

**CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING  
OF  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**BY  
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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of Masters in Clinical Psychology, is my own work in design and execution, and that it has not previously been submitted by me for the degree at this or any other university, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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BOWKER C.A.

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DATE

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my family. To my parents, Aubrey and Colleen Bowker, who have supported me and encouraged me through many years of study and never doubted that I would one day achieve my goals. To my sisters, brothers-in-law, niece and nephew for their encouragement, and to my fiancé, Shaun Erasmus, for his unwavering support and patience.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to determine children's understanding of domestic violence. Children's understanding encompasses their knowledge and perceptions of domestic violence as well as their attitude towards such violence.

Three hundred (300) grade six and grade seven learners ranging in age from 11 to 16 years participated in the study. The participants included 150 girls and 150 boys. The average age of the female participants was 11 to 12 years and of the male participants the average age was 13 to 14 years. The participants resided in the Capricorn district of the Limpopo province. Participants were chosen from three regions, namely a township, city and village or farm area.

A questionnaire designed by the University of Limpopo Psychology Department in conjunction with Childline Limpopo was administered to the participants. The questionnaire formed part of a broader research on children's issues in schools. Areas covered in the questionnaire included biographical data, issues around self esteem, children's rights, child abuse, domestic violence, gender roles and AIDS knowledge. The present study

made use of the biographical data as well as data obtained from the domestic violence section of the questionnaire.

Results indicated that 92% of participants in the sample had exposure to the concept domestic violence although only 37.3% had intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims. The source of greatest exposure to the concept was the school environment. Knowledge of domestic violence victims had a significant influence on children's attitude towards conflict and violence. The majority of the sample did not condone violence and men were perceived as holding more violent attributes than women. The gender of the participant held no significant influence on the results. Geographic location appeared to influence responses to statements with significant differences noted by the township sample.

Results of the study highlight a need to raise awareness and dispel myths regarding domestic violence. Programmes aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence should be implemented at a school level, as this is where most children are exposed to the concept. Greater awareness of organisations offering information and support to victims of violence is necessary.

**Key Words:** Domestic violence, children, understanding.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The effects of domestic violence are not confined to the acts of violence occurring between a man and a woman, but also extend to the children who witness such violence. In 1992 it was estimated that between three and ten million children every year witness assaults against a parent by an intimate partner (National Centre for Children Exposed to Violence, n.d.) There is widespread recognition that children living in violent households experience distress and frequently display adverse reactions (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). To date research has largely focused on the impact of domestic violence on women and the resources available to them, whilst little attention has been paid to children's understanding of domestic violence or how they attempt to deal with violent home situations.

The present study intends to focus on children directly – to gain their understanding of domestic violence rather than to consider how adults assume children perceive domestic violence.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Obtaining statistics for domestic violence in South Africa is a difficult task. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, in many instances domestic violence goes unreported. Secondly, until recently partner abuse was not recorded as a separate offence by the South African Police Services, but was recorded under the category of 'common or aggravated assault' (Glanz, 1997, p. 3). This made it difficult to isolate the cases of domestic violence. Despite these difficulties, it is believed that in South Africa 1 in 4 women are abused (Domestic Violence, 2004). This figure includes women from all cultures, religions, races and economic backgrounds. Of the violent crimes reported to the South African Police Services, 30% involve domestic violence, whilst approximately 40% of divorce cases at the Family Advocate's office involve domestic violence (Domestic Violence, 2004).

Although statistics for domestic violence quote violence against women, in some cases men are also the victims of abuse. However, violence against men is seldom reported and there is scant research in this area. Domestic violence involving female victims appears more common than male victims and female abusers. The purpose of such statistics is merely to give an indication of the severity of the problem. Hughes (in Mullender, 1996) states that in 90% of domestic violence incidents, the child is in the same or an adjoining room.

Interviews conducted by Jaffe and his colleagues (cited in Mullender, 1996) revealed that the majority of children could describe in detail the assaults that their parents were unaware they had witnessed. Thus children are directly affected by domestic violence. Little research appears to have been done that takes into consideration children's understanding of domestic violence or how they cope with a violent home situation. Research relating to children tends to be adult-based whereby adults make assumptions regarding children's understanding and needs. In this way interpretations made by adults may not accurately convey a child's account (Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos & Regan, 2002).

The broad domain of this research is the relationship between domestic violence and children's reaction to it. The focus of this research will be children's understanding of domestic violence and whether this understanding is different for boys and girls. Children may not be disclosing about domestic violence in the home because they may not identify it as being wrong or abnormal. If children do not seek help, there can be detrimental long-term effects.

### **1.3 Background of the problem**

Resulting from Apartheid, South Africa's history is fraught with incidents of violence. Racial and gender inequalities have formed the basis of our history. This background has to a large extent desensitised and conditioned people to acts of violence. Within this political and social climate, the South African state appeared to be tolerant of gender-based violence. The birth of South Africa's democracy saw greater emphasis being placed on human rights, including the rights of women. In this regard, the state began to recognise the problem of violence in the home. The Prevention of Family Violence Act 133 was promulgated on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1991. This act made provision for the granting of interdicts in the case of family violence, the obligation of certain parties to report the maltreatment of children, and the possibility of convicting husbands of the rape of their wives (Glanz, 1997). This was followed by the Domestic Violence Act in 1998 which further offered abused women legal recourse. The Domestic Violence Act places a duty on police officers to inform victims of their rights at the scene of a domestic violence incident. Furthermore, the Act allows for a five-year prison sentence for the perpetrators of this crime (Department of Justice, n.d). These aspects of the Act ensure that abused women are made aware of their rights, as well as emphasising the view that domestic violence is a serious crime.

The physical violence witnessed by children in the home ranges on a continuum from slapping to stabbing or shooting. The physical violence is often accompanied by emotional abuse (Jewkes, Levin, Penn-Kekana, 2002). According to Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos and Regan (2002) children who live with violence form views about why it occurs, whose fault it is and whether anyone from outside should intervene. The children could, following exposure to domestic violence, develop cognitive schemas which make them think violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution, that adults cannot be trusted, or men should dominate family units. Development of such schemas may have deleterious consequences on the children, leading to maladaptive behaviour (Berman, 1993; Edelson, 1999; Hurley & Jaffe, 1990; Osofsky, 1999, in Guille, 2002).

Hanks (in Guille, 2002) stated that the effects of witnessing domestic violence vary according to the child's age, sex and developmental level. Other factors include the frequency, severity and type of violence, as well as the primary caretaker's ability to buffer the repeated stress of the violence. A child's self esteem and locus of control also affect the child's ability to cope. According to Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) the symptoms displayed by children who witness domestic violence may either be due to direct exposure to violence, or from other difficulties prevalent in violent homes. Behavioural symptoms of these children include aggression, tantrums, acting out, immaturity, truancy

and delinquency. Emotional symptoms include anxiety, depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem and anger. Physically these children may have poor motor skills, eating disorders, sleeplessness and other psychosomatic symptoms, whilst cognitive symptoms may include a language lag and poor academic performance.

Abrahams conducted a NCH Action for Children survey in Northern Ireland in 1994 (cited in Mullender, 1996). Of the ninety-six respondents who answered questions on short-term responses to violence, 72% said that their children were frightened. The study reported a range of behaviours indicative of distress, such as becoming quiet and clingy, or aggressive and disobedient with primary school children presenting with broad based fears and behaviours that include fear of their own or other's anger, abandonment, being killed or killing someone. They also become insecure, distrustful and may develop eating disturbances. Adolescents may escape into drugs, run away, have suicidal thoughts or engage in violence, or they may have early pregnancy or marriage (Sinclair, 1985, in Mullender, 1996). Sinclair states that behaviour can occur at opposite extremes, from perfectionism and fear of failure at school, to impaired concentration and poor schoolwork. The child may hang around the house to try to protect the mother, or avoid being at home.

Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) maintain that witnessing domestic violence can have long term effects on children that can be carried into adulthood. Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) referred to four surveys that asked adults about childhood memories. The results suggest that between 11% and 20% remembered witnessing domestic violence when they were young (Henning, Leitenberg, Coffey, Turner & Bennet, 1996; J.L. Jasinski, personal communication, June, 19, 1996; Straus et. al., 1980; Straus & Smith, 1990; in Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998). The adults who recall witnessing domestic violence are more likely to use violence against their spouses, to be abusive to their children, and to commit violent crimes outside their homes, than are the adults who grew up in non-violent homes (Straus, 1992 in Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998). Straus and colleagues (in Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998) also noted that married couples where both spouse were exposed to domestic violence as children, were three times more likely to hit their spouse.

This information shows how children exposed to domestic violence are affected as children, but may also carry these effects into adulthood, thus perpetuating the violent cycle. Domestic violence is a social problem. That is why it is important to identify what children's understanding of domestic violence is. A child growing up in a violent home may not recognise this behaviour as wrong, or if they do, they may not know where to go for help.

#### **1.4. Aims of the study**

The aim of this study was to determine children's understanding of domestic violence. That is, what children knew and thought about domestic violence. Such child-centred research would take into account a child's age and stage of development, as well as each child's understanding and viewpoint.

#### **1.5. Objectives**

The following objectives were identified for the study:

1. To determine if children had heard of domestic violence.
2. To establish children's attitude towards domestic violence.
3. To explore if children perceived gender as a factor contributing to people's ability to be violent.
4. To explore children's beliefs about the abuser's or the victim's responsibility in violent situations.
5. To determine if knowledge of someone experiencing domestic violence influenced a child's attitude towards domestic violence.
6. To establish if there was an association between children's geographic location and their beliefs surrounding domestic violence.

## **1.6. Hypotheses**

Based on the objectives of this study, the study will focus on the following hypotheses:

1. Children have heard about domestic violence.
2. Children believe that domestic violence is wrong.
3. Children perceive men as being more violent than women.
4. Children perceive the abuser as being responsible for the abuse.
5. Knowledge of an individual living with domestic violence will influence a child's attitude towards domestic violence.
6. An association exists between a child's geographic location and beliefs regarding domestic violence.

## **1.7. Operational Definitions and Indicators**

A variety of definitions exist to explain the terms 'domestic violence' and 'understanding'. Furthermore, one's view of what may be considered violent behaviour is largely influenced by one's culture and social environment. As such it is necessary to explore the meanings of these terms and to clarify how the terms have been understood and applied in this study.

### 1.7.1. Domestic Violence

The South African Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1994) defines ‘domestic’ as

“...referring to the home, household or family affairs.”

The definition of ‘violent’ given by the South African Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1994) is

“involving or using great physical force.”

Viljoen (1997, p.18) suggests that ‘violence’ may be seen as an inclusive term referring to all forms of physical aggression. Furthermore a distinction can be made between ‘violence’ and ‘force’. According to Viljoen, ‘force’ may describe more acceptable actions such as slapping or spanking, whereas ‘violence’ may be used to describe unacceptable actions. Using Viljoen’s description, force may refer to

“...the legitimate use of physical control to effect a positive goal...”

and violence according to Viljoen (1997, p.19) may be understood as

“...unsanctioned use of physical force.”

Viljoen’s definition of force seems to imply the use of physical actions as a form of discipline. This may suggest that a husband slapping his wife would be acceptable if his intention was to achieve a positive goal – perhaps that the wife fulfils the husband’s wishes. According to Volpe (n.d.) however, any behaviour that involves the intentional use of force would be classified as

physical abuse, regardless of the desired outcome. Volpe's definition of physical abuse includes pushing, hitting, slapping, choking, use of an object, twisting of a body part, forcing the ingestion of an unwanted substance, and use of a weapon.

Mills, Friend, Conroy, Fleck-Henderson, Krug, Magen, Thomas and Trudeau (2000, p.316) describe domestic violence as

“...a pattern of battering or abusive acts in the context of an intimate relationship”.

The abuse may be physical, emotional, financial or sexual. Domestic violence may also include abuse of property and pets (Ganley, 1989 in Volpe, n.d.).

Buzawa and Buzawa (2003, p.13) define domestic violence as

“...violence between intimates living together or who have previously cohabited.”

This definition is gender neutral and thus recognises that males and females can both be victims of domestic violence. In this study, ‘domestic violence’ will be used as a gender neutral term, thus acknowledging that both males and females may be victims.

Although domestic violence is not only limited to physical force, children are likely to equate the term ‘violence’ with physical force as in the South African Oxford Dictionary of Current English. For this reason, the focus of this research will be on the physical form of domestic violence.

Pretorius (1997, p.58) gives a comprehensive definition of family violence that emphasises the physical aspect of this crime.

Pretorius' definition is taken from Louw, Van Heerden and Smith in 1978 and describes family violence as

“...the unlawful, deliberate, direct, single or repeated administering of violence by a family member to the body of another member of the (extended) family with the aim of harming him or her, or as an indirect attempt or threat to administer violence, where the offender is capable of fulfilling his threat or of reasonably convincing the proposed victim that such violence is within his power.”

For the purposes of this research, domestic violence will be regarded as acts involving physical force occurring in one's home. The physical force is used with the intent to cause fear or inflict bodily harm. These acts will be amongst the adults residing in the home. Thus domestic violence can involve the biological parents, a biological parent and a stepparent, a parent and a live-in partner (boyfriend or girlfriend), or another family member such as an aunt, uncle or grandparent who lives in the home.

In the literature the terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' are used interchangeably. For this study only the term 'domestic violence' will be used.

### **1.7.2. Understanding**

The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology (Reber & Reber, 2001) explains ‘understanding’ as

“the process of comprehending something, of appreciating the deep significant meaning of an event.”

For the purpose of this research, children’s understanding will refer to the factual knowledge children have regarding acts that may be classified as domestic violence acts. ‘Understanding’ will also encompass the beliefs children hold about these acts. The variables used to measure children’s ‘understanding’ will be the extent to which a child has heard of domestic violence, their view on whether domestic violence is right or wrong, the gender they perceive as more violent and who they view as responsible for the violence.

### **1.8. Scope of the Study**

The study was conducted in the Capricorn district of the Limpopo province of South Africa. The sample for the study was composed of grade six and grade seven learners from schools in three different geographic locations. Children ranged in age from 11 to 16 years. A variety of cultural groups were represented such as English, Afrikaans, Venda and Tsonga, although the majority of the sample comprised of Pedi speaking children.

The focus of this study was on children's understanding of domestic violence. As such children were encouraged to give honest responses and were assured that there were no right or wrong answers. No formal lessons on the topic were given prior to conducting the research. The aim was to establish what children understood about domestic violence, and what misconceptions they harboured so that suitable interventions could, at a later stage, be designed to provide children with the necessary facts and information regarding this social problem.

This study was motivated by an increasing awareness of domestic violence as a social problem and the acknowledgement that children in violent homes are also affected. As children are given more of a voice and as awareness of children's rights increases, it is important that children are consulted in issues that affect them. Domestic violence has an impact on the whole family and not just the victim and abuser. Although there is acknowledgement that children are affected by abuse occurring in the home, research tends to involve adults who describe the impact of their abuse on children. The rationale for this study is that research about children's perceptions will be more accurate if children are allowed to give their own responses. With children's input more relevant interventions can be designed. The results of this study could therefore serve as a starting point for designing interventions to appropriately educate children about domestic violence.

## **1.9 Chapter Outlay**

The study will be discussed over five chapters. The first chapter provides a general orientation to the study. The issue of domestic violence is placed within an historical context. The aims and objectives of the study are highlighted and six hypotheses are identified. Definitions for pertinent terms used in the study are clarified. Lastly, the scope of the study is briefly discussed.

The second chapter explores literature relevant to the study. A context for domestic violence is provided before focusing on factors influencing children's understanding of this concept. Factors responsible for domestic violence are briefly explored and theories of violence are introduced. Once the context for domestic violence is created, literature regarding children's perspectives of domestic violence is reviewed, including factors influencing how children cope with domestic violence.

Included in chapter two is a focus on the theoretical perspectives relevant to the study. Two theories are discussed, namely the developmental theory and the social learning theory. The developmental theory considers the impact of a child's age and developmental level on their understanding of domestic violence and how this understanding develops as the child matures. Ages

relevant to the sample, namely late childhood and adolescence, are considered and discussed. The social learning theory is used to illustrate how the views of society and significant individuals impact on a child's beliefs regarding domestic violence.

In the third chapter the research methodology for the present study is discussed. Details relating to the sample and the instrument are provided. Ethical considerations relevant to the study are explored.

The data for the study was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis and interpretation of the results are included in chapter four. The fifth and final chapter in this study provides a discussion of the results as they relate to current literature and similar studies. Conclusions are drawn from the results and limitations of the study are noted. The chapter concludes with recommendations addressing the need to raise awareness and dispel myths regarding domestic violence.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Children search for their own meanings and understandings for what happens to them. This understanding will be different for individual children and can be influenced by factors such as age, developmental level, and social, historical and cultural context. In this chapter two theoretical approaches will be considered to explain children's understanding of domestic violence, namely developmental theory and social learning theory.

#### **2.2. Developmental Theory**

According to Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) how a child perceives, responds to, and copes with observing domestic violence will be affected by the child's age and developmental level. Thus the understanding of domestic violence may not only be different for individual children, but may also be perceived as part of a function of changes within an individual child as he or she moves through different stages of development.

### **2.2.1. Stages of Development**

Mwamwenda (1995) divides human development into five stages beginning with infancy and ending with adulthood and old age. This study will make reference to the stages of late childhood and adolescence.

#### **2.2.1.1. Late Childhood**

Mwamwenda (1995) defines late childhood as occurring between the ages of seven and ten years. During this stage children form friendships with other children and become less dependent on their caretakers. Peers begin to hold a large influence over a child's behaviour. This includes a desire to conform to the peer group. Children during late childhood become conscious of what others think of them (Mwamwenda, 1995). Despite the influence of peers, the family is still the most important agent of socialisation at this stage. Schools also influence socialisation by conferring to children the values and norms of their culture. In this way schools can influence children's perceptions with regard to violence in the home.

During late childhood the family provides for the physical and psychological needs of a child. It is in the home that a child learns how to engage with others and how to react to authority. Thus a child observes interaction styles

between his or her parents and models these when interacting with peers. A child who observes aggression as a means of controlling others' behaviour is likely to behave aggressively towards peers. The interaction between mother and child influences the child's personality development (Mwamwenda, 1995). When domestic violence is witnessed at this stage, it can hinder the relationship formed between a mother and a child with consequent deleterious effects for later development of the child.

As the child develops emotionally, he or she assumes greater independence and decision-making. It is at this stage that children identify with their parents and adopt their values, beliefs and personality traits. According to Mwamwenda (1995) children are likely to model the more powerful parent. An abusive parent can be seen as the powerful parent and may be modelled, especially in the case of a violent father being observed by his son.

#### **2.2.1.2. Adolescence**

According to Kaplan and Sadock (2003) adolescence begins around the age of eleven and continues until adulthood. During adolescence, behaviour is influenced by both parents and peers (Biehler and Snowman, 1986, in Mwamwenda, 1995). Mwamwenda (1995) concludes that parents have a greater influence over long term issues such as values, moral development,

occupational choices and political thinking. Peer groups tend to hold more influence over behaviour relating to immediate status such as styles of dress, interests and social relations. Thus adolescents in violent homes may internalise the violence as part of their values and moral development and may turn to their peers for support and to develop a sense of personal identity.

### **2.2.2. Cognitive Development**

According to Louw, Van Ede and Louw (1998) cognitive development includes processes such as paying attention, perceiving, remembering, thinking, reasoning, planning, conceptualising, classifying and associating.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development "...attempts to give a comprehensive explanation of the child's world and how he understands and interprets it." (Mwamwenda, 1995, p.89). Piaget's theory divides cognitive development into four stages. Only two stages will be described because of their relevance to the ages of children in this study. It must be noted that cultural differences may affect the rate at which the cognitive stages are attained (Mwamwenda, 1995).

Piaget's stage of cognitive development applicable to late childhood is referred to as the concrete operational stage. During this stage, reasoning is

based on concrete objects. Thus children use a logical process of reasoning on the basis of concrete evidence. Objects can be grouped according to their characteristics and are assessed in a more realistic manner than in the previous stage (Mwamwenda, 1995). Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) believe that children who witness domestic violence during this stage of development will experience conflict and confusion.

Piaget's formal operations stage of cognitive development is applicable to adolescents. During this stage of development children can use their imagination and reason beyond concrete evidence. An adolescent's thinking can be described as abstract and flexible and as a result they can perform tasks using prediction and hypothesis, and are able to draw logical conclusions. Wolak and Finkelhor (1998) state that adolescents are better able to view domestic violence as their parents' problem and to turn to friends and adults outside the family for support. Adolescents are also likely to feel less fearful, anxious and responsible than younger children (Wolak & Finkelhor, 1998).

Piaget's theory stresses the role of action in cognitive development, whilst Bruner stresses the role of language in cognitive development. According to Bruner a child moves through three stages of cognitive development (Mwamwenda, 1995). The first stage of the development is the enactive mode. During this stage thinking is based on what an object does. Although

largely associated with younger children, adolescents may apply the enactive mode when they find themselves in unfamiliar territory. Thus children faced with the unfamiliar experience of domestic violence may apply the enactive mode of thinking. In this instance, their understanding of domestic violence may include that when a man is violent, a woman becomes submissive.

The second stage of cognitive development according to Bruner is the iconic mode of development. This stage shows the beginning of abstract thought as a child is able to form images of an experience, and then manipulate these images in his or her mind in the absence of objects (Mwamwenda, 1995). This mode of thinking is important when a child learns concepts and principles that cannot be demonstrated physically. A child in the iconic mode who has been exposed to acts of domestic violence will be able to consider various explanations for the events rather than accepting the occurrences at face value.

The highest level that Bruner describes is the symbolic mode of development. At this level a child can represent information on the basis of symbols, ideas, thoughts and concepts. This level is similar to Piaget's stage of formal operations as, like Piaget, Bruner states that children can construct hypotheses, problem solve and use logical reasoning during this stage of development. In the symbolic mode of development, a child will be able to form his or her own beliefs regarding the experience of domestic violence. These beliefs will be

based on the child's own hypotheses and reasoning influenced by what the child has experienced and been exposed to in his or her environment.

### **2.2.3. Moral Development**

According to Louw et. al., (1998) children's moral development forms part of their social development and includes views of right and wrong as well as influencing how moral judgements are made. Piaget believed a child's moral development falls into two categories, namely moral realism and morality of cooperation (Mwamwenda, 1995).

Moral realism occurs before age ten. During this stage morality is perceived as externally made and imposed. Thus whether behaviour is considered good or bad is determined by what the parents say. A good behaviour would be one that conforms to the wishes of adults. Furthermore, behaviour is judged by its consequences and not by its underlying intention. Applying this to domestic violence, a violent act would be judged by its effect, such as making a victim conform to the perpetrator's wishes. Children in the moral realism stage believe in imminent justice. Thus if someone does something wrong and gets hurt, he is being punished for his wrongdoing (Mwamwenda, 1995). In this way a child may view aggressive acts in the home as punishment inflicted by

the perpetrator. Injuries sustained during the violence may be viewed as warranted in this context.

Morality of cooperation occurs after age ten. Here rules are considered flexible and open to change. Rules are understood as made for the purpose of protecting the rights of individuals rather than for giving allegiance to authority. Transgression of rules becomes judged by the motivation behind the behaviour (Mwamwenda, 1995). Once a child has reached the morality of cooperation stage of development, he or she will be able to think more critically and to consider all sources of information before deciding on the acceptability of specific behaviours. Thus the motivation behind violent acts will be taken into consideration when deciding on its acceptability. Related to domestic violence, a child in the morality of cooperation stage, may take into consideration the factors that preceded the act of violence, as well as the motivation behind the abuser's action before concluding whether the violence was warranted and acceptable.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development is composed of three levels divided into six stages of moral development. The first stage, the pre-conventional level, refers to moral reasoning used between the ages of four and ten years. During this first level moral decisions tend to be egocentric. Two stages of moral development occur during the pre-conventional level. Firstly, like

Piaget's first stage of moral development, rules are absolute, despite the circumstances. In the second stage of development, what is right is what makes one happy (Mwamwenda, 1995). Conflict can occur for a child during this stage as in order to view one parent's behaviour as right, the other parent's behaviour must be viewed as wrong. Furthermore to view as right a situation that makes one parent happy is to ignore the negative effect that this action may have on the other parent or children in the family.

The conventional level of moral development is the level where most adolescents and adults operate. In the conventional level moral reasoning takes into account the interests of others in society. There is a desire to conform to social norms as well as a desire to support and justify these norms. Stage three of moral development is known as the good boy-nice girl orientation (Mwamwenda, 1995). During this stage a child behaves in a manner that will gain others' approval and majority opinion is conformed to. Like Piaget's morality of cooperation stage, motives for behaviour are taken into account when judgements are made.

The fourth stage of moral development, namely the law and order orientation, may also apply to adolescents. During this stage it is understood that laws should be maintained at all costs and a person's acceptance is determined by the extent to which a person conforms to the law (Mwamwenda, 1995). Here,

when adolescents are made aware that domestic violence is unlawful, the act as well as the perpetrator may be seen as unacceptable.

Although cognitive and moral development have been isolated for ease of explanation, one needs to bear in mind the interaction of these aspects within the child. For example, conflict can be expected in a child who cognitively does not agree with the actions of a parent but socially wants to gain the acceptance and approval of others.

### **2.3. Social Learning Theory**

Childhood can be understood as socially constructed because adults' perception of children and their expected behaviour is influenced by the historical, social and cultural context (Archard, 1993, Aries, 1979, Jenks, 1982, in Mullender et. al., 2002). With this understanding, social learning theory can be used, in part, to explain a child's social development. Social development, which is influenced by society and specific individuals, involves a change in children's interactions and relationships with others (Louw et. al., 1998). A component of social development is socialisation, whereby an individual acquires socially acceptable behaviour through interaction with others (Louw et. al., 1998). Thus social learning theory can be used to explain

how the view that society and influential individuals hold about domestic violence is likely to influence a child's view of this act.

According to the social learning theory, aggression is learned through behaviour modelling. Bandura believed that individuals do not inherit violent tendencies but model them after certain principles. Thus children learn aggressive responses by observing aggression in others and because of the belief that aggression will produce reinforcements. To this end, aggression in children is influenced by family members, media and the environment (Isom, 1998).

The social learning theory acknowledges that aversive treatment produces emotional arousal. The arousal can result in a variety of behaviours but the behaviour depends on the type of coping responses the individual has learned and the relative effectiveness of these responses. In this way, a feeling of frustration is likely to provoke aggression in individuals who have learnt to respond to aversive treatment with aggression.

Bandura (1975) made reference to a study conducted by Davitz in 1952 that showed that children who were aggressively trained responded with more aggression to an arbitrary insult than children who were trained to be

cooperative. Furthermore, children tended to base their responses on the actions of models.

### **2.3.1. Aggression Learnt under Naturally Occurring Conditions**

Aggression can be modelled and reinforced by family members. The reinforcements may result in reduction of tension, financial rewards, gaining the praise of others or building self-esteem (Isom, 1998). Bandura believed that aggression reinforced by family members was the most prominent source of behaviour modelling. According to Isom (1998) Bandura holds that children use the same aggressive tactics that their parents illustrate when dealing with others. Therefore a boy who witnesses his father strike his mother has a greater chance of becoming an abusive husband and parent (Isom, 1998). The subculture in which the individual lives also provides a source of aggression. The types of behaviour valued in a community subsystem may support or counteract the familial influences. The third source of aggression is symbolic modelling from mass media, especially television.

If a child observes domestic violence and sees that it is reinforced, for example when a mother is hit she 'behaves', then through this process the child learns how to be abusive (Barnett, Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 1997). Without the understanding that domestic violence is an abnormal manner of interaction, a

child might learn that this is an acceptable method to communicate one's wishes. Social learning theory accounts for the fact that violence tends to recur from one generation to the next.

### **2.3.2. Bandura's Bobo Doll Experiment**

Bandura's Bobo doll experiment validated the claim that aggression can be learned through modelling (Isom, 1998). For the experiment two groups of children in a nursery school observed a live female model enter a room containing several toys. The first group of children watched the model play with the toys and then assault an inflated plastic doll with other toys and her fists. A second group of children, the control group, observed the model behave non-aggressively towards the doll. When children from both groups were allowed into the room, children from the first group who observed the aggressive behaviour produced the distinctive aggressive behaviours of the model more frequently than the children from the control group (Edmunds & Kendrick, 1980). This experiment showed that although the children were not reinforced for performing the modelled responses, the behaviour was learnt.

Bandura went on to show that although a response is learned through observation, reinforcement might be necessary for the behaviour to be performed. To test this hypothesis, children watched a female model carry out

aggressive behaviour for which she was either rewarded, punished or the behaviour ignored. Children who witnessed the model being punished were less likely to imitate the aggressive responses than the children in the other two groups. However, when an incentive was added, children in all three groups modelled the aggression equally. Some form of inhibition had to be overcome in the children who had witnessed the model being punished before they could elicit the behaviour (Edmunds & Kendrick, 1980). Applying these findings to domestic violence, one can make the assumption that children who witness domestic violence where there is no negative consequence or punishment for the abuser are more likely to engage in such violence. When children witness some form of punishment for the abuser, such as arrest, violent behaviour is likely to be curtailed.

### **2.3.3. The Process of Observational Learning**

Earlier reference has been made as to how a child can imitate aggressive behaviours after observing such behaviours performed by a model. However not all behaviour that is observed will be modelled. Four components of observational learning have to be met if a child is to include the observed behaviour into his or her own behavioural repertoire (Isom, 1998).

The first component of observational learning is attention. Children will not learn by observing unless they perceive and attend to significant features of the modelled behaviour. In the case of domestic violence, children must attend to the actions of the abuser in order to reproduce the aggressive behaviour. Secondly, information relating to the aggressive behaviour must be coded and stored in the children's long-term memory. Even though details of the aggression have now been retained, the behaviour cannot be imitated unless the children possess the physical capabilities to do so. Finally children expect to receive positive reinforcement for modelled behaviour (Isom, 1998). In this way children are not likely to imitate aggressive behaviour if they have witnessed negative consequences being experienced by the individual who performed the original aggressive behaviour.

#### **2.3.4. Social Learning in Africa**

Children learn of the cultural and social expectations by identifying with the parent or other significant adult of the same sex. Mwamwenda (1995) refers to how boys observe the activities of the father and older siblings and then participate in some of them on a smaller scale. Traditionally in Africa this included activities that provided for the family such as farming, fishing, herding animals and making furniture. Boys identify with the role of head of the household and protector of the family. In this context violent methods

may be employed to enforce the man's roles. Young boys may then observe and imitate the violent acts of their role models.

Girls will model their behaviour on that of their mother, aunts and older female siblings. Through observational learning girls learn their roles of caring for children, running the home and being subservient to men.

Most socialisation occurs from observational learning. In order for children to enact the behaviour, the behaviour needs to be perceived as important or as normal social behaviour. Children not educated about domestic violence may believe that this is normal behaviour for families. Growing up with this belief increases one's chances of entering abusive relationships.

#### **2.4. Theoretical Framework**

This study has been guided by two theories, namely developmental theory and social learning theory. The way children perceive a construct such as domestic violence is influenced by various factors. Firstly children's age and developmental level need to be taken into account. During late childhood parents hold much influence over their children's socialisation process. As a result children tend to adopt the values and personality characteristics of their parents. Also during this stage children's reasoning is based on concrete

evidence and they tend to judge behaviour according to its visible consequences.

With the progression into adolescence, peers as well as parents influence behaviours and beliefs. As adolescents extend their support systems, they are more likely to seek support outside of the family. The thinking patterns of an adolescent become more flexible and rules are viewed less rigidly. As a result behaviour is judged more by its motivation than by its consequence. Through the brief description of these two stages, it is evident that not all children can be assumed to hold the same views. Furthermore, social learning theory illustrates how children's understanding can also be influenced by the social, historical and cultural context in which the children develop.

Social learning theory emphasises how observing and modelling the behaviour of adults can impact on children's understanding of a construct. The components necessary for behaviour to be imitated were discussed. These included the need for the behaviour to be attended to and remembered the necessity of the observer to possess the physical capabilities to imitate the behaviour as well as the motivation to engage in the behaviour. When children see a behaviour being positively reinforced, they are more likely to view the behaviour as appropriate and desirable.

As children move through the progressive stages of development, their approach to problems varies. Thus a child's view of domestic violence is influenced by the child's cognitive development. However, humans are social beings living within a particular social context. As such, our behaviour is influenced by what is deemed acceptable by our society. In this way, children's views pertaining to domestic violence are influenced by society and can be explained by the social learning theory. It is from this viewpoint that both the developmental theory and social learning theory have guided this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader of the methodology implemented for this research. In this chapter the author will describe how the sample was obtained, the instrument used to obtain the data and the statistical methods employed to analyse the data. Ethical issues taken into consideration during the implementation of the research will also be discussed.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

The research used data obtained from a larger project conducted by Childline Limpopo in three primary schools in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province. The research was conducted using quantitative methods from a positivist paradigm. Observable indicators were generated to reflect children's understanding on various topics. A relational research was used to make gender and geographic location comparisons in the children's understanding of domestic violence.

### **3.3. Sampling**

The sample for this study was drawn from the larger Childline project with which the researcher was involved. The sample for the Childline project consisted of 600 grade 6 and grade 7 children from 3 primary schools in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province. A criterion for inclusion of schools in the project was that the schools should use English as a medium of instruction. Furthermore, schools were selected such that they would represent three different geographical locations, namely an urban, rural and township area. One school was centrally located in Polokwane, the second was a village school located in Ga Mamabolo, east of Polokwane, and the third was a township school located in Seshego Zone 3, north west of Polokwane. A total of 200 children from each school were chosen to participate in the larger Childline project.

#### **3.3.1. Sampling Procedure**

A random sample of 300 questionnaires was drawn from the 600 questionnaires completed by children randomly chosen to participate in the larger Childline project.

A random sampling of the 300 questionnaires that formed a sample for this study was chosen according to gender. Every third questionnaire was selected for analysis until a total of 150 questionnaires were selected for girls and 150 questionnaires for boys.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

A questionnaire composed of closed ended questions was used to collect data. In order to complete the questionnaire, participants were provided with an answer sheet on which they circled or underlined their preferred response. The questions were read to the class by a researcher. This was to ensure that each participant understood what was being asked by the question. The questionnaires were in English as the schools used English as a medium of instruction but a Sotho version of the questionnaire was available to assist those participants who did not understand certain concepts in English.

Before the questionnaire was administered, the researcher established that the participants knew what research was and what was meant by confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also assured that there was no right or wrong answer, and that the researcher was merely interested in their opinions. The results were to be a true reflection of what children believed and not what they thought the researcher wanted them to answer.

The questions were read to the participants to ensure that all participants worked at the same pace. This also ensured that the responses were not influenced by reading or learning difficulties that may have existed in the class. Where concepts were not clearly understood, reference was made to the Sotho version of the questionnaire. No explanation of the questions was given as this may have influenced the answer. If a participant was unsure of the meaning of a question, then the participant was required to choose the response 'don't know'.

### **3.5. Instrument**

The questionnaire was designed by the University of Limpopo Psychology Department in conjunction with Childline Limpopo as part of a broader research on children's issues in schools. Areas covered in the questionnaire included biographical data, issues around self esteem, children's rights, child abuse, domestic violence, gender roles and AIDS knowledge. The present study made use of the biographical data as well as data obtained from the domestic violence section of the questionnaire.

The questions in the domestic violence section of the questionnaire were taken from a similar study conducted in England between 1996 and 1999. Questions from the British study are cited in the book by Mullender, Hague, Imam,

Kelly, Malos and Regan (2002) titled Children's Perspectives of Domestic Violence. Although based on this study, questions were adapted to suit the South African population.

### **3.5.1. Validity**

The questions used from the study by Mullender, Hague, Imam, Kelly, Malos and Regan (2002) were designed for primary school children. Hence, the questions were used for the same age group for which they were originally intended. For many children in the sample, English was not their first language. Sotho versions of the questionnaire were available for the researchers to refer to if children were struggling to understand terms in English. To ensure the validity of the Sotho version, the questionnaire was translated and back translated from English to Sotho and back. To do this, a bilingual individual translated the questionnaire from English to Sotho. Another bilingual individual then translated the questionnaire back to English. The researchers could then compare the original questionnaire with the twice-translated version to ensure that no important aspects were lost in translation (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999). These translated versions were made available to the researchers.

Before administration in the schools, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a group of twenty children who were representative of the age and cultural groups that were to participate in the study. This was to ensure that the questions were unambiguous and clearly understood by the children, as well as to assess the approximate time necessary to complete the questionnaire and to expose any extraneous variables that may have required consideration during administration. The results obtained during the pilot test were not included in the main study.

### **3.5.2. Coding**

Nominal measures indicate that there is a difference between categories (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). To code the data numbers were used as labels to differentiate possible responses. The responses on the questionnaire were coded as follows;

1 = True, 2 = False, 9 = Not sure.

1 = Yes, 2 = No

Gender, ethnicity and geographic location were also coded with numbers. These numbers were recorded on the answer sheet alongside the response. The numbers did not allow for mathematical operations, nor did they suggest mathematical relations (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

### **3.6. Methods of Data Analysis**

The data was analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS programme) to do descriptive and statistical tests for correlational research. The critical level of significance used in the study was 0.05. Answers were coded. A categorical response form was used for the item analysis in that numbers were associated with the different responses. Frequencies were chosen as the summary descriptive suitable for this nominal data.

The Chi-Square, T-test and ANOVA were the statistical tests used to analyse data. Descriptive analysis involved investigating the distribution of scores on each variable, to determine whether the scores on different variables were related to one other. The Bonferroni Post-hoc test was used for unplanned comparisons.

### **3.7. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues that needed to be considered were consent and confidentiality. Permission was obtained by Childline Limpopo from each of the school principals before the questionnaire was administered. The principals gave consent in their capacity as *locos parentis*. It was the principals' prerogative

to decide the level of consent they deemed necessary, for example, if consent from the school governing body was required. Before the children were given the questionnaire, they were informed of its purpose and asked if they were willing to participate. Although children could not legally give their consent, they were at least allowed 'informed dissent'. Any child not willing to complete the questionnaire was not penalised in any way.

Regarding confidentiality, each completed answer sheet was anonymous. The questionnaires from all three schools were combined before results were analysed. This was to further ensure anonymity.

The researchers in each class were 5 fieldwork students from the University of Limpopo, Psychology Department. The researchers were divided so that in each class, there were researchers able to speak the children's first language. In each class, two researchers were Masters in Clinical Psychology students and the remaining three researchers were Bachelor of Psychology students. The researchers were available to assist any participants who showed signs of distress while the questionnaire was being administered. All participants received Childline stickers with the tollfree number and were assured of their anonymity should they wish to phone Childline and ask questions or discuss problems. The researchers were also available after the session, in the event that there were children who wished to discuss in private any areas of concern

raised by the questionnaire. Teachers were also offered resources relating to domestic violence, as well as training by Childline workers in dealing with disclosure pertaining to domestic violence and child abuse.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

The sample for this study was composed of three hundred grade six and grade seven children in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province. Random sampling was administered to obtain the sample. Questionnaires were completed by the participants and the results analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The anonymity of the schools and the individual participants was maintained. Consent was obtained from the school principals before the questionnaire was administered. Children were allowed informed dissent and were not penalised if they chose not to complete the questionnaire. Researchers were available to assist any participants who experienced difficulties arising from questions asked in the questionnaire. Teachers were offered resources and training relating to disclosure of domestic violence and child abuse.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter report on the findings through analysis and interpretation of data will be done. This will include a summary of the biographical data for the sample followed by a discussion of the results according to themes that arose from the data.

#### **4.2. Demographic Information**

The sample consisted of three hundred grade six and seven children from three schools in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province.

The sample demographics were expressed in frequencies and percentages. From a total of 300 participants (N=300), 46% (N=138) of the sample was aged 11 to 12 and 50.7% (N=152) were aged 13 to 14. Thus the majority of the sample fell into these two age groups. The average age of the sample for girls was 11 to 12 years (50%) and for boys the average age was 13 to 14 (54%). The majority of the sample (67.3%) was composed of Pedi speaking

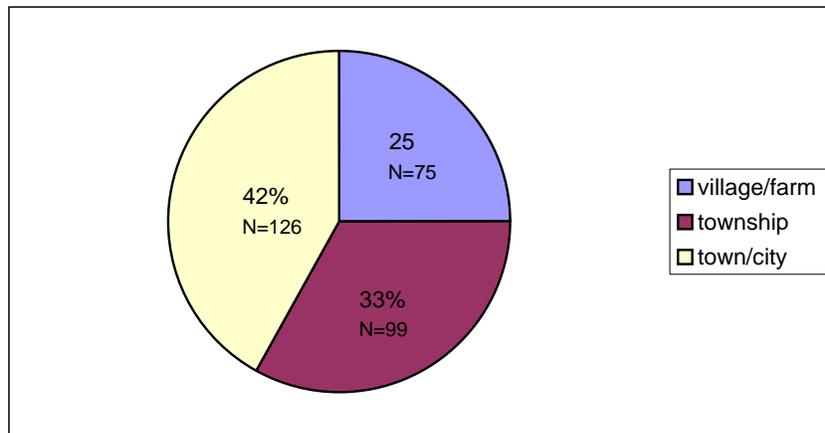
individuals. Smaller groups of Tsonga, Venda, English and Afrikaans speaking children constituted a further 22.7% (N=67) of the sample. The remaining 10.3% of the sample (N=31) has been grouped together under the heading ‘other’. These 31 children included various African, European and Asian ethnic groups. The sample demographics are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sample demographics**

		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female		N	%
		N	%	N	%		
Age	11-12	63	42.0	75	50.0	138	46.0
	13-14	81	54.0	71	47.3	152	50.7
	15-16	6	4.0	4	2.7	10	3.3
Ethnic group	Pedi	100	66.7	102	68.0	202	67.3
	Tsonga	10	6.7	7	4.7	17	5.7
	Venda	7	4.7	9	6.0	16	5.3
	English	17	11.3	14	9.3	31	10.3
	Afrikaans	1	0.7	2	1.3	3	1.0
	Other	15	10.0	16	10.7	31	10.3
Geographic location	Village/farm	37	24.7	38	25.3	75	25.0
	Township	42	28.0	57	38.0	99	33.0
	Town/city	71	47.3	55	36.7	126	42.0

The sample for the study was classified according to three geographic locations, namely village or farm areas, a township and a town or city. The largest portion of the sample (42%) came from a town or city. A further 33% (N=99) of the sample was composed of township residents whilst the remaining 25% (N=75) of the sample resided in a village or on a farm (see Figure 1). The largest portion of the female sample (38%) resided in the township whereas the largest portion of the male sample (47.3%) resided in a town or city environment.

**Figure 1: Geographic location of sample**



### **4.3. The Findings**

The findings of the study have been categorised according to three themes, namely children's awareness, perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence. Results within these themes are analysed according to gender and geographic location.

#### **4.3.1. Awareness of Domestic Violence**

To determine participants' pre-existing cognitions relative to domestic violence, it was necessary to ascertain whether participants were aware of domestic violence, as this would indicate that they could have had prior exposure to the concept and possible intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims.

##### **4.3.1.1. Awareness of the concept 'domestic violence' through prior exposure**

Items to enquire about the participants' awareness of domestic violence included in the instrument identified whether participants had prior exposure to the concept, as well as the source of exposure. Results were analysed according to participants' gender and geographic location.

#### **4.3.1.1.1. Awareness through prior exposure by gender**

Frequencies were obtained for participants' prior exposure to the concept 'domestic violence' according to gender.

From the relevant questions on the instrument, it was evident that the majority of participants in the sample had previously been subjected to the concept 'domestic violence'. Within the sample 91.3% (N=137) of the boys and 92.7% (N=139) of the girls reportedly had prior exposure to the concept 'domestic violence' whilst only 8.7% (N=13) of the boys and 7.3% (N=11) of the girls did not. Furthermore, 37.3% (N=112) of the total sample reported that they had intimate knowledge of an individual who had experienced domestic violence. This subgroup of participants with intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims was composed of 38.0% (N=57) of the girls and 36.7% (N=55) of the boys from the larger sample. Of this 37.3%, 11% (N=33) responded that the victim was a family member. Girls reported a higher incident of the victim being a family member (33.9%) than the boys (25.0%).

From these statistics one can conclude that the majority of the sample (92%) had prior exposure to the concept 'domestic violence' and that little over one

third (37.3%) of this sample had direct knowledge of a person who had experienced domestic violence (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Awareness through prior exposure by gender**

		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female		N	%
		N	%	N	%		
Heard about domestic violence	Yes	137	91.3	139	92.7	276	92.0
	No	13	8.7	11	7.3	24	8.0
Know a victim of domestic violence	Yes	55	36.7	57	38.0	112	37.3
	No	95	63.3	93	62.0	188	62.7
The person is	Family	14	25.0	19	33.9	33	29.5
	Not family	42	75.0	37	66.1	79	70.5

#### **4.3.1.1.2. Awareness through intimate knowledge of victims by geographic location**

Data was analysed using Chi-Square test to establish if a relationship existed between participant's geographic location and awareness of domestic violence through intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims.

A significant relationship was found with 46.5% of participants from the township having intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims compared to 45.3% in the village/farm and 25.4% in the town/city samples ( $\chi^2 = 13.253$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The results suggest that a greater proportion of children in the township area are made aware of domestic violence through intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims compared to the town/city and village/farm samples (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Chi-Square test for awareness through intimate knowledge of victims by geographic location**

	Geographic location	Percent within geographic location	Chi-Square $\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Know a domestic violence victim	Village/farm	45.3%	13.253	2	.001*
	Township	46.5%			
	Town/city	25.4%			

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

#### **4.3.1.1.3. Identified sources of conceptual information**

A variety of sources were identified where participants may have been exposed to the concept domestic violence. Frequencies were conducted to establish the most common sources of information.

The school environment was the most common source of exposure (51.7%) to the concept 'domestic violence'. It was beyond the scope of this study to ascertain if participants had exposure to domestic violence through formal means such as lessons covering this topic, or whether they had formed schema relating to domestic violence following exposure through more informal

means, such as conversations with classmates. Media, especially television (42.7%), was responsible for a large portion of participant's exposure to domestic violence. It was noted that participants had greater exposure to the concept from peers (15.7%) and their mothers (13.3%) than from their fathers (9.7%). It is not known whether this was due to children experiencing greater disclosure with friends and mothers or if fathers, as the more likely perpetrators of domestic violence, were less likely to participate in discussions regarding domestic violence with their children.

Analysis revealed that 25% (N=75) of the participants had exposure to the concept of domestic violence from persons other than parents or friends. Such persons may have included teachers, religious or community leaders and extended family members, however the details regarding these other persons were not included in the study. The findings are detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Identified sources of conceptual information**

Sources	N	%
School	155	51.7
Television	128	42.7
Magazines	54	18.0
Other media	44	14.7
Mother	40	13.3
Father	29	9.7
Friends	47	15.7
Other people	75	25.0

Note: Percentages are based on affirmative answers to the relevant questions. As multiple responses were possible, percentages do not total 100.

#### **4.3.2. Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence**

In the instrument, participants were provided with a series of statements to determine their attitudes towards conflict and violence. Responses to these statements were then analysed.

#### **4.3.2.1. Attitudes towards domestic violence by gender**

Statements relevant to participants' attitudes were analysed and frequencies obtained according to gender.

The majority of the sample (44.7%) condoned verbal disputes between parents but did not condone physical confrontations (83.0%). Within the sample 84.3% did not condone violence. Men were perceived as more violent in families by 65% of the sample, but 45.3% of the sample believed that men would not engage in physical altercations with pregnant partners. More than half of the sample (57.3%) did not attribute violent behaviour in men to mental illness. Within the sample there appeared to be a lack of consideration for the intricacies of a relationship. This was evident in the misperception by 57.7% of the sample that few deterrents existed to prevent women from withdrawing from a physically abusive relationship.

Although no significant differences in responses according to gender were noted, boys (54.0%) were more likely to believe that men did not engage in violence towards pregnant women. Boys (61.3%) were also less likely to attribute men's abusive behaviour to mental illness, thus suggesting that men's abusive behaviour is within their control (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Attitudes towards domestic violence by gender**

		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female		N	%
		N	%	N	%		
Parents' arguing is acceptable	True	62	41.3	72	48.0	134	44.7
	False	67	44.7	53	35.3	120	40.0
	Not sure	21	14.0	25	16.7	46	15.3
Parents' hitting is acceptable	True	11	7.3	11	7.3	22	7.3
	False	127	84.7	122	81.3	249	83.0
	Not sure	12	8.0	17	11.3	29	9.7
Men are more violent	True	92	61.3	103	68.7	195	65.0
	False	40	26.7	31	20.7	71	23.7
	Not sure	18	12.0	16	10.7	34	11.3
Women are more violent	True	29	19.3	25	16.7	54	18.0
	False	96	64.0	100	66.7	196	65.3
	Not sure	25	16.7	25	16.7	50	16.7
Women and men equally violent	True	56	37.3	55	36.7	111	37.0
	False	68	45.3	62	41.3	130	43.3
	Not sure	26	17.3	33	22.0	59	19.7
Violence is wrong	True	125	83.3	128	85.3	253	84.3
	False	15	10.0	11	7.3	26	8.7
	Not sure	10	6.7	11	7.3	21	7.0
Men do not hit pregnant women	True	81	54.0	55	36.7	136	45.3
	False	52	34.7	71	47.3	123	41.0
	Not sure	17	11.3	24	16.0	41	13.7
Men who hit are mentally ill	True	42	28.0	50	33.3	92	30.7
	False	92	61.3	80	53.3	172	57.3
	Not sure	16	10.7	20	13.3	36	12.0
Women could easily leave a violent partner	True	95	63.3	78	52.0	173	57.7
	False	37	24.7	51	34.0	88	29.3
	Not sure	18	12.0	21	14.0	39	13.0

Further analysis converted responses to the individual statements into an attitude score. The T-test was then used to analyse attitude scores according to the gender of the participant.

Overall no significant differences were noted for attitude score and gender ( $t = .231, df = 298, P < 0.05$ , two-tailed). The results are provided in Table 6.

**Table 6: T-test for attitudes towards domestic violence by gender**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> (2-tailed)
Attitude score	Equal variances assumed	.499	.480	.231	298	.817
	Equal variances not assumed			.231	296.125	.817

#### **4.3.2.2. Attitudes towards domestic violence by geographic location**

The statements used to establish participants' attitude scores were analysed according to geographic location. Chi-Square test was used to determine if a relationship existed between attitudes towards domestic violence and geographic location of the participants.

A significant association was found between the variables with the results indicating that more participants in the town/city sample condoned verbal disputes between parents ( $\chi^2 = 12.123$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Further significant results indicated that a larger proportion of the township sample condoned physical altercations between parents ( $\chi^2 = 20.880$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The village/farm sample attributed violent characteristics to both men and women ( $\chi^2 = 15.242$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), and also held the belief that few obstacles prevented women from withdrawing from abusive relationships ( $\chi^2 = 16.331$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). With regard to condoning violence, significant differences were noted by the town/city sample as they did not condone violence ( $\chi^2 = 6.976$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and they were more likely to perceive men as not engaging in physical confrontations with pregnant women ( $\chi^2 = 23.211$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

From these results, it is clear that the participants' geographic location influences their attitude towards domestic violence with participants in the town sample being less accepting of violence in any form. Participants in the village/farm sample experienced men and women as equally violent which may account for their greater belief that women could withdraw from abusive relationships (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Chi-Square for attitudes towards domestic violence by geographic location**

	Location	% answered True	Chi-Square $\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Arguing between parents is acceptable	Village/farm	34.7%	12.123	2	.002 *
	Township	37.4%			
	Town/city	56.3%			
Hitting between parents is acceptable	Village/farm	18.7%	20.880	2	.000*
	Township	29.3%			
	Town/city	6.3%			
Men are more violent	Village/farm	73.3%	3.255	2	.196
	Township	60.6%			
	Town/city	63.5%			
Women are more violent	Village/farm	72.0%	7.689	2	.021
	Township	54.5%			
	Town/city	69.8%			
Women and men are equally violent	Village/farm	62.7%	15.242	2	.000*
	Township	36.4%			
	Town/city	37.3%			
Violence is wrong	Village/farm	82.7%	6.976	2	.031
	Township	77.8%			
	Town/city	90.5%			
Men do not hit pregnant women	Village/farm	33.3%	23.211	2	.000*
	Township	53.5%			
	Town/city	68.3%			
Men who hit women are mentally ill	Village/farm	34.7%	5.378	2	.068
	Township	51.5%			
	Town/city	40.5%			
Women could easily leave a violent partner	Village/farm	84.0%	16.331	2	.000*
	Township	75.8%			
	Town/city	58.7%			

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

Oneway Analysis of Variance was conducted to interpret the relationship between participants' attitude towards domestic violence and geographic location using statements listed in Table 7. A significant difference in the attitude scores for the geographic locations was noted ( $F = 9.670$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). (See Table 8).

**Table 8: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for attitude scores by geographic location**

		Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Attitude score	Between groups	55.735	2	27.867	9.670	.000*
	Within groups	855.902	297	2.882		
	Total	911.637	299			

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

The Bonferroni Post Hoc Test was administered to ascertain the geographic location for which differences in the attitude scores was significant. The results indicated a significant difference for attitude scores in the township sample compared to the village/farm sample ( $P < 0.05$ ) and town/city sample ( $P < 0.05$ ). (See Table 9).

**Table 9: Comparison of attitude score and geographic location using the Bonferroni Post Hoc test**

Dependent variable	(I) Geographic location	(J) Geographic location	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	<i>P</i>
Attitude score	Village/farm	Township	.981	.260	.001*
		Town/city	.110	.248	1.000
	Township	Village/farm	-.981	.260	.001*
		Town/city	-.871	.228	.000*
	Town/city	Village/farm	-.110	.248	1.000
		township	.871	.228	.000*

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

#### 4.3.2.3. Knowledge of domestic violence victims and attitude

An independent T-test was administered to compare the means of the attitude scores, obtained from statements relating to conflict and violence, with the mean of respondents with intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims.

A significant difference existed between knowledge of an individual who had experienced domestic violence and attitude scores ( $t = -.258$ ,  $df = 298$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). (See Table 10).

**Table 10: T-test to establish the relationship between knowledge of domestic violence victims and attitude**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> (2-tailed)
Attitude score	Equal variances assumed	7.753	.006*	-.258	298	.796
	Equal variances not assumed			-.248	203.655	.805

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

### 4.3.3. Perceptions of Domestic Violence

The third theme identified for this study related to participants' perceptions of domestic violence. Included were beliefs regarding perception of blame and

gender as a contributory factor for violence. Results were then analysed according to geographic location and gender of the participant.

#### **4.3.3.1. The relevance of gender in attribution of violence**

A series of statements were posed in the instrument to ascertain whether participants perceived gender as a significant attribute in determining perpetrators of violence.

##### **4.3.3.1.1. Attribution of violence by participant's gender**

Data was analysed and frequencies obtained for participant's gender. Results indicated that 55.3% of boys and 54.5% of girls did not perceive the perpetrator's gender as influencing the acceptability of violence. The majority of the sample (63.0%) perceived men as having greater physical attributes and that they were more likely to engage in physical confrontations than women (67.7% of the sample). However, 82.0% of the boys and 83.3% of the girls acknowledged that both genders have the potential for violence. The majority of boys (84.7%) and girls (87.2%) did not condone violence initiated by either gender (boys = 75.3%, girls = 71.8%). Women were perceived as less violent than men by 56.0% of the boys and 61.3% of the girls (see Table 11).

**Table 11: Attribution of violence by participants' gender**

		Gender				Total	
		Male		Female		N	%
		N	%	N	%		
Differences exist between man to woman, woman to man violence	Yes	63	44.7	65	45.5	128	45.1
	No	78	55.3	78	54.5	156	54.9
Men are bigger and stronger	True	98	65.3	91	60.7	189	63.0
	False	31	20.7	42	28.0	73	24.3
	Not sure	21	14.0	17	11.3	38	12.7
Men hit the most	True	97	64.7	106	70.7	203	67.7
	False	39	26.0	27	18.0	66	22.0
	Not sure	14	9.3	17	11.3	31	10.3
Men hitting women is unacceptable	True	127	84.7	130	87.2	257	86.0
	False	18	12.0	10	6.7	28	9.4
	Not sure	5	3.3	9	6.0	14	4.7
Women hitting men is unacceptable	True	113	75.3	107	71.8	220	73.6
	False	31	20.7	25	16.8	56	18.7
	Not sure	6	4.0	17	11.4	23	7.7
Women are less violent	True	84	56.0	92	61.3	176	58.7
	False	40	26.7	39	26.0	79	26.3
	Not sure	26	17.3	19	12.7	45	15.0
Both sexes can hit	True	123	82.0	125	83.3	248	82.7
	False	16	10.7	16	10.7	32	10.7
	Not sure	11	7.3	9	6.0	20	6.7

An attribution score by gender was obtained from responses to the statements listed in Table 11. The scores referred to whether participants perceived gender differences in the attribution of perpetrators of violence. A T-test was then conducted to establish if there was a difference between the attribution scores for the two gender groups of the participants. No significant differences were noted for attribution scores between the genders and the perception of gender attributes in the perpetrators of violence ( $t = -.361$ ,  $df = 298$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). These results are illustrated in Table 12.

**Table 12: T-test illustrating the attribution of violence by participants'**

**gender**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
		<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> (2-tailed)
Attribution score	Equal variances assumed	.059	.809	-.361	298	.718
	Equal variances not assumed			-.361	297.302	.719

#### **4.3.3.1.2. Attribution of violence by geographic location**

The statements used to determine participants' attribution scores were analysed according to geographic location using a Chi-Square test.

Significant differences were noted with a larger percentage of the town/city sample reporting that the gender of the perpetrator influenced their views regarding the violent acts ( $\chi^2 = 25.180$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, 92.1% of the town/city sample did not condone violence initiated by a male against a female ( $\chi^2 = 13.062$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). A significant portion (77.3%) of the village/farm sample attributed less violent capabilities to females than to males ( $\chi^2 = 14.456$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). (See Table 13).

**Table 13: Chi-Square for attribution scores by geographic location**

	Location	% answered True	Chi-Square $\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
A difference exists between man to woman, and woman to man violence	Village/farm	33.3%	25.180	2	.000*
	Township	52.1%			
	Town/city	70.3%			
Men are bigger and stronger	Village/farm	65.3%	1.732	2	.421
	Township	66.7%			
	Town/city	58.7%			
Men hit the most	Village/farm	73.3%	1.532	2	.465
	Township	66.7%			
	Town/city	65.1%			
It is not right for a man to hit a woman	Village/farm	89.2%	13.062	2	.001*
	Township	75.8%			
	Town/city	92.1%			
It is not right for a woman to hit a man	Village/farm	74.3%	2.938	2	.230
	Township	67.7%			
	Town/city	77.8%			
Women are less violent than men	Village/farm	77.3%	14.456	2	.001*
	Township	53.5%			
	Town/city	51.6%			
Both men and women can hit	Village/farm	77.3%	4.649	2	.098
	Township	79.8%			
	Town/city	88.1%			

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

Oneway Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine difference between participants' perception of gender differences in the attribution of perpetrators of violence and geographic location. ANOVA results indicated that, although significant differences were noted for specific statements, overall no significant difference was noted between attribution scores for the various geographic locations ( $F = 2.152, df = 2, P < 0.05$ ). (See Table 14).

**Table 14: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for attribution scores by geographic location**

		Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Attribution score	Between groups	8.833	2	4.416	2.152	.118
	Within groups	609.497	297	2.052		
	Total	618.330	299			

#### **4.3.3.1.3. Attribution of violence by knowledge of domestic violence victims**

Responses to specific statements were analysed to determine if intimate knowledge of a domestic violence victim influenced the participant's perception of gender differences in perpetrators of violence. When querying whether the perpetrator's gender influences one's perception of violence 56.3% of those who indicated that gender held no influence had intimate knowledge of a domestic violence victim compared to 38.7% who did not have intimate knowledge (see Table 15). A Chi-Square test was used to determine the significance of these results. The results indicated that more participants who had intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims did not perceive differences relating to the perpetrator's gender ( $\chi^2 = 8.248$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 15: Attribution of violence by knowledge of domestic violence victims**

			Know a domestic violence victim		Total
			Yes	No	
A difference exists between man to woman, woman to man violence	No	Count  % within know someone	58  56.3%	70  38.7%	128  45.1%
	Yes	Count  % within know someone	45  43.7%	111  61.3%	156  54.9%
Total		Count  % within know someone	103  100.0%	181  100.0%	284  100.0%

#### **4.3.3.2. Perception of Blame**

Perception of blame referred to whether the respondents perceived the victim or the abuser as responsible for the abuse. Mixed responses were obtained from the participants with regard to the perception of blame. Although the majority of participants did not perceive violence against women as requisite,

there was the perception that violence is imposed on women if they anger their partners. Thus blame was not attributed solely to the perpetrator.

#### **4.3.3.2.1. Perception of blame by gender**

Frequencies were obtained for perception of blame in relation to participants' gender. Results indicate that 64.7% of the boys and 62.7% of the girls in the sample did not view violence against women as requisite. This suggested that blame was attributed to the abuser. In contradiction to this 57.3% of the boys in the sample and 60.0% of the girls in the sample affirmed that physical altercations occur when women anger their partners, thus suggesting that the blame can partially be attributed to the victim (see Table 16).

**Table 16: Perception of blame by gender**

		Male		Female		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Some women need to be hit	True	36	24.0	34	22.7	70	23.3
	False	97	64.7	94	62.7	191	63.7
	Not sure	17	11.3	22	14.7	39	13.0
Women are hit if they anger men	True	86	57.3	90	60.0	176	58.7
	False	37	24.7	22	14.7	59	19.7
	Not sure	27	18.0	38	25.3	65	21.7

**4.3.3.2.2. Perception of blame by geographic location**

Chi-Square was performed to determine if a significant difference existed between participants' perception of blame and geographic location.

No significant difference was noted for geographic location and participants' belief that certain women required corporal punishment ( $\chi^2 = 7.418$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). A significant difference was noted for the statement indicating that when women's actions anger men, physical altercations may occur. For this statement, 70.7% of the village/farm sample answered in the affirmative ( $\chi^2 = 10.155$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). These results are recorded in Table 17.

**Table 17: Chi-Square for perception of blame and geographic location**

	Location	% answered True	Chi-Square $\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Some women need to be hit	Village/farm	29.3%	7.418	4	.115
	Township	27.3%			
	Town/city	16.7%			
Women are hit if they anger men	Village/farm	70.7%	10.155	4	.038*
	Township	57.6%			
	Town/city	52.4%			

\* significant at  $P < 0.05$

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Data for this study was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Analysis included Frequencies, Chi-Square, T-test, Analysis of Variance and Bonferroni Post Hoc tests. Demographic data was provided before a discussion of results according to participants' awareness, perceptions and attitudes towards domestic violence.

The sample was composed of 150 boys and 150 girls of which 96.7% were between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The majority of the sample (67.3%) was Pedi speaking. Results indicated that 92% of the participants in the sample had exposure to the concept domestic violence although only 37.3% had intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims. Knowledge of domestic violence victims had a significant influence on participants' attitude towards conflict and violence. Violence was not condoned by 84.3% of the sample and men were perceived as holding more violent attributes than women. With regard to perception of blame 63.7% of participants disputed the statement that certain women required corporal punishment, although 58.7% did believe that women are physically assaulted if they anger men. Thus blame was not attributed solely to the perpetrator.

Gender comparisons were conducted for all results but no significant differences were noted. Geographic location appeared to influence responses to statements with significant differences noted by the township sample. The township sample also contained the largest number of participants with intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims.

A brief description of results has been included in this chapter. A more detailed discussion of results and their implications follows in chapter five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the results of the study as they relate to current literature and similar studies. The limitations of the study, conclusions and recommendations based on the results will also be discussed.

#### **5.2. Discussion of Demographic Information**

The demographic information revealed that over 70% of the sample was composed of three African ethnic groups, namely Pedi, Tsonga and Venda. This information should be borne in mind when interpreting the results as it may indicate a prevalence of traditional patriarchal beliefs and lower socio-economic levels, the implications of which were discussed in chapter two. Historically in South Africa levels of poverty and unemployment are higher amongst the African population. Wilson (2004, p.40) quoted statistics for poverty from 1995. According to these statistics, 61% of the African population was classified as poor and only 1% of the White population met this classification. Of the Coloured households, 38% were classified as poor.

According to a Labour Force Survey conducted in 2003, 43% of the African population who were willing and able to work were unable to obtain employment (Wilson, 2004, p.40). Thus factors such as unemployment, poverty and patriarchal beliefs are likely to influence children's home environments and their beliefs regarding domestic violence. The average age of the sample was 11 to 12 years for girls and 13 to 14 years for boys. According to Piaget's theory of development, children at this age are beginning to reason beyond concrete evidence (Mwamwenda, 1995). Furthermore, during adolescence the influence of parents on children's values and moral development is still evident (Mwamwenda, 1995).

### **5.3. Discussion of Findings**

The findings will be discussed according to the themes identified in the previous chapter.

#### **5.3.1. Awareness of Domestic Violence**

The results of this study showed that the majority of children had previous exposure to the concept domestic violence and that most children had exposure to the concept at school. Children spend a large portion of their time at school and as a result most of their daily interactions occur in this

environment. Approximately one third of children in the sample had intimate knowledge of a person who had experienced domestic violence. This is in keeping with statistics that indicate that one in four women in South Africa are abused (Domestic Violence, 2004). More girls than boys responded that they knew someone who had experienced domestic violence and in the majority of cases this individual was not a family member. These results suggested that girls were more likely to discuss emotional issues with people outside their family group. This was supported by the results that children had heard about domestic violence more from friends and other people than from their parents.

Children in the township sample indicated a higher frequency of intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims (46.5%) than in the urban or rural samples. Higher levels of domestic violence in township areas may be related to greater socio-economic stressors and higher levels of aggression in these areas. South Africa's history is fraught with incidents of violence. Between 1984 and 1986 the Black uprising led to the government declaring two states of emergency. Between 1987 and 1991 a power struggle between Inkatha and the ANC took the form of a civil war and thousands of people lost their lives (Liebenberg & Spies, 1993). The majority of the violence during this time occurred in the townships and resulted in a volatile environment. Thus historically townships were perceived as violent areas. Currently, hostility may exist in township areas related to overcrowding, unemployment and

resultant higher levels of crime. Where people are experiencing severe stressors and have poor coping mechanisms, violence may result. Violence is more likely to be directed at women who have historically been perceived as the weaker, inferior gender.

### **5.3.2. Attitudes towards Domestic Violence**

The majority of the participants did not condone violence in any form. Similarly, the majority condoned verbal disputes but not physical confrontations between parents. Variations in these beliefs were noted according to geographic location. Children in the township sample were more likely to condone physical altercations between parents. The township group were also noted to have more intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims. One can assume that a link exists between their increased exposure to domestic violence and greater willingness to condone violence between parents. Frequent exposure to violence is likely to weaken children's restraints against aggression (Baron & Byrne, 2000). A significant difference existed between the attitude score of children in the township compared to the town and rural areas. Normal behaviour is that which is considered functional and adaptive for an individual in a particular social system (Reber & Reber, 2001). As children in the township are more likely to witness domestic violence, this behaviour may become their normality and therefore be condoned.

Approximately two-thirds of children in the sample perceived men to be more violent than women. This is the view generally held by society where it is deemed more acceptable for men to resolve issues through physical means than for women. Society also promotes the idea of men as more physically assertive, for example men engaging in contact sports such as boxing and rugby, and men enlisting in the army. The perception of men as more violent than women is substantiated by studies that prove that males are more likely than females to engage in acts of direct aggression (Baron & Byrne, 2000).

Over half of the sample (57.3%) did not believe that men who hit women are mentally ill. This suggests that men are responsible for their actions. This belief is in contrast to a similar study conducted by Mullender et. al., (2002) where the majority of children believed that men who hit women are mentally ill. Literature on male perpetrators does not support a link between violence against females and mental disorder (Mullender, 1996). A common misconception held by society is that women could easily leave if their partner is violent to them. This belief was expressed by 57.7% of the sample in this study. Unfortunately this belief does not take into account factors such as financial constraints or fear of the abuser's retaliation. Box (1983) states that women are often socialised to be emotionally and economically dependent upon men, which in turn makes it more difficult to leave an abusive relationship.

### **5.3.3. Perceptions of Domestic Violence**

Within the sample 82.7% acknowledged that both sexes have the potential for violence although 67.7% believed that men were more likely to engage in physical confrontations. As children's beliefs are influenced by their experiences (Isom, 1998), these results suggested that children are more likely to view men behaving violently than women. Children in the town sample viewed violence against women in a more negative light. This social belief was historically reinforced in schools where boys would receive corporal punishment but girls would not. Parents who have lived with this belief would have instilled the same belief in their children.

Children did not perceive the abuser as solely responsible for the abuse. Approximately two-thirds (63.7%) of the sample did not believe that women required corporal punishment, although 58.7% felt that women received corporal punishment if they angered men. These results indicated that children tended to perceive the victim as partly responsible for the abuse. The concern raised by these responses is that girls who hold this belief and later find themselves in abusive relationships may be less likely to seek help if they perceive themselves as partly responsible for the abuse. Likewise, boys who accept this view may have a greater tendency towards aggression later in life if they feel that they are not wholly responsible for their behaviour. Over 70%

of the rural sample responded that women received corporal punishment when they angered men. The implication is that in the rural area, women are less likely to seek help if they are victims of abuse as they may partially accept blame or receive little support from outsiders who perceive the victims as partially responsible.

Differences were noted between beliefs held by the township sample when compared to the town/city and rural/farm samples. The township sample was more likely to condone aggression against women. Campbell (1984, p.35) stated that anger may be generated by discrimination and racism associated with a township environment. This anger may find expression through violent acts directed at vulnerable targets, namely women. This belief was supported by Liston who stated that, "Violence is simply a message, a desperate one, that a situation of inequality, frustration and rage exists that badly needs correction." (Campbell, 1984, p.35). The tolerance of violence against women by children in the township may be explained by their higher levels of exposure to such violence. According to Bandura's social learning theory, social learning of violence is influenced by environmental experience. Therefore children living in violent environments are more likely to act violently and to view violence as acceptable behaviour (Isom, 1998).

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This study established that the majority of children included in the study in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province, aged between 11 and 16 years, have had exposure to the concept 'domestic violence' and approximately one-third of these children have intimate knowledge of an individual who has experienced domestic violence. Knowledge of domestic violence victims has a significant influence on children's attitudes towards conflict and violence. Furthermore, geographic location impacted on children's attitudes with a significant difference noted by children living in the township. Children in the township were more likely to have intimate knowledge of domestic violence victims. No significant difference was noted in children's understanding according to gender.

Generally children perceived arguing as acceptable between parents and violence as unacceptable. Both men and women were perceived as capable of violence although the belief most prominent was that men have greater physical attributes and are more likely to engage in physical confrontations. Common misconceptions were noted, including that few constraints exist to prevent women from leaving abusive relationships. Responsibility for the violence was not clearly attributed to the perpetrator as women were believed to be assaulted when they angered men.

School and television appeared to have the largest influence with regards to children's prior exposure to the concept domestic violence.

### **5.5. Limitations of the Study**

The sample for the study was composed from a relatively small area in the Limpopo Province. Therefore, results cannot be generalised to the larger South African population. Children from various socio-economic backgrounds and types of geographic locations were included in this sample. Therefore the sample is representative of children in this region, namely the Capricorn district, and this specific age group, 11 to 15 years.

The research did not investigate a stable and unchanging reality as children are likely to express different opinions in changing contexts and as their knowledge and beliefs develop. For this reason, it is not realistic to expect the same results if the instrument was administered to the same sample on another occasion.

The instrument used in this study obtained answers to closed ended questions and did not allow for discussion between the researcher and participants. As such participants were forced to choose what they considered the most appropriate response at the time and were not afforded the opportunity to

elaborate on responses. Such elaboration may have provided greater insight into children's thinking processes and subsequent understanding of the topic.

A further limitation of this study was that the research was conducted in a school environment where the majority of the sample had heard about domestic violence. No control could be levelled over information children had previously received regarding domestic violence, however it cannot be ruled out that children who had not attended school may have held different beliefs and had different exposure to the topic.

Although a variety of geographic locations were included in the sample, over 70% of the sample were African. It would have been beneficial if the ethnic groups in the area were more equally represented.

## **5.6. Recommendations**

There is a need to raise awareness and dispel myths regarding domestic violence. As indicated by the research, children tend to discuss domestic violence with friends. Programmes aimed at raising awareness of domestic violence would improve the quality of support and information that children could expect from friends. As the majority of children indicated having heard about domestic violence at school, a national, long-term education campaign

appears advisable. This would provide a forum for children to raise issues and discuss beliefs pertaining to domestic violence.

Increasing awareness of domestic violence and providing information regarding organisations that offer support, may assist children who are living in a violent environment and who previously did not perceive the violence as wrong or did not know where to obtain assistance. In this regard there needs to be greater exposure regarding organisations that offer information and support to victims of violence. As results of the study suggest easy access to media, the media should be tasked with disseminating information regarding relevant organisations.

Information regarding domestic violence should not only depict the worse case scenarios as this will alienate children from less severe cases seeking help. Furthermore all professionals likely to be in contact with children exposed to domestic violence should receive mandatory initial and ongoing training to ensure that children are provided with the necessary facts and support. These professionals include education staff, health professionals, police and social workers. Where children have been exposed to domestic violence, age and culturally appropriate counselling should be available.

Domestic violence needs to be exposed and acknowledged as a social problem. All children need to be informed of the facts regarding domestic violence so that children exposed to domestic violence are able to access help and the violent cycle is not perpetuated. Providing children with the important facts will help to dispel the myths surrounding domestic violence and in turn lift the shroud of shame regarding what is often a 'family secret'.

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## Appendix I

### Children's General Understandings and Perceptions of Domestic Violence Facilitator's Copy of Questionnaire

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#### Section A – Biographical Data

Please answer the questions below by marking the answer that applies to you.

- i. Gender: [1] Male [2] Female
- ii. Age : \_\_\_\_\_ in years
- iii. Ethnicity: [1] Pedi [2] Tsonga [3] Venda  
[4] English [5] Afrikaans [6] Other
- iv. I am living in [1] A village [2] A township [3] A town/city

**For the following questions, please underline the response you feel is most appropriate. Only one response is necessary except for question 2 where you may underline all appropriate responses.**

#### Section B

1. Have you ever heard about domestic violence (yes/no)

2. Where have you heard from
  - 1) TV
  - 2) School
  - 3) Magazines
  - 4) Mother
  - 5) Friends
  - 6) Father
  - 7) Other Media
  - 8) Other people
3. Do you know someone who has experienced domestic violence  
(yes/no)
4. If yes, the person is
  - 1) from my family
  - 2) not from my family

### Section C

5. Some arguing between parents is ok (true/false/not sure)
6. Some hitting between parents is ok (true/false/not sure)
7. Men are more violent in families (true/false/not sure)
8. Women are more violent in families (true/false/not sure)
9. Women and men are equally violent (true/false/not sure)
10. Violence is wrong (true/false/not sure)
11. Men don't hit women when they are pregnant (true/false/not sure)
12. Men who hit women are mentally ill (true/false/not sure)
13. Women could easily leave if their partner is violent to them (true/false/not sure)

## Section D

14. Is there a difference between a man being violent to a woman or a woman being violent to a man (yes/no)
15. Men are bigger and stronger (true/false/not sure)
16. Men hit the most (true/false/not sure)
17. It is not right for a man to hit a woman (true/false/not sure)
18. It is not right for a woman to hit a man (true/false/not sure)
19. Women are less violent than men (true/false/not sure)
20. Both men and women can hit (true/false/not sure)

## Appendix II

### Children's General Understandings and Perceptions of Domestic Violence

#### Participant's Copy of Questionnaire

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#### Section A – Biographical Data

Please answer the questions below by marking the answer that applies to you.

- i. Gender: [1] Male [2] Female
- ii. Age : \_\_\_\_\_ in years
- iii. Ethnicity: [1] Pedi [2] Tsonga [3] Venda  
[4] English [5] Afrikaans [6] Other
- iv. I am living in [1] A village [2] A township [3] A town/city

**For the following questions, please underline the response you feel is most appropriate. Only one response is necessary except for question 2 where you may underline all appropriate responses.**

#### Section B

1. [1] yes [2] no

2. [1] TV [2] School [3] Magazines  
 [4] Mother [5] Friends [6] Father  
 [7] Other Media [8] Other people
3. [1] yes [2] no
4. [1] from my family [2] not from my family

**Section C**

5. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
6. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
7. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
8. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
9. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
10. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
11. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
12. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure
13. [1] true [2] false [3] not sure

### Section D

- |     |     |      |     |       |     |          |
|-----|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|----------|
| 14. | [1] | yes  | [2] | no    |     |          |
| 15. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |
| 16. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |
| 17. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |
| 18. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |
| 19. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |
| 20. | [1] | true | [2] | false | [3] | not sure |