From Risk to Resilience:

Adult survivors of childhood violence
talk about their experiences

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Abstract

The main focus of research into family violence has been around the ideas of intergenerational transmission of learned behaviours. We know a good deal about what constitutes risk for children, the outcomes of that risk and the processes that work to translate difficult childhoods into difficult adulthoods – for some children. We also all know children who seem to have 'weathered' the most appalling childhoods and to have emerged strong and resilient and who *do not* repeat the patterns of relating they experienced as children in their adult lives. It is this group that is the focus of the study.

A purposively selected sample of eight, seven women and one man, with a range of backgrounds, was interviewed in depth using qualitative research methods informed by feminist standpoint theory. All of the eight had identified as having experienced significant violence as children, mainly in their families of origin. They also stated that they did not currently relate to their partners or children in violent ways, nor were they the victims of violent relationships. They consequently fell into the category of those who have "broken the cycle" of intergenerational abuse.

Each person identified the things that helped them through their experiences and their reflections were then examined in more detail in the context of other studies on resilience. The interviews yielded an interesting array of findings which were consistent with literature which identifies certain attributes of the person and of their environment as protective. Findings are discussed with a view to their relevance to social work practice and policy. The list of protective factors may serve as an 'inventory' of potential resources for those working in the field of family violence.

This study supports earlier work which challenges the idea of the inevitability of the intergenerational transmission of abuse, working instead from a paradigm which suggests that there are a multiplicity of 'resilience factors,' both integral to the individual and environmental, which interact in complex ways to enable many people to survive abuse and to relate in healthy ways in their adult lives.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This study takes its impetus from the need to further develop a helping response to children experiencing violence within their families. Already, there exists a legislative and fiscal framework which can support this work. My commitment to improving outcomes for children exposed to family violence comes from my personal memory of vulnerability and from the children I encountered while working in care and protection social work for the Department of Social Welfare and then the Children, Young Persons and their Families Service. My interest in the empowerment theories of social work and strengths-focussed practice approaches comes more directly from recent learning and reading which took place as part of my involvement with the Master of Arts (Applied) programme in social work at Victoria University. The currency of the new Domestic Violence Act with its provisions for group programmes for children victims of family violence and the current paucity of experience in New Zealand for offering such programmes means that there is an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the factors which enable children to become resilient to the effects of family violence in terms of whether or not they repeat patterns of relating violently in their adult lives. From the information gleaned from study participants about what helped them through their experiences of childhood violence comes an examination of alternative ways of working with children in this situation. Approaches which use a strengths focus can harness resilience factors in the child and in the environment in order to support them and ultimately to enable them to live non-violent adult lives.

The aims of this study were to review the literature on resilience and then to gather qualitative data from a sample of adults who think they have been able to 'break the cycle' with a view to eliciting information about just how they were able to do this. Findings will make a small contribution to a theoretical framework which may be useful to those working to develop the children's programmes under the Domestic Violence Act as well as others working in the field of family violence.

Although most families provide safe and nurturing environments for children, New Zealand and international studies estimate that abut 16% of all families are affected in some way by family violence (Snively, 1994). The cost to family members

is high and so is the cost to society. These families use a disproportionate amount of services, medical, social and educational as well as being over-represented in the courts and justice systems. Between 1988 and 1993, 40% of all homicides in New Zealand resulted from domestic disputes. In 1994, 12 children died at the hands of their parent or step-parent. In the year to June 1997, the Children, Young Persons and their Families service had received 23,046 notifications of children alleged to be in need of care and protection. A 1995 Justice Department survey, *Hitting Home: Men speak about abuse of women partners* (Leibrich et al, 1995) found that 21% of men surveyed had used at least one act of physical violence against their partner in the last year.

Figures from the National Survey of Crime Victims (Young et al, 1996) and the Women's Safety Survey (Morris, 1996) give us for the first time figures on the scale of family violence in New Zealand. A random sample of 438 women with current male partners and 71 women with recent partners (within the last two years but not currently living with a partner), 351 non-Maori and 149 Maori, were asked about their relationship with their male partners (nine women were included in both samples as they had both current and recent partners). Overall, around a quarter of the women with current partners and almost three quarters of women with recent partners, reported experiencing at least one act of physical or sexual abuse by their partner, with Maori women reporting that they were significantly more likely than non-Maori women to have experienced multiple acts of physical or sexual abuse by their partners. Women were also asked about the prevalence of psychological abuse and the vast majority of women with recent partners reported that they had experienced at least one type of controlling behaviour. A finding consistent with other studies was that most women reported that their children saw or heard the violence and were affected adversely by it.

Children are the most vulnerable family members. They are isolated from potential support because of the violence. They may be too fearful for themselves or others to talk about what is happening outside the family. A sense of shame often acts to keep them silent or they may experience conflicts of loyalty, to a particular parent or to the family unit itself. They may not understand that what is happening in their family does not happen in all families.

The Domestic Violence Act of 1995, contained a provision for programmes to be offered to children who were the subjects of protection orders under the new Act

(see Appendix 1 for the programme goals of the proposed groups for children). Because group programmes for children of the sort that were envisaged had not previously been delivered by the state sector, a two year framework for implementation was made; the responsibility for operationalising this aspect of the Act lay with the Department of Courts. At the time of writing, a working party has drafted standards documents, panels have been appointed to assess potential providers and applications have been called for. An earlier call for registrations of interest resulted in responses from a wide range of groups. It is expected that the first programmes will be underway later in this year (personal communication M Ella, Department of Courts, 21 January 1998). We already know that only a small proportion of those affected by family violence apply for protection orders so that many children will not get access to groups through these means. In recognition of this, funding was made available in the 1996 Budget for the establishment of trial programmes for *all* child victims of violence and several pilots have been set up around the country. Evaluations of these programmes are currently being conducted. Indications from overseas research show that effective programmes can change children's attitudes to violence, rebuild self esteem and allow them to plan non-violent futures (Jaffe, 1996).

Provisions in the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act, 1989, allow for the state to intervene in the lives of children experiencing family violence. Section 14 (1) (a) deems a child to be in need of care and protection if it is "being, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treated, abused or seriously deprived."

Recently, there has been a tendency generally, in acknowledgement of the effects of violence, to widen the definitions to include aspects of emotional and psychological abuse, especially as they relate to child witnesses of family violence. This is well exemplified in the legal definition employed in the New Zealand Domestic Violence Act of 1995 which states that domestic violence means "violence against that person by any other person with whom that person is, or has been, in a domestic relationship." It goes on to list 'violence' as being "physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, including, but not limited to, intimidation, harassment, damage to property, threats of physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological abuse and in relation to a child, a person psychologically abuses a child if a person causes or allows the child to see or hear the physical, sexual or psychological abuse of a

person with whom the child has a domestic relationship; or puts the child at real risk of seeing or hearing that abuse occurring…" (NZ Domestic Violence Act 1995, Section 3 (1), (2) and (3)).

Concomitant to that Act is the amendment of the 1968 Guardianship Act (1995 Section 16A) where, although violence is defined as physical or sexual abuse, the amendment widens the definition to include the provision that "where violence has been used against the child, or a child of the family or against any other party to the proceedings" and goes on to say that, "the Court shall not (a) make any order giving the violent party custody of the child or (b) make any order allowing the violent party access, other than supervised access, to the child, unless the court is satisfied that the child will be safe while the violent party has custody of, or, as the case may be, access, to the child." The court is directed to have regard for any physical or emotional harm caused to the child by the violence.

This legislation was widely hailed by those working in the field of family violence as a vast improvement on the previous legislation and the inclusion of the wider definition of what constitutes violence was particularly welcome.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by New Zealand in 1993, also sets out a clear obligation on the State to protect children from all forms of abuse and to provide programmes to support child victims of abuse (Article 19, Section 1 and 2).

Within this legislative and human rights framework has developed an infrastructure of service delivery. There have been several recent initiatives. The most widely known are the public awareness campaigns run by the Police and Children, Young Persons and their Families Service (CYPFS) respectively. This new attention to prevention also has a legislative base and is operationalised under goals such as Goal 2 of the National Crime Prevention Strategy 1994: "Reduce family violence". Both campaigns have had demonstrable results in changing public attitudes in a relatively short time (see Appendix 2 for evaluation of both the Police "Family violence is a crime – call for help" and the CYPFS "Breaking the Cycle" campaigns).

The "Breaking the Cycle" campaign is a multi-stage campaign which is intended to raise public awareness of child abuse, encourage action to prevent it and to promote positive parenting. It was called "Breaking the Cycle" because "research findings indicate that patterns of violence flow through family generations" (Mike

Doolan, CYPFS Chief Social Worker speaking at Family Violence Symposium, August 1997). Some of the key messages people took from the initial television advertisements of the "Breaking the Cycle" campaign were that "child abuse occurs in cycles; child abuse is passed down through generations; and if you were abused as a child you are more likely to abuse your own children" (see Appendix 2).

These ideas have gained wide support, in general and also amongst those in professional helping roles.

Although the evidence for the disastrous effects of family violence on children is compelling, not all children are affected to the same degree and in the same way. In a review of empirical studies looking at intergenerational abuse, Widom (1989) found surprisingly little evidence to support the claim that abuse begets abuse. A growing body of evidence that suggests that most people who experienced violent childhoods do *not* repeat the pattern (Kaufman and Zigler, 1993; Stark and Flitcraft, 1996). "Victims of physical child abuse are at higher risk to become future victims and future perpetrators but there is not an inevitable connection. Abused children do not grow up to become abusing parents – in fact, most do not" (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl and Toedter, in Finkelhor et al, 1983).

There are dangers in using this simple 'cycle of violence' idea as a basis for intervention. The first is that the analysis of family violence as being the preserve of a small group of 'dysfunctional families' who pass it on to their children means that interventions must be directed at these 'problem' families and wider issues such as social inequities are not considered. The other is that it may act as a rather fatalistic predeterminant for those who are in that situation, not only because they might believe they have no choice about how to change the patterns they grew up with, but because their chances to do so are limited by those helping professionals who make assumptions about their ability to parent on the basis of what they have experienced as children. In a debate on the Internet news group "Intimate Violence Research and Practice Issues List" in July 1994, several correspondents made the point that "the last thing victims need is a fatalistic attitude from those around them" (cited in Robertson and Busch, 1994).

My study takes the above statement as its beginning point. It uses a *strengths focus* approach which validates experience and affirms the survival strategies of individuals and groups who have experienced abuse as children. Unashamedly, it

makes central the perceptions and reflections of those children, now adults, who are living out lives without violence.

There are many people who experienced abusive childhoods who struggle to do things a different way. It is this group that is the focus of this study. It is from people who have successfully survived experiences of family violence that we will learn most about what things protect and nurture children through difficult times. The idea of working from a strengths perspective rather than using a problem based approach is gaining credibility in many different helping fields. Its critics say we are too short on knowledge about 'what actually helps' in particular situations for this approach to be effective but we have a large group of experts whose knowledge has been largely untapped – the grown child survivors of family violence.

I spoke to eight people who identified as having experienced family violence as children and asked them what helped them through. They were able to talk about some things that supported them in their own situations and I discuss these reflections, categorised into five broad themes, in the context of the literature on resilience. I then examine the findings in a section which looks at their significance for social work, draw some conclusions and make recommendations.

What is clear already, is that there is no simple formula for 'what helps', but rather a complex interplay of factors that exists between the person and his or her environment. The concept of providing strong family support in material as well as in other ways, is receiving new recognition in the arguments for promoting less stressful childhoods for children. Until now, much emphasis has been placed on minimising risk. Attention now needs to be given to the ideas of maximising resilience. The two taken together provide the greatest scope for supporting vulnerable children.

By using knowledge gleaned from people who have survived childhood violence we may be in a better position to understand some of the complex interactions between genetics and environment that work to offer children some protection and allow them to develop resilience – the ability to develop normally in adverse circumstances. This small study contributes to our knowledge by focussing on the experiences of a group of adult New Zealanders who have been able to reflect on their childhood experience to identify things which were helpful to them. By increasing our understanding of those processes we may enable others in need to tap into those sort of resources. This is what those developing the programmes for

children need to be doing. As well, all of us in a helping role need to actively resist theories which categorise people and take away the greatest resource of all – the hope for change.

Literature Review

The review of literature pertinent to this study appears in three places – in this first chapter, then juxtaposed with the data findings and lastly in the chapter which deals with the significance for social work.

This first section contains a broad look at the ideas about family violence in general and gives attention to the ideas about the intergenerational transmission of violence. Then follows a more specific examination of resilience factors particular to people who have experienced this or similar trauma as children. Each factor is discussed in terms of a particular category to which it relates in the data and so appears adjacent to the findings for ease of reference. Social work theories of empowerment will be described in the section which looks at the significance of this information for social work policy and practice. Empowerment approaches are used alongside a feminist analysis of family violence to tie the ideas generated by the data to a framework for re-examining existing policies and practices.

Family Violence

An 1878 piece entitled "Wife Torture in England" (Cobbe, in Stark and Flitcraft, 1996) examined the phenomenon of family violence and concluded that at its root was the economic and social inequality of women. This view is still shared by many today although the thinking about family violence has undergone many transformations over the years. By the end of the nineteenth century, wife beating had become criminalised as assault in most Western countries but the proportion of men beating their wives remained relatively constant even though there had been a decline in other forms of violence.

The study of child abuse and domestic violence as a popular phenomenon needing urgent attention emerged in the late 1960s. Erin Pizzey's "Scream Quietly or the Neighbours will Hear" (1974) was the first full length treatment of the issue to find its way into the popular press and in the subsequent years there was an exponential increase in the number of books and articles which looked at this issue. The questions asked by the public and addressed by the research community were 'how common is it?' and 'what are its causes?' The answers to these questions for a long while consisted of a identification of factors found to be related to family

violence – the appearance of a literature which attempted to develop a theory of its causes came later.

These theories fall into the three following groups:

- Psychopathological – the intra-individual level of analysis
- Social situation theories – the ideas about the effects of learning and the effects of stress
- Ideological theories about the role of sexism and racism and other inequities in family violence.

Psychopathological theories

Much early writing on child abuse and domestic violence portrayed the causes as arising from the psychological problems of the offenders (Kempe et al, 1962; Steele and Pollock, 1974). After years of study, it is agreed that the number of batterers with psychological disorders is no greater than the proportion of people with psychological disorders in the general population (Straus et al, 1980; Steele, 1978).

Associated with this view came the idea that violence is to do with the psychological problems of the victims (such as 'some women like to be beaten' and ideas about co-dependency). It is now known that there is no distinctive set of psychological characteristics or of problem behaviours that distinguish women who are battered. Studies have identified battered women as experiencing disproportionate rates of psychological distress but only subsequent to the onset of abuse (Stark, 1984).

A better case could be made to suggest that it is the batterers who are motivated by mental illness because research shows them to be emotionally distant, obsessive, jealous, uncommunicative dependent and often addicted to alcohol and drugs (Gondolf, 1990) but these can be seen as traits associated with male socialisation rather than indications of disease.

Social Situation Theories

Some of the earliest research on child abuse found that abusive adults were likely to have been raised in abusive homes (Steele and Pollock, 1974) with the explanation being that being abused as a child produces a personality disorder that then predisposes the person to a life pattern of violence. A later explanation for this idea was that exposure to violence teaches that violence can, and should,

be used towards those closest to you and that the pattern of behaviour once learned, is then repeated.

This idea came from the learning theories of Bandura (1977). He held that in order for human development to occur there must be a continuous and reciprocal interaction between a person and their environment, a principle called *reciprocal determinism*. In contrast to the prevalent ideas about a 'normative' maturational path through which everyone must pass (Piaget, Erikson), Bandura posits that there is no 'normative' path but rather a more complex interplay between the person's cognition and the environment and that these principles operate across the entire life span. An example he used was that of the influence of violent television programmes on children's behaviour. Some children, he points out are frightened and avoid watching violent shows while others tend to prefer and select these programmes which in turn then strengthen pre-existing tendencies to aggressive behaviour. Thus the child actively shapes his or her viewing environment and controls to a degree the influence on behaviour. These theories have been important not only in shaping approaches based on behavioural interventions but also in constructing deterministic myths about the influence of early experience. In fact, properly read, Bandura's ideas invite a fuller consideration of the possibility that it is the individual's cognition, in interaction with the environment, that constructs the reality and that this is likely to be a continually evolving process. This theory may explain why it is that siblings, with similar experiences of family violence, respond in such different ways. While social learning and social psychological stress have a role to play, neither is sufficient as an explanation for the occurrence of family violence.

Another theory is that family violence is a conflict resolution tactic that partners have used in childhood. The national family violence surveys in the US (Straus et al, 1980) indicated that men and women were equally prone to use force with one another and that battered women were 150% more likely to use severe violence with their children than were non-abused women. Other researchers argue that learning to use force to resolve conflict is culturally and racially patterned in violent families or 'cultures of violence' eg inner city, minority and low income groups are identified as violence prone (Gelles and Straus, 1988; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967).

- **Intergenerational transmission of abuse** The idea that both wife beating and child abuse are caused by exposure to childhood violence that is transmitted intergenerationally is somewhat difficult to dispel. Nevertheless, challenges have been made to it on the basis that the studies which support this view were methodologically weak and over dependent on self report and retrospective data (Kaufman and Zigler in Gelles and Loseke, 1987). Study samples were mostly of unrepresentative groups, that is of those who had already come to attention for some form of problem behaviour. Reports have often been secondhand or anecdotal and the difficulties involved with the definitions of violence have also played a part. Vague concepts such as "lack of empathetic mothering" (Steele and Pollock, 1974) made it difficult to be sure that the empirical support for this proposition was sound. Although in better designed research, Widom (1989) found abused children statistically more likely than controls to be arrested for subsequent violence, the actual difference was small (29% versus 21%).

On the basis of their national population survey, Straus et al (1980: 112-113) report "a clear trend for violence in childhood to produce violence in later life". What their data actually shows however, is that although boys who experienced violence as children were disproportionately violent as adults, 90% of children from violent homes and 80% from homes described as 'most violent' did not abuse their partners. Conversely, a current batterer was more than twice as likely to have had a non-violent than a violent childhood and seven times more likely to have had a 'non-violent' than a 'most violent' childhood.

Reviewing studies in this genre, Kaufman and Zigler (1987) conclude that no more than 30% of those who experienced or witnessed violence as children are currently abusive, an estimate some believe is still too high. Even in Widom's (1989) sample, 71% of the abused children were not currently violent.

In the past, the uncritical acceptance of the intergenerational theory of violence has caused undue anxiety in many victims of abuse, led to biased responses from professionals and influenced the outcome of court decisions. Cited in the literature are examples of a woman , in her 70s who was advised never to have children by a professional when she was in her 20s because she would abuse them as she had been abused. She followed this advice and never had children. Another woman nearly lost custody of her children when it came out that she had been severely

abused as a child although her current parenting was reportedly excellent (cited by Kaufman and Zigler in Gelles and Loseke, 1987:218). Psychological and social work reports to the family court in custody and access hearings in New Zealand today inevitably contain information about the parent's family of origin experience with the implication that this has bearing on this person's current ability to parent.

There is a growing school of thought that resists the ideas about the inevitability of abuse being transferred by parents to their children. Two of the researchers who were instrumental in making this challenge to intergenerational transmission a substantive one, have this to say:

> The association between abuse in childhood and poor parenting has been overstated. Most parents with histories of abuse do not abuse their children. It is time for researchers and practitioners to stop looking for evidence to support the intergenerational hypothesis and instead to focus on understanding those mechanisms involved in the transmission of abuse and those factors likely to decrease its occurrence (Kaufman and Zigler in Gelles and Loseke, 1987:218).

Ideological theories

At a wider socio-cultural level of analysis a number of themes have emerged. There is clear evidence that women, blacks, minorities and the poor are over-represented victims of domestic violence (Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980). Some argue that this data supports the idea that the real cause of family violence is not psychological disturbance or the result of social learning or the presence of stress but that it is oppression on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, ability, minority status as it is embodied in the structures of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. This ideologically motivated analysis has received a lot of attention more recently. Its critics argue that the field has become "emotion charged" (Gelles, 1987) and not able to be backed up empirically.

Child Abuse

Studies which have attempted to trace the causes of child abuse have accounted for it variously with maternal violence or neglect in the family of origin (Steele, 1976), a lack of parenting skills (Newberger and Cook, 1983), poverty or other deprivation (Gil, 1973), the absence of supports (Newberger and Bourne, 1978) or some combination of provocation, psychological predisposition and environmental trigger events (Helfer, 1976).

Which ever theme is emphasised, the assumption is always that child abuse is caused by some breakdown in the mother-child bonding process. The normative character of mothering and female domesticity is taken as self evident and usually it is assumed that mothers are generally responsible for child abuse.

But are children typically hurt by their mothers? Representative sample surveys indicate that fathers may be as likely or more likely to abuse their children. National survey (US) data in the 1970s indicated that men were responsible for two thirds of reported incidents of child abuse in which men were present (Gil, 1973). Once the division of childcare responsibilities and the proportion of children raised by single women are taken into account, the proportion of men's involvement in child abuse becomes more significant. Certainly, men bear the responsibility for the serious and fatal effects of child abuse. Bergman, Larsen and Mueller (1986) in comparing the hospital records of two time periods 1971-73 and 1981-83 also reported an increase in the proportion of known male perpetrators. Fully 80% of the fatalities were attributable to men, the remaining 20% were unknown. None were attributed to women. It is thought that this rise may be explained by a growing willingness to report male friends rather than a shift in violence. Authors of this research point out the likelihood that women may under-report because of a fear of further violence from their male friends or because of punitive welfare legislation.

Stark and Flitcraft (1996) looked at the link between child abuse and women battering and weighed the evidence of the dominant view, that it is caused by a combination of maternal deficit and environmental stress, against the view that it is caused by the same power struggle between partners that causes woman battering. Because men commit most domestic violence as well as most serious child abuse, Stark and Flitcraft argue that there is a good chance these events are related. Child abuse occurs disproportionately in battering relationships. Twenty-five of the twenty-eight child abuse reports were identified in medical records of battered women (Stark and Flitcraft, 1988b).

Another study (Bowker, Arbitell, and McFerron in Yllo and Bograd, 1988) report that 70% of batterers abuse children. This makes domestic violence the most important context for child abuse.

Children in battering relationships face immediate risk of becoming co-victims during an assault on their mother as well as suffering psychological consequences because of exposure to violence.

Early work looking at the long term effects of direct abuse and of exposure to spousal abuse suggested that psychological consequences of spouse abuse may be more serious for children than those of child abuse itself (Rosenbaum and O'Leary, 1981; Jaffe, Wolfe and Wilson, 1990).

In a recent (1996) review of the literature, Evan Stark and Anne Flitcraft trace the various historical definitions of family violence. They contend that not only the definitions and the research on which they were based but also the concomitant intervention strategies suited both government policy and the growth of the 'helping industry'. They make a compelling case for linking the developing social policy around family violence with broader social trends. Although their research has been conducted in the US they use many examples from the United Kingdom. The impetus for New Zealand policy development in this area comes overwhelmingly from these two sources and our links to the British justice system are also relevant. The trend of viewing public troubles as private issues can come in handy for governments who want to divert attention away from basic inequities and instead scapegoat or at least marginalise a clearly definable problem group.

The idea that the 'problem' was confined to a small group of 'dysfunctional' families had its heyday in the 1960s and early 1970s but received a significant challenge from sociologists Steinmetz and Straus who suggested that all families were violent to a lesser or greater degree. This idea of the family as the 'cradle of violence' (Steinmetz and Straus, 1973) suggested that the causes of violence lay deep within the family system and the implications were that all conflict had to be suppressed because it was unhealthy. From smacking children through to homicide represented the continuum of experience which was endemic, violent and needed to be managed. Again, argue Stark and Flitcraft, in the political arena, the legitimate conflict initiated by the disadvantaged, was becoming a priority for attention and this reframing of the issue of domestic violence suited thinking in the public policy arena. It is at this stage where the ideas about intergenerational transmission of violence come to the fore because this same theory suggested that the family provided the training ground for future violence. Many studies generalised from

studies of high risk populations to conclude that witnessing severe violence as a child led to adult violence. Social learning theories were at their height and the claim that 'violence begets violence' of the new 'social genetics' earned the privileged place in the thinking about family violence that it holds today.

Stark and Flitcraft (1996) point out that these ideas about the family had become generalised ideas about what constitutes a problem or violence prone family. The idea that the family, for most, represents an inherently unequal situation on the basis of gender had become lost. Development of research tools like the 'Conflict Tactics Scale' (Straus et al, 1980) served to feed researcher bias that violence was simply an expression of conflict within families. This scale, which considered events such as 'threats' and 'hitting' outside their contexts, intent and actual consequence, served to further mask the politics of gender roles that led to battering. Most battering incidents are initiated to enforce male control – to suppress conflict rather than to resolve disputes. When female aggression involving hitting was looked at for example, rather than looking at the context of the event and comparing these incidents with the cumulative degree of control achieved through coercion by men, researchers concluded that the population of battered men actually exceeded that of women (Steinmetz, 1977-8). Interestingly, this vast population is yet to come forward into doctor's surgeries and emergency treatment rooms or to organise safe houses for themselves.

Explaining the connection between battering and child abuse

Although men and women use violence to resolve family conflicts, mounting evidence suggests that partner violence against women typically occurs against a background of intimidation, isolation, coercion and control over resources perceived to be scarce (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Jones and Schechter, 1992; Stark, 1992). Stark and Flitcraft hypothesise that in this context, men initiate violence to suppress conflict, not to resolve it. The pattern of coercion and control explains the link of domestic violence and child abuse. Because the motive for battering is gendered they also suggest that the motive for hurting the child is part of a larger strategy to undermine the moorings of women as mothers, partners, workers and people.

Effects on Children

Results from Claire Dominick's evaluation of the Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot Project (HAIPP) (1995) and the Office of the Commissioner for Children's analysis of the Victim Impact data from HAIPP (Maxwell and Carroll-Lind, 1996) are consistent with other studies which show that few children are unaware of the violence of their parents.

Studies carried out over the last two decades both in New Zealand and internationally confirm that a wide variety of abuse has negative outcomes in the short and long term. From longitudinal studies, some of which have been carried out in New Zealand (Lloyd, 1990; Fergusson et al, 1994 and Silva, 1992), there is evidence that a number of adverse factors including exposure to abuse in a child's early life can be linked to a variety of difficulties in later years. Some children will display psychological ill-health manifested in depression, anxiety, mood swings, and suicidal thoughts and actions while others will show anti-social behaviour such as drug use, intimidating others or using violence and breaking the law. For some, there is evidence of later social disability in forming relationships with others. Pocock's (1994) New Zealand study compared a sample of children resident in women's refuges to a general population sample to find that 75% of refuge children had behavioural problems severe enough to fall into the clinical range compared with 25% in the sample group.

Finkelhor's (1992) work, with others, establishes importantly that different abuse experiences can have similar outcomes – what seems to be important is the severity and duration of the abuse, not the type.

The last decade has seen a rapid increase in interest in that group from disadvantaged backgrounds who do *not* display these difficulties in any great degree. The search for protective factors is becoming more prominent in the research in child protection (Finkelhor, 1988). We now know that the protective factors may be temperamental and particular to that child as well as environmental and that the relationship between them is a complex one.

Longitudinal studies such as the well known one by Werner and her associates have provided vital baseline information for studies on resilience. In this study, 698 Asian and Polynesian children born in 1955 on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, were

monitored for thirty years for the impact of a variety of biological and psychosocial factors, stressful life events and protective factors (Werner and Smith, 1982).

Kimchi and Schaffner (in Arnold, 1990) suggest that a dynamic balance exists between stress and protective factors. Most children cope until the stress factors outweigh the protective ones and the balance is necessary throughout life. At different developmental stages though, different factors assume more or less importance. During infancy, constitutional factors are more important, in adolescence, interpersonal factors such as sense of control over the future and ability to plan become more important. Garmezy (1984) categorised protective factors into three broad groups; the positive personality disposition of the child, a supportive family milieu and a support system external to the family.

Kimchi and Schaffner reviewed studies in this genre and have constructed a table of protective factors which provide a useful overview of findings to date (see Appendix 3).

Dilemmas in family violence research

Despite fairly solid attention from the research community for three or so decades, there is still a good deal of disagreement on the cause of family violence.

Reasons for this may be that:

Focus on a single aspect

Most research has concentrated on a single aspect of family violence, for example, partner assault or child sexual abuse. There are few studies which look at the issue as a whole.

Issues of definition

There are problems of definition itself. The concepts are political ones as evidenced by the naming of the phenomenon as variously as 'wife battering' and 'domestic violence' each with its respective political overtones.

Because of the wide variation in definition of violence, it becomes difficult to directly compare studies so that a knowledge base of a set of behaviours is not being developed. The terms 'abuse' and 'violence' have been applied to a range of behaviours from actually striking a person and causing injury (Kempe et al, 1962) or to mean acts where there is no physical contact at all but a perception by the victim nonetheless of emotional violence (Straus et al, 1980).

Sample Selection

Most research focuses on families or cases which have come to attention through referral to child protection, women's support or police services and have thus already been labelled violent. It is impossible to then decide on which factors make the family vulnerable to be labelled as violent as opposed to actually being violent. The implications of a family admitting violence are huge and therefore present ethical dilemmas for the researcher. There are exceptions to this and representative samples have been used to gauge incidence, as well as control group studies (Straus et al, 1980 in the US; Morris, 1997 in NZ).

Resistance

Some argue that in patriarchal societies there is institutional resistance to research which clearly identifies social problems as having their roots on the oppression of vulnerable groups by the more powerful and that governments will never truly support moves to redress this balance (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996; Yllo and Bograd, 1988).

Understanding Family Violence

There has been some work done on theories which seem to have relevance to understanding family violence. Gelles and Straus (1988) discussed 15 separate theories. Gelles comments on the difficulty of developing an integrated model that was not too complex to examine, and subsequently writes that it is more useful to work with a more middle range set of propositions for the sake of being able to answer some of the pressing questions in the family violence field. He uses an exchange/social control model of family violence which basically posits that "people hit and abuse other family members because they can". The idea about a mutual exchange of rewards applies. Each human interaction is guided by the pursuit of rewards and the avoidance of punishment and costs. So, people will use violence in the family if the costs do not outweigh the rewards. From social control theory we have the idea that family violence occurs in the absence of social controls which would negatively sanction family members for acts of violence.

Family violence research then, is a field characterised by debate, some of which is of an overtly political nature. Feminist writers in the field regularly challenge those who see the problem as having its roots and therefore its answers in the world of

individuals and families. This group of researchers in turn, tend to dismiss broad ideological analyses as being impractical and oversimplistic.

The fact that research into family violence has occurred in many disciplines, notably in health, developmental psychology, sociology, social work, criminology, education and women's studies is a strength as well as a potential disadvantage. The strands of knowledge must be now woven together into a new synergy, which is organic and evolving and carries the hope that things can change.

Research Design

A Feminist Framework

From the outset of this study, I have been attracted to the ideas of feminist standpoint theory in part because of their relevance to and parallel nature to the basic precepts of social work practice (Van den Bergh, 1995; Swigonski, 1993) and also because they are also consonant with a personal philosophy which embraces these same ideas.

Dissatisfaction with the positivist ideas of what constitutes 'good science' are by now well documented. Claims of value-free research activity, subject-object separation, and scientific objectivity have been roundly challenged by the post-positivist movement and we have reached a point in the present where the core is "doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal or general claim to authoritative knowledge" (Richardson in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:173).

In the last decade feminist perspectives have become more developed. Recognition of a myriad of frames of reference has grown out of the initial challenge to androcentrism as being the only recognised framework and there has been a reclaiming of the value of women's experiences, values and ideas. The construction of new epistemologies (ways of knowing) has consumed the attention of many feminist scholars. The post modernist movement which began in the 1970s has had a significant impact on how we look at the existing knowledge in the field of social science because it questions the ideas of 'grand theory' or of knowledge developed by those who were in privileged positions and which consequently overlooks the perceptions of reality held by disempowered groups. It posits an underlying set of assumptions or structures on which causal explanations for various observed phenomena were then based. Many of the ideas that inform social work practice in the field of family violence fall into this category. Learning and role theory, systems theory, ideas about psychological development and determinist frameworks both biological and cultural are some.

The knowledge base of social work as well as the developing feminist frameworks have been significantly influenced by the ideas of post-modernism. Proponents of

postmodernism attempt to redress inequity by challenging established truths and "have been seeking to reconstruct truth by reconstructing grand theory by a process of looking for who or what was excluded" (Van den Bergh, 1995). Of these, the ideas of feminist standpoint theory with the focus on the empowerment of women extended here to include the social work commitment to the empowerment of *all* oppressed groups, offer a suitable framework for envisioning this study.

Standpoint theory begins with "the idea that the less powerful members of society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression" (Swigonski, 1994:90). As a result of having to survive, disempowered people have to attend to the perspective of the dominant group as well as their own and consequently hold a 'double view' with the potential of gaining a more complete view of social reality.

A feminist standpoint assumes that all people see the world from the position they are in socio-culturally. "What is real depends on one's standpoint and is grounded in experiences related to one's position within the socio-cultural topography (Davis, 1993; Stanley and Wise, 1983, 1990; Swigonski, 1994). This differs from the earlier feminist analysis because it emphasises multiplicity and diversity within women's experiences. It includes for example, Maori women's standpoints, lesbian standpoints, and the standpoints of older women. Each has validity because it is grounded within specific women's realities. The idea of a number of interlocking oppressions which act and interact to disempower certain groups is central to current approaches in social work. Standpoint perspectives have great value for informing social work practice and research because they share many of the values of social work; notably a respect for client self determination, a belief in the dignity and worth of individuals, the affirming of client strengths and validating of client uniqueness. Included in these shared values is the idea that the 'personal is political'. Thus both feminist and social work conceptual frameworks stress the need to view client problems within a wider context to understand how social and political realities influence them.

Feminists argue that compared with positivist research traditions, research that begins in the everyday lives of people will be grounded in cultural diversity, hence knowledge distortions based on stereotypes will be decreased. In contrast to positivism, the goals of standpoint theory are explicitly political, that is they must seek to empower clients and/or to transform social structures. They do this through

the use of methodologies which raise consciousness and encourage critical thinking by both researcher and participants.

Inherent in this research approach is the belief that individuals who have lived through experiences are more credible than those who have read or thought about them (Swigonski, 1994).

The following are all associated with standpoint theory –

selecting issues for investigation that are based on problems associated with the everyday lives of ordinary people

assisting subjects to develop critical consciousness about the impact of public structures on their own lives

advancing the subject's causes by ensuring the study results are used to address problems

using a process which is guided by an ethic of caring and responsibility

adopting a reflexive role as the researcher by reflecting on the impact of oneself on the research process (Van den Bergh, 1995).

A discussion around this last point begins with my location of myself as researcher as a middle-class white woman and a parent who holds heterosexual and educational privilege; who has shared some of the childhood experience of the participants and who identifies, as they do, as resilient to its effects in terms of the ideas about the intergenerational transmission of violence.

The experience of working in the area of statutory child protection for several years has given me another perspective on the problem of family violence and its impact on the children who live within its bounds. Alongside this is my commitment to feminist ways of seeing the world and my analysis of the problem of family violence as one which is rooted in the patriarchal value system that underlies our society. The consequent adoption of the values of feminist standpoint theory as a way of creating knowledge mean that the approach, methodologies and overall theoretical context of this study will be underpinned by the feminist values already discussed.

Stages of research

Establishing the Research Question

A discussion of the factors which converged to allow me to begin thinking about this area of work can be found in the introduction to this study.

Conversations with other adults who had experienced childhood violence, with those working in the policy field and with those directly involved with victims through their work in Women's Refuge or child protection agencies convinced me that a focus on resilience factors was a valuable perspective.

If we are able to leave behind the preoccupation with proving a link between childhood violence and later use of violence, we can then turn our attention to examining the 'mechanisms involved in the transmission of abuse and those factors likely to decrease its occurrence' (Kaufman and Zigler in Gelles and Loseke, 1993:218).

The main research question emerged as:

What were the things that helped you to break the cycle so that you do not repeat the abuse you experienced as a child in your family now?

Ideally, it would have been useful to have employed a focus group at the outset of this study to form the question and help establish the most appropriate research design. However by talking informally with a range of people involved in working in the field at practice and policy levels, by reflecting on my own practice experience and by talking to those who identify as resilient adults, both informally and as part of a two-person pilot, I was however, able to take advantage of a wider range of ideas than just my own. Some of the advantages of using a focus group were gained by using this process of preliminary discussion and reflection.

The 'Research in Family Violence Priorities' project, set up under the auspices of Department of Social Welfare has been a helpful source of information about the current research situation in New Zealand. Similarly, my attendance at the National Symposium of Family Violence held in August 1997 put me in direct touch with those working in related fields and gave me a sense of current trends in family violence work.

Finding the Participants

An advertisement requesting participants had been drafted for use, but after discussion with the editor of a community newspaper, *The Kapiti/Horowhenua Mail*, a brief article which outlined the project and contained a request for participants was published (see Appendix 4). My phone number in the original article was misprinted with the result that the editor rang to offer me the opportunity to place another piece about the project in the paper the following week. The paper had

already run a brief apology and correction. This stroke of 'bad' luck in fact took care of the initial dilemma of how I could possibly respectfully turn away people who contacted me after I had reached my sample quota. In the second article I was able to thank people for their interest and add that I had enough participants. A sample of eight participants was recruited through this publicity. Interestingly, several of these people got through to me despite the initial wrong number. Two rang the newspaper after trying the number, one tracked me down through the university and still another contacted my mother who has the same surname. One of the participants jested when I congratulated her on her persistence, that that in itself demonstrated resilience! The definition of 'violent family of origin' was deliberately left wide: "those who lived in a family that was violent (physically or emotionally) but who think that they have managed to break the cycle" (*Horowhenua Mail* article, 9 January 1997). I particularly wanted to avoid defining violence too closely because I was interested in participants' self perceptions and in their own definitions. How particular acts or situations are perceived and interpreted by those vulnerable to their effects has the capacity to make them more or less stressful. One person who did not fit my criteria responded because she had thought the term 'family of origin' referred to any previous family. She had survived a violent relationship as an adult rather than a violent family of origin. When I outlined the criteria for her she said that she then realised her experience did not fit but expressed an interest in the project and so I agreed to send her a copy of results.

There is no difficulty in fitting the experiences of the eight participants into definitions currently in use in New Zealand. Section 2 of the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 defines child abuse as the "harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), or ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person." Although one woman was not abused by any family member, she was sexually abused by a man who initially was a boarder in her parents' home – therefore he was in a domestic relationship with the family as included in the legal definition of family violence employed in the NZ Domestic Violence Act of 1995.

Interestingly, none of the eventual eight participants expressed uncertainty about whether their experiences 'fitted'.

Another reason for this method of sample selection (self-identification) is that survivors of family violence, whether or not they repeat any violent behaviours in their adult lives, carry painful memories. By making the research focus explicit and asking for people to volunteer, I thought there was less likelihood of the researcher coming face to face with a person for whom the issues are too unresolved and raw to talk freely about. The emotional safety of participants was always a factor to be considered.

The sample of eight adults, seven women and one man, was selected purposively on the basis of its identification with the topic under scrutiny. A balance had to be struck between the advantages of obtaining as heterogeneous a sample as possible, taking into account the factors of age, gender, parental and marital status, educational background and socioeconomic status and the more practical aspects of working within fairly rigid constraints of a 12 month period.

In fact, the nine participants (eight in the sample and one other who did not meet the criteria) all contacted me within ten days of the original publicity appearing. Because I took the opportunity offered to thank those who had responded and to say that I had enough participants, I do not know whether many more people would have contacted me. All of the women identified as Pakeha New Zealanders except for one who identified as a Maori New Zealander. The Maori man identified tribally.

All the participants were living in the lower North Island.

Setting up the Interviews

I had asked that people ring me in the evenings, (mainly to lessen the chances of one of my children answering the phone) and also so that I could attend fully to them when they made the first contact. In fact several people were not able to ring at night and occasionally I did need to make a time to ring them back because it was not possible for me to talk when they rang.

In the initial conversation, I thanked them for their response, explained briefly about the project including the parameters of the research so that they and I could be sure that they met the criteria, explained the next stage which was that I would send out an information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 5) and said that I would contact them again by phone when they had had at least a couple of days to go through the material. I tried to send the information to each person within 24 hours of their phone call and rang everyone back within a week of the first contact.

The information sheet contained a brief description of the purpose of the research, contact numbers, assurances about how confidentiality would be maintained and the interview questions. At the second call I asked whether there were any questions, and how they felt about continuing. All participants said they were satisfied with the information, very few had any further questions and it was at that stage that I set up most of the interviews. Three people had commitments or were going away, so I arranged to call them or have them call me when they felt able to make a time. I asked where people wanted to be seen, making it clear that I was quite happy to come to their home. Because it was January and February – holiday months – I was able to be very flexible about times. Aside from one woman whose home was just too busy with her young children, it suited everyone to be interviewed in their home. I was able to complete the interviews within six weeks of placing the publicity.

The Interviews

The interviews were conducted face to face and individually. I audiotaped each interview but also took notes. There were some constraints to do with the positioning of the recorder and microphone, depending of the power source but I endeavoured to make the recording equipment as unobtrusive as possible. I checked recording levels at the beginning of each interview and ensured that I sat near enough to the recorder to be able to turn the tapes over when needed. I considered not taking notes during the interview because it might interfere with the rapport building or narrative process in some way, but decided in the end that the benefits of being able to cover for tape failure (which occurred on one occasion) and also to pick up details which might not have been picked up by the audiotape, outweighed any potential disadvantage. As soon as possible after each interview I also noted my response to it or anything which had stood out for me. These comments often reflected any emotional response to the person and her/his story or noted anything of interest such as where the interview took place and whether there was anyone else present for some part of the interview. I also noted any problems. At the first interview I neglected to release the pause button at one point and so missed about 20 minutes of the interview. Luckily I had taken quite good notes. At the last interview the record button jammed and I spent about 10 minutes trying (successfully) to free it. This made the end of the interview rushed

as the participant's son who had been on a school camp all week arrived home before we had finished.

I pretested my set of interview questions initially and then tested the reviewed set which were much more successful. My original guide had about 12 questions in a sort of chronological life order. Not only did it feel intrusive to ask these questions in this order it also had the effect of cutting the person off because the questions were reasonably specific to particular areas I wanted to look at. My observation of this during the pilot interview was confirmed by the feedback from this person. I settled, in the end, for four much broader openly phrased questions which I varied slightly depending on the context. I tried as much as possible to match participant language style in order to establish rapport and create a feeling of safety around the process for them. The questions broadly were:

- Tell me what was violent about your family of origin

- How are things different for your partner/children in your home now?

- What are the things that you think have helped to 'break the cycle'?

- If you knew a child in this sort of situation, could you say what needs to happen for that child?

The demographic information I requested was age, sex, ethnicity (own definition), marital status and length of parenting partnership if applicable, parenting status – whether full time or part time, sole or shared and the number of children and their ages.

I also had a list of factors which I had summarised from the literature of all the things that had been considered helpful to children growing up in violent situations. I used this occasionally as a checklist. For example if I got little response to question three "What helped you through?" I could follow up with "Was there anyone in your family who supported you while you were growing up?"

The advantage of using an interview guide and checklist was that I could maintain a tone of conversational informality. "Questions can be repeated or asked in different ways to achieve clarity or depth and the questions do not have to be asked in any particular order" (Patton, 1990:280). Because this approach was relatively open and unstructured, I was able to get a large amount of expansive and contextual data. It was made clear to each participant that she or he could withdraw any part of the information or withdraw entirely from the project at any time

without need for explanation and that in that event the tapes would be returned. No-one chose to do this.

My original intention had been to ask participants to check their interview transcripts before I began the analysis and I had accordingly written this into my information sheet and consent form. I changed my mind about doing this after doing some more reading and talking to past students and my supervisor. I had not realised that for people to receive back an unedited verbatim transcript can be quite upsetting. There is a huge difference between spoken and written language and pure transcripted text reads badly. Some past students I spoke to told me that some of their participants had been uncomfortable with what appeared to be a stilted and strange text and some had wanted to withdraw from the study altogether. When I did some reading on the ideas about offering transcripts back to participants for checking, (Maxwell, 1996), I realised that it was more appropriate to offer versions which were edited to be read. The dual purposes of offering transcripts back are to allow people to check that your recording of what they said is accurate and to give them an opportunity to withdraw any information that they are uncomfortable about being included in the study. Again, ideally it would have been appropriate to offer every participant an edited transcript to check as soon as it was completed, time and travel constraints influenced my decision not to do this. Instead, I told people at the conclusion of their interview that I might get in touch by phone if there was anything I needed to check with them and also we discussed at the interview, ways that I might preserve their anonymity in the final write-up. For example, one participant who has an unusual occupation, chose another to represent her in the research. For those people who were born overseas, I discussed with them how I could indicate this without using their actual country of origin. Thus I felt, that the safety needs of the participants were addressed in this way and although I had to take responsibility for the accuracy in transcribing the original material from the tapes I knew I was able to ring to check anything I was uncertain of.

Having made those decisions before I started the interviews, I amended my information sheet accordingly and also told participants at the interview that I might contact them again if I needed to but otherwise they could expect to receive their tapes, copies of the findings chapters and a purposefully written summary of the main features of the study in early 1998.

I rang several participants at various stages of the project to check various details and one person requested a transcript which I provided. The editing of the verbatim version took several hours. I made it more readable but because it was for her personal use only, I did not think to change any of the identifying details. When she received it in the post, she rang me wanting reassurance that I really *was* going to change these details before using her quotes in the final study. I realised then that the safety issues for people involved could not be underestimated and I regretted that I had not given her a version with the names changed, or at least consulted her about doing so. I felt uncomfortable with the idea that I had inadvertently caused that person unnecessary stress, however briefly.

The ending to this discussion is that I realised about three weeks before the study was due to be submitted and when I was putting the finishing touches to it, that I had neglected to amend the consent form so that it still read: "Notes will be given back for checking when completed." It was hard to believe I had made such an elementary mistake and the next two days were perhaps the lowest of the entire project. I knew that people were not expecting to get transcripts for checking because we had discussed this in the interview but at the same time it was part of the written agreement I had made with each person and I knew I needed to honour it before I could submit the report. I rang the seven people concerned (the eighth already had her transcript) and offered them their notes for checking. I explained that they would not read well and that they were only notes. I knew that to undertake to edit them would be hours and hours of extra work and it would mean I would certainly miss my deadline. To my (immense) relief, though I worked hard not to communicate this on the phone, not one of the participants wanted to see their original notes although several people requested to see the version of their stories that I was intending to use in the final draft. I used the opportunity to let each person know just how I had changed identifying details if I had not already spoken to them about this and was able to ascertain that every participant felt comfortable with the material as it would appear in the completed version. I think I was lucky to have selected a sample of people who appeared to be able to trust me with their precious stories and lucky to have had a supervisor who talked me through the dilemma with her usual calm. However, I think I will be always mindful that a simple matter of overlooking a single sentence could have such far reaching implications and will use a different checking method if I am involved in

any research projects in the future. I am also aware that as the mother of four young children, aged eight, six and two (the twins), when I commenced the study, I was often juggling work and study with the needs of my children. Much of my work has had to be done in short bursts, sometimes with a child on my knee. I suspect the mistake I made was due to tiredness or an untimely distraction and I think underlines a dilemma for all students who have dependants.

The ideas of Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (in Berger, Gluck and Patai, 1991) about developing a listening style which encourages people to talk and keep talking and stresses the communication of a non-judgemental acceptance of their ideas were familiar from my social work training. Shortly before commencing the study, I had worked as a student in a community mental health team. Most of my directed work was termed ubiquitously 'support' but it comprised in the main, using my knowledge of the basic counselling techniques of active listening, clarifying and reflecting with the people I was working with. At that time I consciously practised my ability to be a good listener and found that when the time came to do my research interviews it was not all that difficult to again tap into that skill. I was however, still surprised at how many closed questions I did ask (although I noted my attempts to couch them as open ones) and at the number of times I cut someone off from their stream of thought by leaping in to analyse something prematurely. Listening to the tapes was a good exercise in practice reflection and challenged my perceptions of my interviewing style somewhat.

Jack's three suggestions on how to listen for meaning were helpful. These were to listen for what she calls *moral language*. These are self-evaluative statements that give an idea of the standards the participant uses to judge him/herself, such as a woman talking about the fact that she stayed in an abusive situation "I still don't know why I didn't leave after the first time...". The second sort of statement to be aware of is the *meta-statement*, when someone stops in midstream and makes a comment that shows they are aware of a discrepancy between what is being said and what would be expected, for example, "I suppose that's a funny sort of thing for a religious person to do". The third way of listening is to attend to "the logic of the narrative itself, noticing the internal consistency or contradictions in the person's statements" (Jack in Berger, Gluck and Patai, 1991:2) to see how the person describes and orders the experiences they are retelling. This is a guide to the constructs they are using and the value system they subscribe to.

My social work training has also taught me to be aware not only of the emotion expressed both verbally and non-verbally by the speaker but also of my own response to the speaker. The pauses, repetitions, laughter and tears are all part of an interactive process which provides valuable meaning in a live interview. Noting my own reactions helped establish my position as researcher and indicates my value base. Although for example, I attempted not to show any of the discomfort I felt when parents talked about their belief in and use of corporal punishment for young children, my feelings were real. I was aware particularly of the difference between a social work role where I would have no hesitation in discussing with the person my feelings about hitting children as a way of controlling their behaviour compared to the researcher role where it was not appropriate to do so. I had however written in my initial consent document that the material would be treated with complete confidentiality except where I had "good reason to believe that a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect as defined in the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act of 1989." Although several respondents talked about smacking or hitting their children there was only one occasion when I felt that I needed to check for myself on the situation for a particular young person and that was to do with his safety during access with his father who had a history of violence. I felt reassured by his mother's description of the protections in place in this instance and the interview continued. Oakley (1981) and others have challenged the earlier ideas about interviewing in which the interviewer attempted to distance him/herself from the interactive process by not entering into any real dialogue with participants. In some settings, Oakley argues the refusal to give information or answer questions is morally indefensible. The idea that a 'real' researcher, one who may share something of her/himself and answer participants questions, is more likely to 'corrupt' the research process I think is easily refutable. As long as the researcher bias is made explicit, the possible effect on process and outcome can be considered. The idea of a 'robot' researcher who has absolutely no influence on the interview is akin to, and as ludicrous as the positivist ideas of 'truth' residing only in empirically based studies.

I had written some information about myself into the initial mailout and often elaborated on this on the phone and again, as seemed appropriate, during interviews. I was not often asked personal information by participants but they

sometimes referred to information I had already given them for example, "how old did you say your children were again?"

All of the participants had talked about a wish to help children in violent family situations and so I spent some time with each of then going over how exactly I saw this research might be useful in terms of giving us information for developing the children's programmes under the Domestic Violence Act. Several participants expressed an interest in the provisions of the Act and I told them what I knew. On one occasion I gave specific information about how protection orders could be extended to include children and how the Children, Young Persons and their Families Service could act to seek a protection order if a parent was not able to do so. This was in response to a particular situation and it was information I held that had potential use to the participant. Another time, I gave a participant details of where she could receive some very specific support for a particular need she had identified. It felt good to be able to do this, in part because it felt like giving something back but also because my knowledge of the local community, the child protection and domestic violence legislation and my inside knowledge of how those systems worked, had potential practical use to empower the respondents to keep themselves and their children safe in the future.

The process of interviewing and then of transcribing these interviews myself, meant that I felt very close to the respondents and their stories. Listening to the tapes on headphones brought me clearly back to the interview scene with its existing emotion. Some stories touched me more than others. I was aware at times of particular things which resonated for me because of my personal experience or because they reminded me of a child I had come across in the course of my work.

The four questions gave the interview some structure but within those broad areas, my interviewing style was as open as I could make it. I probed for further information at times, always conscious that I had said that I only wanted to hear what the person was comfortable in telling. I did at times make clear responses to what I heard attempting to acknowledge feelings and often my summaries made it clear how I saw the situation "so things were really bad for you after you moved". I deliberately affirmed statements which I saw as 'survivor statements' in particular in relation to the journey each individual had made towards change.

My impression was that most of the participants experienced the process as a positive one but I cannot be totally sure of that. I made a point of asking how each

person was feeling as I was about to leave and from these responses and from comments made during the interviews it seemed as though the opportunity to retell a story to an interested listener was generally an affirming experience. Some people reflected on their new insights as we talked. Comments like, "I've only just thought of that while I've been talking to you" and "what a lot of new insights I'm having just as we talk" were not uncommon. I was conscious that the very act of revisiting painful experiences during the interview would be likely to bring things up for people that were unlikely to go away when I left. I talked about this during the interview as well as noting it on the information sheet. A minority of people had counsellors who they saw regularly. Some had other sources of support; they mentioned people who they could talk to; for others it was less clear. There was a great deal of variation in how much 'practice' people had had in sharing their stories. Some were in the process of writing about it themselves, some had had counselling while another had only very recently told her husband of several years about her abusive father. It was quite clear to me that some people had some issues that were still quite 'raw' and not yet integrated into their present selves and others had done a great deal of reflecting and 'learning to live with' their respective pasts. Overall though, my expectations of finding a group of people of basically survivor rather than victim status were met. The fact that these adults had been able to reach the point where life for their children is so very different than it was for them is a tribute to their bravery and persistence and the process of hearing their stories renewed my commitment to 'do the best by them' in terms of generating some useful results from the data.

One hope for the individuals who were brave enough and generous enough to share their stories with me is, that in the act of the telling in the context of a project that was explicit in its emphasis that it was dealing with survivors, there was some possibility for the person to see anew their journey in terms of the strength they had shown.

Usual practices of maintaining anonymity and confidentiality were followed; the audiotapes stored safely for the period of the research and then offered back to the participants. Interviews were coded and pseudonyms used to preserve confidentiality of participants. The original list of participant details was always kept separate from the tapes and transcripts and headphones were used in the process of transcription to ensure privacy.

Analysis

The processes of transcription and analysis started as soon as the first interview was completed and occurred over a period of several months. The analysis was ongoing and inductive in order to identify emerging themes, patterns and questions. As well as making post interview notes, I made interview summaries which were helpful in establishing categories for an initial coding of the data. Other studies in this area have used various categories to examine resilience factors such as 'internal' and 'external'. In the end, I used five broad categories which seemed to emerge easily from the data. They were:

- The role of partner as support

- The role of others as support

- The contribution of formal and informal learning

- The role of belief

- Survivor perceptions and strategies for survival

Each theme was examined in the context of the literature and the implications for social work policy and practice discussed in a subsequent chapter.

The findings will be validated mainly by the very richness of the data itself, feedback solicited from research participants and members of interest groups, comparison with the literature, by noting any discrepant data and by being aware of and making explicit researcher subjectivity. As Hess says, "Validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference but of integrity" (Hess, personal comment, cited in Maxwell, 1996:197).

Presentation

The final write up occurred over the summer months of 1997-8. The entire project took just over fifteen months from initial conceptualisation to completion. A report summarising findings will be offered to interested parties. The National Collective of Women's Refuge, the Policy Division of the Department of Courts and the Family Violence Unit of the Department of Social Welfare as well as some community groups working in this field have all requested copies of the findings of this study. Thought will be given to publishing findings in the *Social Work Review*, the magazine of the New Zealand Association of Social Workers and *Social Work Now*, the Journal of the New Zealand Children, Young Persons and their Families Service. Copies will

be lodged in the School of Sociology and Social Work departmental library and in the main library at Victoria University of Wellington.

Chapter 4

The Stories

The Research Participants

The eight voices you will hear in the following pages are the voices of seven women and one man who were kind enough to respond to my public request for people who "think they grew up in a family that was violent but who think they have managed to break the cycle". The following names were chosen by the people themselves. Some other details have been altered to preserve their anonymity.

Julie is thirty-three and Pakeha. She has two daughters, aged nine and six; and has been married to her children's father for fifteen years. She works part-time during school hours.

Star is a twenty-nine year old Maori man. He is married and cares for his two preschool children as well as a relative who is ten. He and his partner both work part time in paid employment and share the childcare duties.

Hannah is a Maori New Zealander who has three preschool children. She is thirty-one and a qualified primary school teacher but currently is at home with the children. She parents with her husband who works fulltime.

Lucinda is thirty-seven and a Pakeha New Zealander who has three of her own children who are nineteen, seventeen and twelve as well as two stepchildren of nineteen and twenty-four. Now, only the twelve year old is at home and Lucinda works at home while her husband of thirteen years does the paid work.

Vicki is twenty-six, the Pakeha mother of two young children aged seven and three. She works in full time paid employment and her husband works, often from home. They share the domestic and childcare responsibilities.

Terri is forty and a Pakeha New Zealander. She has been married eight years and has two young children from this relationship as well as three older children from previous relationships. The children range in age from seventeen to four. Terri works at home.

Nina is forty-two and mother to two children aged eleven and nine. She comes from outside New Zealand originally but is married to a New Zealander and has lived here for fourteen years. Currently she is a full time student and her husband of sixteen years works in full time paid employment.

Cynthia is aged forty-four and the mother of two teenagers, seventeen and eighteen. She is a sole parent. One of her children lives at home. She joint-parented her children with their father for several years and then took over most of the parenting role during their college years. Cynthia is a Pakeha New Zealander and works full time.

The Stories – Then and Now

The motivation for asking my respondents to identify as having experienced a family of origin which was violent but who had subsequently been able to relate to partners and children in non-violent ways, came from the dual considerations of issues around definition and of ethics.

Firstly, there are many different definitions of 'family violence' and some of the existing research in this area concerns itself with what can arguably be termed a narrow framework, for example, the studies which use only incidents of physical assault as indicators of violence. There are infinite variations of course, in what is believed to constitute violence and abuse. My preference in definition is for giving weight to the perceived experience of 'victims' (in this case, survivors) over any flatter description of actual events. This stems from my experience in talking to children and adults who have lived through events which may, on a surface description of what actually happened, sound very similar, but which are perceived very differently by the victims and which may have very different consequences for them. I think of some children who came across a 'flasher' while walking home from school. This man was apprehended after a single reported incident and did not approach the children concerned, all of whom were able to tell someone about the incident. Of a group of several children, most of whom reported no serious ongoing effects, two stood out as having been particularly traumatised and experienced sleep and other disturbances for some time. For both of these children, this incident had 'triggered' memories of a previous trauma and their need for support was substantially greater than that of the other children.

All of the people in this sample described experiences which certainly 'fit' into usual definitions of family violence. Seven of the eight experienced the violence directly from family members, the eighth, Nina, experienced abuse at the hands of those acting in *loco parentis*: the nuns who ran the institution she was sent to when her mother died.

Secondly, a particular ethical concern in family violence research must be the bringing up of painful memories in the process of in depth interviewing. I considered that people who were drawn to respond to publicity about research in this area were more likely to have reached a point in their own lives where they were able to share their experience with a stranger, and that to do so would not be as potentially traumatic for them as for people who were 'asked' to join the study because the researcher somehow knew they fitted the sample criteria.

In order to set the parameters of the study, that is, to give an indication of what the experience of participants actually was and the difference between their own childhoods and what they now offer their children, I will include some of their descriptions about 'then' and 'now.' These accounts will provide a context for a more detailed examination of the factors identified by this group as having been helpful to them. I also asked each person to tell me what they thought needed to happen for a child in a violent situation. Their thoughts appear in Appendix 6.

Quotes directly from the interviews are indented and my questions appear in italics. Bracketed words are my insertions to transcripts of verbatim text, added to establish context or to help the spoken words flow on the page. Three dots… indicate some words have been left out of the quote.

The chapter following this, *Findings,* will be devoted to five main themes that emerged from the data; the 'things that helped'. They will be examined in the context of the literature which relates specifically to each factor.

Julie expressed vividly her feelings of injustice at the punishments meted out to her as a child, at the same time recalling the despair and sense of powerlessness she felt.

Both her stepfather and mother beat her and her sisters.

> My stepfather was violent, , but it was mainly my mother. We were made to call him 'Dad'. I once called him [his name]… [and was] slapped so hard and fast by him when I was about 13. I told my mother – she didn't believe it. The only person who could help, didn't. I felt this was my life, my lot.

There is a strong sense of the shock and disbelief that her mother could treat her as she did. Not only the acts of abuse but the failure to support and protect were things that hurt Julie as a child.

> Mum had the cat put down. I was screaming. I loved that cat. I was pouring my heart out about the one thing I loved and I thought 'she must listen', but she didn't. I couldn't believe it, I was just so shocked.

Now Julie is committed to supporting her daughters when they need it. She does this on a personal level.

> That's why when C [my daughter] comes home from school and someone's spoken to her badly I'm going to go to [that person] and say; 'don't you dare upset my kids' I hate it when they're emotionally upset.

She also does it by ensuring they live in a safe environment.

> A friend up the road and I got stuck in to get a [pedestrian] crossing [outside the school]

She also talked about being just when disciplining and trying to understand her children's behaviour.

> Now I make sure I'm being fair. I give a verbal warning first. A smack is the last resort. Now I try to understand the children learn about their development.

> I don't want my kids feeling like [I did] that because I know what it's like.

For *Star* it was the hypocrisy, the inside and outside face presented by his family through the generations that was a major theme. He says of his relationship with his father:

> In public [it was] 'how are you my son?'... all lovey dovey and I couldn't accept it. I couldn't accept his love, his compassion, because I had this feeling, ' I can't trust you,' because he'd hurt me [and] might hurt me again.

> I was very proud of both my parents, one had come from a proud family, the evidence of stories and history is that my grandfather beat my grandmother. Whenever I saw either grandfather they were violent. Their children were violent and the violence came straight down onto us.

> At the time the physical violence didn't even hurt. It was terrible. There were moments when I wished I wouldn't wake up in the morning.

Star chose to live with his father from the time he was seven until his father died when he was seventeen. He talks about the role of alcohol in his father's aggression and how he became skilled at judging how safe his father was.

As well as severe physical beatings, there were constant putdowns, the witnessing of the sexual abuse of his sister by his father, the beating of his mother as well as a general and over-riding neglect caused by a failure to provide and protect. Star remembers his mother hiding them in the compost heap to keep them safe from their father's rage.

> When Dad was paralytically drunk he was OK, but when he was just in a mild case, an in between time when he really got aggressive, that was the worst time. I couldn't even run away. I just had to stay there and take it.

If Mum uttered a word Dad gave her a hiding. I never heard an argument, all I heard was Dad's fists flying and my mother crying. I remember my mother shoving us in the compost the nights we were hiding. She would throw all this stink compost over us to hide us and when I go out and smell that, I cry. I think to myself that this man was my father looking down on us. I just want to remind him of the things we had to do just to live because he was so aggressive. He thought that we were round just to be his punching bag.

At one stage Star decided to report his father but was not able to carry through with it.

Then there was a period when I worked up enough energy to report my father to the police. I turned up to the police bloody as anything and they asked me if I got beaten up and I said 'yes' and they asked me 'who' and I said 'by some people down the street' so they took me home. Dad was home. They tried to wake my father, they couldn't wake him, one of them asked me 'did your father do this?' and I said 'no'. If they'd gone into the bathroom they would have known because my blood was all over the wall.

Star has responded to his early recognition of and dislike for hypocrisy. His life is free of alcohol. He remembers the hurt he felt when people said bad things about his father and now has a strong desire to live a life so that what his children hear and know about him is the same thing. Star has been able to recognise in his own behaviour towards his children, shades of his father and this hurts him.

I don't want my children subjected to hearing bad things about me. It hurt me to hear things about my Dad. So what people and my children see is the same and the truth about me.

It's a part of wanting to be admired. I don't want to be like my father but I do see traits of him. When I see similar behaviours I panic. I cry, I come in here and I cry, or I go out to the beach and I cry because I made myself a promise never to be like him.

Star also talked about his changed ideas about gender equality and parenting responsibilities which he says he gained not only from formal education but also from his wise mother-in-law. Star's love for and appreciation of his wife was obvious from the emotion he showed when he talked about her.

That's different from where I come from. My father never appreciated my mother. My responsibility is to come home and carry what needs to happen at home.

Hannah's family life was dominated by a father who was physically and emotionally violent to his wife and three daughters. Hannah refers to the stress caused by his unpredictable moods; the "walking on eggs" syndrome that is often referred to by those who have lived with family violence.

It was an abusive and an uncaring environment – really quite a sick sort of power that my father tried to dominate us with. He was very complex, controlling, into every little bit. I did things because of Dad and to keep the peace and if he was in a good mood everybody was in a

good mood but it wasn't quite a good mood… just enough, because it could change 'bang' like that if you said something a little bit wrong.

The theme of 'ownership' is evident in Hannah's father's expectation that his wife and daughters would serve him and work on the family farm in order to 'earn' their living and in his attitude to his wife's achievements and friendships.

We had a farm and we had to work. We had to work like full grown men. We just did it, we worked and worked. We didn't realise that not all families did this, later when we had boyfriends they had to pull finger or my father would kick them out.

My father was an intensely jealous man. She[my mother] [got a work promotion] and he belittled it, he couldn't cope with the fact that she earned more than him and that people respected her

Her first recollections of the violence were when she was about five but things got progressively worse after her father had a breakdown when Hannah was in her teens.

It happened quite often. In the end my mother just took it. She never argued back, she gave up.

I always used to feel very sorry for my mother and if Dad hit Mum I would try and stop it.

Hannah's family lived in a rural area and her father was well known in the community because of his professional job which carried with it certain expectations for the rest of the family.

The isolation caused by her father's intimidation and the fact that he was well respected in the community was another barrier to the violence coming into the open. The public/private personas were evident for Hannah as they were for others in this study.

People still see Dad as this wonderful father, this wonderful person and he was very respected in the community. [There was this] very public face, the caring father, the one with the wonderful children who did nothing wrong.

We had to look good. We were public figures.

Lucinda experienced physical and emotional abuse and neglect at the hands of her mother and sexual abuse from her father. Her two brothers, one of whom she knew as her twin, were not treated harshly. Lucinda was the daughter of her father and a woman with whom he had had an extra marital affair. She was born overseas shortly before her brother. Her paternal grandmother went to collect her and brought her back to New Zealand as a tiny baby. She was taken to the nursing home where her 'mother' had just given birth to a boy. Lucinda's mother returned

home with not one, but two babies, saying that she had had twins. Her first memories of abuse are very early ones.

> The sexual abuse started at age three; that's the earliest memory... [I have] memories of Mum drawing a knife and plates cracking. I didn't know what was going to happen next, didn't know what to do. Weapons were used till I was seven then Dad had a bad stroke. From then on, further strokes left him incapacitated so the physical struggles ended but verbal abuse from my mother continued.

> Mother beat up on me but not my brothers. I was left out. My twin brother got birthday presents and I got none except one from my grandmother. I had no new clothes and was teased at school. [It was] deliberate cruelty "I hate that girl, I never wanted a daughter" I overheard my mother say.

The beatings and severe acts of cruelty and neglect continued until Lucinda moved away.

> My mother continued the beatings till adulthood. I never saw her hit the boys. She'd send them out of the house while she punished me... My mother made sure my grandmother never saw. The teachers noticed the scars... My mother tied and gagged me at one stage and locked me in the car boot. She drove the car, my vomit made the tapes loose. I lived off the water stored in the boot. I'd been missing for three days when I heard my grandmother's voice and called out.

Lucinda's medical needs, a hearing loss and some medical problems which resulted from self harm, were not attended to either. Now she is able to identify some reactions as being triggered by past events and has developed strategies to manage at these times. It hasn't always been easy though.

> I've gone overboard with my kids to make sure not the same thing happens... as a baby she [first baby] giggled, made this screech and I threw her down the hall. I thought 'god I'm going to be like my mother' and I shook and cradled her. But now looking back, I [realised] I just can't stand loud noises.

Things got better after this and Lucinda, with the support of her current partner, has a good relationship with her children.

> I think I've raised my children to be self sufficient. They've all been independent. When the kids are sick I don't have a lot of tolerance. I'm very strong when it comes to pain. I can tolerate an awful lot. I just vowed and declared I'd never raise them the way my mother raised me the day I left home.

Vicki's earliest memory of the physical and sexual abuse from her stepfather is at about age three. It continued till she was ten when her mother left the relationship.

> When I came home from school he used to take me up to the bedroom and sexually molest me. My baby sister was asleep in lounge. I wouldn't come home from school till late so I'd get a beating. I had one memory of being beaten so hard I couldn't walk, always when my mother wasn't around. He always told me that if I told anyone he'd kill my mother and baby sister and I really believed it. He broke my nose once, pushed me over in the bath. He punched me in the

stomach. I remember collapsing and went unconscious. I don't know how long my mother put up with it. We went to Woman's Refuge several times; she always went back.

She was not able to tell because she was so fearful of her stepfather and had a strong wish to protect her younger sister

> I was called into see the principal at school and asked why I had another black eye. They said 'you can tell us'. I was so scared of him [stepfather] I couldn't. I was also scared for my baby sister. I had to protect her.

At home she was cooking, cleaning and caring for her younger sisters at a young age while her mother worked. The sense of loss of a childhood is clear and it influences her in how she relates to her daughters now.

> So I look at my oldest daughter and think 'at her age I was doing dishes, cooking meals and she's not doing any of that' and I think 'maybe I'd better start'

There are certain things that Vicki has strong feelings about now; violence against children and women is one.

Her mother remarried twice and Vicki comments that her third stepfather was a good father to her apart from episodes of physical punishment.

> I got a hiding when I needed it; something I'd never do my children.

Now Vicki puts a lot of emphasis on communication: explaining to her children. That and keeping a sense of humour as well as making allowances for how children see the world are cornerstones of her parenting.

> We try to explain to the children why we're angry; try and have an input. *So although you get a bit short sometimes they have a totally different experience?* Oh totally. We haven't had to smack our eldest daughter since she was three. The youngest is a bit devious but [we use] time out. We don't need to discipline her... [It's] hard in the mornings, yeah but I know that children have a different time frame.

Terri was the oldest of three children. From as early as she can remember her parents fought. Alcohol and weapons were features of the violence. Terri took on the role of trying to stop her parents hurting each other.

> My parents were violent. My father was violent. I don't really know a lot of my childhood. I don't have a great memory. All I remember was there was alcohol and my Dad used to bash my mother up, or throw knives. We had guns and I used to have to try and get between them and stop them. I don't know how old I was. I used to send my brother and sister to the bedroom and then come out.

> When my parents used to go drinking and Dad would vomit. My brother and I would cook breakfast and take it to them in bed. We tried to keep the family together.

This experience of assuming adult responsibility at a young age meant that Terri, like others, missed out on her childhood.

> I don't know what its like to be a child. I can't play with any of my kids, because I've always been an adult.

Terri also experienced sexual abuse from a grandfather who she loved and trusted. More sexual abuse followed and she coped by developing multiple personas. Coming to terms with the events of her childhood has been, and still is at times, a struggle for Terri. She is open about the fact that she parented the first three children in ways she does not feel proud of and although things are better now and the experiences of her two later children are totally different, she still feels the need to make it up to the older boys.

> My parenting didn't feel normal to my emotions. I wanted to love this kid. These children were mine, my responsibility and yet I wanted to hurt them Sometimes I have thrown them on the bed. I've walked out and thought 'No this is not right' and I've gone back to them and said 'Mummy was naughty'. But I haven't marked them. I haven't bruised them. I get out of the room... Yes, things are different now.

Nina did not experience abuse in her family of origin but her mother's death when she was eleven and her father's mental illness resulted in court action to place the seven children in the care of the state until they were sixteen. Nina was sent to board at a Catholic school where she experienced emotional abuse and neglect at the hands of the nuns charged with her care. She was one of the boarders known as 'house children' who were treated differently because of their status as being in state care. They were made to do extra cleaning and assist the nuns when they were not attending school. Cruel practices were used to control the children.

> We used to be locked in at night so you couldn't go to the toilet. If you ever wanted to go to the toilet you had to open the window on the fifth floor and try and go out the window. If kids wet their beds they got called names like 'sop' and some of the dormitories stunk, absolutely stunk, of urine. Then they had this thing where they'd tell about the facts of life but because they didn't like me they didn't. I didn't get my period till I was 15 but they never ever offered me any sanitary towels, nothing. I got nothing so you'd have to make do with a bit of toilet paper. If you played the game you were alright but if you were in any way challenging they just wouldn't speak to me at times. We were only allowed to wash our socks once a week so you used to have to wash them in the toilet and flush the toilet on the socks and put them between the blankets at night... I left there when I was 15.

Nina was also sexually abused by a man who was originally a lodger in her parent's house. She was a young child when this abuse began and it continued for some years. The man would take advantage of the fact that Nina's mother would

be away in the maternity home for days at a time and would come to the house then. This man threatened Nina: if she told, her mother and father would die. Nina believed for 26 years that she had caused her mother's death because she thought about telling.

In the last few years Nina has gone through the painful process of working through this childhood abuse for herself and recently has been able to begin the exhausting process of taking a legal case against this man who is still alive. Her motivation for doing so is not only on her own behalf.

> But the price, not money wise but emotionally. I've had to do it on my own but he's still a danger to the community and one of the things I feel sad about is that I hadn't been able to do it earlier.

Self sufficiency and being in control are important concepts to Nina in the way she lives her life now.

> I suppose I saw my mother as very strong and having to do things in the family without any support.

> I'd made a decision never to marry anyone like my father. The other decision is that I will never ever as long as I live, take any medication.

Strong feelings started to emerge for Nina when she was pregnant with her two children, feelings that at first she did not understand but now realises were to do with early abuse experiences. One of the consequences of the loss of trust that early abuse causes was that she was very protective of her children.

> The feelings were awful. I couldn't control them and when M was born I was so overprotective. I would never trust anyone. I became so I would never leave him. I would never get a babysitter. I didn't know why I felt I needed to do those things and yet there was nobody I felt I could trust. I never let him out of my sight.

Cynthia thinks her experience of being physically punished as a child was typical of New Zealand families at the time she was growing up in the fifties and sixties.

> In terms of violence I think that I had quite a normal upbringing in that we were hit or beaten for 'misdemeanours.' For example, I remember swearing and my father strapping me with the strap. I wasn't a particularly naughty kid but I can remember very well being hit. Part of this was that my father would just lose his temper, just see red and go over the top and really hit and really hit hard and my mother would do the same. There was that kind of violence but there was another kind of violence. My mother withheld affection and still withholds it and is critical. Now that's not violence in the way that we talk about violence but it still has a lasting effect.

> In my family of origin people almost thrived on shouting, yelling and carrying on.

Cynthia's growing awareness came from a number of sources one of which was the feminist ideas she came across in literature. She was also involved in political action against violence on a personal and global scale

> I became aware that any amount of violence isn't appropriate in a family and I knew that's how I wanted to bring my children up in a calm environment without hostility.

Cynthia had learned a new repertoire of parenting strategies by the time she was sole parenting her children. She does not remember smacking them.

> The transition was really hard but I think that by the time I came to have my children I had worked off the flashpoint tempers that my family had had and was able to control myself a lot better.

These then, are the stories – an indication of the experiences that these eight people have survived and a small look at their lives today. There is a world of difference between the experiences they had and those of their children, and a world of difference between how they relate to partners and others and what they observed as they were growing up. This is not to say that it has been, or is even now, an easy journey. It is not. But the fact that these eight people have survived to describe it and their learning from it, is indication that there is always hope. A complex mix of personal, social and structural factors can combine to make some people resilient to early experiences of childhood violence.

It is to these factors that we now turn for examination.

Findings

Factor 1 • *Role of partner as support*

All participants talked about the importance of the support they got from the father of their children or their current partner. This stood out as something which helped them maintain a style of parenting which was different from what they had experienced.

Both Hannah and Vicki thought that they may well not have been so thoughtful about choosing the 'right' partner had they not survived abusive childhoods. Vicki says:

> I couldn't have been in a violent relationship because I wouldn't have stood for it. *What would you have done?* I would have run… when K married me I said, 'If you ever hit me I'm out the door' and I meant it. And he never has and he never will. He's not that kind of person and I'll never hit him. It goes both ways. And I really did mean that and maybe more women should say that and mean it too… but maybe if I hadn't come from that background and hadn't seen that type of violence then maybe – I wouldn't have run.

Hannah was also clear at the outset that she would not accept being hit by her partner.

> I decided I wanted another relationship. [I] made a mental list of what I wanted and I was really staunch… made this list of what I wanted in a partner. The top priority was 'one who did not hit'. That was the one thing that I stipulated. When I met S I said, 'You do not hit me' and he was shocked. He also had a bit of money, good job, was extremely honest. That [the list of what I wanted] was very organised. If I had grown up in a stable situation I'd be married to the first man. …[A previous relationship] I had to be very careful. I had no qualms about saying 'toodle-pip' if they didn't meet my standards.

She and her partner actively thought about how they wanted to relate and to parent before their children were born. Hannah's partner had also come from a difficult family background.

> We planned our family – we sat down and made a list of how we were going to be as parents and how we could achieve that. We made a commitment to iron out what we needed to and get on top of things and be good parents. We actually wrote it down… [It was] lots of hugs, cuddles, affection from S and myself… No arguing – but children have to realise that if we disagree we still love each other and that 'no argument is your fault'… [we] need to explain things to him [the child] We manage to keep to the things on the list. We… have a good functional relationship.

There are not many studies which focus on a population of adults who some believe are at risk of abusing their children as a result of having experienced

violent childhoods. Consequently there is little discussion in the literature of factors which are *currently* helpful to those adults in forming and maintaining healthy relationships. One study which does look at this factor is Egeland and Jacobitz's (1984) study of 160 high risk, predominantly sole parent, mothers. They found several mediating factors which included being currently involved in a relationship with an emotionally supportive partner.

Rutter et al (1990), in a study of women who had been institutionalised in childhood, found that the presence of a reasonably stable and non-deviant spouse with whom the woman had a close, confiding and harmonious relationship acted as a powerful protective mechanism against the upsets experienced during childhood. In the absence of support, none of the ex-institutional women showed good parenting.

Belsky and Pensky (1988:208), in their review of research which examined the transmission of dysfunctional behaviour across the generations, cited several studies which show that women who were abused as children could break the abusive cycle if they found a stable and emotionally supportive partner.

Harris and Bifulco (1991:263) offer an example of a fifty-one year old woman who had suffered severe lack of care and depression over a long period but eventually formed a good supportive relationship with her third husband. She had experienced abuse from her first two husbands, a breakdown and had had her children removed from her care, before meeting this third husband. She had remained well for several years at the time of the study. The researchers comment that although "early relationships can send us on a downward spiral, there is hope that secure attachments in later life can help us climb up once more" (Harris and Bifulco, 1991:263).

Terri was open about the fact that she has survived two abusive relationships with the fathers of three of her children and that during that time she was herself abusive to her children. Things have turned around for Terri and her family now and she believes:

> The biggest thing for me is having a supportive partner. Having somebody that understands as much as I push him away... but just knowing I don't have to go it alone... as much as I try to push him away there's parts of me that know that he's here. And when he comes in after work... I say 'Those kids are your problem. I've got to have some space'

The unfamiliar, even after eight years, feels strange to Terri:

> But there's love in the house. And that's different too. It's scary – but it's there.

It's like my family's in order. G's the head of the household – then me – then my children. I've learned to put G before my kids – they were very important. I love them but they'll leave me one day. My relationship with G's important.

Nina can remember testing the relationship when she first met her future husband.

Then I met J – he immediately contradicted everything I thought. He'd come from New Zealand and was working in a pub. [We] started going out. I wasn't sure. I did lots of things to test him – push him away.

Julie's romantic vision of a future partner while she was growing up, was related to the fact that he was going to provide the means of escape from her situation.

I remember thinking one day after a hiding from my mother… it was raining and I was crying and I was totally fed up and at the end of my tether. …I just I want out. I just want out. I thought, one day there's a man out there that's going to take me away and that's just what happened

At the start of the relationship, Julie describes her feeling of not being good enough.

Everybody loved him – I thought he'd never look at me – I'm from the state housing area and he's from [a middleclass suburb].

Cynthia acknowledges the maturity of the father of her children and their economic privilege, as helpful in her situation. She also talks about the fact that because they it took several years before they had their children, they were older parents and had had a chance to establish their relationship.

I married someone five years older than me. He came from a privileged background. He had plenty of money so when we married we could do whatever we wanted. G. was much more mature, there was that levelling that maturity provides. We found it difficult to conceive so we had been married 5 years before our child came along. We lost that first baby at 28 weeks and subsequently went on to have two more children but never recovered from that experience. The marriage failed, partly because we didn't know how to recover from that. I was 28 and 30 when I had my children – relatively old then.

Although Cynthia separated from the father of her children when they were young, he continued to play an active parenting role, something Cynthia realises, her father would not have done.

We decided to joint parent our children after the separation. We started off quite good friends. They were four and five… . We agreed really early that we would joint parent them so that meant that he could change a nappy, do washing. My father could never have done that.

Star was aware when he met his partner that there were going to be hard times and was able to be clear with her about what he needed from a partnership.

...because I'd come through crap and I wasn't going to have a relationship full of crap... I said
to her 'I'm going to need your love. I will rely on it daily because I grew up with none'. So she's
been a huge strength. She's taught me a lot of things. She's been hard – self pity's not the
medicine for this one. Oh no, it's get up and get going... get into it.

For Star, it is the stability that his wife provides that anchors him now and he
appreciates her to the point where he finds it easy to resist social pressure to spend
time away from his family socialising.

You wouldn't believe... [cries with emotion] I truly believe she was heavenly sent. She's
beautiful on the outside and on the inside. She's stable, like a boulder, can't move her.
Wherever I go and I hear people talk not nice about their spouses – even yesterday my
colleagues tried to get me to go with them... and they said 'she won't mind' and I said, 'no, she
won't, but I do'. So I never stay for purely social things.

For Lucinda and Terri, the fact that their partners have had to be patient and have
learnt new ways of relating sexually, so that triggers to previous sexual abuse are
avoided, is appreciated. Lucinda comments:

C has been really great. There's certain sexual things he can do and I just get turned off but he's
thought about it and he tries to avoid certain things. He's been absolutely marvellous.

And for Vicki and Star, their partner has been a good person to talk to. Vicki says:

I've never had any counselling... don't need it either. I've talked it over with K a lot. He's a
good listener.

And Star adds:

In those days everything was private. So nobody was there. So I've had no professional help.

No-one except for my wife even knows.

Some people stressed the emotional support they have from their partners, others
talked about the practical aspects to the relationship which have helped. Mention
is made of the less stereotypical roles which some partners adopt and from all
participants come an acknowledgement and an expressed gratitude for the role
played by partners in establishing more healthy ways of relating.

From partners who support in the adult lives of these eight people we move to
those who they identified as supportive while they were growing up. Some of these
people were within the immediate or extended family and some were not family but
neighbours, friends and their parents, teachers, sports coaches, cultural leaders and
others who were perceived as mentors because of something about them.

Factor 2 • *Role of family members: parents, siblings and wider family as support & Role of non-family: neighbours, friends, teachers, sports coaches – others who had contact with child and were mentors or perceived as supportive*

Many studies on resiliency have examined the role of the support both within and outside the family.

The ideas on attachment and its relationship to trust building and secure ego formation are well documented in the psychological literature (Rutter, 1979; Wyman et al, 1992). Studies on resilience itself (Werner and Smith, 1982; Garmezy, 1985) confirm that secure attachments and the presence of at least one stable caretaker in the early years is linked to the survival of vulnerable children. When a supportive adult is available to the child reasonably consistently through the early years, then a period of high stress does not increase the risk of either physical or mental illness (Caplan, 1981). As well, Jenkins and Smith (1990) found that good sibling relations were significantly related to lower psychiatric symptom scores in a population of children living in disharmonious homes. The notion that social support generally could act as a buffer against stress emerged from the work of Brown and Harris (1978). For those experiencing stress, the existence of strong social networks and quality relationships with others becomes especially important for psychological health. The link between the emotion consistent with close relationships and its role in forming and preserving identity and self esteem is now better understood.

Some studies (O'Keefe, 1994) have suggested that it is the mother's role that is more crucial in preventing externalising behaviours as a response to stress in maritally violent families. It appears that the relationship with the father is less crucial to the child's well being. It is suggested that there could be some reasons for this – perhaps children rely on mothers more for emotional support because they have traditionally been the main caretakers. There is evidence that where it is not necessarily just biological mothers who do the most early caretaking, the ideas about the importance of attachment to a single caretaker, the biological mother, need to be re-examined. It is suggested that they may be most relevant where the social construction of motherhood includes the idea that it is mainly she who should, or indeed does, most of the physical and emotional caretaking. Generally though, early ideas about attachment to a single caretaker (Bowlby, 1968) have widened to include concepts of family, community and culture as interacting with each individual.

Certainly in this study, the feelings of anger and betrayal felt towards mothers not only for direct abuse but also because of their 'failure to protect' or in other words, failure to fulfill that role expectation, come across very strongly from several participants.

Julie told her mother when a man sexually assaulted her when she was about thirteen but she didn't believe her.

> When I told what that man did to me outside the boatsheds she did nothing.

> The only person who could help didn't... her love for the kids went to L. There was no love for us any more. There couldn't have been. I wouldn't let things happen that she let happen...

Vicki says that she wonders how her mother allowed the abuse to happen.

> I love my mother and it wasn't her that was abusing me – it was a stepfather but I found it hard, probably mainly now more than ever, to understand why she let it happen...

When Terri's mother started a relationship with a new man he began to sexually touch Terri.

> And I tried to tell Mum. I said 'I don't like him touching me, I don't want him to touch me.' She'd say, 'who do you think's putting food on the table?'

Cynthia describes her mother as withholding affection and says that the effects of that were lasting. She too, felt that her mother didn't fill the role of mother that she would have liked.

> I wish often that I'd had a mother who was like the role of mother... and then I thought well 'how do I know what the role of mother is?'. So it is hard to talk about it except that as I watch my mother with her grandchildren and I watch the people around me with their grandchildren I'm aware of a real holding back – of not being available.

As well as not being there for her at crisis points later in her life, as a child Cynthia remembers wanting

> my mother to have done the kinds of things that other mothers did – like maybe going on class trips or going to sports days...

Support from within the family is important but also evident is that wider social support, which may come from extended family, peers, trusted adults, school staff or people involved in sports, cultural or religious groups has a role to play. This can be effective in the treatment of depression and other chronic medical conditions as well as in supporting children in difficult situations. Resilient children tend to be good at accessing social support and it may be that "their skill in eliciting a supportive social support network may be the key to their resiliency" (Kimchi and Schaffner, in Arnold, 1990:491).

As children, all eight people mentioned at least one family member who provided some nurturance. Hannah, Vicki and Nina all acknowledged that their mothers had provided some support. Nina remembers her mother, who died when she was eleven, as a strong woman who basically ran the family farm after her father became ill. Both Hannah and Vicki question how their mothers could have stayed in situations which were highly abusive to both them and their children for so long, yet both also acknowledge that there was some support from them.

Vicki's memory of how things were is hazy, but she says

> ... I don't remember my mother ever being supportive – I'm sure she was – I just don't remember it.

Hannah's relationship with her mother has developed after the abuse ended for both of them. While she was growing up, she had mixed feelings towards her mother, feeling she was to blame at times and also feeling that she needed protection from her abusive husband.

Nina's experiences of abuse happened because of circumstances and were outside of her family. Her memory of her family when she was a young child was of a close group, unified by rural isolation, poverty and shared family experiences.

After her mother's death, even though her father was not able to look after them, she remembered him as a caring and supportive person.

> Dad was always there, permanently in the house. He never drank, never smoked. He would ask you things. He would always encourage us – say 'try to better yourself'. He was always there.... To us he was our world; he was the whole world. The house wasn't nice – so we'd never bring anyone home... we were all quite close...

Although some people perceived their siblings as supporters, some felt they were an added responsibility. Most did not talk about their experiences of violence with their siblings when they were children.

Julie was close to her sister who was three years older than she was.

> I got some guidance and support from her. I could ask for help – we had so much fun.

Nina was deliberately separated from her sisters while she was in the institution. Some of them had a better time than she did there, because they were not as challenging to the nuns who ran it.

Hannah felt that her older sister protected her from the brunt of her father's anger at times. She has only one memory of talking about how things were with this sister.

> She said 'I wish Dad was dead' and I said 'I wish it too'. We never talked about it. That was the only time. We were very different people. I had to be looked after. She sheltered me. She looked

after me.

The sisters colluded in keeping the reality of their abusive home life to themselves.

> Once my sister and I had been crying all night. When we got to school someone said, 'You look terrible' and my sister turned around and said 'We're both sick'.

Grandparents were an important source of support, nurturance and role models for Terri, Lucinda and Cynthia.

Lucinda's paternal grandmother knew the truth about her origins because she was the person who had travelled overseas to bring her back to New Zealand as a baby. Lucinda says that this grandmother knew about her mother's abuse of her but not about the sexual abuse from her father. She lived in the same city as Lucinda's family but only visited on invitation. She was the one who arranged and paid for a hearing test when Lucinda was seven and also 'had words' with Lucinda's mother about her treatment of the child. Lucinda also spent periods of time living with this grandmother, most notably for about nine months when she was about seven after the incident when her mother had locked her into the boot of the car.

Terri's only happy memories of childhood are from weekends spent with her grandparents who lived in a nearby town. Ironically, it seems as if it was this grandfather that sexually abused her from a young age. Terri stayed with her grandparents for weekends regularly through her childhood.

> Well, he taught me to ride a bike – he took me swimming, rollerskating. He took me to feed the ducks.

> *And that's something that kept you going?* Must have. I know that when they sold the house I was devastated because there was a tree I used to climb.

> *Were they the only positive memories of your childhood?* Yes. I actually cannot think of anything nice about my mother. I can't think of anything nice about my father and I can't remember doing things as a family.

Cynthia recognises that both her grandmothers were models for her later interest in politics and spirituality but as a child she remembers that they were sympathetic and admonished her parents for the treatment of the children. She feels lucky to have been the favourite grandchild of one grandmother and remembers the special treatment when she visited her several times each year.

> It was time out – special attention, gifts, favourite dinners. I often went on my own, sometimes with my sister... this grandmother was extremely sympathetic. It was the things she used to say. My other grandparents fulfilled that role too. My maternal grandmother provided a different personality model. She was a practising Christian Scientist. I lived with her for my last year of school. I was 17. They had a different way of being a family – quiet.

Several people had experiences of seeing how other families lived at close quarters through visits to schoolfriends' families or neighbours although most spoke of isolation and a lack of peer friendships.

Although each of the eight people identified some source of nurturance or support within the family, what stood out, was the sense of isolation. Some people thought that others did know, or had an idea of what was going on in the home, while others wondered how people they came into contact with could possibly *not* know. Mostly, those who knew, appeared not to act to change things for the children. Three people remembered times when they had been questioned by people in authority who obviously had some concerns but none of the three were able to tell exactly what was happening.

Most people talked about being too embarrassed to invite friends home – for Star, the added effect of hurt probably attributable to pakeha racism contributed to his isolation.

> I remember there was a period when I didn't want friends because I'd invited three friends, pakehas, to my birthday but none invited me back – so 'friends' was a bit of a facade. I only ever had one birthday party – that really hurt.

> I went through a phase of having no friends... right up till the time I met my wife...

Cynthia had an important friendship from when she was about seven.

> I had a very close friend too all through those years a very close friend whose parents were far more how I wished my parents would be. [It was a] just normal small town relationship – in and out of other people's houses as kids are... we're still friends now.

Vicki too, avoided bringing friends home because home 'wasn't a nice place'. She had some time out in her early adolescence with her gymnastics training and at thirteen moved to another city to be able to train with a particular coach. She boarded with another family during this time and so saw another side of family life.

> I guess my sport kept me going... it was a safe environment – very good. I had a coach who thought I was so wonderful [but] no-one picked up the abuse, nobody showed great interest... [I] stayed away from close friendships. I look back and I can't remember any names – even teachers' names. It was like I kept my home and school life totally separate.

Hannah and Lucinda both remember the interventions and interest shown by neighbours – Hannah's family was very isolated. They lived on a farm and the social isolation came in part from Hannah's parents' positions in the community and the expectations that went with such a 'professional' family although the

reality was quite different. Her father's behaviour towards his family and any visitors increased the isolation.

> In the end he isolated the family from everybody else. People stopped coming... People were never invited. We never had people for tea – people didn't invite us.

People talked about who supported them and how they perceived this support. Some were visitors to the home, others provided another home for a while, some a place to go when things got bad, some provided spiritual or moral guidance just because of who and how they were. Family members offered nurturance and support to the child and some were role models and mentors as well. Those people who seemed to stick up for the child were well remembered as significant people. What is very apparent, is that to children growing up in very difficult circumstances, any indication of support was valued. There is a surprising degree of detailed recall about things that were said or done by others that were perceived as supportive by the child at the time.

Even though a neighbour who came over to help on one occasion was abused by her father and then left, Hannah still remembers his action as the only time anyone directly intervened.

> There was one man, a neighbour and a good friend. Dad was leaving and it got a bit out of hand. He rushed over and got abused so he backed off and left. That was the only time. Some people know but they don't say.

> I remember people being there and mother had a black eye and someone mentioned it and she said 'I walked into the door' or something. I remember feeling really sick and thinking 'have you no idea?'

Lucinda remembers things that neighbours said and did to be supportive. She also was serious about her sports training and knew that her coach overheard the abuse and felt sorry for her.

There were several people in Star's life who were mentors and models for him. Within the family, there was one time when he realised that his father did care. Star had been chosen to perform a whaikorero on the marae. He received no family support for this and yet when the time came he made his speech and then:

> When I turned to sit down I saw a figure, a ghost I thought. It was my father. He had walked. All the others had come in cars... he had walked all that way and I didn't know... he smiled when he walked out. I cried. Nobody knows he was my Dad. If only he would have let someone know he would have got that elation. Also, I thought, 'This must be important now my father's here so I'll keep on this track'.

His father's partner from when Star was about seven to age twelve and her children, knew what life was like for him and supported him but would not directly intervene between him and his father because of mixed loyalties.

> Dad's girlfriend – she knew everything. E had nine children of her own – six at home. They were fabulous. [They] really protected me and looked after me. I lived with them while Dad was going backwards and forwards. They gave me physical help but I still got severe beatings. It was their window my father put my head through, their wall, their washing machine that my father broke my arm in. My father stabbed me – they didn't report my Dad. They left the house when it was happening. It was a natural thing. She [E] was looking after her own.

Others were inspiring to Star because of who they were.

> There were moments… when I had mentors, people who have inspired me to go forward. One was T. It has to do with having knowledge, being educated. The accolades that come from having position inspired me. From him it was being able to travel, converse with other people, to be seen as being so skilled in many ways. He could speak Maori, French, English. People wanted to be around him and it was that I was attracted to. He was the High Commissioner for NZ to the Solomon Islands. He was a diplomat [and was] based in France. I was taking French at high school. I posted him a card and he sent one back. I was blown away. He was a mentor that helped me get through those years.

> Another was the woman who used to take our haka team… She just blew me away. I imitated her. She always made you feel really worthwhile.

Children were very aware of conflicting loyalties and why people chose to offer support in the way that they did. There was no evidence of bitterness towards anyone except some of the mothers for 'allowing it to happen' from these people as adults. Rather there was an understanding and an appreciation of the support which was communicated to them at the time.

Factor 3 • *The Contribution of Formal and Informal Learning and Positive Experiences at School and Outside of School*

This discussion focusses on formal learning and success in the school system as well as some of the less formal learning experiences that people had out of school.

Several studies have linked the ideas of educational success as a protective factor for children in stressful situations. There is also a suggestion that the acknowledgement of talent and success in less formal situations can serve the purpose of attracting validation for the person concerned thereby increasing self esteem. Connecting the person to supportive networks is a further potential buffer against stress. A positive school experience has been found to produce pleasure and an increase in self worth and competence. One study found that over time, girls in a

group home situation who experienced pleasure and success in school activities, began to take a more active role in planning their futures. The increased feelings of being in control meant that they were less likely to act impulsively and of the two groups studied, the group that had experienced success at school, stayed in education longer and was noticeably later to enter intimate relationships which meant that there was more likelihood of the relationship being a stable and supporting one (Rutter et al, 1990).

To an extent we all select and shape our own social world (Scarr and McCartney, 1983). If we are aggressive or hostile we invite aggression, if we are cheerful and cooperative we engender similar feelings in those we meet. Thus, the importance of success in any given area cannot be underestimated and in fact takes on special significance to those who are not experiencing success or having their self worth validated in other settings. The potential spin-off effects of success can be clearly heard in the experiences of people in this study.

Star, Cynthia and Hannah all talked about the importance education had had for them. Cynthia regarded her early interest in books and newspapers as important in beginning the exposure to ideas which would influence her politics later.

> I've always been a great reader of newspapers, magazines, *Time, Listener*. I wanted information. I can remember reading a newspaper when I was seven. This is why I became a journalist I guess because I'm damn nosy. My mother has always read books. I've always read and I think that's part of being open... once I'd worked out that's that how I wanted to live my life then I started to look around for parenting books, childrearing, parent effectiveness training for example.

Hannah identified educational success as the most important factor that had helped her.

> I think education's so important because without that I wouldn't have been able to leave. That was my one thing I had to get. I knew I had to get out and I didn't know how first of all... then I realised that I had to get my School Cert and UE and then in the 7th form I realised that I had enjoyed school and primary school and it occurred to me that I could become a teacher.

One of the things that helped Star was that he was able to use the skills he had and build on them. His father had taught him to behave and he liked what he got from the teachers when he did behave. Although initially, he had no particular skills in Maori language, he was chosen to do a whaikorero, because, he thinks, the teachers trusted him to behave. When he had spoken on the marae, he realised that he had enjoyed the sense of achievement he felt and subsequently threw himself into other school based activities that he could succeed at.

I remember doing the whaikorero because I knew what was happening in my life and I got chosen over those other kids who were in stable conditions and I felt proud and that gave me confidence to do other things like 40 hour famine, gala days and to exude (sic) in those areas. So... I worked hard to get more sponsors. I was happy to achieve... I tried my best in the classroom – but all that I knew that I was really good at was behaving. I liked what I was getting from the teachers when I behaved. I responded really well.

These comments tie in with ideas about certain protective factors interacting with others. The positive feedback he received from these first successes not only served to bolster self esteem but also served to widen Star's network of potential support in the form of teachers who took an interest in him. They also relate to the ideas about resilient children having a strong 'internal locus of control', a term from psychology which in effect means that the person has a strong belief in his or her ability to influence outcomes. School successes like the ones Star describes can serve to give weight to this developing characteristic because the child can make the connections between cause and effect and actively try to repeat the positive experience.

Star left school with no formal qualifications but the time he had spent on marae and around the old people had given him a grounding in things Maori. He spoke Te Reo, the first member of his family to learn and he had the opportunity to learn many traditional arts. It was just after a low point in his life that he saw and responded to an advertisement for teacher training. He had experienced considerable shame because of something he had done. The fact that he was selected for this course and then gained a scholarship which meant he could live in a university hostel and receive an allowance while he studied, seemed almost too good to be true. Star's response to this was to make a commitment to succeed.

And I knew that from then on you have to make it work. And I loved the work. I was being left the [university marae] to run for 3 weeks at a time. I was only 21 – knowing where I came from. No-one back home would leave [someone of my name] in charge of a marae. I tried to hide my abilities from my family because they would have thought I was snobby. I didn't want to be like that – not that I didn't want to be like them.

It appears from Star's comments that it is not only academic success at school but the validation he received through success in participation in other areas of school life that provided him with enough confidence to seek out the possibility of tertiary education in the field that interested him and so build on that success with more achievement.

Star also talked about the skills he developed as a consequence of his lifestyle as a child. He identifies that the autonomy he gained from the success of being able to fend for himself at a young age gave him confidence. Here Star is talking about a time when he was twelve:

> I looked after myself when Dad was in prison for seven months. Dad fell out with his family. He told everyone that my Mum's brother in Australia had us.... So... I was young, I didn't know where they lived. So nobody knew. I lived under the bridge. One [boy], 17, he looked after us.... I spent about four months under the bridge - the rest of the time with friends.

> I've always had the 'kaha' - strength to go out and find out for myself and I got that because Mum and Dad used to send us on the bus from home to family in a town a few hours away. We used to have to get on and off the bus... buy food... and when Dad was in prison Mum taught us how to cook and clean so I already had those skills. I had to make decisions so when I found that I could make a decision I started to take charge of my life - negative, of course. If I bumped into something good it was always by accident. So I knew I had the energy... 'kaha' to investigate things and be inquisitive. I was called as a young child 'pakiki' - very nosey. I was questioning - so I had that streak in me... I was building autonomy on that bus.

These comments relate to the challenge model proposed by Garmezy, Masters and Tellegen (1984). In this model the child rises to meet the challenge a stress event causes and by successfully doing so actually increases his or her sense of mastery and accomplishment. By applying their own talents and deriving pleasure from their ability to cope with a stressful environment, an element of control and predictability is added to their lives and vulnerability is lessened.

Vicki clearly remembers trying to shield her baby sister from her abuser and being able to physically care for her at the age of five. She too, had developed confidence by rising to the challenge of getting herself to gym practices. At age seven, she was cycling into a suburban train station, catching a train to the city and walking a couple of kilometres by herself to get to the gymnasium.

Most people had the opportunity to participate in something out of school from which they were able to achieve some satisfaction. For several of the people in this study, the fact that they excelled at something brought them some recognition of talent and worth, not necessarily from within their families, but from people associated with the particular activity.

Interestingly, several of the seven women were extremely talented at sports - two were nationally selected for athletics and gymnastics teams to train for the Olympic and Commonwealth teams respectively while others were regarded as extremely promising all round athletes and gymnasts. Four people spoke of involvement in

music – playing guitar, piano, singing and dancing to a high standard. Some of these interests remain alive for them today.

Hannah was academically successful at school, completing a seventh form year and then being selected for teacher training. In that year she was also the sports dux and had gained her grade eight piano in the fifth form – quite an achievement.

Lucinda was a talented athlete who was training for possible selection in an Olympic squad at one point. Her memories of school are positive despite the fact that she was teased by other children because of the way she was dressed and because of a bald patch, a result of self-harm in response to the stress of her situation.

> I liked school because it took me away. I liked writing and did quite well. Sports were always good. I got an award in writing once for writing a story about my dreams.

Vicki excelled at sports, particularly gymnastics and it was her selection for a special training squad that gave her the opportunity to leave home and board.

> I was a gymnast. For many years I trained up to 3 days a week and that got me out of the house and that was good… I got really good and used to go away a lot. I think that kept me going a lot…. Everyone thought I was such a wonderful person and I was good at sports. I represented the school at cross country right up till college but behind the scenes it wasn't that rosy but I was getting lots of… [*positive attention because of your talent?*] Yes.

Terri was another talented gymnast who trained seriously for a time. She also remembers a teacher who took an interest in her.

> He taught me to play softball and pitch like a man. I liked him as a teacher. He was hard but I respected him. I remember crying because I had to leave him and go to college…

Terri also used music as a way of blocking out the sound of her parents fighting.

> Music was another thing that was my saving grace. I'd listen to loud music and the louder the better because it stopped… If my parents were fighting… up would go the stereo – I used to go off in a world of my own.

Nina, together with her sisters, danced and sang but remembers losing the confidence to perform at about age twelve.

> We were all quite close – we did [our national] dancing and music – we were all very musical. I used to sing traditional [songs] and I won loads of medals but then at the age of 12, I completely lost confidence – and I couldn't do it.

Cynthia found schoolwork relatively easy but did not experience teachers as at all supportive possibly because they were the peers of her parents, also teachers, in a small town. She also did some activities outside of school.

I learned piano and did some team sports and guiding. In our family, lots of emphasis was
placed on intelligence – the worst thing for my mother was that someone was 'dumb.'

Most people then had some opportunities to participate in some activity outside of
formal schooling and several in this study showed great talent. No-one though,
fulfilled their promise. Many spoke of lacking the confidence to go on after a
while. It was as though without the support from family, continuing to achieve
and excel became impossible.

The high activity level of some of the people who were in serious training may in
itself have been a protective factor. Studies with adults show that vigorous exercise
is associated with a reduction in moderate depression and anxiety (Morgan and
O'Connor, 1988) and other studies suggest that exercise can augment mental coping
skills. Although the role of vigorous exercise has not been tested on children who
have been abused, studies with physically impaired children suggest that exercise
training improved self-esteem and self-perception (Gruber, 1986), both of which are
known to affect how someone copes with stress.

Factor 4 • *Role of belief*

It appears that religious beliefs enhance resistance to stress because they can
provide a sense of coherence and rootedness (Antononsky, 1979); give life
meaning and provide an optimistic outlook (Segal, 1986); provide a source of love
in a hateful world and help a child behave compassionately (Moskovitz, 1983). In
the St Louis risk project, several children who seemed at risk climbed to success
through affiliation with religious groups. Often, a significant adult played a role in
introducing the child to the religious denomination concerned (Anthony, 1984).

The contribution of a religious or spiritual belief of any kind has implications for
the development of a sense of meaning and possibly for the sense of control a
person feels she or he has over personal destiny. These are factors which, if present,
are thought to have a mediating effect on resisting the effects of stress (Beardsley,
1989).

Star, Julie and Terri all remembered seeking for something in response to an
emptiness or a feeling that there needed to be something more to life. Even after she
had left her situation and things seemed to be going well, Julie spoke of an
emptiness

But something was missing. I… felt so alone. I asked God for help… then things started
happening.

From then on, things got better and Julie and her husband are churchgoers today. Julie believes her belief was crucial to her survival

> I hold a religious – Christian – belief. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for that.

Star began to investigate different religions for himself while in his early teens. Through the support of a neighbour who took him to her church, he began to hold a notion of God as a comforter.

> The lady above [was] Salvation Army and realised and had words with Dad. She took me to church and it was then I started to believe in a comforter. I started to investigate. My connections to Jesus and God are continuous now. It sits well with me.

Terri also sought solace in religion at a time when things were really bad for her. She had the experience of feeling that she was judged by the first church she approached, and continued her search until she met people who she felt she could trust.

> I knew there was something out there. There had to be – this existence – there had to be something more. I'd been into occult. I'd been into all sorts of things.

Not everybody had had positive experiences with the church as a child. Star in fact, talked about how the physical abuse he suffered at the hands of both his parents was justified as 'discipline' and sanctioned by the church of which his family were members.

> My family were involved with a religious faction, violence was justified as being discipline.

Several other participants mentioned the hypocrisy they saw as children from people who identified as having religious beliefs. Some had high expectations. Terri says:

> I remember we used to pray to God to bring my parents back and I blamed God for bringing my father back.

Nina and Terri both had experiences of disappointment with the institutionalised church at times when they really needed support. For Nina, it has been the personal relationship with God which has helped her through more than support from the church organisation. It has been difficult to reconcile her angry feelings towards the man who sexually abused her as a young child with the Christian notion of forgiveness

> But I believe God has given me the answers, not people. I've been so hurt by some of those comments – saying 'forgive'.

She no longer attends church but thinks the struggle she has had to maintain a relationship with God at times when she has been angry, has been helpful.

> I've really struggled - it has helped - this relationship with God. I've had to leave people out because I found them too destructive...

After some searching, Terri had a religious experience which stays with her and gives her strength.

> I can't get away from it even if I try. I've seen Jesus holding the lamb and it was like He had me - that the lamb represented me. And I saw him sitting - holding this lamb and there were six around it and it was like he was saying 'I have your family'. Sometimes I sulk and don't talk to God but because of what I've seen I know, I just know, there is a God. But it's just me I don't trust to go through things. I don't have to be alone any more and my faith... I know in my heart I'm crying out to Him and He's hearing me and I know that He stops me if I want to snap off at the kids...

Star too, spoke of a connection with a spiritual world that has offered him sustenance when things were bad.

> I've always believed in God and a spiritual connection, partly because that was all there was - just me and the thin air...

The importance of wairua Maori is an ongoing theme in Star's story. He was attracted to seeking out experiences that enabled him to stay close to the source of wairua as a child.

> I did know that I liked it at my grandfather's tangi. I used to come home and practice the karanga. I realised I had an affinity... It just seemed as though it followed me that wairua Maori. I never maintained it because I couldn't... But because I had maintained this closeness with my heavenly father - in the cemeteries I maintained that - I went at a time of day when no-one would go anywhere near a Maori cemetery and I felt safe. So I had that spiritual and Maori connection come through with me.

Star finally decided on the Mormon church. He was introduced to it through a mentor, a woman who led his kapahaka group at school and who he admired greatly.

> She was a really positive influence. I used to watch her walk past. She said 'Come to church'. I went. They were so lovely to me even though I wasn't (well) dressed. I kept going regularly. What appealed was the discipline. All my life people had been trying to make me drink and I'd always resisted it but at 14 it was beginning to look a bit sweet. So I wanted something with the discipline... The consistent discipline was a relief. So the faith has had a lot to do with my being this strong...

Today, when things go wrong, it is this same faith that helps Star to stay strong.

> I rely heavily On my spiritual faith. I say to myself 'You've come through worse. Why fold now?'

Religious and spiritual beliefs then, have a role to play in supporting the vulnerable child and can provide some continuity into their adult life. If the belief comes with an involvement in a community of people, here too, is another potential source of support. One of the ways that belief works to protect, is to provide a sense of meaning to the experience. Ideas about the implications of how people are able to view their own experience is examined further in the next section.

From religious and spiritual belief systems we examine another factor. This time it is a personal attribute; the ability to step outside a situation and reflect on it.

Factor 5 • *Survivor Perceptions and Strategies for Survival*

The idea that it is not necessarily the event itself but the person's perception of the event that affects the degree of stress experienced, has been examined in studies using divorce as a major life stress (Wahlstein, 1994).

This idea has been applied to children who were abused; the child's subjective experience of and attitude to the abuse experience is seen as the theme of what becomes internalised and is translated into a "working model." Zeanah and Zeanah (1989) have identified role reversal, rejection, and fear as underlying themes for people who have experienced childhood abuse. Egeland (1993) adds emotionally unavailable parents to this list and says that it is not the violence per se that is passed on but rather the ongoing theme of the caregiving relationship.

This model then influences the child's future relationships and there is evidence to suggest that the early models can be transformed if later experiences do not fit the expectation. Egeland et al (1988) studied a group of mothers who, despite violent backgrounds, did not abuse their children and found the following factors to be important. They had emotionally supportive individuals (usually partners) available to them, they had had therapeutic experiences which had helped them (mainly psychotherapy) and also they were able to retell their abusive experiences in a way that suggested they had integrated and accepted them as part of their history. Many of the stories were accompanied by emotion appropriate to the experience and there was evidence of an awareness of how early experiences affected current realities including parenting practices. In general, these women were more insightful about themselves than an abusive group with similar backgrounds. They typically

expressed strong views that they did not want their children to experience similar abuse.

These ideas are related to ideas about attachment that come from psychological studies (Bowlby, 1969) whereby the child constructs a cognitive model of self and others based on its own experience. Psychologists tell us that the ability to make sense of the world, including disharmonious early experience, is closely tied to the development of personality. Put simply, the more integration and organisation that personality structures achieve, the healthier they are. There are links also with the ability to do this effectively and with intelligence and cognitive ability; the higher the level of intelligence, the easier it seems to be for people to engage in helpful reflection (Rutter and Rutter, 1993: 210). Studies in the 80s (Grossman et al, 1988) identified a group of mothers who had had unsupportive parenting themselves and yet demonstrated secure attachment to their children. What was different about these women was their ability to reflect on and analyse their unhappy experience. These women "broke the cycle of unsupportive parenting by their willingness and ability to be open and constructively regretful of their unhappy experience". Others with similar backgrounds who did not show such a strong ability to reflect on their experience did not fare so well (Grossman et al, 1988:256). Another study (Main, 1991) concluded that those who can access, process and organise all aspects of their relationship history, whether pleasant or painful, are likely to develop more fully integrated personality structures which in turn allows them to respond more sensitively to others including their own partners and children. Fonagy (et al, 1994) state that more reflective mothers with difficult childhoods are more capable of effective planning, finding a supportive partner and learning from experience.

"The ability to reflect on one's own and other people's mental states is associated with other attributes associated with resilience – imagination, the ability to play and fantasise, and a sense of humour but most important is the opportunity for reflection… which equips the individual with ballast, a self-righting capacity" (Fonagy et al, 1994:245).

The group of people in this study were all able to tell their story in a way that indicated they had integrated it into their experience to some degree. They showed appropriate emotional affect at times and a variation is response to their experience which went from anger and bitterness to acceptance and even gratitude. Four of the eight had had formal therapy to help them reflect and some said that their partners

have provided this opportunity for them. Everyone in this study expressed a wish that children in abusive situations are given the help they need – for some, it was the main motivation for the risk they took in sharing their story.

Closely linked to ideas of social competence derived from a well integrated personality is the idea of control. Children's ability to control their environments and their faith in the ability to do so can be a strong protective factor against stress (Beardslee, 1989).

Children with what is called a 'strong internal locus of control', are more likely to face the world with a sense that they can control it. For most of the people in this study, this belief was something that emerged over time.

Other studies which have looked at individual characteristics suggest that resilient children share the following characteristics: They are alert and responsive to people and situations. They are good copers with intense drive and vigour, show self-confidence and independence early and are socially mature. They have a sense of direction and strong internal locus of control and a degree of insight which they typically apply to their situation in order to make sense of it (Hunter and Kilstrom, 1979; Egeland et al, 1988).

Many people in this study talk about their ability, at some stage, to "step outside" their situation. To engage in this sort of thinking, the person must not only think and reflect about oneself and events but also take action congruent with the reflection. In psychological terms, evidence of this is described as a "higher level integrative function" (Beardslee, 1989). Interest in the ideas about self understanding arose from the belief that the place to start studying individuals who have come through difficult experiences is in what they themselves say about their own lives. Because there is no standardised instrument for measuring resilience, Beardslee (1989), in his work with civil rights workers and resilient children of parents with mood disorders, used an open life story method to show that the "successes" in both groups were characterised by a high degree of self-understanding.

In my study most people remembered actively thinking about their situation in some way and for some, this resulted in the formation of deliberate strategies to escape or get help in their situations.

For Julie, Star, Hannah and Cynthia in particular, the realisation that they would be able to gain some control over the situation by growing up was a comfort. Julie says:

> That feeling of knowing I had to hang in there and bide my time before I could get out. I had it
> most of the time. It was a comfort to me. It was the only security I had.

Star adds:

> I knew that I had a right to things... so I thought that this was just a trying period of my life
> that I have to get over...

Once Hannah knew that she would be able to get out eventually she spent time
planning how she would do it:

> I had these hours and hours I spent by myself. I used to go to the back of the farm and think –
> what am I going to do? I need to get out. People expected me to run the farm when I left school
> and so I basically listed all the things that I could do that I enjoyed doing and all the things I
> wouldn't be able to do because of my epilepsy... but I decided that no matter what it was, I
> needed to leave home and I needed to leave home as soon as possible.

Cynthia is very clear that the realisation that she wouldn't always be a child was
an escape route.

> I think that the thing that helped me through was the view that I wouldn't always be a child.
> When I was nine or ten I figured that one day I was going to be grown up. I looked forward to
> it from then on.

Like Hannah, Cynthia went ahead and planned her future away from the abusive
environment.

> I looked forward to the time when I was going to live in the city and have a job and be
> independent and a very clear set of plans – well, definite as in fantasy definite...

Several people perceived themselves as independent, competent, bright and
curious as children. Cynthia stood out in her family for her later political action,
while Nina described herself as a child who hated hypocrisy and challenged
injustice when she saw it even after she realised that her more compliant siblings
were having an easier time.

For Lucinda, the fact that she was able to make for herself a very real fantasy
world offered her protection from ongoing abuse. Lucinda movingly described her
dream world which kept her from feeling the pain of physical abuse from her
mother and the sexual touches of her father.

> I was very little when my parents were fighting. I used to dream – wish myself somewhere else.
> I learned that I could wish hard enough so that I couldn't feel or hear. The dreams became
> real – I could pick up from where I'd left off. There was a cave under the section. I feasted on
> that. Only I knew the secret passage. It was decorated with dolls and teddys. Only people I
> wanted could go there. The toys turned to real animals. It was decorated differently as I grew
> up. It grew with me. It was very real. It stopped everything – I couldn't feel Dad touching me or
> being whipped.

Lucinda also used the strategy of taking some enjoyment from others' pleasure. She worked out that life couldn't be as consistently bad for everyone as it was for her because her two brothers were treated much better.

> When I was little it obviously it hurt very much that he [her twin brother] got presents and I didn't but I learned very quickly that you just faded away into nothing if you dwelled on it, it was better to take some sort of enjoyment. I learned to get real joy out of watching him open presents and see that he actually got what he wanted. I mean the look on his face was enough really. And that's how I felt over the years. I was pleased for him. I don't know – there is definitely some inner strength there. How it got there and why I don't know. I remember at about [age] seven or eight deciding to take delight in the things he achieved...

Because of his bloodline, Star always felt pride and what he calls a sense of entitlement to the good things in life.

> It's just an inward feeling. I knew what was right and what was wrong and I knew that I had a right to things. It could have been also this pretentious feeling that you're entitled to anything and everything because you're born of that line – this proudness.

Vicki's theory about how she was able to survive her childhood is to do with her positive personality:

> I've always thought positive things. I don't know why. I think it's just the person I was born... just my personality... I just wasn't born violent. I've never had to stop myself from mood swings because I've never had any. Maybe a lot has got to do with thinking 'I'm never going to be like this'[violent] but I don't remember. Everything just blows over my head – my star sign or something my mother took when she was pregnant. I'm just not a stressed out person. I really think that people are either born violent or they're not.

Vicki too, at one point, planned a way out of her situation. She was eight.

> I do remember having murderous intentions to my stepfather. I wanted to stab him with a knife. I used to lie in bed working out how I was going to do it... but he got off scot free.

As adults, all of these eight people show an ability to reflect on their experiences, to own them and then to reflect again on what has made it possible for them to be survivors now.

For some, the perception is that the experiences of abusive families of origin have made a positive difference to how they live their adult lives. Hannah says:

> I don't ask for pity – don't expect it. It's something that happened and I got through it and I'm a better person for everything that went on... you can sort of look at it positively and think I'm now in control of everything I do...

And Vicki agrees:

> I found my childhood not a negative experience but a positive one for me because everything my mother did I've totally changed around, maybe subconsciously – even words she used to

> describe things… I don't find it sad at all – just learn from it. I still think I was just born the way
> I am. [It] probably just made me stronger. It's a shame it weakens some people.

The ideas about applying the insight to future behaviour are reflected in some of the comments about parenting. Many of the participants in this study, stated clearly that they had actively thought that they didn't want to be like a particular parent and some see their current parenting practice as very much a reaction against their own experience. Still others acknowledge there are times when they catch themselves saying and doing things they vowed they never would and that those realisations bring a degree of discomfort and a new commitment to do things differently.

For Star:

> I don't want to be like my father but I do see traits of him. When I see similar behaviours I
> panic. *What do you do?* I cry. I come in here and I cry or I go out to the beach and I cry because I
> made myself a promise never to be like him.

Summary of Findings

This concludes the overview of the factors which emerged from the study data as having been helpful to people as children and as adults.

The findings are consistent with those of other studies.

The only elements which I have not found in the literature on resilience factors are the use of dreams (Lucinda) and loud music (Terri) to block out an unbearable reality. These things are however noted in the psychological literature and in work on addiction as possible effects of abuse. Viewing them, as Lucinda and Terri did, as having been helpful, is to reframe them more positively and so and imbue these particular responses with another set of possibilities. There is some variety in how resilience or protective factors are categorised in the literature. Common groupings are to see them as internal (intra psychic) and external (environmental), or as 'in family', 'out of family' and 'societal.'

My somewhat arbitrary division of this data into five broad categories: Role of partner, role of family and non-family, contribution of formal and informal learning, role of belief and survivor perceptions and strategies for survival, is not so much any statement about the validity of these particular categories as for an ease of handling in discussion. Dividing the data into these five themes for discussion was the way that allowed for the least amount of overlap and seemed to be a straight forward way of representing the ideas as they emerged from this data.

What is clear, and becoming more the focus of work in this area, is that there is no real divison between factors, but rather, each may interact with others, to produce a matrix of protection for the child concerned.

An example of this interactive chain might be that those who are positive and friendly invite interest and nurture, which in turn strengthens positive self perception, feelings of competence and control and the ability to reflect on one's situation and relationships. From this and other learning, life's possibilities become clear and plans can be made to achieve desires.

How to work with this propensity to achieve healthy social relationships, even under adverse conditions, is the focus of the next chapter, which examines how we in the helping professions can best support people to identify and then harness just these strengths, be they personal or part of their environment.

Significance, Conclusions and Recommendations

Significance

Legislative and political context

The 1980s and 1990s marked significant changes in the family violence field. The shift from the viewing of domestic violence as being a personal affair between a couple to being the responsibility of the whole community including the state has been a relatively rapid one. Now in place is a state sanctioned legislative and fiscal framework to facilitate the delivery of these and other programmes. "No political party would now consider publishing a manifesto which did not abhor the existence of family violence and state its intention to fix the problem" (Pilott, 1997).

Our child protection legislation (CYP and F Act 1989) and now our Domestic Violence Act (1995) are the envy of many. They are seen as innovative and far reaching and as having a substantially improved ability not only to protect children but also to give a clear message to the community that violence is intolerable. Policy initiatives by the police, welfare, health and education systems have developed alongside this legislation to form the basis of an infrastructure which could be very supportive to families and children experiencing violence at home. Initiatives in the voluntary sector, in particular the work of Refuge and the national network of Stopping Violence Services for Men have contributed in a major way to broaden the base of service provision.

Theoretical Contexts and Practice Realities

The theoretical base which informs practice in this field is variable. Groups such as Women's Refuge, groups servicing ethnic and other minorities and some Stopping Violence Services acknowledge and work with ideas of structural oppression of minorities. The statutory services however, maintain the theoretical position of the idea of family violence as a phenomenon which exists in a few 'problem' families juxtaposed with the idea of the family as the 'cradle of violence'. The ideas about the intergenerational transmission of abuse are at the forefront of the police and DSW media campaigns. The 'If you abuse your children they'll abuse theirs' message which appears on a "Breaking the Cycle" poster of a broken doll is a clear

message directed at parents. Government responses to family violence prevention have bypassed an ideological analysis of family violence as a phenomenon related to structural oppression. The effect of this position is that it permeates intervention practices which are at best, unsupportive and at worst, increase the vulnerability of family members to violence.

Stark and Flitcraft's 1996 (US) study on what happens to battered women when they present at hospital emergency services for treatment after assault contains a chilling indictment of helping services. " … Clinicians rarely identified their problem correctly, minimised its significance, inappropriately labelled or medicated women, referred them for secondary psycho-social problems but not for protection from violence and emphasised family maintenance and compliance with traditional role expectations rather than personal safety (Stark and Flitcraft, 1996:212).

This range of responses sounds frighteningly familiar: what it serves to do is not only to fail to address the urgent problem of safety for the woman and her children but also to collude with the batterer's view of her as 'crazy.' Despite a prevailing view that many women in this situation do nothing to help themselves, research clearly shows that in reality women use a range of strategies to help themselves and their children (Dobash, Dobash and Kavanagh in Pahl, 1985). Each time they come across a barrier when they turn for help, their sense of isolation deepens and their vulnerability is increased.

When those in the helping agencies then, view family violence as a problem between two people and refer for counselling or a parenting skills programme instead of to a safe house and for money and food, the message is a clear one: those involved need to work harder at their interpersonal skills. No matter that a pattern of fear, coercion and control, which may or may not involve physical violence, has been set up in the home. Any possibility of safe resolution of issues between family members is then rendered impossible, and probably unsafe. If violence between adults is the largest single context for child abuse, and current studies indicate that this is indeed so, then children's vulnerability is also increased by interventions such as these.

Policy makers and practitioners need to have an explicit position on family violence as a societal issue. Otherwise, ill-thought through interventions will be colluding with and compounding the problem.

Every fortnight in New Zealand a woman is killed or dies as the result of injuries perpetrated by the person with whom she has a domestic relationship. When practitioners work with family violence, the stakes are the most serious of all.

The reality is that laudable government mission statements, groundbreaking research and legislative change is not in itself enough to make the difference. There has been a decrease in real spending in the health, education and welfare areas justified by an ethic of the appropriateness of increased community responsibility. Thus the gap between the stated commitment to helping those affected by family violence and the reality appears to be widening as the effects of market-driven economic policies become all pervasive. The statutory agency charged with the responsibility of protecting children, NZCYPFS, has come in for increased criticism in the last decade for its evident inability to keep children safe.

Social workers within the statutory system speak of their frustrations at not being able to support families to implement changes which would help them because of a lack of resourcing; money for material basics, therapeutic services and the availability of appropriate support. Community groups continue to operate on low budgets which they must apply for on a yearly basis. There is evidence of difficulty in delivering quality services throughout state and voluntary sectors. The effect of the media prevention campaigns has meant an increase in the number of referrals in all sectors. Statutory agencies now take only the most serious of cases. Other services are consequently under pressure and the overall quality of service delivery is compromised.

In the first year of operation of the Domestic Violence Act, the family court received 8000 applications for protection orders. Of these, around 96% were made against men and many involved families with children (Judge Mahony, Chief Family Court Judge quoting Department of Court figures at the NZ Family Violence Symposium, August 1997). The increased workload means that waiting lists are extended increasing the stress on all family members. Children's timeframes are certainly not acknowledged when families have to wait months and in some cases years for their cases to be heard. Although there are some lawyers who specialise in representing children's interests, by and large, the quality of professional advocacy for children depends a great deal on the practitioners directly involved. Some are simply not competent to deal with children. All juggle heavy workloads. It will take

strong and continued advocacy to ensure that the intent and promise of the Domestic Violence Act is actually fulfilled and maintained.

The importance of allowing children to have a voice in decisions which will affect them is now acknowledged in theory, but again to achieve this is in any meaningful way presumes a high degree of skill and knowledge about children which is simply not available to most children in this situation.

A Way Forward – Empowerment approaches in family violence work
Empowerment theories in social work, a children's rights agenda, the current legislative framework and an analysis of family violence which acknowledges both micro- and macro-level cause can combine to underpin interventions which are effective in supporting children.

Mary Bricker-Jenkins in Saleeby's (1992) text on strengths perspectives in social work practice, gives an example of how the phenomenon of child neglect was looked at as a pathological condition based on personality deficits in the mother. This theory became the centrepiece of all training and practice models on child neglect for many years. The information on which this theory was based was important but incomplete.

There are parallels with the ideas of intergenerational abuse becoming the lynchpin for all practice models in child abuse. Bricker-Jenkins says that what the researcher Polanski noted about some of the people in his study being able to resist this definition of mother deficit as being a 'happy accident' may in fact have been a sign of "people's innate compelling potential for growth and health converging with opportunities and support for the unfolding of that potential" (Polansky et al, 1981:158). She urges that these 'accidents' are what we must now study. "If we are to develop practice models that engage the inherent strengths of individuals and families, practice that joins those strengths with opportunities and support for people to satisfy their needs for safety, growth and health, then our practice theory must be derived from a study of and appreciation of those phenomena." (ibid:159) We need to study the members of at risk groups who 'make it'. They will give us the material for a theory of strength and growth, and they will "tell us how to engage and support the naturally occurring environmental assets on which they rely" (Bricker-Jenkins in Saleeby, 1992:128).

A focus on positive factors in families and their environments as a way of challenging the inevitability of intergenerational abuse can be well utilised by

statutory and voluntary agencies as well as by providers of the state funded programmes for children under the Domestic Violence Act. We have to replace the pathological lens with a health oriented lens and focus on strengths and the broad spectrum of environmental resources when assessing situations with people. It is only this kind of assessment that will engage strength and operationalise the principle of empowerment. Pilot programmes which specifically use strengths approaches in their work report not only more successful outcomes for families in the pilot but workers report less burnout and a more positive attitude to their work (Graber and Nice, 1992). Although elements of a strengths perspective can be found in earlier social work theory, it was not until 1989 that the term itself was used (Weick et al, 1989). Saleeby's (1992) text is a collection of articles in which several authors explain its principles. They are, that all people and environments, no matter how deprived they appear, have resources which can be tapped to improve the quality of people's lives and that these strengths and the way people wish to use them need to be respected by practitioners. By consistently emphasising strengths as defined by the client, motivation to change is increased. Cooperative exploration between client and worker is needed to discover strengths so that the idea of worker as expert problem solver and the client as a victim who can be blamed is minimised.

These principles conform to "a poststructural notion that social workers must increasingly respect and engage client's ways of seeing themselves and their worlds in the helping process… the client's meaning must count for more and labels and scientific theories for less in the helping process" (De Jong and Miller, 1995:729). Working in an empowering way means to create a context in which "clients can discover the considerable power within themselves" (Saleeby, 1992:2). Clients must be able to define their own worlds, their problems and potential solutions. The amount of literature on applying the strengths perspective in social work practice is growing and covers philosophy, areas to explore for client strengths and more recently some microskills such as questioning techniques which can elicit strengths. Some writers recommend using an inventory of potential strengths to assist the exploration process (Cowger, 1992; Rapp, 1992). Although care must be taken that this inventory provided by the worker, does not 'take over' the possibility of the client establishing his or her frame of reference, the possession of such potential 'strength inventories' by workers can serve to keep the emphasis on client empowerment. In the last few years, some writers have concentrated their efforts on

developing practical applications for the use of this perspective with groups and organisations (Selekman, 1991; Sparks, 1989).

For those working in the field of family violence, the words of the people in this study about what helped them, represent such an inventory.

Forming an inventory of possible strengths from resilience factors

Keeping children safe: helping children to tell

Remember the odds are heavily stacked against children being able to tell. As practitioners we need to be able to go the extra mile, take the extra time, win the extra trust and be sure we can keep that child safe once they have told.

> If they'd gone into the bathroom they would have known because my blood was all over the wall.

Advocating for assured freedom from ongoing abuse

> The only thing that would have helped is Mum saying "That's it. Let's go." and getting out.

This may mean helping with safe housing, food, money and support. It will mean 'hanging in there', it might mean 'taking control', by involving authorities, using agreed protocols or by insisting on some changes. It might mean spending the time to win the trust of the child before acting.

Gaining a perspective on the violence

We know from the literature and from this group of people that an inner ability to stand outside the experience and see it for what it is, can be pivotal for being able to plan a future over which the person has control:

> That feeling of knowing I had to hang in there and bide time before I could get out. I had it most of the time. It was a comfort to me. It was the only security I had.

In order to support children in this process we as practitioners need to be clear about our own value base in relation to family violence and to help children make links with things outside their own experience. It can be immensely helpful to the child to realise that he or she is not the only one experiencing a violent situation and that there are alternatives to staying.

> That time Dad was going to walk out I remember thinking 'what will we do?', 'how will Mum cope?' not realising she had strengths we didn't know about.

Finding nurturing others

Nurturing adults have a very important role to play for these children. Encourage a commitment from grandparents, wider family, friends and other social networks

especially those who are able to offer some time out or an alternative haven for the child. Children remember well any support they have had from adults. Messages of hope seem to be especially important for those in the middle of very difficult situations.

> It was time out; special attention, gifts, favourite dinners. I often went on my own, sometimes with my sister… this grandmother was extremely sympathetic, it was the things she used to say.

Work hard to strengthen relationships between children and the non-abusing adults. This might involve spending time with children helping them gain some insight into the pressures on other adults in their lives once safety and support for those adults has been assured.

> Dad was always there, permanently in the house… He would always try to encourage us… to us he was our whole world.

Using talents

Encourage support for children to identify and develop their talents, things which will help preserve their sense of self esteem over time.

> I guess my sport kept me going… it was a safe environment… I had a coach who thought I was so wonderful.

Alternatives: ideas and education.

Breaking down the isolation and helping families to look at some of the ways things are done in other families at least offers an alternative choice.

> I've always read and I think that's part of being open… once I'd worked out that's how I wanted to live my life then I started to look around for parenting books…

Belief

A spiritual belief seems to help get children through the worst times. Although this must be a personal choice, adults do have a role to play in giving opportunity to the vulnerable child to explore belief systems.

> I rely heavily on my spiritual faith. I say to myself 'You've come through worse. Why fold now?'

Because this factor is tied in with spirituality and is intensely personal, culturally appropriate services are imperative. Star spoke of his connection with Maori wairua and how it lasted throughout his childhood. As a pakeha practitioner, I would have little idea of how to help a Maori child access and maintain that aspects of Maori culture.

Again, although there exists a legislative framework and stated commitment on the part of government, to honour Treaty of Waitangi provisions, there are arguably resourcing constraints which act to subvert this possibility.

The way our institutions, including our helping ones, are tied into larger social frameworks which devalue minority experience, is an issue for all practitioners who work within them. This huge dilemma is not the focus of this work. It is believed however, that empowerment approaches with their insistence on including a social analysis of the issues made with the person or family, have the potential to address inequities in a way that will empower people to become subjects rather than objects in their lives. Advocating for services which give users a choice of a range of workers, some of whom will share aspects of minority status with them, is part of this paradigm.

Conclusion

Techniques such as strengths based assessment tools, finding and actively incorporating strengths in families and their communities in the helping process, and using family decision making models as opposed to those which maintain power in the hands of the worker or agency need to replace 'diagnosis and treatment' models. Arguably, the New Zealand child protection legislation with its explicit valuing of family and whanau, hapu and iwi input into decision making, is well suited to facilitate this way of working. This legislation is derived from indigenous models (Puao-te-atatu, 1986). Although there is disagreement on whether the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi is truly being honoured when the absolute power is still retained by the state, this Act is still unique for its enshrining in law for the first time, the notion that families know best, what is best, for their own. The CYP and F Act 1989, Section 5(a) and (b) state that not only must wider family be consulted about what should happen for their children but that the "relationship between a young person's... family group should be maintained and strengthened."

This is more than just an opportunity; it is an imperative to direct us to work in ways which look at the strengths inherent in families and their environments.

When we then find a child who has experienced violence at home, we can be on the alert for ways to help them look at their situation from a step away and begin to plan a different future, people who can mentor and support them from inside or outside of their families, skills or talents they might have which can be nurtured, opportunities to explore belief systems which may be helpful to them and support to enable them to take advantage of educational opportunities, both formal and informal.

Our practice must be underpinned by a constant process of reflection. We need to rethink how we study as well as what we study. The world is complex, adaptive evolving and multidimensional. We must use research methods that capitalise on this rather than be limited by this fact. Research itself must be empowering. The practice theory that develops from this sort of research must then be open and organic, tentative and evolving. It must engage workers and the people they work with in collaborative search for and creation of another set of truths.

Material for constructing the practice model will come from the existing literature, clients, workers and the administrative environment. We need to pay particular attention to material where the voice of the client can be clearly heard and will be asking questions like "what worked for you?" in order to discover the many strengths that can be recognised and reinforced in practice.

As Sacks (1987:176) expressed it, "we each have a life-story, an inner narrative – whose continuity, whose sense, is our life." Life stories are vital to social workers' understanding of how someone perceives their life condition in relation to having or not having the power to act. Ideally, the research and practice paradigm developed from the knowledge helps people to understand and use their own strengths and realise their potential. As life is lived, we can assist client groups to redefine their experience of the world, to act within it from a position of greater human potential and power. The potential for change and new directions within personal stories helps create "individualised localised hypothesis about human behaviour and strengths" (ibid:110). Empowerment research makes use of what have been called "generative theories" (Gergen, 1981). These are theories that provide for individual and group liberation or opportunity for transformation. Although mainstream science does not generally recognise it, all of us have transformed many times without medical treatment or therapy. "Giving legitimacy and spark to this power to heal, grow and change is the essence of the empowerment paradigm" (Holmes in Saleeby, 1992:165). The empowerment agenda recognises that the narrative given by the client is in part a self assessment of strengths, resources and power. The act of telling the story to the social worker who validates its authenticity may be the first step in refurbishing or refining the story so it can be more generative.

There are many levels of both prevention and intervention in the field of family violence. My contention is that all areas could benefit from a reworking from a strengths perspective. Both policy and practice needs to be informed by knowledge from the literature and from our expert advisors, the grown up survivors of childhood violence.

Previously, attention has been paid to those who have been drawn mainly from samples which have come to notice because they have manifested some behaviours, either internalising or externalising, which may be related to their experience in their family of origin. The time is overdue for seeking out those 'others', who shared similar experience but through complex interactions of personality and

environmental factors have managed to relate to intimate others in non-violent ways. We need to listen carefully to this group and from their wisdom begin to construct a practice which has at its heart a considered yet hopeful range of possibilities.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- community and statutory service provision in the field of family violence initiatives be fully resourced and that rigorous evaluation of all preventive and intervention programmes occurs on an ongoing basis

- policy initiatives motivated by theories of intergenerational transmission of abuse in 'dysfunctional families' in particular the public awareness media campaigns, be re-examined in the light of what we now know about the "Breaking the Cycle" myth

- a strengths focus approach prevail in social work policy and practice and that appropriate training in these approaches and their specific application in the family violence field be given

- there is further research into how knowledge about protective factors can be incorporated into practice

- the current analysis of the causes of family violence be extended to include the presence of social inequities and that plans be to made to address these as part of a long term approach

Children's Programmes Goals, Domestic Violence Regulations 1996

Regulation 28

"(2) Every programme for protected persons who are children must have the following goals:

a) To assist the child to express his or her feelings, including feelings of hurt, pain, guilt, shame, and isolation in order to assist the child to deal with the effects of domestic violence;

b) To assist the child to develop a sense of normality, a healthy self image, and to build self esteem;

c) To assist the child to deal with issues arising from separation or loss;

d) To assist the child to gain a realistic perspective of the events leading to the making of the protection order, including the child's involvement in those events;

e) To assist the child to understand the events following the making of the protection order, including the changes in the child's family life, and the options for the future;

f) To help the child to build a support network;

g) To assist the child to assess safety issues and to put in place strategies to maximise that child's safety;

h) To strengthen the bond between the child and his or her caregiver;

i) To assist the child to develop –

   i) Social skills and improve his or her competency in social relationships, including social relationships with the child's peers; and

   ii) Strategies for non-violent conflict resolution and to learn anxiety management techniques and anger management techniques."

Public Awareness Campaigns

New Zealand Police

The New Zealand Police "Family Violence is a Crime – Call for Help" campaign won the supreme award at the New Zealand Marketing Awards in 1995 and a gold medal in the Public Service category for advertising and marketing effectiveness in the New York Festival in 1996. The campaign could demonstrate a measurable change in public attitudes and behaviour. There was a 92% awareness rate of the campaign itself, a doubling of prosecutions for family violence, a 50% increase in the number of male offenders seeking counselling and a 30% reduction in the annual numbers of women murdered by their male partners after the campaign had been running for 18 months (Thompson, J in Patrick et al, 1997:102-103).

Breaking the Cycle

Results to date

To date the *Breaking the Cycle* campaign has been very successful in meeting its objectives of raising awareness about child abuse:

May/July 1995 Emotional/verbal abuse	95% of New Zealanders were aware of the television advertising, with 76% spontaneously mentioning the advertisement. The key messages communicated were: • child abuse occurs in cycles (49%) • yelling/arguing is child abuse (45%) • people shouldn't yell, argue or fight in front of children (43%)
November/December 1995 Emotional/verbal abuse	Rerun of television advertising with new radio parenting campaign was not monitored through market research. Increased audience take-up in information via the 0800 number demonstrated effectiveness of good parenting/caregiving messages.
April/May 1996 Physical abuse	89% were aware of the television advertising with 49% recalling it without prompting. The key messages communicated were: • child abuse is passed down through the generations (40%) • if you were abused as a child you are more likely to abuse your own children (36%) • physical abuse, hitting a child is wrong (34%)

Those interviewed for the post-campaign research monitors stated that they now considered aspects of their behaviour abusive whereas they had not prior to the campaign (*Breaking the Cycle Research Monitor Final Report*, Colmar Brunton, September 1995. *Breaking the Cycle Research Monitor Qualitative Report*, Colmar Brunton, 8-23 June 1996)

Breaking the Cycle

June/July 1997

CHILDREN,
YOUNG PERSONS
& THEIR FAMILIES
SERVICE

Protective Factors Identified by Kimchi and Shaffner

Individual Factors	Social Factors
Ability to elicit caregiver's attention	*Family Factors*
Achievement orientation	Adequate rule setting and structure during adolescence
Adequate sensorimotor and language development	Alternative caretakers
Adequate verbal comprehension and reading/writing skills	Ample attention by primary caretaker during first year of life
Challenge	Age of opposite-sex parent (for girls, fathers over 30; for boys, mothers below 30)
Competence	
Commitment	Birth order (first)
Efforts toward self-improvement	Family cohesion
Flexibility	Family size of four or less children
Freedom from serious illnesses and accidents	High socioeconomic status
	Little parental conflict the first two years
Gender (female for most stresses, male for some)	Maternal perception of the infant as highly active and socially responsive
Good communication skills	Open communication
Good coping mechanisms	Parenting gradualism (gradual exposure to stress better prepares to deal with real life!)
Good problem-solving skills	
Hardiness	
High endorphines (decreased discomfort!)	Parental anticipatory guidance
High scores on measures of responsibility, socialization, femininity/masculinity	Positive, self-confident mother
	Stable behavior of the parents during chaotic times (war, disasters)
Humour	
Independence, advanced self-help skills as a toddler	Supportive family milieu
	Sibling relations good
Internal locus of control	Warmth toward child
Internal psychic strength	
Internalized values	*External Social Support Factors*
Physical activity	A close adult with whom to share experiences
Positive personality disposition	
Positive sense of self	A support figure who can serve as identification model for the child
Self-confidence	
Sociability, social perceptiveness	Dedication to a cause
Temperament (cheerful, responsive)	Ethnicity
Thrill seeking	Friendship
Touch seeking	Good day care/school teacher
	Informal sources of support through peers, kin, neighbors, ministers, and teachers
	Peers
	Positive recognition for activities
	Religious affiliation

in Arnold, E (1990)

Research Project Publicity in a Local Newspaper

Researcher seeks family violence cycle breakers

Jude Douglas, of Ohau, a masters student in social work at Victoria University, is looking for people to participate in her research project titled "From risk to resilience - adults talk about their experiences."

Although recent focus has been on the devastating effects of family violence for children, Jude says there are a substantial number of adults who have survived the experience of a violent family of origin.

"They do not repeat violent behaviours in their relationships with partners and children. These are the people I would like to hear from, specifically parents with children between 3 and 17 who think that they have lived in a family which was violent (physically or emotionally) but who think that they have managed to break the cycle," she says.

By studying the factors which have helped people survive and change, Jude hopes to confirm or add to over-seas studies. "Results will be particularly useful to groups such as women's refuge and others who are setting up programmes for the children affected by family violence.

"This is an opportunity for the voices of those who have direct experience of living with violence to be heard by the policy-makers."

To contribute, contact Jude Douglas on 06 368 9878 (evenings). Confidentiality and anonymity is assured.

Rafting trip

The Hamilton family of Arawhata Rd Paraparaumu, have The Hamilton family of Arawhata Rd, Paraparaumu have won a rafting trip for four on the Otaki River, provided by the Tararua Outdoor Recreation Centre, Otaki Gorge Rd.

Their name was the lucky one drawn in a reader promotion in the Kapiti Newspapers "Take A Break" summer leisure publication, published on December 28.

Horowhenua Mail, January 9, 1997

Good response to researcher's call for violence survivors

Jude Douglas of Ohau says the response to her search for survivors of family violence was very pleasing.

Jude, a masters student in social work at Victoria University, made her request in an article in The Mail (January 9).

She invited people who had experienced violence of any kind in their family or origin and who did not live in a violent situation now, to contact her. She has heard from a good number of people who want to be involved.

"I'm very grateful for their willingness to share their experiences with me. I've been impressed with the enthusiasm for the project and their wish to help vulnerable children living in similar situations."

Jude does not need any more volunteers but would be happy to talk to anyone who is interested in her study. She can be contacted at 06 3679878 evenings.

Horowhenua Mail, January 23, 1997

Participants' Information Sheet & Consent Form

Information Sheet

Dear. . . . .

Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my project "Resilience and Risk – Breaking the Cycle of Family Violence"

A little bit of background – About myself

I am an MA (Applied) student in Social Work at Victoria University with a work background in Care and Protection Social Work. I am also a parent of four young children.

About the Project

I'm interested in finding out from you the things that you think helped influence the way you relate to your partner and children now and how they are different from the family you grew up in. It seems to me that we hear a lot about the negative effects of growing up in a violent family – and there certainly are negative effects – but not so much about people who have managed to 'break the cycle' and live non-violently. I deliberately have not defined 'violent' and 'non-violent' for you because I'm interested to see what you think they mean for yourselves.

About Confidentiality

When we talk, I would like to tape our interview. This will help me remember the detail of what you say. I will also take notes while we talk.

You can *completely withdraw* from the project at any stage or just say that I can use this bit but not that bit. You don't have to give me any explanations and I won't ask. If you want to withdraw I will send back the tape by registered mail and destroy my notes. As soon as I have your tape I put a code on it so it never has your real name on it.

I will store your tape/s and notes securely and will only discuss contents with my supervisor who is Jenny Neale of Applied Social Science Department, Victoria University of Wellington Tel 04 4955233. You can contact her at any time.

If you are happy for me to use your material in my study I will go ahead. When the study is completed in early 1998 I will send you back your tape and also a summary of the results of the study for your interest. As well as helping me get my degree, I would like to share my results with the people who are going to be working with children affected by family violence. I'm thinking of groups from Women's Refuge, from the Department of Social Welfare, and from the Department of Courts. My thesis will also be held in the Victoria University library and will be publicly available.

As I've said, you won't be able to be identified because I will use pseudonyms and change any details that might identify you.

I will be talking to about ten different people.

I enclose:

- a list of questions that will form the basis of our interview – you might like to have a think about them beforehand.

- information about the 1993 Privacy Act Principles as they apply to the collection, storage of and access to personal information.

- a consent form which I will ask you to sign before our interview.

If you have any questions or would like any further information about the project, please ring me on the above number otherwise I will ring you within a few days to arrange a time and place for our interview.

Again, thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this study. I look forward to meeting you.

Regards

Jude Douglas
Tel 06 3679878 (evenings)

Questions

The questions I'd like to ask you cover ---

• a description of the violence in your childhood - as much as you feel comfortable talking about

• what happens in your home now that makes it different from your childhood experience

• what were the things that kept you going as a child, a teenager, - what helped you through

• why do you think things are different for your children than they were for you

• some statistical information about you - ethnicity, age, income bracket, no of children

Consent Form

MA (Applied) Social Work Research Project:

Resilience and Risk – *Breaking the Cycle*

Researcher: Judith Douglas

I agree to participate in this research project on the understanding that any information I give, my tape/s and notes will be stored securely, and only used for the purposes of this study. They will be given back to me for checking when completed.

I have the right to withdraw myself and any or part of any information I have given from the study at any time, without explanation and without penalty. If I do so, my tapes will be returned to me.

The tape/s will be returned to me or destroyed at the completion of the study. There will be no identifying information included in the final report.

My participation will be treated with complete confidentiality with the exception of information that is given that gives the interviewer good reason to believe that a child (17 or under) is at risk of abuse or neglect as defined in the Children Young Person and their Families Act of 1989. In this instance, the researcher reserves the right to report this knowledge to the appropriate authorities. This will only be done after discussion with you the participant, and only where there appears to be no other avenue of resolving the issue of the safety of that child.

I understand what is required of me in this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to take part in this research

Signed. . . . .

Name of Participant. . . . .

Date. . . . .

Name of Researcher. . . . .

Lessons for Helpers

I asked each person to tell me what he or she thought most needs to happen for children living in violent situations. These reflections are the expert opinions of these grown children.

Star

Get them out... It's up to you to hang in there on that child's behalf and sort it out and make sure nobody hides; nothing's hidden. You must be sure that when you go into that situation that you don't leave that child because the safest thing for that child is you; and so it's my firm belief that even if you report it to the police you have to hang in there because now you've got all the families that belong to that child, you've got them in trouble because they knew. So at the moment, they're looking after their own rear end – the child's rear end is nowhere. It's clouded with their own inability to cope with the ridicule of being found out, so you owe it to that child to hang in there... this child can not afford scared people. So if nothing changes, you take the child because it's not getting abused and this child's just going to have to put up with the uncomfortableness of being in a stranger's home because it beats getting beaten up and at the end of the day you just have to convince yourself the imposition that the child is feeling of being in your home because you're a stranger will far outweigh the fact that you've left them in a violent situation or an abusive situation. I'm really firm to that.

Vicki

The only thing that would have helped is Mum saying "That's it. Let's go." and getting out.

Maybe someone going in and taking control because women like that have got no control, no self esteem. Maybe someone really putting their foot down saying "this is how it's going to be", maybe police protection.

Nina

I think that the authorities need to know, Children and Young Persons [Service]. The whole situation has to be investigated to see what is going on.

Hannah

They [children] have to trust you first. A teacher would have to go to the principal; someone in authority. Go through the right ways of doing it. You'd have to bring the parents in.

Cynthia

I think there's a lot of benefit in child health camps, time out, different models. Hope that the kids have a chance to look outside, chance or choices. I made lots of choices and have been lucky enough to have been able to stick with them. You can choose to react to that or not and it requires work on your part. The point is that often kids don't know what the choices are. Well

we see grown women staying in violent relationships because they don't know what the choices are or they are too frightened to make them.

Also, we have to say as a society that it's not good enough, like the drink and drive campaign. No-one I know drinks [and drives] anymore.

Lucinda and her partner have had the experience of supporting a relative who had been sexually abused within her family. This is what they did:

Lucinda

We took custody, took control.We listened to her, supported her. We kept her safe by our actions. You need to be non-judgemental, to me that's crucial.

Terri

It breaks my heart because there are so many children out there that are hurting. They desperately need to find somebody they can trust. They desperately need to know what good touching is. What bad touching is. They desperately need to know that there are people out there who do love them, who do care. People need to stop fluffing around in their own cupboards and open their eyes and see that there are kids, that kids out there are hurting because home's not cool... And I guess... have faith... there *are* people that care... I think people that can help other people are people that have been there; or that are prepared to listen and try and put themselves there. But when you get social workers coming round saying 'Yes, I know all about it' the first thing I say is 'What's your home life been like?' and if it doesn't tally up I kick them out... I think that's really important that people who have been through it are there for other people. Take a chance, that's what I would like to do. Take a chance to help somebody else.

Julie

I could have been saved from so much if someone spoke for me long ago.

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