurt me." Indeed, getting a divorce is a very expensive process. Even though she wanted to have closure from this relationship, she could not afford one. Furthermore, social assistance was not enough to provide daily necessities, how could she afford the divorce?

Currently, women are more likely to be financially responsible for their children especially the female-headed family. Maria did not have money to buy the food. She said, "Peter complains if there is not bread. I will go without so that he can have it." Peter seems did not realize that they were on a tight budget. Maria needed to go without, in order to meet Peter's desires.

Dan was telling Maria that he was going to stop paying maintenance after Peter graduated from high school. So she told Peter, that

... he has to move out after graduation in July. I'm moving back to the transition housing and, hopefully, I can afford it and I won't have to be worried about being evicted. I don't know how much money I'll have, and either I am not paying rent or there is no food and that's all that's been on my mind. Right now, I'm getting \$600 for rent. My husband (pays), altogether, my son and me, it's about \$300, if he takes that away, if I stay where I am right now, I can't, I have nothing else. I don't have a phone; I can't afford anything else but the rent. I can't survive and I've tried looking at various places and I can't find anything (apartment) for less than \$500. Right now, I don't know if I can afford it or not."

The amount of money they received from court-ordered awards was very little. Maria and Peter faced considerable financial hardship after the separation.

Maria had waited for months after they applied for the Disability Pension. Even though she had a lawyer to support her application, the process was still very slow. She recounted

the sequences,

... The legal aid has been trying to get me disability and they've been trying to get that for the past five or six years. It doesn't help being so slow. They feel that I've had the chance I should go for it. If I get turned down this time, that's it, I can't appeal for anything else that I haven't appealed for. They're sort of keeping their fingers crossed for me.

In Bee Housing, Maria only needed to pay rent but now she needs to pay other utilities. It is quite hard to handle financially. For that reason, she needs to go to Frenchy's, food banks, and Bee Housing for bread. She also said, "I have to wait for the GST rebate to have a hair cut, or to buy some supplies for my son."

At one point, Maria and Peter moved to a less desirable apartment and they had quite a bad memory from it. Maria described,

... We got stuck in a bad section of town. After we moved there we were very scared. We were broken into. My son and I couldn't go to sleep at night. He woke me up at three o'clock at night. There were guns in our backyard. We couldn't take it. Housing Authority provided another apartment, just like a box. We couldn't live there. There was only a little window. I had to refuse it. I haven't heard from them since.

Maria and Peter were living in a high crime neighborhood. These were low-income housing.

Maria had been experiencing major set backs in her studies due to her poor health. She tried very hard to be independent and active but,

... It's my health, my body gives up on me, my spirit is willing but my body is weak. I guess maybe I push myself too hard. I... am getting up at 6:30 until 11:00 or 12:00 at night. It was too much for my health, ... I enjoyed school, I've met different people and

I want to get back to that. I have tried to do things for myself and it just seems to come against me.

There are many uncontrollable elements in her life. She had not gone to school for two and a half weeks because of a bleeding problem. She said,

...I tried going into academics for a full day and I found the last few times I went, I lasted for about two hours. And they (teachers) brought me home and I just stopped. My body has sort of taken a beating and I need to rest and eat and don't push it.

It was an unexpected interruption for her study and it beat her down quite badly. At that point, I pushed aside the research role and made her some soup. It would not heal her but hopefully, she would take it as an encouragement.

After a divorce, women also have the additional work of redefining relationships with friends and families and building a new personal life (Andersen, 1993). Maria was facing the work of building a new personal life when she was telling this story.

Her son told her that she shouldn't be dating because she is still married. She sat him down and told him "I feel that it is your problem if you don't accept it. It's time in my life that I stick up for my rights." She was building a new personal life and at the same time, she was redefining the relationship with her family. She set the boundaries and explained to her son about her rights.

She met a man in her school and they started dating This was a dilemma. She felt that she needed a companion to grow old with. She continued,

... Someday, I would like to have a companion to live with; I don't want to grow old alone. He is going to "look after me", but I hate those terms because that takes away all my independence. I don't know what else is left (for me to choose from).

From Maria's point of view, it was a very hard decision to make. She left her "prison"

and found her freedom. It was a very hard-earned freedom. How could she give it up just like that?

Maria and Dan talk to each other once a while. He said that he was glad they are still talking because they still have a chance. She told him, "I can't. On Valentines Day he came and gave me flowers. I can't have sex with him. Anything else that I give is nothing. We got into an argument."

The abuse did not end the day Maria left him. The stress was still very real. He told her that she was a coward for not going back home. She pondered on this name calling and then she wrote a four page letter to him after another big argument. She recounted

... The more I thought about it. I knew that something has not changed. I know that there are things that hurt too much and will never go away. I tried to explain to him and after four or five days, I thought he was going to be ugly. He is going to be miserable...But he surprised me. He called me back one night and apologized to me for being such a coward, because he had seen how upset I was. I told him I really, really appreciated that he accepted my letter. I told him that we spent years and years together and we raised our family. We shared so many memories that we can't share with anyone else.

This was the only positive segment of their story from what Maria had talked about in the interviews. It was a healthy closure to this relationship at this point.

Another time she felt she had made a big mistake was when she allowed her ex-husband to stay over night after his birthday. They had a big fight over the same problem. He said it was her attitude that was affecting his potency performance. She felt that it was his depression medication that affected his potency. It was the same old story.

... 'my fault, my fault'. He wanted me to go back and then told me that even if I went

back he wanted me to either take over the business or get a full time job and make money, because I would not be sitting at home and look after the house. I was taking advantage of him.

The blaming game has played again and again. There were times that Maria blamed herself and took up all the responsibilities for what had happened. She said,

...I felt shame for the last two years. I don't know. I feel so empty, so lost. Maybe if I believed in my family, my home, my kids are the best choice of my life. I have stretched my head first, me first. My kids are upset with me; they blame me for tearing apart the family. They are my babies. It's hard.

She was depressed after the fight in her apartment. She also questioned what would happen if she could not work any more. She wondered "what if I can't make a living, if I can't survive."

In discussion with Maria on her experiences of the past thirty years, she said,

"I am getting more confidence. I am not afraid to say I dislike or like something I am not questioning myself as much now. If I feel like doing something and if I am not breaking any law, then I am content to do what I feel like doing. I am worth something!"

Although there were a lot of challenges and set backs, Maria was able to see some positive occurrences. She happily broke the news

...I went back to school. My children are proud of me. I felt so good. My children are realizing that I am mom, but that I am also me. Children told me that it's about time to meet somebody; to have a social life. I reconfirmed to them that, whatever they thought of me, I still loved them. I just could not go on (living with their father). They finally understood, realized and told me that if I go back, I am crazy because nothing

will change. The youngest daughter and I got a little more comfortable with each other.

She also said that she met good people at school. When she was sick, they were very understanding. She recalls,

... The people at school have been really good, they told me I could go back whenever I get back on my feet, I need to look after myself first. So, I started, I tried going to mornings this week and they told me that if I could only make it for an hour or two, that's fine. I feel that I'm getting too tired. So I've been going for half a day. but I'm going to try to write my grade twelve next month.

Maria felt alive. She could carry on a joke or a serious conversation with somebody. She even said,

... Somebody may come down on me and criticize me. I have companionship that I enjoy is really nice. It's nice that, for the first time in a long time, I feel that somebody think something of me. I am not just a thing. I also enjoy everyday and I will take things as they come. I just do what I want to do, just myself. It had been so many years - just like being in a deep freeze. Now I am alive, but I am afraid, still. It's very hard to explain. I realize my journey is not over yet"

The roller coaster journey of Maria is in a high point now. What will happen tomorrow, a year later, or even three years later? From what she had gone through, she was on her way to healing. The internal strength that she gathered from her experience, she will be able to face another challenge or set back.

... I haven't regretted it. I brought up my kids. I loved my husband dearly for years and years but I know that I can't change my husband. I can't go back. I've done my best. I haven't twenty or thirty years to relive my life. I got to enjoy my life as long as I don't hurt anybody. He didn't like it, but I told him don't expect me to sit here getting

older and waiting to die. After that five years. No dream, no hope, just waiting to die.

I never want to experience that again, so useless, hopeless, nothing in my life. I have the right to be happy, the right to show that I am happy.

Maria continues to describes her journey,

... The journey is just like climbing up the mountain from the valley. It was a long, long climb. It's just like a yo-yo; it's up and down, sometimes I question myself if I am going in the right direction. I learnt so much more. I cannot say I can celebrate. It is still going.

As she stopped and looked back, she claimed,

...I am not rich, going from payday to payday. I have to go to the Food Bank and get assistance. I have my fun (laugh). It's nice that I can go out for a coffee. I can even go out and have a drink. I don't feel that I do anything wrong. I enjoy the life. It is nice to have freedom, but it is also nice to be able to enjoy the freedom with somebody.

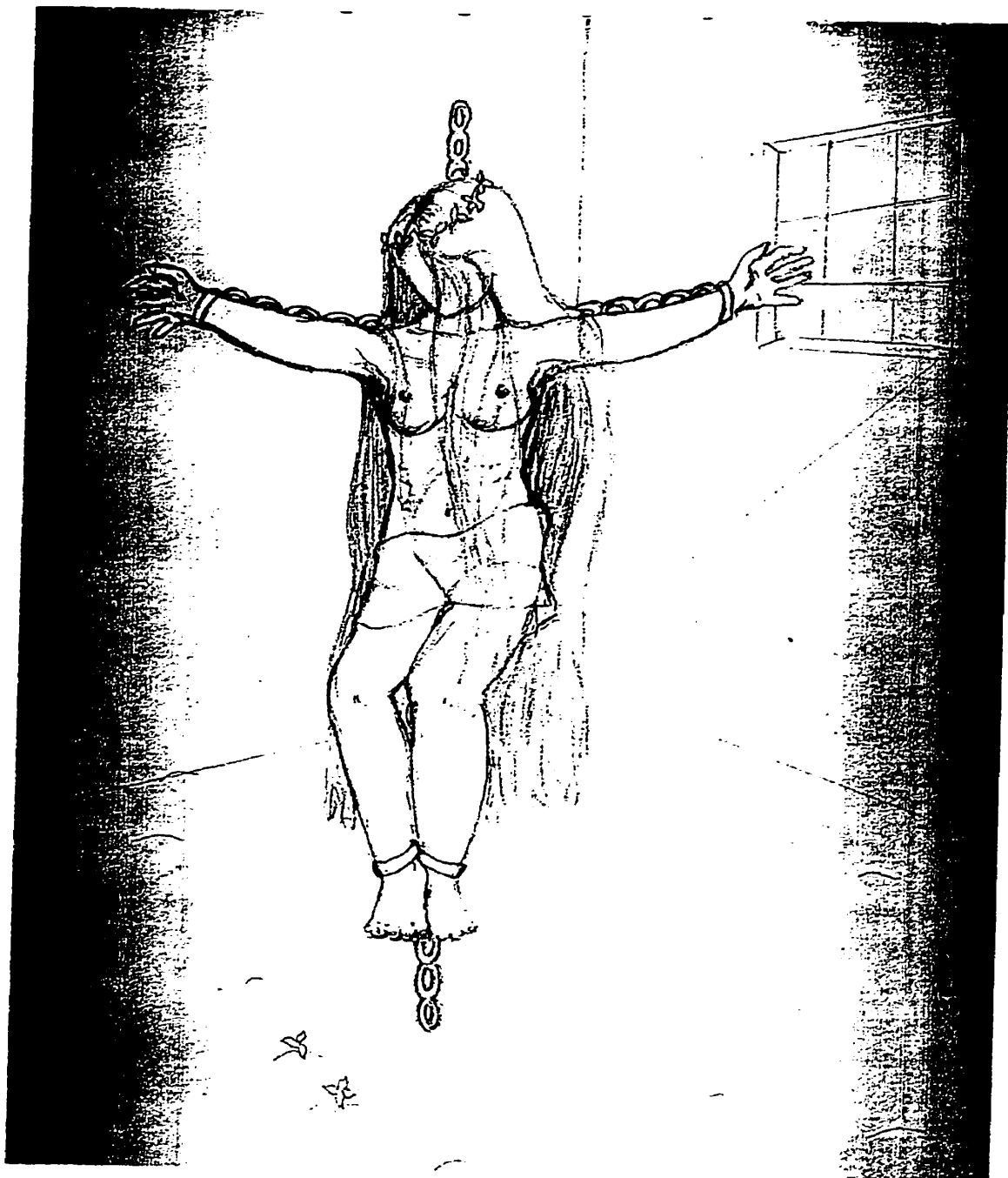
Chapter six: Agnes' story

Interviews with Agnes

We had all three interviews in her home, which is located on a quiet street. She decorated her home with style. Although her dog sheds quite heavily, she is still able to maintain a clean home. Her two daughters were at school when we had the interviews. We had the whole house to ourselves for those hours.

The interviews lasted from one and half hours to an hour. It seemed to me that the first interview was quite challenging for her and, therefore, I decided to stop the interview and debrief with her. I found the introduction and the debriefing were very important elements for Agnes and for me. She was able to talk more freely about her experience and I was able to understand her better.

The second and the third interviews were more relaxing. The experience that she was talking about was quite sad and challenging but she persevered. She showed me two pictures that she had drawn when she was in the Bee Housing. Agnes is a very expressive artist. You can tell her inner emotions by looking at the pictures. I had her permission to duplicate her pictures and include them in the thesis.



Agnes' Picture June 1999



Agnes' picture July 1999

Agnes is a friendly, helpful, conscientious, kind, and reliable woman who has two daughters. She is a student and on her way to gaining a professional diploma. High moral standards are very important to her. She also respects the rights of people. Agnes is always searching for the self that she feels is lost.

She grew up in a conservative Catholic family that consisted of five girls and two boys. Agnes is the fifth one in the family. Her father worked for an automaker as a foreman, and her mother was a homemaker. Her parents were churchgoers and insisted that their children go as well. According to Agnes, her parents were not a happy couple ever since she was very young. It was a very stressful relationship. Her mother submitted to her father's power all the time.

Agnes became involved in an intimate relationship six years ago. She felt her choice of the partner, Ben, was not right from the beginning. Ben made her feel guilty and he manipulates her all the time...

Living with the abuser

Ben mainly abused Agnes socially. He did not give any personal space to Agnes. She depicted the abuse,

...It was like one of the worst things, once the kids were in bed, I wanted to stay up, I never had time for myself. Ben was with me for six years; we were literally together for twenty-four hours a day...He never went out. I had to go pick up his cigarettes; I had to make his phone calls for him. I was very uncomfortable because I really couldn't talk about things that I wanted to because he was always there.

Ben used a subtle way to isolate Agnes. It seems that he suffered from depression or another mental health problem. She had to make all the outside contacts for Ben but at the same time Agnes did not feel comfortable making personal calls.

Although he never hit her, she had to go to bed the same time he did. He irritated her to “no end.” He followed her everywhere. He liked her to be near him. He liked her to sit beside him. He liked to tuck her in bed at night. “It used to drive me nuts. Some bizarre thing that would drive me nuts.” If she was reading a story he was there and asked, “what are you doing?” She was never alone. Agnes said,

... It got to the point where I would go to the bathroom and sit on the side of the tub and that is where I would stay because that was the only place I could go. It was awful. I would say, Ben never, never hit but he would go on in here cursing, right under his breath ... to the end I would just end up going to bed. And he told me he was afraid that I would make phone calls to my boyfriends. It was just constant. Over those six years there would be times that I would be so frustrated and it would be me who would get upset. I am the one who would just lose it.

Agnes said “Ben did not trust me, therefore he made me go to sleep at the same time”. Ben mistrusted her that he needed to keep her in his sight at all times.

He demanded Agnes’ full attention and took up all her energy. She said, “I was very caught up with him and looking after his needs or whatever. And I never looked after my own; I never thought about myself, it was always somebody else.”

The nurturing role in Agnes was fully expressed in Ben’s life. Women often forget their needs when they are nurturing others.

After Ben cursed under his breath for twenty-four hours, Agnes broke down. She became very irritated and angry, then she thought it was her fault. She sadly recalled, “So many times I was seeing a counselor trying to help me with leaving him. I would blame myself. I would think if I weren't here, it would be better. The kids would be better off.”

Agnes even felt that,

... it didn't matter what I wanted anymore, it was always what he wanted. He never did anything for me. But I still depended on him in a way, like to figure out the finances and stuff... I didn't have to think about that. I don't know. It was just bizarre, it was just a weird relationship. And I, would tell him that there is something very wrong here. And he would say, 'oh no, it's fine'".

Another trick he used, in order to make Agnes fall into his trap, was to send her on a guilt trip. Agnes related,

... When we had moved into an apartment I said to Ben, 'look, you know this isn't going to work. You know right at the beginning you just can be friends or whatever.' And Ben said, 'Oh, I knew this was going to happen, they all do this to me.' I'm thinking, okay, oh well, I'm partly responsible for this, may be I should give it a try. So right from the beginning, it has always been feeling guilty. Now it wasn't like I had a boyfriend, it was like I had a child. He never worked for six years cause he felt he didn't have a lot of confidence. I worked two jobs when pregnant, well I was working all the time and Ben stayed at home. Like he was able to manipulate me.

Agnes had a lot of guilt and shame while Ben manipulated her regularly. There was another time that he made her feel guilty again. It was when Agnes decided to leave him. He kept asking, "...How am I going to do it? Am I going to pay the rent, or how am I going to make sure I have groceries or whatever."

After asking so many times, Agnes ended up not going. Basically, he kept track of her daily routine. He used guilt to stop her from moving but actually, he manipulated her to the point that he abused her emotionally. Agnes labeled the relationship as a dysfunctional relationship. She further commented that, "... It seems that I attract something; I don't know what it is, like people want me to look after them. So I just split up with this man a little

while after I met Ben.” In discussion with Agnes, she felt that Ben did not want her to meet anybody. She cited a typical conversation between them.

...If I wanted to go out, he would ask, 'why do you want to go out, I don't have to go out, I don't want to go out, I am happy here, why do you have to go out?' So I never went out. I didn't have friends. I had nobody. I was in the house all the time and I guess, after six years of being on your own and not doing anything. I didn't know anybody for six years.

Agnes was frustrated by the fact that Ben was very smart but he had not been working. He said nobody would hire him. He said, 'who would hire me with long hair and no clothes. And Agnes would say, 'well, go get your hair cut, go get clothes.' He answered, ' no, no, we can't afford it.' Agnes also told me that he would not go anywhere or do anything except watching TV and play computer games.

She was hoping that he would change diapers or bath their baby when she went back to work but he didn't do the child care duties at all. She cited an example,

... So I did all the chores after I got home, I brushed their hair. I would come home and their hair would be all over, like he really didn't have any ability or he just didn't bother with that kind of thing. So I would say, you have to go outside. So it was like pulling teeth to get him to go out to a playground, and he would only go there if there were no other person there.

Agnes had a very difficult task. She needed to work outside of the home as well as inside the home. At the same time, Ben did nothing.

Agnes went on,

...It was about after five years of supporting him and being there for him, and letting him go to the courses and feeling really positive that something great was going to

happen. And, him saying that it was going to get better but it never happened. I admit, at the end, I didn't have any respect left for him. I felt guilty about that but I couldn't help it. He didn't look after himself, he had hair down to here, and he never bathed practically. His clothes had holes in them everywhere. I would say, "go out and do these things" and he wouldn't. I am sure there is blame on both parts. After so many years of supporting him, I mean at the end, I didn't anymore.

Ben also refused to deal with issues requiring professional assistance. Ben said, "no, no we can work it out for ourselves. We don't need counseling," after Agnes suggested he seek professional help.

The decision of leaving

For six years, Agnes was thinking of leaving him. Her counselor said, "I couldn't believe that I got your call from Willow House. And, I have to be honest with you; I didn't think that you would ever, ever leave him." Agnes recalls,

... Once I had the kids, it seemed more clinched. I wanted to leave more. I think it was like we both changed. Ben seemed to change a lot while I was expecting the baby. He had the tendency to say things at times that were not very nice. And I, started not feeling very good about myself. He used to make comments about how big my body was and he did it in front of his parents. He used to keep a lot of magazines, the Playboy, those kinds of magazines, and he liked those magazines. And anyway it went on for a little bit. I didn't feel very good about it, so I would get down and feel bad because he made fun of my body. He didn't realize it. I would tell him afterwards, 'you did do that to me and he would say, 'well, maybe, okay, maybe I did. I didn't mean it or anything.'

The abuse has intensified before Agnes actually left Ben. Within one segment of an

interview, she described many different types of abuse. He verbally abused her by insulting her body in front of his parents during the pregnancy. He abused her sexually by displaying pornography that made her uncomfortable.

The abusive relationship hindered motherhood. Because she could not handle Ben's abusive behavior, she worked twelve days straight. She just didn't want to go home. But then, she was starting to feel guilty because she wasn't seeing the kids. She wasn't spending time with them.

Taking the children with her and leaving for a women's shelter, was the solution at that time. Ben's withdrawn behavior was not a good model for their daughters. Agnes "wanted the children not to be like that". She wanted them to learn from her. She said, "...I am a quiet person, I don't have lot of confidence but I am trying. I made the phone calls. I didn't let things hold me back."

Furthermore, the emotional abuse was too overwhelming for Agnes. She could not handle this emotional draining any more. He told her that she was cold but, in order to function, she needed to ignore him. She told me in the interview, "I think the only way that I could handle being there was that I would go about doing my things and he was, like, wasn't there." But she could not keep this up because he would follow her wherever she was.

She did her value check on marriage after she had a vision. She saw a tombstone and it was talking about her mother staying with her father, although they did not have a good relationship. Her mother stayed with her father and it was basically just living with somebody. Agnes expressed her opinion on living together for a entire lifetime as follows:

...I've gotta to be with him all my life? Staying with him, this is, just the thought of living my entire life like that. It was just like, oh my God. It was just that I couldn't

stand the thought. It was just so miserable. I thought that there has to be something more than this. She then decided to leave Ben.

Another factor which led Agnes to leave Ben was the over-work situation. Agnes was pregnant but she still needed to work overnight at a local department store. Her job was lifting very heavy merchandize. Sometimes she had morning sickness and was constantly tired. After she finished work, she still needed to babysit Ben's niece and nephew. At the same time, she needed to deal with Ben's sister and her family. On top of it, their living conditions were very poor.

Although she worked all the time, she didn't have well paying jobs. She needed to sell things for milk and food, especially after she had the baby. Eventually, she sold all her collector's items and had nothing left.

The worst part was when Ben did not have his cigarettes. He would become crazy. Agnes could not stand him, therefore; she had to take her picture off the wall and sell it for cigarettes. In her words "I gave up everything". There was sentimental value in the things that she sold, as well. The abuse affects every element of life.

Before she left Ben, she gave him enough money for a month.

... Yes, that is exactly what it is. I mean the day I left, I mean after 6 years of being with Ben. The day I left, Ben had been following me around, following around the house. Saying, 'don't go, don't go, what am I going to do?' Then I said, 'look, I will pay your rent for the month and I will give you some spending money.' And, it was like, ah, he felt better. Oh, that made me feel real good, you know. It was just so that I can look after him and make sure that he was looked after for the month.

We discussed with Agnes' experience as a mother. When she was in an abusive relationship, she quickly responded as follow, "I always lived my life according to what

other people wanted and I never lived for myself.”

Agnes knew that both children witnessed most of the arguments but Linda probably understood it more because she was older. There was always some stress in the house, even though there was nothing said. She said, ‘Linda knew there was something not right. Agnes also pointed out that she had never said anything against him in front of the girls. The girls were very important to her and she had always tried to keep Ben in their life. As she said, “like I know, he thinks a lot of the girls. So I mean the girls love their Dad. He comes over here and is always taking them out.” For this reason, the children kept visiting their father continuously even when they were in second stage housing.

There was another concern as a mother who was abused by the partner. She recalled the time when she was pregnant with Eli.

...I was really depressed and stressed out when I was pregnant with Eli. Eli was not colicky. I think it was the stress that I went through while I was pregnant with her. It was awful. I think, it must have affected her because she cries a lot. It didn't bother me but it bothered her father. She was a loud and cranky baby. I wondered how much it could affect other people?

From what Agnes described, she was over worked all the time especially after the birth of her daughters. She took care of other people's children as well as her two daughters. She also worked from seven in the morning until three and then she would come home and have to make supper. And then she would baby-sit an infant until 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. There was another mother who worked shifts and Agnes babysat for her child as well. When Agnes did not need to work, she also baby-sat in the daytime in order to make some more money. In the mean time, Ben sat around and watched TV or played computer games. He said that he just didn't have the confidence to go out. Sometimes, Agnes would not cook

supper and stay in the bedroom in order to make him work. He finally would cook but he got very angry. It worked, but the atmosphere of the family was unhealthy. She could not ask more from him and she ended up doing all the chores and childcare.

As a conclusion, the duty of being a mother of two was demanding enough, but for Agnes, since Ben was not participating in any childcare or house chore responsibility nor did he work in a paying job, she had to do it all. At the same time, she was suffering from emotional and social abuse. It was a very challenging life.

Agnes was trying to find ways to leave Ben. One of the ways was to put herself in the hospital because she felt that she was suicidal. She would sit right next to the hospital for seven hours.

... I was going to put myself in because I was so stressed out. And I would ask him, and there would be times that I would get up and I would say, 'you know, you've got to go.' And he would say, 'oh, please give me another chance and he would just follow me around the house. 'Come on, I'll get better. I'll get a job.' 'I'll do this and that.' And he would never listen to me.

Life in shelters

Agnes decided to leave but did not know where to go. Her sister was facing a similar situation and therefore her home was out of the question. Motels were too expensive to stay for a long time. Her last choice was Willow House. She described the process,

... I ended up calling Willow House. I had called them one time in the past and they were full. But anyway, this time I called again, but I said, if it weren't for them, I would still be there (in abusive situation). I actually don't know where I would be that gave me a place to go, because that is the biggest thing; you have to have a place to go. And up until that point I didn't know what to do. I had actually rented an apartment. I put a

deposit on but he talked me into not taking it. I lost my deposit there.

Thank God for Willow House that Agnes had a place to go to. As she said, finding a place to go was the “biggest thing”. The first stage housing provides a very important service for abused women. The children of the abused women receive therapy as well.

Agnes was quite emotional when she talked about leaving. She called Willow House a few days before the end of October. It is very rare that the house is quite empty. There were not too many people in there at that time. She let the kids have their Halloween, and then, on the first of November, she called and said she wanted to go.

...I brought along my daughters with me. It was around that time that I was thinking they were better off (to stay with Ben) but I really wanted to take them with me. At first they were fine. I told Willow House that I had the girls and that I would come and they said to get there as soon as I can as it can change. I got there pretty quick. I took the kid's clothes and got a cab.

Ben's most effective weapon to attack Agnes' self-esteem was a guilt trip. Once again, he made her feel guilty for leaving. Ben's sadness made her doubt herself. She questioned her parenting skills and said, “I was thinking they were better off (to stay with Ben)”. She also questioned if she made the right decision about leaving Ben.

She was certainly glad that they moved to Willow House. She would not need to worry about her children imitating their father's behavior. She also thought her choice to go with Bee Housing was a very good decision because she did not trust herself. She thought that if she moved into a place where it was so easy for him to come over and visit, it would be just hard for her to tell him no. That was why she chose Bee Housing, and it worked.

...I was in L apartment for six or seven months, I was on the waiting list for one of the duplexes. They were filled, so we went there and so it was kind of small, it was a little

crammed for the three of us. That was a hard time for all of us at the time because I moved in to L apartment at the end of November, going into Christmas time.

When talking about the challenges in the transition time, she said, 'they were all right at first, but then they had some difficulties. Eli imitated other children when she was upset. There were just too many kids. By the time we were there for a week, it was just packed and there were many kids.' Agnes detailed,

... We were lucky. We had our own room most of the time, so we didn't have other people in. There were a couple of kids when they got upset, they would throw themselves on the floor and they would just be screaming and screaming. And Eli did that. She never did that ever. She did that a couple of times. And it was not just a really good place to go, but we were there for three weeks and there was just so much going on all the time. It is hard to get settled. It was hard on the kids, I think. They would ask when they were going home and see Dad. It made me feel bad too.

By then, Agnes and her daughters had moved to two different places. It was hard for the children. Eli learned the way to throw a temper tantrum. Agnes recollected,

... We settled down a little bit when we got to Green Street, but she was very much into throwing herself on the floor. She had never done that before, ever, so this was something new for me. My gosh, what's going on? I know we've witnessed it a few times but she was hard to handle.

Agnes's first daughter is a very quiet child. She is usually quite content but the transition was also a hard time to her. The first few months after Christmas, Agnes went through a depression, so it was hard for her and it was hard on the girls. Agnes noticed,

... Linda especially, she's the older one so she knew more and this was all two years ago and Linda was probably four. And she was upset at me, she was actually mad at me.

One night we had just moved in and I couldn't put the beds together, something was wrong and she said she was moving in with daddy and she was saying, "I'm moving in with daddy, you can stay, Eli can stay with you." She was mad.

Linda's response to her parents' separation was similar to Maria's son. They both were angry at their parents for separation. Having this strong emotion during the initial transition stage was quite normal (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990)

Another difficulty that Agnes and Eli faced in the transition period was Eli's stuttering. She had the problem for a little while. She had seen a speech therapist twice and now she's fine. Agnes concluded,

... the problem was one of the effects, because I've seen it when I worked at day-care, I've seen kids like that, I use to have a boy that use to do that after they had all gotten into this family problem (abused). We did as best as we could, the speech therapist knew, we tried so hard to get her, because my brother who does that as well, so there's a hereditary thing to it too.

Agnes' conclusion was quite reasonable. Children express their emotions in many ways after witnessing abuse.

On the other hand, Agnes felt guilty for Eli's stuttering. She blamed herself for working too much and spending too little time with her daughters, especially Eli. She spent more time with Ben, who hardly talked to the children. Up until the time they moved into Willow House, she was working full-time, and Eli stuttered more. She felt guilty.

... Did I make a mistake, and Eli, from a young age, Eli was three and she had a slight problem with stuttering and it actually increased after and that was kind of hard on her. And that made me feel even guiltier. Everything was making me feel like I had done something terrible. It took me three years to stop feeling guilty, which was the biggest

part. Feeling bad for the kids and you know, it is hard on kids and they actually adjusted pretty quickly, quicker than I thought they would. And they were fine with that.

The self-blaming and guilt were the main emotions for Agnes to handle throughout the whole process. As a mother of two, it was even harder to handle the thought that she did something bad to them that affected their language ability.

They liked to see their Dad because they were allowed to watch TV all the time with him. It was the only time that they got to watch 24-hour-TV. They said, “when we are there, we get to watch all kinds of TV because our Dad had been watching a lot of TV. He would tape hours and hours of programs for them. Agnes was against this parenting approach, she protested,

...I don't like watching so much TV. They don't get to do it while they are here. They have cartoon movies that I let them watch. I mean I give them a certain amount of time and then they have to get off and do something else.

This posed a challenge for Agnes because both of them had different parenting styles and this confused the children.

Agnes was still struggling over work when she was in Bee Housing. She worked full-time but the children were not in school because it was during Christmas period. After Christmas, she still needed to arrange babysitting for her two daughters. They attended day-care and somebody would pick them up and keep them until she got home around nine o'clock. When she could not afford it, Ben babysat them. It provided chances for Ben to manipulate her. She said,

...that was very stressful because I would pick them up at nine o'clock and they were still awake, I took them home, put them to bed, and then we'd be arguing. And that

ended up being one of the biggest reasons I stopped working because I couldn't afford to work because it was costing me so much and I make good money, but not enough.

The financial hardship was another big challenge because it was an accumulation. She had to pay the day-care and the babysitter. She claimed,

... it was just a lot of money going out and that part of it was just so frustrating.

Another part of it would be the kids getting home so late at night sometimes and if they had to go to their dads', that was crazy.

She was facing double jeopardy. She had to work but the childcare cost her too much. When the father did the childcare, the interaction between Agnes and Ben created chance for them to fight.

Concerning the social life of the children, there were really no other kids for them to play with in the first apartment. There were a few children from Bee Housing in the second location. Agnes remembers,

... when Jennifer was there and once they played with Ryan and James. When they moved out the children didn't have anybody, and once Grace would come over, but she's a little bit older and she would go out and play with them.

There were children in the neighborhood but they labeled the residents as welfare bums. Agnes was quite angry as she described the situation,

... That was one of the things why I was kind of getting ready to go (move out from Bee Housing), because I don't know if it's because of the parent thing or, people recognized, they knew by where we were living, they know what it is, people in the area have had arguments with the residents, like neighbors would call us as welfare bums. There is the attitude of the area. I've had kids in the neighborhood come to play and they'd say, and they'd tell my kids to leave them. I don't know why, because the girls never did

anything to hurt anybody.

This was discrimination and stereotyping others. As mentioned in Jennifer's story, there was lack of literature material to discuss this challenge. The newsletter from Bee Housing may build the bridge between the neighbor and the second stage housing organization.

While she was staying in Bee Housing, Agnes had gained weight and stopped working due to her arthritis and back pain. In discussion of her weight, she found that once she started to see Ben, she gained weight. She recalled,

...I was in small sizes and then Christmas came and I still see their dad periodically because he still visits them often. And from that point, once I started seeing him, I started putting the weight on. Whether that's connected to that or not, but I was feeling so good at that time, so I don't know what's going on with that. When I met him (Ben) I was thin, I could wear a mini-skirt.

If Ben cooked supper, and Agnes was eating as much as she needed, he would just say 'why do I bother cooking?' And he goes on so many times that she would eat more than she wanted. It sounds like Ben was using food to exercise his power.

In Bee Housing, Agnes had done a lot of important work for her emotional well being. At first, she thought "it was just a place to go." Then she found the second stage housing was an appropriate place to heal her emotional wound. She could always find someone to talk. She said,

... It was nice to have someone to talk to when you were trying to think things through. Everybody was really supportive and helpful, understanding about everything and they were basically there to help me get through times. It really helped, having a place to stay and you didn't have to worry about anybody that was there.

...Bee Housing was a good place to be, for sure. There was always someone to talk to. Call Mary to come over or go over there. It is a hard time, but it was a good time too. ...But I actually felt good being on my own and didn't have anybody to tell me what to do. Be independent and do what I want is what I wanted to do. And that felt pretty good.

Concerning Agnes' social life, she said, "I have a few more (friends), I mean, I do talk to people. So that has improved somewhat." Agnes also mentioned that she had a lady group to visit her when she was in Bee Housing. They were very helpful because 'they've been through what I've been through'. They got together to make crafts.

Overall, Agnes and the children seemed to be happy and content. According to her story, she was more emotionally stable than before she left the abusive relationship. Although Agnes still faces a lot of challenges, she seems to have enough strength to live a peaceful life.

Moving on

It is definitely challenging financially after moving out. Agnes was on financial assistance for a while and then she went back to work. As she said, she earned "a little extra money but then it still was getting eaten up so it was really, basically everything has been the same along the way. There hasn't been any big improvements or anything," The rent and the utilities were more expensive.

Agnes had number of low paying jobs. She worked very hard but barely earned enough to support herself and later her family. She worried and asked herself, "I don't know what I'm going to do, how I'm going to make a living." And then she told herself "I just have to work on it".

First of all, Agnes needed to find a neighborhood where the children would be

accepted. It took months of looking. Later she found a place. "City housing was trying to help me. There was a place coming up and I waited and waited. We waited so long, I just wanted to leave. I just wanted to get out, to move out."

She had a lot of problems with people not being very nice. "I got a lot of people looking at me funny when they found out that I am a single mother." One time, the landlord humiliated me in front of people." She recalled

...I had one man, he had a three bedroom house and the rent was pretty reasonable, when I went for the interview, I had the two girls with me and there was another couple in there, a young couple dressed up. So I was, I came in and I told him I wanted to fill out an application, so he gave it to me and I filled it out at the table and I brought it back and he read it out loud, what my income was and he was just being, "and there's only one of you? There's not a husband? and he was just being really rude, everything out loud and I was just like, "shut-up!" and he was like, "okay, good-bye" so I took the kids and left.

Finally, she found a house after three months. These were painful experiences and they happened everyday and everywhere.

Agnes found parenting easier when it was just her and the girls. She explained, "It's easier to be a parent because the situation was just less stressful, when Ben was not around."

Agnes was able to have a fresh start after moving out from Bee Housing. It was a positive event. The new neighbors did not know her business therefore she could "start out better this time and become a part of the neighborhood. If I get myself out too, I kind of feel better. Sometimes I have to force myself to do things like that"

Yes, the neighbors in Bee Housing were quite judgmental and discriminating. After Agnes moved to the new neighborhood, she really could start over again.

The children's social life has improved after moving from Bee Housing. Eli is a very out-going girl according to Agnes. Linda is the shy one, the quiet one. After three months of observation, Agnes found her children are a little more accepting, probably just because there are so many children with children with different backgrounds. They are more accepting of Linda. She will stay in at recess and learn to help the teacher, to clean the room. "Eli's doing really well in school, and she's a social little girl. She does her work and then she does her little roam around." Agnes recalled,

... In some ways, I kind of like that she's doing that, even though it might not be the right time but she is doing that. Linda, they say she's a great student, but she's quiet, and she does help or if she'll automatically go over there and help them. I have spoken to teachers about that, to encourage her to speak up.

The children finally found some friends. They had matured a fair amount since then. Agnes remembered,

... When we (Ben and I) were together, it was really stressful on them and they actually adjusted pretty quickly, quicker than I thought they would. And they were fine with that.

They started to have friends though they were not from the same neighborhood. She was having a birthday party and Agnes hoped to see if they would start coming to the house. Eli said she has a best friend. The social life of the children seems to have settled down. Their spiritual life was healthier too. They attended the church nearby, Agnes said,

... we should be going back, I like that church a little bit more. It is a church and it's a little bit more laid back and it's got a woman minister there, and it's a good church I think. .

Agnes felt that she was unsettled. She never wanted to decorate the apartment when

they were in Bee Housing. She felt,

... We never got settled. So I never really got to know anybody because I knew I was only there for (temporary). I don't know if I could hold out on the girls and stuff went around for the past few years, even prior to that, we moved all the time. We have moved about seven times. I just want to stop.

Agnes started to participate in community events. She is participating in Neighborhood Watch. She said,

... I'm trying to get involved in different things in the community, and try to get to know some of the different people in the area and kind of know what's going on because it is a rough area and there's a lot of crime.

This change is quite a special one for Agnes because she is a quiet person.

...I think I've learned to recognize things a lot easier, I know what I want now, but I think I'm not willing to take what I took before, I'm willing to, I see their dad and he asks me, why don't I treat other people the way I treat him, or I'd tell him something, "no, I don't like it" and in that way, I've changed, I think I've learned to recognize things a lot easier

Her relationship with Ben is definitely not improving He still has his way. He still says things,

...I don't like and I'll say, look, I don't like that, I tell him what it was that he's doing because old habits die-hard. And in other ways he's, I know he's trying, he says he wants his family back, The relationship right now with him is not what I would like it to be, I've been away, I have certain standards and things that I'm looking for, so I don't know, it's something I need to continue to work on.

Agnes was not eager to reconcile with Ben. She pointed out that she was looking for

more and still “needed to continue to work on” Healing takes time. “It took me going, for him to finally get a job.” Agnes said. He always said that he wants to get back together. He said that this is the most important thing. He finally got a job. Agnes always say, “what about the kids? Is it not worth getting a job for the kids?”

At the end of the interviews, Agnes was asked to talk about her achievements through the process. She feels that she

... still have ways to go yet, I'm still working on it. I certainly have achieved things I had wanted to and I have made a lot of changes, but I'm not there yet. It's something I need to work on, Yes, I have achieved things that I want to.

Chapter seven: Discussion

This study uncovered complex relationships between individual women, their children, and their social networks. Their life histories revealed that they had suffered some form of emotional, financial, and social abuse from their partners. Each has significant contributions to make towards our understanding of what it is to live with, leave from, and thrive after an abusive relationship. Also significant is the revelation that not one of the participants came from homes in which there was psychopathology. Not all psychopathology comes from biological family or homes in which one is raised. The common assumption that women's own psychopathology constitutes a cause for abuse was critically challenged in their stories.

Living in an abusive relationship

According to Irons and Schneider (1997), substance addictions such as alcohol use are often present during episodes of abuse. The abusive episodes of Darren echo the conclusion of Irons and Schneider's research but no evidence supports the notion that alcohol is used as an 'excuse' to abuse.

Covell and Abramovitch (1987) found that the children of the abused mother assumed responsibility for their mother's emotions. Maria's eldest daughter told her mother "it's our fault" when Maria was recovering from her attempted suicide. Jennifer and Agnes did not mention how their children responded to their mother's emotions. Their children who are under seven years of age might not have possessed the language to express their thoughts.

During the abusing phase, all the participants were self-blaming and held onto the traditional values of women-bearers and nurturers. One of the main reasons for them to leave abusive relationships was because the abusers took their children's best interests away.

It demonstrated a traditional ideology, which defines women primarily as bearers and nurturers of children.

According to Enns and Black(1997), “abuse is any behavior that results in the mistreatment of another ”(p.14). Darren, Dan and Ben mistreated their partners with both obvious and subtle behaviors very early on in their relationship. It seems the participants were not aware that the other types of abuse (emotional, social, financial, verbal and sexual abuse) are just as serious as physical abuse

For many years, they were deeply wounded from different types of abuse by their partners. Since the women were unaware of the seriousness of abuse, and because there were no bruises, nobody considered charging the abusers. According to Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, “regardless of what it is called, abuse of women is an abuse of power, and it is a crime” (1997, p.6). If any type of abuse is a crime, then the abusers have to face many charges. Who will reinforce the charges? Will the abusers be punished? If there is no punishment then how can the abusers know that they have committed a crime?

Bograd (1988) suggested, “there were many ways that men as a group maintained women in oppressed social positions” (p.14). Jennifer’s lawyer suggested that Jennifer make a long term and a short-term plan in order to establish her credit in front of the judge. Making plans is a great step for anybody, but why did Jennifer need to make a plan in order to prove to the judge that she was not “just running”. The fact that she was able to make the right decision in fleeing from her abusive relationship should be enough to establish credibility. Maria’s doctor told her to go home and reconcile with her husband. A landlord humiliated Agnes openly after she filled out an application for an apartment. There were many similar stories from Hoff’s research (1990). One landlord even put the rent up by \$75

once he found out that she had a child (p.188).

Through the stories of these women, men have the power to mistreat abused women. Jennifer's lawyer questioned her credibility. Maria's male doctor ordered her to reconcile and Jennifer's male landlord rejected her application rudely.

The decision to leave

The participants had a hard time recalling when they first fled the home. Jennifer forgot the content of the counseling session in the first women's shelter. Maria could not recall the sequence of the events before her suicide attempt. It took Agnes a while to remember what exactly Ben did before they got in the taxi for Willow House.

The participants also seem to have internalized their emotions, which is quite normal in the initial stage of leaving an abusive relationship. Some women even "spoke like a woman who had forgotten how" (Jones, 1994, p.173), especially when they tried to speak about the abuse.

All three participants expressed limited choices for them when they decided to leave their abusive partners. The natural social network was somehow either unable to help, or was unavailable for the women. Therefore, the women's shelter was the only choice for them. Although the shelter was the only choice, they "spoke very positively about the assistance they received while in the shelter" (Hoff, 1990, p.230).

When I listened to the women's history, there was very little evidence to justify the notion of 'learned helplessness'. Instead, the women were knowledgeable and resourceful people who found ways to cope with the abusive relationship. Their ability to cope with crises in spite of self-blame and intimidations from others (justice system, welfare workers, neighbors) revealed them as survivors rather than helpless victims.

Life in shelters

The participants' comments on the second stage women housing shows the necessity of the service. They all found that the shelters for abused women and their children played an important role in the fleeing process. From the literature I have read, I find few writings that study shelters, even less on second stage women's housing.

The counselors in the shelters are very helpful. They offered for the most part, non-judgmental counselors who are ready to listen..

The women may be forced to become homeless. Hoff (1990) revealed the same situation that the participants in this study experienced. He stated, "the post-battering phase of the women's lives revealed poverty and homelessness" (p. 230). Jennifer and Maria were facing poverty as soon as they left their abusive husbands. Their situation matched Biele's (1998) description of the financial situation of the divorced, female-led, single-parent family. The income level of mothers and children dropped significantly when separation occurred. In Canada, about half of the female-led, single-parent families are considered to be living below the poverty level (Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1999). The response paper of the NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women mentions, "single or lone parent mothers are also extremely vulnerable to poverty and have a much higher risk of being poor than single parent fathers" (p.8).

After shelters

Jennifer, Maria and Agnes were facing challenges in their new neighborhood. Maria and Peter were facing a high crime neighborhood in low-income housing while Jennifer felt she was out-classed in the middle class neighborhood. Agnes also mentioned her children's school was a 'rough school and this is a rough area'.

From Jennifer's description, the neighbors discriminated against her family after

knowing her as a single-mother. Agnes and Maria had similar experiences while they were in the shelters.

As Hoff(1990) mentioned, mothers were so deeply devoted to their role to the point that they would forget themselves. The participants of this study are also devoted mothers. Maria sleeps very little because she takes care of her sick children and she “goes without so that Peter can have.” Jennifer put herself between Ryan and Darren when she did not want Ryan to see his father trying to kill her. Agnes sold all her personal belongings for food and milk when her children were facing hunger.

From the history of the participants, they revealed that their emotional and physical resources were depleted before and after. On the other hand, they believed that their responsibilities “lies with the children.” They attended to their children’s growing needs for support following their exposure to abuse and divorce. According to Thorne & Yalom, (1982), motherhood is women’s major role and this ideology of the family mystifies women’s emotional needs in families. This reinforces the emotional exploitation.

Zill (1996) reported that children of divorced parents were twice as likely to have poor relationships with their parents, drop out of high school and receive psychological help. The second child of three participants did show some signs of such challenges. Both the second child of Jennifer and Agnes expressed their anxiety by throwing temper tantrums.

The children’s expression of anxiety takes on many forms: aggressiveness, withdrawal, eating habits, crying, and demanding behavior (Hoff, 1990). Anger is a form of aggressiveness and it was the predominant emotion that the children showed in this research. Their emotions include feeling frightened and confused, especially when their fathers’ visits are irregular. Adolescents and teens might depersonalize the mother and blame her for the family problems (Jaffe, Wolfe & Wilson, 1990).

Maria, Jennifer and Agnes initiated conversations to explain to the children that it was not their fault, and that it was between the mother and father. It was good for them to be able to have a meaningful conversation. Otherwise, the children may further internalize the problem, and it will affect the way of handling the interpersonal conflict (Carlson, 1984).

Moving on

The abusers are still hurting the participants in many ways. Darren did not show up in court to sign an important document. Dan threatens to cut the Child Support constantly and Ben visits his daughters as if he was living there.

Presently, women are more likely to be financially responsible for their children, especially the female-headed family. In Nova Scotia, a single mother with a child lives \$6,987 below the Low Income Cut Off (Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card, 1999). According to the report card, female-headed families continue to experience the highest rate of child poverty in Nova Scotia. Maria, Jennifer and Agnes live in a female-headed Nova Scotian family. Their stories prove that the statistic was not just a number. It is their reality.

The amount of money they received from court-ordered awards was very little. Rettig, Christensen, and Dahl's study (1991) described a similar picture. In 492 court-ordered awards, only 58% of the children's income needs were met when measured against poverty-level support. Furthermore, spousal support is awarded in less than 14% of divorces and received in less than 7% (Andersen, 1993). From these figures, it was evident that women and children will face considerable financial hardship in the aftermath of divorce.

Weitzman (1985) states, women's economic status that drastically deteriorates after a divorce. Women's post divorce income is 24 % of previous family income. Maria and Agnes went to Frenchy's and food banks to get their necessities. One also waited for the

GST rebate to have a hair cut, or to buy some supplies for her children.

Chapter eight: Implications, recommendations, and reflections

Implications for counseling

Individual

First of all, individual counseling or therapy cannot end women abuse, but it can help women understand the oppression - the abuse. It also can minimize the ways in which they internalize and comply with it. Furthermore, it can help women develop more overt and direct means of using anger and exerting power on their own behalf. The ultimate task for the counselor is to gear to the interests of women as a whole. "This means helping women redefine and internalize a women-identified, rather than male-identified, sense of femininity. It also means helping transform the Victim in women into the Fighter" (Greenspan, 1993, p.203).

Greenspan (1993) that argues the abused women unconsciously consider themselves bad because they are women. Evidence of this presents throughout the women's stories. They think that they are not worthy enough to have a loving partner or to participate in society. They are emotionally vulnerable. They may also prefer to consider themselves as persons with a personal problem instead of thinking of themselves as women with a social problem. They may even blame themselves for choosing the wrong men without realizing there is a larger problem of how men are trained to treat women in patriarchal societies, and how women are trained to accept such treatment. In counseling situations, the counselor needs to be aware of the abused women's emotional situation, the training from the patriarchal society.

The participants suffered depression according to their stories. To help them overcome their depression and to value themselves as people, Greenspan (1993) suggests counselors

develop women's potential to exert their own power in such a way that their 'unconscious depressive rebellion' will be 'converted to conscious, joyous warfare against the conditions that depressed them' (p.205). I think the suggestion is workable. Counselors must actively listen to their stories and help them see both their depression and themselves as a feminine person with eyes that are neither the eyes of the male society nor the eyes of the victims. Counselors also have to show the abused women the connections between the self-transformation they seek and the transformation of the social reality for women as a whole. The most important piece of work that a counselor needs to do is help abused women value themselves as special people, not as a victim. "Helping women undo the Victim in herself must, however, go beyond helping her get angry about her powerlessness" (p.203). the counsellors must help her to experience the power that women already possess, individually and collectively. Counselors may also need to stand by the women when they need to fight for their rights.

All of the participants in this study told me that their children were the primary reason they stayed in an abusive relationship and that result is echoed in Henderson's study (1990). They all felt that the children needed a father and that they could bring them up by themselves. They all questioned their capability of being a single parent. If people can stop defining the female-headed families as "broken," "torn," "deficient," or "not normal", maybe the mothers and their children will not internalize their challenges. People can describe these families as "positive" and "healthy" whereby the parent would feel more secure regarding her ability to parent. This is a way to empower the female-headed families. People also need to help the mothers develop positive personal and emotional resources. One of the ways is to help them define themselves as "women and then as a mother" (Bilinkoff, 1995, p.97).

Furthermore, the participants also described their guilt when they raised safety issues for themselves and their children. As Bilinkoff (1992) suggested, the counselor may encourage the mothers to mourn, "the end of their relationship and the hopes and dreams that ended." It is important to "honor the positive and pleasurable aspects of her former relationship, for even the most violent families have moments of love and nurturance."(p. 98)

Silvern, Karyl & Landis (1995) made a significant contribution, for counseling children, especially in trauma-specific psychotherapy. They proposed a four-step intervention strategy. Each step addresses both distress and defense. The steps build upon generic and inclusive interventions and moves toward more specialized interventions needed only for traumatized children with more complex needs.

The first step is to assess all the children of abused women to identify traumatic and other symptoms. If the post-traumatic symptoms are found, then one moves onto the second step, which is to provide an opportunity to disclose the abuse to which they have been exposed. It is referred to as "straight talk" (Silvern, et.al. p. 51). The third step is dealing with the symptoms of some traumatized children by using desensitization and cognitive restructuring. The fourth step involves introducing interpretation for dissociated impressions of the violence. Silvern, et. al (1995), stress the ongoing reassessment through the four steps. As a family counselor for the children in the second stage abused women's housing, I find these intervention strategies are very useful. They are straightforward and client centered.

From this study, all the children of the participants show anger toward their mother and/or the situation at some point of time. The group counseling programs will be able to address this issue. These programs are highly structured with specific goals such as

defining violence and responsibility for violence, expressing feelings, including anger, improving communication, problem-solving, cognitive coping skills, increasing esteem, developing social support networks, developing safety plans; and feeling safety and trust (Peled & Edleson, 1992, p.78). The group therapy for children, who witness abuse, is welcome from my experience. The peer support is more effective. It is easier for them to start discussing their issues in group than in a one on one counseling session.

A man abuses a woman “not because there is something wrong with her (though he says so), or even because there is something wrong with him (though women say so) but, because he can. He can, because nobody stops him” (Jones, 1994, p.164). All the participants of this study blame themselves one way or the other. As a counselor, he/she needs to realize Jones’ argument is the true picture of women abuse issues needed to counsel the abused women to stop their Victim self-blame.

Institutions

The women need wide support from a formal network when facing abuse. The law firms, hospitals, court and schools are the formal network with which the participants had interacted. The participants had reasonable experiences with these institutions, except the law firms that they deal with and the court.

The difficult transition period will be easier when the doctors and nurses are not judgmental. However, they were very resourceful and able to make useful referrals for the women. The teachers of the schools were quite friendly and flexible; therefore, the women have some time to take care of their physical body, while the children are in school.

The court and the lawyers’ firm that they dealt with gave them a difficult time. The judges seemed to lean toward the men’s side, many times. Adversarial law is very intimidating most of the time. One of Jennifer’s lawyers even abused her emotionally while

he was handling her case. The Barristers Society may need to reinforce the professional ethic closely. Judges and lawyer will benefit from more training on abuse issues. They also need to be aware of the tendency to exploit their power. Finally, especially for the judiciary they may need to change the ideology of a nuclear family as the best family.

Societal

Hamby (1998) believes that the society needs to “reduce societal tolerance for partner violence” (P.213). Counselors, we need to find the channel to increase public awareness of the social problem. On a community-level, we may develop a women’s safety campaign in the workplace, neighborhood, school, or church. It is also necessary to build a consensus among colleagues and neighbors that abusive language and behavior are unacceptable.

From the experience of the participants, it is evident that structural and economic changes in society are needed. Their lives will not change if the hierarchical structure does not change. As a professional group, counselors need to ensure the hierarchical structure is not present. We also need to advocate economic programs for the women in order to improve their economic standing.

Recommendations: Face the problem

Personal change

Women, children, and men have the right to be free from bodily and mental harm. Many are not, however. There are several avenues of primary support which could be developed and expanded for victims of abuse.

1. Education: There is an increasing amount of educational materials available. Each of us can learn more and teach and support others to, as well.
2. Women’s shelters require financial assistance and support. We can promote greater community aid to victims of abuse.

3. Community programs can be developed and offered to all citizens. These can provide education, self help forums and support in many forms: childcare; free literature; and educational materials.
4. Media is a favored medium for children and adolescents. It can be used to educate and create opportunities for dialogue about the causes and issues related to abuse and its aftermath.
5. Support for healthy relationships can be developed. It is important for couples to develop communication and conflict resolution skills as Hamby suggests (1998). The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (Markman, et al., 1993) uses cognitive-behavioral techniques to teach active listening, expressive speaking, and problem solving skills.

Institutional change:

As Jones (1994) suggests, community agencies, public and private (housing authority, credit union, school board, family resources center, vocational school, etc.) need to sit down together to brain storm strategies and to plan some programs for the community. By working together, the joint force may overcome institutionalized sexism, racism and homophobia.

Jennifer's process provides us with inspiration to challenge the justice system

1. Arrest perpetrators of emotional abuse, as well as those who commit acts of violence and sexual misconduct. These unseen bruises scar deeply.
2. Clarify and reinforce supports so that women do not have to leave their homes after being victimized.
3. Address issues related to custody. This issue forces women to continually negotiate with the abuser. It also puts them in a dangerous and unequal position. "The best

interest of the child” is the most important guideline to make any decision on custody proceedings.

4. Educate paralegals through public funds to provide lay advocate services to women who cannot afford to obtain legal representation.
5. Educate the judiciary in the issues related to abuse and the consequences inherent in the aftermath of domestic violence.

Societal changes

The women’s stories reveal that the problems they face are the individual manifestations of what are essentially collective problems for all women. This finding is echoed through out NiCarthy’s book (1987), The Ones Who Got Away. The cure for this problem must be collective as well. This multidimensional problem demands multidimensional attention.

Alvi, Dekeseredy and Ellis (2000) made few valuable policy suggestions:

~ We know that growing up in a violent family atmosphere is a strong predictor of becoming violent later on. Therefore, we need to focus on creating policies that will enable family members to deal with family conflict in a non-violent manner.

~We need to create better access to the institutional “shields” that are available for women and children who are battered.

~We need to develop and implement community education on the issue of family violence, focusing on facts, myths, and linkages to other social problems.

~We have to encourage men and women and women to speak and act out against family violence, and to confront those engaging in such acts. (PP. 241)

I want to add two more policy suggestions. First, we need to contribute more funding for the agency-“institutional shields”. This will enable the agency to empower the women

and children by providing support and community education. Since the funding for social programs has been cut, women's shelters need to devote a lot of time and energy to fund raise as well as write grant proposals, instead of counseling and helping the abused women and children. If they do not, the shelters may close. In a society in which it is so clear that abused women and their children require some form of post-abusive care, how can the cutting of funds be justified?

In addition, we can see the significant role schools can provide in assessment and support for students facing abuse. Further education for teachers, administrators and counsellors is a second recommendation.

Research suggestions

Another recommendation is to conduct more research with children who witness domestic abuse. We need to understand the whole context of witnessing domestic abuse from the child's perspective. Children need a forum and we need to create one for them. As a family counselor, I have the privilege of listening to their stories from their perspective. I wish I had a forum to retell their stories and for the children to tell their stories in their own words.

There is abundance of research on physical abuse, some on emotional/psychological abuse but very little on social, or financial abuse. It is necessary to understand these, as well. How does the abuse affect lives? What are the interventions for these women and children? How effective are these strategies for the women and the children who have been abused socially, or financially?

I have spent five months doing the research for this study and I am witnessing the changes in the participants' lives. A lot of sad incidents happened during the five months. Their lives are not triumphant. Instead, they are just like roller coaster rides. I wonder what

their lives will be like in one year. Will their sons stay in school next year? Will the women find reasonable housing? Will their ex-partners stop threatening them about custody of their children? Will their children become abusers in ten years? Finally, I would suggest that a longitudinal qualitative research would help us to understand the lives of these women and children and the impact the abuse has had over time.

Reflections:

As you have read the women's stories, you may have the same feelings that I have. The participants' lives are still rough and tough. But, is it the end of their stories? Is there any hope for them and their children? Is there any hope for breaking the cycle of abuse? Is it possible for every one of us to say, "**stop**" to this unacceptable behavior and respect each other's rights?

It is almost the end of the thesis. The forum of the abused women who are mothers of children that witnessed abuse is set in front of you. Did it inspire you by relating their struggles, setbacks, triumphs and continuing challenges? If you feel helpless, afraid, controlled or trapped in the relationship with a partner, or if you have just separated and wonder what to do next, I hope the stories of these women have given you a fresh perspective on your own situation. The courage of these mothers may have inspired you to make dramatic changes and, perhaps, to save your life as well as your children's. If you have already started a new life, free of abuse, but the budget is strained, the ex-partner is harassing you, the child care service is too expensive, the children are difficult and the washing machine has just broken down, these stories may remind you of why it is worth it. I sincerely hope that this study may help you to keep in mind that you can endure, that you can create a new and safe life if you give yourself time, just like thousands and thousands of

women out there.

If you are a women counselor, mental health professional, school teacher, therapist, friends, neighbor or relative of abused women and their children, I hope the women's experiences with people who helped and hindered them will direct you to find a way to support and encourage the women you know, to decide what they want to do and then to act on it. May the women, their children and I count on you to give them hope, support and help in whatever ways, at whatever time and in whatever context.

If you are the leader of a government department, a principal of a school, a community leader, a VIP, a judge or a politician, I urge you to act on behalf of these women and children to *stop* the abuse. Lastly, we never know if the abuse has happened in our own backyard, at some point of our lives.

There is no question that I have chosen the appropriate methodology for the study. Through in-depth and in-person discussion, I learned a great deal about the journey of abused women that quantitative data could not reveal. Talking with abused women made clear to me that I was a part of what I was studying. As a woman in this society, I am vulnerable to such violence. Being aware of this phenomenon makes a difference in how I comprehend this social problem.

Sometimes, when I was transcribing the tapes, I was depressed. I had to take long breaks. It took three days or even a whole week before I had enough emotional strength to continue transcribing the stories again. Although this research is very emotional and painful, it is intellectually satisfying. In spite of problems and complications in the research process, from conceiving the idea and contacting participants to writing the thesis, this kind of research makes a great deal of sense to me. It is hard and sometimes draining, but I have never lost the feeling that it is a privilege to gather the stories of the abused women through

interviewing and to come to understand their experience through their stories. It also had more impact on my personal life and my own relationships. I am going to end the thesis by quoting my last conversation with one of the participants. She told me that “if you made a mistake, you learn from it. You do the best that you can do and start all over again, if you have to then start all over again.” I then asked, “ then you are starting all over again?” She replied, “Yup, everyday.”

Bee House

**There is a place
called Bee House
with branches like a tree.
It offers a warm, safe haven
for women like you and me.**

**Its branches offer shelter,
from the rage and pain within.
It gives us hope and time,
to rest our souls and minds;
a new place to begin.**

**It gives us strength,
when we are weak;
a chance to dream again.
It feeds our spirit
and clears a path.
To take a chance, to win.**

**I came, frightened and weary.
My life, I thought would end.
Now I must leave,
a new road to trod,
a new life to begin.**

**So please take heart!
Don't give up,
there is life and hope anew.
Stay strong, have faith and trust yourself.
A new life awaits you!**

-Maria, 1999

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Appendix 1: Consent Form

For the purpose of conducting research for the research "Silence Scream: A study on the journey of the abused women", by Lily Szeto, the following conditions are mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants:

As Researcher, I agree to the following:

- Conduct the interviews in a place mutually agreeable to the participant and myself. This location will reflect a comfortable and safe environment.
- To ensure that the strictest of confidentiality procedures be upheld at all times including and following the production of the final product.
- To ensure that every participant is supplied with an opportunity to have support/counselling available throughout the course of this research.
- Provide an opportunity for each participant to read direct quotes, which appear in the document and have the opportunity to indicate if anything is quoted out of context or inadvertently provides identifying characteristics of the participant.

As participant, I consent to the following:

- The interviews being audio-recorded with the understanding that the tapes will be listened to only by the researcher and me or one person hired for transcribing, and the audio-tapes will be in the locked cabinet.
- That the information given by me be used for the purpose of the above names thesis and any subsequent journals.
- That a verbatim transcript of the interview be created with each participant's name

being replaced by a pseudonym.

I have read and understand the conditions outlined above and agree to proceed with this research project in accordance to these conditions.

Participant Signature

Researcher Signature

Date

Date

Appendix II

Tentative questions in the in-depth interviews:

A. Prior moving in women shelter:

1. Please describe your experience as a mother when abuse happens.
2. Please tell your story about your relationship with your family before moving into the women's shelter?
3. What triggered you to leave the abused relationship and would you recount the incidents surrounding that time?

B. During the transition period:

1. What enabled you to change when you were in the shelter?
2. Please tell your story as a mother during the period of transition.
3. How were your children doing at home, at school while staying in the transition shelter?
Please describe their emotional, physical and spiritual stages at that time.

C. After leaving the shelter:

1. How would you describe your relationship with yourself and your children after you moved out of the shelter?
2. Could you please share your joyous moments as well as your challenges after you moved in this apartment/house?
3. How are your children doing at home, at school, and the new neighborhood now? Please describe their emotional, physical and spiritual stages.

Appendix III

A Declaration of Rights

I am not the cause of my abuser's abusive behaviour.

I have the right to feel safe.

I have the right to not be hit.

I do not like or want to be abused. I do not have to take it.

I have the right to be treated with respect

I am an important human being.

I am a worthwhile woman.

I have the right to raise my children in safety.

I do have power over my own life.

I can use my power over my own life.

I can use my power to take good care of myself.

I can decide for myself what is best for me.

I have the right to be believed and valued.

I can make changes in my life if I want to.

I have the right to live in peace.

I am not alone. I can ask others for help.

I have the right to end the violence.

Nova Scotia Advisory council on the Status of Women (1997)

Appendix IV

Types of abuse

Physical

choking, kicking., punching slapping, grabbing, poking you

pushing, shoving, spitting at you, pulling your hair

physically restraining you, stopping you from leaving

holding or hugging you when you say “no”

any unwanted physical contact

abusing your children or pets

treat you roughly

Sexual

threatening to harm your reputation

putting you down or comparing you sexually to others

getting back at you for refusing to have sex

sleeping around, or threatening to

treating you as a sex object

forcing you to look at pornography

hounding you for sex or forcing certain positions

forcing you to have sex(rape)

Verbal

verbally threatening you (telling you to stop cryingor else)

calling you names (stupid, slut, crazy, bitch....)

yelling, shouting, or raising his voice at you

abusing your children

being sarcastic or critical

always blaming you for things that go wrong

insulting you or your family

laughing in your face.

Financial/economic

controlling you by not paying the bills

refusing to give you money for groceries, clothing, things you need.

spending all the money on things he wants (alcohol, trips, cars, sports)

forbidding you to work outside the home

taking your money or your pay cheque

not letting you take part in financial decisions

Emotional/psychological

intimidating you, making you afraid

playing 'mind games', not telling you what he is doing, lying.

ignoring you, being silent, walking away from you in discussion

refusing to deal with issues

putting you down, finding and talking about your faults, brainwashing

acting jealous and being possessive, falsely accusing you

treating you like a child

making you think you are stupid or crazy

refusing to do things with you or for you (such as withholding sex)

always getting his own way

criticizing how you look

not allowing you to do what he does himself

telling sexist or woman-hating jokes

Social

Putting you down, ignoring you, making a scene in public

Embarrassing you in front of your children

Not letting you see your friends or being rude to your friends

Being jealous of your friends, family, or accomplishments

Being nice to others but changing his personality when with you

Not taking responsibility for the children

Turning your children against you

Choosing friends or family over you

Comparing you unfavorably with other women

Not allowing you to express your emotions (denying your feelings)

Taking your passport or threatening to have you deported

Quote from Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the status of women (1997). Making changes:
a book for women in abusive relationships.