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Growing Up with Domestic Violence: The Voices of Resilience

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is not only a problem affecting many women nationally and internationally, it is a phenomenon being negotiated by thousands of children on a daily basis. The aim of this research was to bring voice to the experiences of adult children exposed to domestic violence as children; to privilege their experiences, insights, contradictions and resistances in their stories of resilience as they negotiate lives free from violence. Nine participants volunteered to participate in conversational interviews that were focussed on the effects of living with violence. Interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed and analysed using Riessman’s (1993) method of narrative inquiry. The analysis represents the participants’ stories of resilience, linking past experiences with particular storylines as they reflect on their meaning making in the present. Narratives of change were embedded in understandings of violence as intergenerationally transmitted and maintained through the conspiracy of silence. Through these stories of change, there were common storylines of safe relationships, being heard, changing actions and spaces to reflect from that were critical to positions of resilience. The presence of domestic violence produced tensions in mother and child relationships, and the loss of what a mother should be was profound. Embedded in stories that normalised violence, protected the secret, and ensured silence, were conflicting messages that the participants had to negotiate and overcome. The embodiment of trauma was embedded within the conspiracy of silence and produced relationships of gendered domination and subordination, and the effects were enduring. In a continuous movement between the past and the present, forgetting and remembering the pain and suffering, the participants positioned themselves through stories of victimisation and survival as they continue to encounter the enduring effects, as adults, through positions of resistance. These findings have implications for the necessity to privilege interventions for women and children in our attempts to reduce the effects of violence in our communities.
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