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**STRUGGLING WITH SYSTEMS:  
REFUGE WORKERS ACCOUNTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
SERVICE PROVISION**

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
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**Shelly Hindle**

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## ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is thought to be at epidemic levels in New Zealand and is considered a priority in the health care sector. This research explored the topic of domestic violence service provision from the perspectives of nine Women's Refuge advocates<sup>1</sup>. The data, in the form of interview transcripts, was analysed from a feminist standpoint and Sarbin's conceptualisation of narrative analysis was utilised. Findings from the analysis suggest that there are still many barriers to both providing and accessing service provision for D.V. related issues. The Refuge advocates expressed concerns about other organisations/agencies apparent lack of education/training in D.V., different views of D.V., and negative views of Refuge. They commented on the lack of links between organisations/agencies, the problematic systems of other service providers and the resulting propensity to subject women to structural violence. These outcomes have also been found in other literature, suggesting that despite implementation of various government initiatives, there still appear to be problems within this field of service provision. The advocates also discussed the difficulties they experience within their own jobs and further research is suggested to address this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> The participants views and opinions, and my interpretations of the participants stories, do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **What is D.V.?**

Domestic violence (D.V.) is an increasing problem all over the world and has been described as an epidemic here in New Zealand (NZ) (Stark & Flincraft, 1996, cited in Hand, 2001). D.V. has been recognised by the NZ Ministry of Health as a “significant public health concern” (Hand, 2001, p.1) and is considered a ‘top priority’ to address in the health care sector (Fanslow, 2001). D.V. is a complex issue, and is one that cannot be easily defined, explained or measured. Because violence against women comes in many forms such as psychological, emotional, and economic as well as physical and sexual aggression, and because these forms of abuse are interconnected, no one definition accurately describes what D.V. actually is. What D.V. is and how it impacts on someone is subjective and is different depending on factors such as culture, upbringing, and age. Defining D.V. is like the proverbial ‘pin the tail on the donkey’, as professionals (i.e., psychologists) find it hard to pin down. Although there are definitions and measures for assessing physical violence such as the Conflict Tactics Scale, there are many interpretations and definitions of what psychological or emotional violence is (Semple, 2001). According to research, psychological abuse was found to have a larger negative impact on women than physical abuse (Ellington & Marshall, 1997, cited in Semple 2001) and is also more pervasive, prevalent and insidious (Semple, 2001). Although psychological abuse can and does occur without physical violence, it is an inherent part of physical and sexual abuse because of the tactics of power, control and fear used in this type of violence. It is for this reason that psychological abuse cannot be ignored when addressing the issue of D.V., despite the difficulties in measurement and definition. For the purposes of this research, D.V. will denote any form of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic and/or spiritual abuse, perpetrated by someone that the victim knows. This definition is one upheld by the National Collective of Independent Women’s Refuges (NCIWR) in New Zealand (Hann, 2001). Because the majority of D.V. is committed by men against women (Fanslow, 2001; Jivani, 2000; Matlin, 2004; Balzer,

1995 cited in Semple, 2001) and given that this research investigates a service provider for women, the term 'D.V.' will only refer to violence against women. Violence against men and violence within lesbian relationships are separate issues, which are fundamentally different from the issues this research addresses (Matlin, 2004; Hague & Malos, 1993, cited in Semple, 2001). This research aims to explore Women's Refuge workers' experience of working with abused women, alongside other service providers in the field (e.g. Police, Doctors, Lawyers, Judges). It is a contribution towards a broader programme of research focusing on service provision for women victimised by D.V.

### **Where does D.V stem from?**

*"D.V. cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account"* (Yllo, 1993, cited in Roberts, 1999, p. 34).

D.V. is often considered a pattern of coercive control (Yllo, 1993, cited in Roberts, 1999). It is also considered a gendered issue. According to feminist theory, without the patriarchal structure of our society, violence against women would not have been allowed to reach epidemic proportions. There is much support for the theory that D.V. stems from a patriarchal culture which values and privileges male dominance. This patriarchy, the system of male power and privilege in society, is what supports, legitimates and condones violence against women. Patriarchal structures in society have been traced back to 18th Century British government, Christianity, and the evolution of Western capitalism (Yllo, 1993, cited in Roberts, 1999).

Violence condoning beliefs, values and ideas are widespread among the general population (Roberts, 1999). Organisations and health care providers may directly or indirectly reinforce these values and therefore condone violence to a certain degree. Links have been made between structural violence and D.V. Structural violence in relation to D.V. refers to the practices used by organisations that contribute to the oppression of women. These practices include withholding benefits, labelling women, invasion of privacy by organisations and silencing women (Roberts, 1999).

Structural violence is said to be a result of patriarchal societal values but it also reinforces and perpetuates the values and beliefs underlying D.V.: “Structural violence provides the groundwork for normative justification of (interpersonal) control and violence” (Tifft, 1999 cited in Roberts, 1999, p. 44). Patriarchy is not just about gender. A quote by a Women’s Refuge advocate in Roberts’ (1999) article explains this clearly:

I began to see battering not just as a gender issue, but as a much deeper manifestation of the concept of power and dominance in our culture...a form of dominance and control that permeates the thinking of all human beings subjected to patriarchal environments (p. 43).

### **Who are the victims of D.V.?**

Although women of all cultures are abused, the effects and rates of abuse may vary from culture to culture. New Zealand statistics regarding the prevalence of D.V. are higher (often considerably so) for Maori women in contrast to Pakeha women (Morris, 1997), and Maori women are over-represented in Women’s Refuges (NCIWR, 2001). This hints at the different dynamics and variables involved with D.V. when addressing it in reference to a non-Western culture. Although currently a high percentage of Maori women experience abuse (over 25 percent experience physical abuse and even more have experienced controlling behaviour from their partners), evidence shows that this was not always the case (Morris, 1997). In this respect, the effects of colonisation on Maori culture need to be addressed. It is proposed that the patriarchal structure of Western society in New Zealand stems from British colonisation and law, Christianity (e.g., the influence of the missionary movement and the hierarchically male-dominated faiths of Anglicanism, Catholicism, Presbyterianism, etc), and Western capitalism. These institutions were imposed on Maori culture by colonisers in the 1800’s. Maori women’s loss of status has been attributed directly to the cultural inducement of Christianity on Maori (Mikaere, 1999). Whereas a Maori woman once held a place of respect and in some cases authority in her tribe, she is now also a victim of the oppression inflicted on women from patriarchal power. In Mikaere’s article (1999) on colonisation and the imposition of patriarchy, she writes that the oppression of women in Maori culture stems from a collective cultural memory loss. “The men must be re-educated about what their

responsibilities are” (Monture-Angus, 1995, cited in Mikaere, 1999, p.35). Through alterations of Maori mythology, enforced education based on Western values, conversion of Maori religion to Christianity and the breakdown of large Iwi groups into nuclear families, there was a major redefinition of gender roles in Maori culture. This had, and still has, according to Mikaere, a profound effect on the status of and attitudes toward Maori women today and can be a source of much confusion to today’s Maori women. Mikaere speaks of the contradictions between what she is told about a Maori woman’s role and the practices she witnesses. This highlights the experiences of patriarchy for Maori women are very different from that of Pakeha women. Patriarchy and colonisation are inextricably linked; you cannot address one without acknowledging the other (Mikaere, 1999).

D.V. is found in families of every racial background and every socio-economic level (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998). New Zealand research conducted by Leibrich, Paulin & Ransom (1995) demonstrated no connection between abusive men and level of education, income, employment status, or socio-economic level. According to the NZ Safety Survey (1996) 44 - 53% of women have been victimised through psychological abuse in the past twelve months. In the last year, 15 - 21 % of women have been subject to physical abuse. The lifetime prevalence rate for physical and/or sexual abuse is 15 -35% for women. Leibrich, Paulin and Ransom (1995) report that in New Zealand, 35 % of men have physically abused their partners and 62 % have used psychological abuse. In NZ, a woman is killed every five weeks by her partner or ex-partner (NCIWR, 2001) and 40% of homicides are a result of domestic dispute (Patrick, Foster, & Tapper, 1997). In 2002, 400 women were hospitalised for injuries resulting from D.V. and three percent of women surveyed claimed to be scared that their partners might kill them (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2002). Heise (cited in Roberts, 1999) estimated that 25 to 75 % of all women are battered at least once in their life. This large variance in statistics reflects the difficulties involved with obtaining accurate demographic information about occurrences of D.V., and thus problematically highlight the numerous interpretations of it.

## **The 'Cost' of D.V.**

### *The cost for women*

The effects of D.V. on women are great. Approximately 15 % of women who go through refuge are permanently disabled in some way due to abuse (Chambers & Chambers, 1989, cited in Hand, 2001). Over 400 women are hospitalised each year in NZ as a result of D.V. (Hand, 2001). Emotional and psychological abuse such as social isolation, degradation, and economic deprivation, also have a detrimental effect on women (Roberts, 1999; Semple, 2001). Abused women are reportedly five times more likely to need help from mental health services (Elvidge, 1977). Anxiety, agitation, depression, enraged behaviour and increased drug and alcohol consumption are symptoms of domestic abuse. Disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative, anxiety and eating disorders, and depression, are prevalent in abused women (Kaplan and Saddock, 1998). Femicide and suicide are also factors linked with D.V. (Gondolf, 1998).

### *The cost for children*

In 30 - 60% of families in which D.V. occurs, there are also instances of other forms of abuse. Edleson (1999, cited in Fanslow, 2001) reports a "substantial overlap between the occurrence of child abuse and partner abuse in families" (p.2). According to the Women's Refuge statistics, 90% of children who stay in Refuge safe houses have witnessed their mothers being abused. When a child witnesses violence against a family member, it is considered direct psychological and emotional abuse of that child. Child abuse can have a detrimental result on the child's psychological, emotional, behavioural, social and cognitive development (Fanslow, 2001). Each year, ten children die from D.V. causes.

### *Monetary cost*

The cost of D.V. to NZ government funded services is estimated to be between 1.2 billion and 2.9 billion dollars per year (Snively, 1995). Pilott (1997) estimated that the real cost may be as high as 5.3 billion dollars per annum.

### **Service Provision for Abused Women**

Service providers for abused women include the police, doctors, lawyers, judges, nurses, counsellors, psychologists, and support agencies such as Rape Crisis and Women's Refuge. D.V. is considered a top priority for health care providers in NZ. At present, it is estimated that only ten to eighteen percent of D.V. incidents are reported and responded to by agencies such as the police (Hand, 2001; Morris, Reilly, Berry, & Ransom, 2003). This is suggested to be due to these agencies only being used in extreme cases and because of barriers that exist to service provision. There appears to be a need for better procedures and education for health care and service providers of abused women. According to Fanslow (2001), development of care protocols and procedures and further education on D.V. may increase the likelihood of service providers addressing and adequately supporting victims of abuse. Obviously, how someone understands and perceives D.V. will impact on the service they provide. Although this thesis focuses on the experience of women from one particular service provider (Women's Refuge), the work they do alongside other various organisations influences how they provide their service. Therefore, it is important use information gathered from previous research on various service providers for abused women to gain a better understanding of the field as a whole.

There has been much NZ research conducted on the ways abused women are helped and supported (Dominick, 1995; Elvidge, 1977; Fanslow, 2001; Hand, 2001; Ministry of Health, 2001; Ministry of Social Development, 2002; Morris, Reilly, Berry, & Ransom, 2003; Morris, 1999; Morris, 1997; Roberts, 1999). The Hamilton Abuse Intervention Pilot project (HAIPP), developed in 1992, supports the belief that D.V stems from male power and control that is part of our culture so is therefore a problem for which the community is responsible. It is based on the Duluth Abuse Intervention Project, which is a community intervention programme (Robinson, 1996). HAIPP was developed in response to the inconsistency of service provision for abused women, and the increasing awareness of the prevalence and effects of D.V. in society (Dominick, 1995). The 'Free from Abuse' research (2001) conducted by the Auckland District Health Board found that

this inconsistency, plus lack of co-ordination and poor procedures of service providers was detrimental to some women: "The experiences of women showed that professional services did not consistently operate in a manner beneficial to them. Women experienced the silence, failure to enquire, misjudgement and lack of support by some professionals as abuse" (Hand, 2001, p.165). In Brenda Pilot's (1997) article on 'Preventing Family Violence: The Governments Role and Responsibility', she points out that current research is not, but should be used for the further development and refinement of service delivery for abused women. When Wendy Styles (1997) was asked to develop a training course for support and counselling agencies that work with abused women, she was told, "what was needed was a change in attitudes and a coherent professional response to D.V." (p.145). Styles reports that much of the literature on D.V. is centred around the perpetrator and on the 'underlying reason' for the abuse rather than on strategies to help women. Many of the policy reforms and legislation that have been developed in response to feminist analysis of the social processes underlying abuse have been targeted at men. These include the D.V. Act, harsher penalties for offenders and the development of men against violence groups/programmes. Roberts (1999) writes of the difficulty involved in measuring whether these reforms have improved the quality of life for abused women. Tables that show the decreased number of violent instances per month are used as evidence of a 'successful' intervention plan. He points out that one could alternatively view success as the eradication of D.V. altogether.

In 2002, the Ministry of Social Development published the Te Rito document, outlining a New Zealand family violence prevention strategy. Various government and non-government organisations participated in the development of this strategy, as well as an independent family violence advisory committee for the Minister of Social Services and Employment. The strategy includes a five-year implementation plan with specific areas to action. The objectives of this strategy are: to bring about a change in attitudes through education about D.V.; to provide education about supporting victims of violence; to develop an integrated and co-ordinated response to D.V. by service providers; to prevent D.V. by educating young people and their families and by identifying violence early; to ensure culturally appropriate service and prevention; and to ensure on-going commitment

to the implementation of this violence prevention strategy (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Action plans of relevance to this topic of research include a commitment to collate and support on-going research about D.V prevention, addressing barriers to service provision and service co-ordination/communication, and the improvement of services for women who are victims of abuse.

Dr Mandy Morgan (School of Psychology, Massey University) is currently supervising a programme of research, which focuses on service providers, and their understanding of D.V., and the social processes that underlie this phenomenon. At present, this research has included studies on women's experiences of their partner's attendance at a men-for-non-violence programme; a post-structuralist critique of the science and practice of stopping men's violence to women; a study on police discourses on policing D.V.; general practitioners responses to D.V. and legal discourses on D.V.

### **Specific Service Providers**

#### *Police*

Research conducted on barriers to seeking police assistance for DV (Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003) found that there were three types of barriers that women experience: situational and personal factors; fears and past negative experiences with police; and the women's fears of the repercussions of involving the police. Many of these barriers focused on personal factors relating to the woman herself. However, these personal factors were often related to particular beliefs held by society (and in some cases by individual police officers) about D.V. that contribute to women failing to report abuse. For example, according to the above research, many women felt that unless they had some physical evidence of the abuse, they were not entitled to police assistance, or would not be taken seriously. Therefore, women suffering from emotional abuse were less likely to seek assistance than those who were victims of physical abuse (Wolf et al., 2003). This problem was also reported in the process evaluation of the Domestic Violence Act 1995 (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000) as well as the NZ National Survey of Crime Victims (Morris et al., 2003). Certain beliefs in society, such as not calling the police unless it is a 'serious' matter, precluded some women from reporting abuse, which indicates that D.V is

still not accepted as a serious issue by some people in society. Other women felt they needed to keep the abuse private in order to preserve their family's reputation; D.V. is still considered a 'family' problem rather than a societal one (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000; Morris et al., 2003).

In the NZ Free From Abuse research (Hand, 2001) participants reported both positive and negative feedback in regards to their experience of seeking assistance from the police. According to this research, some women found that the delay in response from police meant that by the time the police arrived at the scene, the perpetrator was either no longer there, or no longer displaying abusive behaviour, and was therefore not charged (unless the woman has physical evidence of the abuse that took place). Other women pointed out that by ringing the police, they may aggravate the abuser, and feared that by the time the police arrived (often hours later) the perpetrator may have hurt her more than if she had not rung the police in the first place (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000; Hand, 2001; Morris et al., 2003). A common complaint by women is the inconsistency in the response they receive from the police, ranging from receiving excellent assistance to being treated unethically (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000; Hand, 2001). In research on police officers views of D.V, it was found that some officers make judgements about whether a woman is 'deserving' of assistance or not, and such judgements are dependent on the likelihood of her leaving the abusive relationship. This reflects the belief that the woman is responsible for ending the abuse, and therefore attributes some blame onto the victim (Morgan, 2003). It is also reported that some police seem to have little education about the dynamics of D.V., although this situation has apparently improved since the D.V. Act 1995 was established (Barwick, Gray, & Macky, 2000; Hand, 2001). As Weisz, Tolman and Bennett (1998) point out, the police are often the first point of contact for women in abusive relationships, and therefore have an obligation to women to provide information they need to access other important services, as well as provide the women with some education on D.V. For example, one woman in the above study commented that she did not consider herself 'abused' until contacting the police on one occasion and being talked to by the officers who responded to her call. Through this interaction, the woman was able to access help from other agencies, and also receive support from other women who

were in similar situations. It is obviously extremely important for police officers to have up to date information and education on D.V. Being unable to access assistance or receiving inadequate assistance from the police was given as one explanation for women staying in or returning to abusive relationships and is said to contribute to the isolation and hopelessness often experience by women being abused (Anderson, Gillig, Sitaker, McCloskey, Malloy, & Grigsby, 2003). This problem is reported to be worse if the woman lives in a rural community, or if her family is known to the police.

#### *Health care providers*

Due to the increased number of visits to inpatient and outpatient medical facilities and emergency departments by women in D.V. relationships, health care settings are deemed important in the identification and assistance of abused women (Hamberger, Guse, Boerger, Minsky, Pape, & Folsom, 2004; Hand, 2001). Unfortunately, it has been found that many women are treated for injuries related to abuse without being questioned about the cause of the injury (Hand, 2001; Ministry of Health, 2002). According to Hamberger et al. (2004), health care providers' reluctance to screen for D.V. stems from a lack of confidence in their ability to help these patients, and a lack of understanding about D.V. issues. Other reported barriers to inquiry include lack of formal protocols, lack of support and time and discomfort in addressing D.V issues (Ministry of Health, 2002). Hamberger et al. (2004), report significant improvements in health care providers self-efficacy and self-ratings after D.V. training in regard to their perceived ability to identify and assist their patients who are in D.V. situations. Other research findings indicate that improved confidence in these areas results in an increase in screening of clients for D.V problems (Short et al, 1997 cited in Hamberger et al, 2004; Sugg & Inui, 1992). Many documents have been published that address the need for education and direction for health care providers in regards to D.V. For example, the New Zealand Health Strategy 2001 emphasised the need for co-ordination between health care providers and advocates for abused women (Ministry of Health, 2001). It encouraged health care providers to develop a strengthened response to D.V. by utilising a multidisciplinary approach involving a number of services, including those who specialise in the advocacy for abused women. It was found that if Health care professionals had received some education on D.V. and had

access to advice and information from advocates, they were more confident in their ability to help patients and therefore more likely to screen for D.V. (Ministry of Health, 2001). However, in other research, the need for a revised definition of 'success' was emphasised, encouraging health care providers to take a closer interest in the needs and opinions of the patient, and take more responsibility, rather than referring patients on to other agencies, or feeling satisfied if the patient has been given shelter at a refuge for a night (Nudelman & Rodriguez, 1999). The Ministry of Health's Family Violence Intervention Guidelines for Healthcare Practitioners was published in 2002. The aim of this document is to guide healthcare services in their response to D.V. using practice protocols (including mandatory screening for D.V.), and thus facilitating training for healthcare providers and public health campaigns. The New Zealand Doctors for Sexual Abuse Care (DSAC) are also promoting routine D.V. screening for women, particularly during pregnancy, which is often a time when abuse begins (Hand, 2001). There is a vast amount of literature (both nationally and internationally) now available to educate and direct health care providers in regard to identifying and addressing D.V. (Fanslow, 2001; Hamberger et. al., 2004; Minnesota Department of Health, 2003; Ministry of Health, 2001).

#### *Lawyers/Judges*

In 1999, the New Zealand Law Commission published a study on women's access to legal services (Morris, 1999). As part of this research, hundreds of women spoke of their experiences of utilising the legal system in regard to D.V. The women highlighted many difficulties they faced regarding the court system and in seeking assistance from lawyers, as well as reported barriers that prevented them accessing information and assistance. A commonly reported problem was women being unsure how to access legal assistance or not knowing exactly what they can be assisted with or where to get this information. Even community groups were reported to be of little help, as their information is limited also, and some women found that these agencies could not give specific information as to how to go about obtaining legal advice or representation (Morris, 1999). Community law centres were praised however, but not all women had access to these due to geographical constraints, or even knew of these agencies. Communication barriers between the women and the legal system were also common, resulting from lawyers using complex language,

printed information being too general for the women's purposes, and women not being able to find answers to basic questions they have about legal proceedings and their legal rights (Morris, 1999). They also felt that their lawyers should take more responsibility for informing them of other agencies that could provide assistance also. According to this research, women often felt misunderstood by lawyers and believed that specific details pertaining to their unique situations were not taken into account. For example, lawyers were said to place minimal importance on issues that the women felt were of great importance such as household possessions, which are not easily obtainable for someone who is financially limited (Morris, 1999). Morris (1997) and Pond (2002, cited in Morgan, 2003) also report lawyer's lack of awareness and understanding of their client's life experiences, as well as the sense of alienation experienced by women in regard to legal proceedings. Research has found that some lawyers and judges do not seem to be able to empathise with women who are abused, and minimise the emotional toll the legal proceedings have on victims. In fact, participants reported that they felt their case was taken less seriously if they showed 'excess' emotion when meeting with their lawyers (Morris, 1999). The lawyers' minimisation of the impact that D.V has on women was also found in Pond's research (particularly in cases of psychological abuse), along with victim blaming and excusing the perpetrator (Morgan, 2003). These issues have been identified in research for many years (e.g., Hart, 1993), but are still a current concern. A lack of understanding also included lawyers' and judges' knowledge of the dynamics of D.V. As a result of this inadequate understanding, some women's safety was reportedly jeopardised due to advice given or procedures undertaken by legal professionals (Morris, 1997; Morris, 1999; Pond, 2002, cited in Morgan, 2003). Women have stated they felt ill-prepared for legal proceedings and some reported feeling isolated and excluded from the proceedings, after not being given the chance to voice their opinions on important matters pertaining to the case (Morris, 1999). Some felt that the lawyers were not acting in their best interests, but rather "playing their own game" (Morris, 1999, p.57). This result has also been found in research cited by Morgan (2003), in which some women stated that they found their lawyers to be money oriented, and "condescending, judgmental and looking down" (Pond, 2002, p.2). Another barrier to service reported by the participants of the NZ Law Commission study (1999) included the cost of legal assistance, particularly if

the women were not entitled to legal aid. Even when they were utilising legal aid, some women felt that their lawyers were not doing as adequate a job as independently paid lawyers. In some situations, this resulted in the woman being disadvantaged when her (ex-) partner could afford to pay for a lawyer, while she had to rely on legal aid, and it appears that some perpetrators will deliberately use lawyers to delay processes, or force women to seek further legal advice of which they cannot afford (Hand, 2001).

Applying for protection orders can be problematic, as some women feel that they will not be believed or taken seriously. Research shows that lawyers do report being wary, to a certain extent, of women exaggerating the abuse or fabricating it to 'punish' their partner (Pond, 2002, cited in Morgan, 2003). This finding validates the women's feeling of unease when applying for protection orders through her lawyers. Research has also indicated that some lawyers believe that protection orders violate fathers' rights. As Morgan (2003) points out, these beliefs held by lawyers, and their women client's awareness of these beliefs, constitutes a significant barrier for women applying for protection orders and perpetuates the acceptance of men's violence against women.

#### *Men's D.V. intervention programmes*

Under the Domestic Violence Act 1995 it is mandatory for any man who is convicted of D.V. to attend an accredited D.V. intervention programme (Domestic Violence Act 1995, s.32). The programme must be accredited by the Ministry of Justice and belong to a national organisation such as the National Network of Stopping Violence, or the New Zealand Violence Prevention Service (personal communication, Manline, 20/01/05). It is difficult to glean an overall understanding of the efficacy of men's programmes for multiple reasons. In Robertson's paper (1999) on men's stopping violence programmes he lists many reasons for the above difficulty, such as having limited access to recidivism rates, conflicting definitions of 'success', differing outcome measures, and the various programmes having diverse theoretical assumptions. In addition, outcome research does not account for attrition rates. From the victim's perspective, it appears that men's programmes are only temporarily effective, and then only moderately so (Morgan, 2001; Robertson, 1999). It is commonly reported that although men's physical violence reduces

after programme attendance, psychological and emotional abuse increases (Furness, 1994; Morgan, 2001). Research on the moral development of men who attend court-ordered programmes found no significant changes after completion of the programme, with the participants' level of moral reasoning continuing to be two standard deviations below the mean (Buttell, 2001). Damian O'Neill (2001) investigated one particular men's group and conducted a discourse analysis on the various discourses of the men in the programme before and after attending the programme when talking about their violence. He found that by the end of the programme, less men were utilising a 'pathological' discourse (i.e., attributing acts of violence to underlying pathology) and more men utilised a 'liberal humanist' discourse (i.e., viewing violence as a personal choice and therefore taking responsibility for making that choice) (Morgan & O'Neill, 2001). However, the efficacy of men's violence intervention programmes is not known due to the various difficulties and complexities in interpretation with the evaluation of such programmes (Robertson, 1999).

*Shelters and Refuges: The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges*

Women's Refuge is often the first port of call for abused women and is a key service provider for women and children (Fanslow, 2001) "Refuges are pivotal in ensuring safety for women" (Hand, 2001, p.139). The National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) was developed in 1981. A constitution was adopted and a national co-ordinator was elected. Twenty-one years later, NCIWR is still strong and 51 refuges belong to this organisation. The four cornerstone stances of NCIWR, which are common to all affiliated refuges, are: non-violence, parallel development, lesbian visibility and feminism. NCIWR has the vision and philosophy of "Women and children in violence free communities, Whanau, Hapu, Iwi living Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Hann, 2001, p.1). Women's Refuge is run as a collective, with a core group consisting of women from four regions in NZ directing their national office on behalf of the independent refuges within their regions. The majority of women who work for refuge are unpaid volunteers. Only one quarter of refuge advocates are paid for their work. Refuge provides many services for women and children. Such services include support advocacy, liaising with other service providers, one-on-one support for daily needs, legal and financial advice, moving house,

medical assistance, emotional support and counselling, educational and support programmes, child care, and transport and community care (NCIWR, 2001). NCIWR is a political movement which seeks to raise societal awareness about D.V., lobby at government level for legislative changes, provide policy to community agencies and the government, deliver training in issues surrounding D.V. and develop relationships and agreements with other agencies (Hann, 2001). In 1999, Women's Refuge helped 6865 women and 9130 children, and nearly 100,000 safe house bed nights were reported. During this time, Refuge advocates assisted over 1200 women applying for protection orders (NCIWR, 2001). A longitudinal study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2000 found that the true cost of services from Women's Refuge was over 17 million dollars. Volunteer work met over 70 % of this cost (NCIWR, 2001).

Before Refuge advocates are asked to join Refuge, training must be undertaken. There is a standardised training package for Women's Refuge and women are often 'trained to train'. Trainee advocates are educated in issues such as D.V., feminism, patriarchy, legal matters, listening skills, children's issues, cultural awareness and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Hann, 2001).

In Hand's 'Free from Abuse' research (2001), the participants were predominantly positive about their experiences with Women's Refuge. They commended Refuge on their vigilance towards safety issues, their knowledge of pertinent information for their clients, and their willingness to spend a great deal of time in helping women despite whether they are willing to leave the abusive relationship or not. Some participants felt uncomfortable living at the safe houses, due to having to share a room with their children, and share the house with other women and children. One woman commented on the lack of follow up from Refuge once she left the safe house<sup>1</sup> (Hand, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup> In my experience it is standard practice for Refuge advocate's not to contact women, but rather wait for the woman to contact Refuge.

### **Barriers to Service**

Many barriers to service for abused women have been reported in research. Although service provision and resources exist to help women in abusive relationships, it is not always easy for women to access this help. Grigsby and Hartman (1997) report numerous barriers to service faced by women and locate these barriers in a model that is comprised of four concentric circles or layers, of which the women in question is in the centre. Each circle represents a layer of which a number of barriers are part. The first layer includes barriers in the environment, such as misinformation given, the abuser himself, money, police assistance, and the criminal justice and mental health system. The second layer includes barriers due to family, socialisation, and role expectations, such as values and beliefs about relationships, abuse and identity, and family of origin values and beliefs. Barriers to service due to the psychological consequences of violence are located in the third layer and include the abused women's defence mechanisms, the physical results of violence, 'brainwashing' of the women, post-traumatic stress disorder and the isolation of the woman. Layer four of this model is comprised of barriers faced by abused women as a result of childhood abuse and neglect. This layer includes early messages about abuse and safety, and psychological consequences of this early abuse such as various psychological disorders. This ecological model takes into account the women's experiences across and between systems and highlights the vast array of difficulties faced by women who are attempting to leave or get help for abusive relationships (Grigsby & Hartman, 1997).

Lutenbacher, Cohen, and Mitzel (2003) also report research on the barriers women face when attempting to seek help for the violence they are experiencing within their relationships. Their research involved speaking with focus groups, which were comprised of women who had been or were currently in abusive relationships. An overriding theme that emerged from these focus groups was the need for more education on D.V. for the public as well as for service providers who work in this area. The women spoke of the silence they experienced from doctors when being treated for injuries visibly resulting from abuse, and of being shut down when disclosing abuse to nurses. Women participating in this research reported experiencing judgmental responses from helping

professionals and a general lack of awareness of the dynamics of D.V. and the implication of seeking help for the woman. The women gave examples of service providers getting tired of trying to help after the woman had missed appointments because it was not safe for her to attend on that occasion. They also felt that they were made to feel somehow to blame for the abuse. One woman recounted telling her pastor of the abuse and being told "if only you were a better wife and mother" (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Mitzel, 2003, p.60), implying she was to blame for the abuse. The women also highlighted the practical barriers to seeking help such as lack of transportation or childcare facilities. The perceived lack of communication and "nonexistent co-ordination among agencies" (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Mitzel, 2003, p.61) was also presented as a barrier to receiving help. Inequities in the court system was spoken of as a deterrent to seeking legal help, as was once again a lack of understanding of the dynamics of D.V. shown by lawyers and judges. The women in the focus groups emphasised the need for the tolerance of D.V. in the community to be reduced. They said that the way to do this was to educate the children in schools about D.V. in an attempt to "break the cycle" (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Mitzel, 2003, p.61).

Other barriers to assistance include structural violence perpetrated by organisations as well as pervasive beliefs and misconceptions held by society about D.V. Styles (1997) writes of how women seem to end up carrying the blame for violence. There is a belief in society that women somehow provoke and/or deserve violence. "It is a pervasive and powerfully oppressive idea, one that a lot of us picked up in childhood and one exploited by male D.V. offenders (Styles, 1997, p.148). Styles found that women were often asked "what were you doing prior to the abuse?" These types of questions focus on the cause of violence as opposed to giving support for the women. In my own experience with abused women, if a woman is offered an explanation for her partner abusing her, she may use this as an excuse for his behaviour and therefore a reason for her to stay with him and/or accept the abuse. Part of Styles' training is to teach service providers how to resist the idea that women are to blame and how to teach abused women not to use these explanations as an excuse for violence.

Another common belief in society is that the abused women should 'just leave'. It is extremely difficult and often impractical for the woman to leave the violent relationship. Many different reasons exist for why a woman stays. A woman may even put herself in greater danger by leaving. Women have a 75 percent greater chance of being killed by their partners *after* they leave than when they are still with him (Kaplan & Sadock, 1998). The implication of suggesting women 'just leave' is that the responsibility for the cessation of violence lies with the women instead of the offender. Assumptions such as these and others that exist in society can make it even more difficult for a woman to get help, especially if these assumptions are held and/or reinforced by service providers who work with abused women.

### **Why this topic?**

As highlighted previously, there appears to be a need for better service provision for abused women. This refers to Women's Refuge as well as other service providers. My interest in the psychology field lies in women's issues, particularly in relation to abuse and trauma. Working as a Refuge advocate, I am interested in conducting research that will benefit this organisation. The aim of this research is to provide information for NCIWR and to make recommendations and suggestions in the hope of facilitating even better service provision and social interventions from refuge workers and NCIWR as a whole. This thesis is also a contribution to the research already conducted on service provision for abused women, including that of Dr Mandy Morgan's programme, and aims to add further to the understanding of pertinent issues within this particular area of health care. This research is an exploration of Refuge advocates' experiences of working with abused women, alongside other service providers in this industry.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

#### **Methodology**

This research involved interviewing nine Women's Refuge advocates about their understanding of domestic violence in the context of working for Women's Refuge, alongside other service providers for women who are abused. A narrative analysis was conducted on the transcriptions of interviews in an attempt to represent participants' experiences of working in this industry. Overall, this research was conducted using methods and procedures commonly applied in qualitative psychological research.

#### *Why a qualitative approach?*

As outlined earlier, there are many difficulties associated with the definition of domestic violence. Given that the effects of violence reach further than just the physical realm, measurement is extremely difficult. The emotional and psychological effects of abuse are not directly observable and thus cannot be viewed objectively because of their complex, subjective nature. Qualitative research methodologies are open to the idea that knowledge can be gained and generated from sources that cannot be measured or quantified (Morgan, 2001). In this sense, it seems practical to employ a qualitative method to the investigation of experiences of service providers who work with abused women.

By using qualitative methods for investigating domestic violence, participants have the freedom of defining domestic violence for themselves. Without the imposed meanings of variables and objects so often found in quantitative psychology, the participant can articulate their ideas in a way that 'fits' for them, leading to a greater understanding on the researcher's behalf. Nevertheless, there are also some limitations to the qualitative approach. According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000), there are certain assumptions made when conducting qualitative research. These include the assumptions that the participant "shares meanings with the researcher; is knowledgeable about his/her experience; can capture it satisfactorily in a single concept [e.g., domestic violence]; and is motivated to tell the truth" (p.11). Due to the interviewer being a Refuge advocate

herself, there is an element of shared understanding between the participants and the researcher, gained through shared experience. Also, the participants may have had a greater level of trust in the researcher because she is a refuge worker, and therefore has the best interests of Refuge in mind, and no 'ulterior motive' or 'hidden agenda' for conducting the research. Another limitation often raised in regards to qualitative research, involves the difficulties of generalising findings from qualitative research (Morgan, 2001). In the case of this research, it is not necessary to generalize findings of the study. The phenomenon investigated should not apply to all service providers, as experiences are subjective and change depending on the specific circumstances of that time and place<sup>2</sup>. The only 'truth' the researcher is looking for, is that of the women being interviewed, from their own points of view. From a qualitative standpoint, this type of 'truth' is the most valid kind (Cheals, Morgan, & Coombes, 2003). The increasing uptake of feminist methods of research has enabled women's experiences to be reported from their own voices, which have previously been silenced. In every conversation, there are certain positions available for the narrator to locate him/herself in. It is also possible for someone to be positioned by another (Davies & Harre, 1990). Taking up certain discursive positions has substantial implications for how the meaning of something is perceived. There are multiple interpretations of any action, linguistic or otherwise, and subject positions or positioning contributes to this multiplicity (Davies & Harre, 1990). It is through post-structuralist approaches that these multiple ways of speaking and interpreting are acknowledged and 'allowed' or 'made valid'. Language is not static, nor is it a reflection of some core reality, it is fluid and changeable, and it is active. It is constructive. Davies and Harre (1990) talk of these positions as being 'spaces' available for people to speak. It is this acknowledgement of the differing positions available within a particular discourse that has allowed the space for women to talk about their experiences.

The aim of this research is not to objectively search for the 'reality' of working for refuge. I do not position myself as the 'knower', a position all too often taken in the positivist

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<sup>2</sup> However, it is not unrealistic to expect that other Refuge workers may have similar views and ideas due to the shared experience of working for Women's Refuge.

method. For me, the women being interviewed are the 'knowers' because they are the experts of their own experience. This idea of the participants being the experts is one taken up by feminist methods of researching (Cheals, Morgan, & Coombes, 2003).

### *What is Narrative?*

In the field of qualitative inquiry, there has been an increasing interest in the narrative method (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative is a broad term; there are many different kinds of narrative inquiry and multiple approaches and perspectives. Narrative approaches to research fall under the paradigm of 'social constructivist' (Mishler, 1999). The social constructivist paradigm adheres to the assumption that the 'self' is dependent on language; in fact, social constructivism has often been called the 'language based' approach. So instead of asking 'what is the self', the question is "how is the self talked about" (Mishler, 1999, p.9). Language plays a constructive role in the formation of the identity or 'the self'. Language creates meaning, so in order to understand the self, language and the structure of language needs to be investigated. We are constantly creating and recreating our selves through language, and constantly making meaning of experiences through language. We are also natural storytellers (Crossley, 2000). A narrative is a way of structuring and ordering experience so it makes sense. It also positions experience in a temporal framework. It is this process of structuring experience through storytelling to make meaning of events that is the focus of narrative analysis (Crossley, 2000).

Narrative has come about after the birth of the idea that is no reality of the individual or of society that is completely independent from language or the culture in which they are represented (Andrews, Sclater, Squire, & Treacher, 2000). Rather, in narrative, they are inextricably connected. It is the representation of society or the individual that contributes to the construction of reality – (i.e., what is real): "The construction of meaning through narratives seems to be a fundamental aspect of both individual and social experience" (Andrews et al., 2000, p.9). Stories shape our lives and give meaning in every aspect of our lives. Stories connect us through time, history, connect us to others, and connect places and events. They advise us on how to live our lives and give us a future vision: "Life narratives are the context for meaning making" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, cited

in Oliver, 1998, p.245). Stories are theories that explain and interpret experience, to ourselves as well as others. They help us understand meaning of experience and also give us reasons for why a person acts as she or he does, as they explain action: "The subject matter of narrative is human action" (Oliver, 1998, p. 247).

Sarbin (1986) points out that narratives are employed in many areas of our lives. We dream and fantasize in stories, rituals and routines in everyday life are organised into stories and we remember things in a storied nature. We make meaning of our own as well as others experiences through stories and also give meaning to non-human actions by embedding them in narrative. Sarbin talks of narrative as being the 'organising principle' for the actions of human beings (Sarbin, 1986).

He gives an example of this by the telling of an experiment conducted by Mischotte (1946/1963). In this experiment, participants observe two rectangles whereby their movement is controlled by the experimenter. The participants, in describing what they had observed, tended to describe these using stories (e.g., "It is as if A's approach frightened B and B ran away.")<sup>3</sup> (Sarbin, 1986).

Time is a very important concept when studying narrative, as it is central to our understanding of the self. We orientate ourselves temporally within narratives because our experiences take place overtime in particular contexts and the stories we tell reflect that (Crossley, 2000).

Husserl (cited in Crossley, 2003) talks of three different types of experience: passive, active and experience of self/life. When we experience things passively, we do not consciously acknowledge the experience but we do give meaning to it through previous experiences and understanding. Husserl explains this using an analogy of a piece of music. When listening to music, we do not acknowledge every individual note, but we do experience each note as a part of the overall piece of music. The note has meaning, but

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<sup>3</sup> In writing of the shapes, I myself initially referred to them in human terms by writing "whose" – a word unusually used for people rather than objects. I found this interesting, as this was the specific behaviour that Sabin was referring to – giving shapes human qualities to enable them to be talked about in a storied nature, thus giving meaning to the shapes movement.

only in relation to the note preceding and following it. Active experience is also linked to past experiences. The present is made meaningful through past experiences, it is not an isolated event, but is connected to a string of events from the past, as well as expectations of the future. We make meaning of experience through narrative, and at the same time, create and express our 'identity'. Narrative is full of value statements, judgments and assumptions that give insight into who we are as a person. As we make meaning of action through story, we build on this idea of identity and refine it within ourselves (Crossley, 2000).

A narrative is a retelling of events in a way that is coherently linked in time (Packer, 1991). Mishler (1986, cited in packer, 1991), points out that interviews are human interactions in social settings. The idea that people naturally 'story-tell' is at the heart of narrative analysis. Through the storylines that tell of sequences of events, we also include our understanding and our interpretation of these events (Sarbin, 1986). Sarbin (1986) goes as far as to say that we "think, perceive, imagine and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (p.8). Stiles (1990) believes that because of the unpredictability of human behaviour, narratives could possibly be the most precise method of reporting psychological research. When conducting this analysis, the concern is not with the validity of the story. Rather, it is how the storyteller *understands* this experience - their place within the story and in the place of others. An underlying theme of narrative psychology is to pay attention to how people live and experience things themselves, and how people interpret events themselves rather than focusing on what *really* happened (Crossley, 2000). This taps into an important aspect in regards to narrative: their constructive powers (Reissman, 1993). When analysing storylines, we get an idea of how people *evaluate* and *construct* themselves in regards to the event that they are telling. Without narrative analysis this aspect may be lost (Reissman, 1993). Many post-structuralist methods have language as their object of study, but many, such as discourse analysis, break down narratives and take instances out of context. Narrative analysis keeps experiences whole. Narratives are structures of meaning making, so they should not be fractured for fear of losing the meaning altogether (Reissman, 1993). People's experiences are subjective and although we cannot have direct access to these experiences

we can have access to representations of these experiences. But these are not objective representations, they are interpretations – they are subjective in themselves. A narrative is not a reflection of reality, but a representation of experience. Riessman makes the point that there is no difference between representation and what *actually* happened because narrative is a part of the construction of reality. Although subjectivity is often considered a flaw in mainstream psychology, the experiences people have are subjective, so narrative analysis is valued because it gets to the source of these subjective experiences (Riessman, 1993).

### *How to do Narrative Analysis*

There are many ways of conducting research that can tap into narratives, such as structured, semi-structured, conversational and free association interviews, as well as autobiographies. Similarly, there are also many methods for analysing the stories we collect: discourse, formal, psychoanalytic, content and feminist analyses to name a few (Andrews et al., 2000). Lieblich et al. (1998) defines narrative research as a study that analyses or uses narrative material in some way. Narrative methods are used in many fields of study such as psychology, sociology, history, linguistics and anthropology, and can be conducted in a number of ways. We can examine narrative by gathering the 'data' ourselves during interview or by analysing pre-existing stories via written, spoken or visual media. Methods of analysis 'borrow' ideas from many differing fields such as sociology, anthropology, and linguistics and incorporate techniques such as those used in literary studies, cultural studies, conversation analysis and discourse analysis (Andrews et al., 2000).

The narrative method is used and applied in a number of ways in research. It has often been used to research minority groups in order to 'give voice' to minority individuals who have not been heard before. Research methods in narrative should be chosen to fit the research topic (Lieblich et al., 1998). Unlike many other forms of research, there is usually no hypothesis being investigated when conducting narrative research. This is because the results are an interpretation of the data collected, and this interpretation can change with further reading and analysis. Lieblich, et al. (1998) writes of three 'voices' that are listened

to when performing narrative analysis: that of the narrator, that of the theoretical framework being used and that of the researcher her/himself in the form of reflexive monitoring – (i.e., a process used by the researcher which employs self awareness in relation to how decisions are made and conclusions are drawn about the data).

According to Mishler (1999), the responses from the interviewees serve a purpose, and the 'social-interpersonal' context of the interview needs to be examined to find this purpose.

Mishler (1999) writes of Paget's (1983) discussion about conducting interviews, and talks of how she creates certain solidarity between herself and the person she is interviewing. Mishler explains that in his experience, when there is a power imbalance, which is more often than not the case in interviews, the narrator may not disclose facts, which are important to the interviewer. For example, the interviewee may feel threatened by this power differentiation and take on a 'protective stance'. Mishler states that by giving the interviewee control of the situation, or at least making the interview a collaborative effort, the interviewer is 'empowering' the person, which may lead to a more authentic interview and more disclosure from the interviewee.

The way the narrative analysis is used depends on the question the research is asking. In finding the narratives in this research, evaluation clauses were identified and the relating information was highlighted. Evaluation clauses are "the soul of the narrative" (Reissman, 1993, p.20) and say how the person wants to be understood. They also state here what the point of the narrative is. At this point the teller is standing back from the narrative. "Evaluation infuses the account with values and meaning" (Atlanucci, 1991 cited in Reissman, 1993, p.20). Data from multiple sources is then organised into an overarching narrative that gives insight into ways of constructing meaning from experience (Oliver, 1998).

### *Why Narrative Analysis*

In working with Refugee advocates, I have noticed that the advocates understanding of domestic violence issues is often expressed through stories (i.e., their own stories as well as those of the clients they work with). I believe that these stories are an integral part of

how Refuge workers come to terms with and organise in some sense, the issues surrounding and underlying domestic violence. I believe that to omit these stories would be to lose a very important aspect of this research. It is through these women's experiences, as told by stories, the answer(s) to the research question will come about.

If meaning is given to life through stories, then we should study human experiences through a methodology that looks at how meaning is constructed about experiences (Oliver, 1998). Narrative analysis is not only a social constructivist method, but is also a holistic one. Instead of breaking down experiences like other social constructivist methods do (e.g., discourse analysis), NA looks at the experience as a whole in how the person expresses this experience and how they make meaning of it through other experiences over time (Crossley, 2000). In empirical interviews, the concern often lies in how to standardize the questions being asked in the interview and how to score each interview the same as the last one. The issue of language context and meaning is not always addressed. Stories are a common occurrence in any interview, but are often ignored or cut out of the coding or analysis. If people are left to answer a question without being interrupted with the next question, they will go on to tell stories (Mishler, 1999). The positivist method of isolating certain events and using them as representative is inappropriate when considering that the *meaning* of this event can only be understood in context of the person's life at the time the event occurred. By conducting narrative analysis on people's experiences, we can keep their story whole, and see how meaning is made of these experiences by connecting each event to other events sequentially.

In telling a story, we are also giving a type of presentation of ourselves. We are showing a part of our own identity, no matter what the topic of the story is about. Stories are "identity claiming" (Mishler, 1986, p.244). As we tell stories, we position ourselves in such a way that tells others what kind of person we are, what our beliefs and values are and how we would like the world to see us. We create a sense of self or identity through the telling of stories, and these stories are located in a temporal setting, and thus identity and time are connected inextricably. By quantifying human phenomena, a method commonly employed in science, and by ignoring the temporal nature of activities and

experience, the identity of a person and the reality of human nature are lost (Crossley, 2000).

Although the sample size of studies that employ a narrative method of investigation are often small, the quality, richness and depth of the data collected is vast. Using a narrative form of enquiry allows a multitude of dimensions to be investigated, such as structure, content, attitudes and beliefs of the narrator and function of narrative to name a few (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Because we use narrative to understand our lives, it makes sense for researchers to use narrative to understand other people's experiences of phenomena (Liblich et al., 1998). Quality of service provision for abused women can be improved by further understanding the experiences of the workers in this field. Experience and meaning are unified through NA, as it taps into the "fullness and uniqueness of human existence" (Oliver, 1998, p. 247)

The interpretation of the narratives is from my subjective experience and perspectives. Although this may seem like a flaw to some psychologists, any interpretation will always be subjective, from a qualitative stance, and this is inevitable because you can never situate yourself outside of social phenomena and suspend your values, beliefs, opinions, and assumptions (i.e., be completely objective) (Morgan, 2001). Quotes accompany the analysis in an attempt to demonstrate how I came to my particular interpretation of each story. The narratives of the Refuge advocates were interpreted in relation to the theoretical underpinnings of this research in an attempt to address the research question proposed.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

For the purposes of this research, eleven women from the Pakeha caucus of the Women's Refuge were interviewed. This number of women is appropriate given the extensive analysis that was conducted over a period of time. An invitation was given to all general refuges asking for volunteers. Participants were from different refuges in different areas

of NZ. By interviewing women from different refuges, the research covered a broader scope of understanding, especially given that different regions have different types of women as clients. For example, in the Auckland region, there are more clients of Pacific Island descent than in the other regions. There are more clients of Maori descent in the North Island regions than in the South Island. This variability in client base may have lead to different understandings of domestic violence and thus I wanted to capture as wide a range of experience as possible.

A research proposal was submitted to the Massey University Ethics Committee before the research began. This proposal outlined the rationale for the research, justified why this research was necessary and gave an overview of how the research was to be conducted, including copies of the information sheet and consent form that were later given to the participants. Subsequently, the Ethics Committee consented their approval for the research to be conducted.

With the agreement and help of Women's Refuge National Office, information sheets about my research were sent to all general refuges in New Zealand. This information sheet invited Refuge advocates to participate in the research, and asked them to contact me if they were interested. Once the advocates contacted me, dates were set for the interviews to be conducted. I then travelled to the advocates' hometowns to conduct the interviews.

### *Interviews*

When conducting the interviews, six of the participants were interviewed in their place of work, four in their own homes and one in the home of an acquaintance of mine who lives in the same city as the participant being interviewed (this is for reasons of privacy<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup>This interview was conducted during a Women's Refuge national gathering in a city that the participant does not live in. Because there was nowhere private at the function venue to complete the interview, I suggested using the home of an acquaintance of mine who lives in the city where the function was held. The participant agreed to this. The acquaintance was not home during the interview but had left a key out for us to use.

Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to two hours. Each participant had viewed the information sheet before making contact with the researcher (Appendix A). They were again asked to read the information sheet at the beginning of the interview, and asked to take specific note of their rights as participants in this study. Participants all read and signed a consent form before commencing of the interview (Appendix B).

A semi-structured interview technique was used in which participants were asked a series of questions but were free to talk about any issues that were relevant to them. There was no set order in which questions were asked apart from the first question, as the participants directed the interview to a certain extent and often brought up the question topics. Interview questions were designed to generate speech from the participants that related to the research focus question. Interview questions are included in Appendix C.

The interviews all ran smoothly except for two that were not used in the analysis due to technical difficulties<sup>5</sup>. Rapport appeared easy to develop, most probably because I was a Refugee advocate and the advocates had seen me at various national gatherings in the past. Although the participants were able to speak freely about their experiences, I was able to direct the conversation by asking participants to elaborate on what they had said, or by encouraging the specific topics by adding my own contributions. At the end of the interviews, each participant was asked if there was anything else they would like to add before finishing in order ensures that the participants felt satisfied with the interviews.

I then transcribed the audiotapes. Repeated and non-meaningful words (i.e., um, ah, etc.) were deleted unless they added to the meaning of the stories being told. This was in aid of making the transcriptions easier to read and understand. Each participant was sent her transcription along with a letter explaining her right to alter or delete anything from the

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<sup>5</sup> One interview did not tape, and while another taped, it had so much interference that most of the interview was indecipherable when it came to transcribing it. The situation was explained to both of the participants who were also offered an opportunity to participate in another interview. They both declined this offer, as it was obvious that it would be difficult for the interviewer to travel to their hometowns again.

transcriptions. No participant made any significant changes to her transcription, apart from editing grammar.

### *Analysis*

The data for this research is the collection of transcribed interviews from refuge advocates. The interview questions were designed to tap into and get a sample of the Participant's subjective experiences and understanding of domestic violence issues, and in turn, answer the research focus question. The data was analysed using a narrative methodology. There is no set way of conducting a narrative analysis, apart from adhering to the underlying theoretical assumptions of this methodology. In narrative analysis, "the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.15). In this research, the interview data was configured into a story that gives meaning to the experiences of Refuge workers in relation to working as service providers for abused women. In conducting the analysis this way, I was able to keep the participants' stories intact. This was important when considering the theoretical assumption of narrative analysis, that meaning of experience is created through stories that link events over time (Sarbin, 1986). By breaking the transcriptions down into themes and looking at the common stories told by the participants, the analysis tells an overarching story which is common of the individual participants' experiences. The stories told through the analysis explains how the participants make meaning of their shared experiences and how they have come to their common understandings (i.e., commonalities highlighted by the analysis). In the following chapters, quotes are used as examples to support the themes being discussed, and to give the reader an understanding of how I conducted the analysis. The quotes used in the analysis were narratives told by the participants and not all of the narratives could be included. The quotes were chosen for their ability to convey a point and it is important to point out here that they are *examples* of narratives the participants told.

During the first stage of the analysis I categorised each person's transcript into common themes that were developed as I went through this process. Some themes were combined

when it was found that they overlapped, for example, the 'myths about Refuge' section contained much of the same data as the 'common assumptions about Refuge'. These were originally separate because the 'myths' section dealt mostly with the stereotypes of refuge whereas the assumptions section was about common beliefs about Refuge and Refuge women. However, there was too much overlap in data for them to remain separate. The end of this phase resulted in four separate sections whereby each contained excerpts from each participant's transcript. These were labelled: 'Other service providers', 'The job – working for Women's Refuge', 'Being a Refuge worker', and 'Myths and misunderstandings about Refuge'.

I then looked at each theme individually while identifying each story and highlighting evaluative statements – (i.e., the point that the narrator was attempting to get across through her story). I also highlighted areas where the narrator is explaining the understanding she has, based on the experience she has told of through the story. When this was completed for each theme, I once again categorised the data I had chosen into more sections. For example, in the 'Other service providers' theme, I brought together all the data that dealt with stories about the need for further education on domestic violence. This meant that there were 'sub-themes' within each of the four overall themes of the analysis.

I began by concentrating on the "Other service providers" section first. After looking at what each story was about, and compiling a list of topics, I found that there were six overall sub-themes. These were: 'Different agencies having different views on Domestic violence', 'Other agencies not having enough training', 'Women being refused help they are entitled to', 'Problems with the systems of other agencies', 'Refuge being viewed as trouble makers and/or not being taken seriously', and 'Not enough links between the different agencies'. When it came time to actually allocate each story into one of these new sub-themes, I found that many of the stories fit into more than one sub-theme. Stories often fit into the first four sub-themes simultaneously. This predicament does make sense when you consider that when agencies are not trained well in DV, they have a different view point than Refuge, and therefore their systems are set up in a way that

allows for Refuge clients to be subjected to structural violence resulting in these women not getting the help they need and service they are entitled to.

I followed the same format for the other three main themes ('Being a Refuge worker', 'The job and myths and misunderstandings'), identifying individual stories and commonalities between participants' stories, and finding themes that tell of a common experience and understanding shared by the participants.

Throughout the interviews, the participants referred not only to their own experience of working as advocates, but also to issues pertinent to the Women's Refuge. Because these issues were focused on the organisation rather than the participants' experience of the work that they do, I decided to leave these narratives out of the thesis, as they were not directly related to the thesis questions themselves. Additionally, as some of these topics were of a confidential nature, it would have been unethical for them to be included in a thesis that is publicly available to be read.

The analysis of data collected is included in the following five chapters titled: Participant 'Herstory'; Other Service Providers; Myths and Misunderstandings; Doing the Job; and Being a Refuge Worker

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PARTICIPANT 'HERSTORY'**

The following section details accounts of how the participants of this research became involved in Women's Refuge, and their initial impressions. I decided to write this section using direct quotes from the participants themselves. I feel that by writing the introduction of the participants in this form I have kept in line with the narrative approach used in this thesis. By keeping the women's stories whole, I believe that I have honoured their experience more so than if I wrote about it in my own words.

#### **Nicole**

"I've been there [at Refuge] for just over two and a half years...I worked full time as a volunteer first before I got offered a paid position. At first I found it really challenging because it was for me - and the type of person that I am - hard not to take work home, and to be able to detach and leave that stuff there, but I can do that now obviously. I started at refuge because of [name]. She was doing her [education] and was a volunteer at refuge, and she was never home - I never saw her as soon as she started volunteering for the Refuge. And I said to her "why are you never home, you're always going away...you've never got time for yourself, why? What are you doing?" And she said, "well, why don't you come along to a collective meeting...come and find out for yourself". So I did, and then was a full time volunteer for the year, and then got a paid position and that's how I got here. Once I started I couldn't stop (laughs)."

#### **Mavis**

"Yeah I was probably a little naïve when I came in and I don't really know how I got involved with it but I do know that I was married...and there was marriage problems and I remember getting really desperate this day and thinking who the bloody hell can I talk to so I rang here, but I refused to come down. There was no way I was going anywhere near refuge [because it was] embarrassing. So we arranged to meet in town separately. And anyway...I got the support that I needed and it was neat to talk to someone and you

weren't going to be judged by it. Like my family had been really supported but were getting to the stage where "oh god, here we go again" you know? So it was sort of around that time and I thought, "I quite like that work, there must be so many women out there that could be helped". But I certainly was totally unaware of how bad it is out there. Because I believed that an abusive relationship was physical. And when I was shown the power and control wheel, it just threw me, absolutely threw me and I find that with a lot of women."

### **Anna**

"I'm not from New Zealand, so it's been a highly interesting journey for me to be at Women's Refuge. I started off as a volunteer and now I'm a staff worker. But I didn't know too much about what happened in the New Zealand context, I've worked in another country in a similar field...I've got brothers and I was the younger sister so (laughs) I was always standing up for girls to be heard from early days kind of thing. ...So I think all along I've had women's interests at heart...I think it was probably just part of who I am, part of the plan for my life was to be someone who encourages women to just be able to do what they can do and not to be limited in any way by things. So then of course I was blessed with a little boy (laughs) just to keep things in balance."

### **Petra**

Actually I got into it [Refuge] because my [relative] had done the training and she was saying things like she was going out to 'pick up' – she could pick up a women at any time - and I thought "hmmm that's doesn't sound very safe", so I thought that I better go and do the training and find out. And once I got started at training I just thought "wow", and something just clicked inside of me...I think it started when I was thirteen - when I recognised the inequities between men and women ...because my step father had said something to my mother and I thought "well, who the hell do you think you are?" And, then it just clicked inside of me and I just kept watching a listening for that sort of thing and it was happening all the time. Now it actually is a part of me. I was doing the training at the same time [as having a relative in a D.V situation] and it was really difficult but I keep going and then I realised that I'm here for all the women, but I'm also there for the

future women, for my granddaughter, to get as much education so that she doesn't [end up in] bad relationships. You know, violent relationships..."

### **Aulbry**

"I started off when I was doing my certificate in social work and I thought I would, just for experience more than anything, do the training. From the training came the part time work that I started doing after I finished my studies up there. So basically I've been here [number of years]. I haven't come from - and I think I'm the only one at the moment up at the refuge - from an abusive relationship. I am the only one and I thought initially I would have concerns. I was really aware of that, that I might not understand where these women are coming from, because I haven't walked down that track. And I was wondering how effective I would be, but as I got into it I felt I had a real empathy for the women."

### **Janet**

"I guess my interest in Refuge came more from supporting women than it did from challenging domestic violence, like that was my in, it was more about working with women...I was a student and I did a [qualification] and approached Refuge and [other agency] about doing my placement. I was then offered a paid position at Refuge doing the office admin, and so I worked parallel with [agency] and Refuge...I'm not sure if I had much of an idea about [what refuge would be like] actually. It was women's centred, that was the thing that attracted me to Refuge. I know when I came along to the training it was women working for women, there were no men involved in it and the cornerstones really attracted me - that way of challenging oppression really attracted me. But my knowledge of Refuge was limited, I'd been in Refuges in when I was younger, and I have to say that wasn't the most pleasant experience. So yeah it was pretty limited, it really was, like I didn't know anything about the philosophy of refuge, how [they] worked collectively or any of that stuff so I learnt a lot and was attracted to that...And I knew the first time I went down to Refuge...I had a déjà vu, like I'd been there. That's when I really knew that this is where I was meant to be for now."

**Maxine**

“Growing up I’ve had a lot of personal experiences with domestic violence in terms of family members who have been abused...so I have a lot of experience there and I’ve always known that I wanted to help other women...I always wanted to work in social services, always, but never knew exactly what, and I suppose I was finding exactly what it was that I wanted to do when I joined refuge...I had an opportunity to do the training and so I did. And then I had the time and I knew that refuge needed someone in the office so I came in...but my passion is with children and always will be. And I’m really hot on the tail of women that I can educate and I can inform, to empower women, to give them the choices that they need in order to keep themselves safe and their children safe.”

**Lesley**

“Well I really had no idea what Refuge was about...I was actually doing a women’s paper at [educational institution] and we were debating women’s rights and things like that and the tutor said to me “look you – I think that you’d be a really good volunteer for Refuge” and I went “what’s a refuge” - not knowing what even a refuge was. And she sent me along to a meeting and that’s how I got involved. But all the women at this meeting I really liked and I made connections with these women and I enjoy being around women and that’s how I got involved - and then I didn’t know what I was getting involved in really! (laughs) And it was *way* outside my realm of reality because I didn’t know anybody [who was in a D.V. situation] because back then it was far more guarded secret. I couldn’t say now looking back that I knew one person who was being abused you know, even now - there might have been verbal abuse but I can’t think of anybody who was physically abused...so it was really foreign...When I went along to that first meeting I had no idea what I was getting myself into...”

**Barbara**

“I came and did a year as a voluntary worker and I worked forty hours a week voluntary for my first year and it just so happened that I left a job and I didn’t have another one to go to so I spent a year [volunteering]. And then I was asked if I would take on the role of [job title]...I always had a feeling that everybody ought to give something back to their

community...And I was actually working [in another job] and Women's Refuge staff were constantly ringing me and saying could I [help them with certain things]. So I had a dialogue with them quite often over what was needed for the women and then I left that job and I didn't know what I wanted to do and I found myself at a loose end really, and they said to me "you should come and work for us", and I said "oh well, I'll come and see if I can be of any help. And I just got hooked into it that way really...I think all women should be made to do the Refuge training, you learn so much, and it has helped me so much...so yeah, it's a very worthwhile experience to have had."

### **My 'Herstory'**

Near the completion of this thesis it was suggested to me by my supervisors that I include my own personal 'herstory' of my experience of conducting this research, to complement the participant's 'herstories' about their experience of working at Refuge. Following is my narrative of this thesis.

When my supervisor suggested this thesis topic to me, I felt that it was an ideal topic considering my interest in the area as well as my experience as an advocate for Women's Refuge. Throughout this journey I have had many up's and downs, have felt inspired and passionate about the topic, but also frustrated and discouraged. When conducting the literature review I felt an incredible sadness about the difficulties faced by women accessing service for D.V. issues. I also recognised the problems reported in the literature, as they were problems that I myself faced on a daily bases in providing service for abused women.

Conducting the interviews was by far the most enjoyable aspect of the research. The participants were so welcoming and willing to help and shared so much of themselves with me. Being a Refuge worker myself helped tremendously as I had an understanding of what the participants were talking about, could relate to their stories and supplemented the interviews with narratives of my own. I do not think that the analysis could have been written as it has without having this shared experience of being a Refuge worker.

In transcribing the interviews I was struck by how amazing these women are – the things they said were reflexive and insightful – and I found that I gained much from reflecting on their narratives in the context of thinking about my own experience. There is much resonance between their stories and mine and for that reason the narratives held in this thesis are extremely special to me.

The results of the analysis are both exciting and discouraging at the same time. They are exciting as they will hopefully open doors for further research to be conducted in this area, but are also discouraging as they mirror results found in previous studies – some dating back decades – when and how will these problems be resolved?

I feel privileged to have been able to conduct research on a topic I am so interested in. I feel honoured that I was allowed entry into the participant's lives and was touched by each and every one of them. Overall, I feel positive about this thesis and hope that it has contributed in some way to the improvement of service provision for women in abusive relationships.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS

The most common themes emerging from the narratives of the women's accounts concerned the women's experiences of working alongside other providers of domestic violence intervention services. The women spoke of various other agencies and institutions including the police, lawyers, judges, doctors, and Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). Stories of these other service providers were organised around six themes: Education and training; other service provider's views of domestic violence, victimised women and perpetrators; links between service providers; social systems supporting violence against women; other service providers' views of Refuge and Refuge workers; and structural violence that re-abuses women clients.

#### EDUCATION/TRAINING

During the interview process, Refuge workers talked about other service providers having a poor understanding about D.V. issues. They attributed this to a lack of/or inadequate education and training in D.V. They said that this impacted negatively on clients using the services and also perpetuated common misconceptions around D.V.

*Yeah there's still a lot of learning out there for the other organisations to do, I don't really think they understand the full understanding of family violence...I still have a real problem because I don't believe that those organisations are trained properly to deal with battered women and children. (Mavis)*

*I do think that they have a smattering of training but they don't actually have a good analysis of what's happening. (Barbara)*

This lack of education about D.V. has also been acknowledged in literature, and various training programmes have been implemented that target this problem. In Fanslow's

(2001) report on health care providers' response to D.V., the link between education on D.V. and improved service provision was made. A lack of training on D.V. for police officers has been documented along with the negative impact this has on abused women (Hand, 2001; Barwick et al., 2000). The 2002 Te Rito document presents a strategy to be implemented over a five-year period, which includes educating service providers in D.V. issues (Ministry of Social Development, 2002).

- *Lack of Education about D.V from victim's point of view*

A common problem identified by the advocates was other service providers' lack of understanding of D.V. from the victim's point of view. Refuge advocates said that other service providers do not know what it is like for the victim, and have no understanding of how difficult it can be coming out of an abusive relationship. This lack of understanding often leads to the common question "why doesn't she just leave?" when referring to women who are in abusive relationships.

*Yeah there's still a lot of learning out there for the other organisations to do, I don't really think they understand the full understanding of family violence. They still have this thing of "oh gosh this woman's been in this relationship for ten years and she's still there" you know there's still that stigma. (Mavis)*

*...because we have an understanding of D.V and accept that 'okay the time's not right' [for her to leave], maybe the time will never be right and she will come out in a box... because they haven't had the training at the hospital it is hard for them to understand. (Aulbry)*

*...And I had it told to me from the senior Sergeant in [location] that he gave women three chances, if they don't get out the third time he wasn't going back. (Maxine)*

It is taught during Refuge training that a woman takes seven attempts, on average, before she will leave an abusive relationship permanently. There are many reasons for why she

stays in this relationship, that relate to emotional as well as practical aspects, one being that it is often safer for her to stay than it is for her to leave (Kaplan and Saddock, 1998). There are also many barriers that prevent women from leaving abusive relationships (Anderson et al, 2003). By asking this question – ‘why doesn’t she just leave?’, the responsibility for ending the abuse is placed upon the woman herself instead of the perpetrator of the abuse (Anderson et al, 2003).<sup>6</sup>

*...like they'll ask "why doesn't she leave" instead of "why doesn't he stop hitting her", that sort of belief, that basic belief, that's still around. (Janet)*

Refuge workers spoke of the Privacy Act, saying that this was sometimes a negative thing when working with abused women. When other agencies will not give information because privacy laws bind them, it can be difficult for advocates to help the women. Although privacy agreements may be broken when a women’s safety is jeopardised, not all agencies understand the safety issues involved with D.V cases. Once again this, according to advocates, is due to a lack of education and training in D.V.

*...the safety of women is paramount, it overrides the Privacy act. Cause they'll say "oh I cant give you information cause of the privacy act"...we've listed a whole lot of things what that might be, you know...we would be concerned about their safety if this was happening, that was happening, that was happening – given them a list really. Cause they will say "Oh no, she was safe" you know "we didn't think there was a safety issue". So spelling out some things around safety issues. (Lesley)*

A related topic raised by the advocates was other service providers’ perception of psychological and emotional abuse. Although it appears from the interviews that other organisations/agencies may be starting to understand the seriousness of physically abusive relationships, they do not seem to be aware of the implications of psychological and emotional abuse for the person suffering from them. Not only is this an issue relating to a lack of education around D.V. , it is also related to other service providers having a different analysis of D.V. than Refuge workers do, and will be addressed in the following section.

- *Don't understand how Refuge runs*

Refuge workers made mention of how other service providers do not seem to have a very good understanding of how Refuge runs. They believe that this also has to do with the lack of training given to other agencies/institutions, and creates difficulties and misunderstandings at times between agencies.

*...A women volunteer was to admit a woman and the police were bringing her in and she waited five hours at the Refuge and then she rang the police station and they said "Oh well no we've arrested him now" but they didn't bother to ring back. And like so I wrote a letter of complaint and they said "oh we thought you had staff there twenty-four hours" thought she'd just be in sitting in the office. (Lesley)*

*...So their training's really slack in terms of they don't know how we operate in Refuge...Over the years my experience has been that they'll say things like "oh yeah we've got this woman we want you to pick her up" and I'll say "can I speak to the woman?" and they'll say "don't you provide safety – isn't that what you're there for!" and I go "yes we do provide safety, Refuge is about safety for women and children" you know, blah blah blah "but, it is also our protocol to speak to the woman first. As you have your protocol, so I want to speak to the woman." (Lesley)*

The advocates felt that there is a definite need for other service providers to be educated on the above issues. For example, training should be given to agencies/organisations about the safety risk involved in women leaving violent relationships. Ideally, Women's Refuge trainers who have a sound analysis around domestic violence would conduct this training. The advocates also felt that all agencies providing services for abused women should be informed of each other's protocols so that they can work together more successfully. This point was spoken about at length by participants, and is elaborated in a further section of this chapter.

- *Don't have training for intervention*

Another concern relating to the perceived lack of training and education of other service providers is that in the advocate's opinions, other organisations lack the expertise to work successfully with women from abusive relationships. Once again, this is detrimental for the women and creates difficulties for Refuge workers if the woman has been to other agencies before coming to Refuge. Other organisations commonly refer women to Refuge because they themselves do not know how to help women. However, the advocates did not think that this in itself was wrong as they felt that currently, Refuge is the best place for abused women to receive assistance, and all participants had experiences of women receiving inadequate and even dangerous assistance from other organisations. But Refuge advocates did feel that if the other organisations were properly trained, Refuge would not get as many referrals as they do now from agencies who aim to provide assistance for abused women but do not follow through.

*I still have a real problem because I don't believe that those organisations are trained properly to deal with battered women and children. They're there more as a talking tool and they ring us to find out what the next step is. So it's just the training for them, I don't believe that they have the proper training. (Mavis)*

*So yeah, sometimes there are a few things like you know, the police will say "oh we are going to do this" and we'll say "no, you are not aware of things like we are aware, you are going to make that a very difficult and potentially dangerous situation for her". (Anna)*

The finding that women can be put in potentially dangerous situations due to service provider's interventions has been documented. For example, in some studies, lawyers and judges have been found to make certain decisions that jeopardise their client's safety as a

result of their inadequate analysis of D.V. (Morris, 1997; Morris, 1999; Pond, 2002, cited in Morgan, 2003).

Refuge workers felt that the lack of education and training given to other service providers about D.V. results in these service providers having quite different views about D.V., which can create or reinforce barriers to services for women seeking help, as well as make advocates work difficult and frustrating at times.

### **Different view of domestic violence**

Throughout the interviews, the advocates related stories of the difficulties they faced in sharing clients with other service providers whose views of domestic violence were different from their own, and how their job was often made difficult due to having to work with people who did not share the same view of domestic violence as they did. For example, all advocates talked about the distinction between physical violence and psychological and emotional abuse as one of the areas where other service providers do not share the same view as Refuge workers. Refuge workers understand that psychological and emotional violence has long-term detrimental effects for abused women. Other service providers do not necessarily consider psychological and emotional abuse serious, or even abuse at all. If there is no physical abuse within the relationship, others may not understand why the woman would stay. But in the advocate's experience with working with women in this type of relationship, it is not simply a matter of leaving: leaving is itself a very difficult process. The Refuge workers explained that this lack of understanding was damaging for the women concerned, in terms of them not being able to get protection orders, and being made to feel as if they are exaggerating the impact of the psychological abuse.

*I've found that a woman who has been psychologically abused cannot get a protection order without notice and I think that is so wrong because you know, if he knows that this protection order's gonna be out on him, well he can talk her around. I think that's wrong.*  
(Petra)

*...with the domestic violence act in 1995, it changed so that it would cover emotional, psychological, verbal, sexual, physical abuse, yet it is so hard for our women to get protection orders at the moment, and has been for some time. And what's the point anyway? I mean, when women go in with – when we take a woman to the lawyers to get a protection order for emotional, psychological abuse instead of physical, it's a struggle because they don't understand...*

*...I do think that a lot of the other organisations have a different analysis of domestic violence, so working with them is tricky in regards to they see it as if a woman's been – well from my perception, if they've been beaten black and blue then sure that's domestic violence, not the fact that they have had to leave their home because they've been psychologically and emotionally tormented for fifteen years. Or they're locked in their home with no control of anything, you know. (Nicole).*

Sometimes other service providers see the reality of abuse in physical injury but do not seem to understand tactics of control that men use to isolate women or deprive them of resources. In particular, the participants reported that other service providers did not understand the ways in which abused women's choices were limited by the control tactics of their partners.

*...he has her cash flow card in his wallet and she can't access the money anyway...And they just think – they come back to the whole “well why did you stay there then”, or “it's your money, you have a right to it”, yeah, that's easier said than done...(Nicole)*

*But its like when you're told every single day that you're nothing but a fat worthless ugly slut and you are a useless mother, well I'm sorry but that is abuse, regardless of what you think, it is abuse. (Nicole)*

Refuge workers, on the other hand, were well aware that leaving a violent relationship, or challenging a violent partner's controlling behaviour, are difficult and dangerous processes. This is a problem that has been identified for many years and is addressed in the Domestic Violence Act 1995. However, according to research this is still an issue. In Pond's (2002) research on lawyers, it was found that lawyers still minimise the impact of psychological abuse (Morgan, 2003), and other research reports that women are less likely to seek assistance if they do not have physical evidence of the abuse (Wolf et al., 2003; Barwick et al., 2000; Morris et al., 2003).

Other service providers may have a different view of Women's Refuge itself, and the way it is run. Because other agencies have a different view of D.V., they do not understand why Refuges run as they do. This also ties in with how Refuges are viewed by other organisations in general.

*But I mean, when you talk, when you hear them talk at the network meetings you know that their analysis is different. One of the unaffiliated Refuges - she's always throwing out things like "oh we don't keep our women prisoner" you know and I say "well, neither do we", "Oh but you have a - you have a curfew" I said "yes but they're not locked out if they didn't get back by then but it's a curfew for their safety". But they're always, you know saying things like that and this particular Refuge allows male visitors - well I mean, it's hardly a Refuge. (Lesley)*

It is a policy of Refuge that men are not permitted in the safe houses. This is because it is believed that the women who are living there who have mostly come from relationships where they were abused by men may feel unsafe with other men around at that time and place. Lesley can see the difference between her view and the other woman's view of domestic violence, by the comments that the other woman makes.

The Refuge workers felt that because the other service providers do not have adequate education and training around D.V. and therefore have often very different views on the issue, they do not always attempt to make connections with Women's Refuge or liaise with them at times when it would be appropriate to do so. If other service providers are unable to identify the need for women to receive assistance from Refuge, or are not aware of what services Refuge provides, it is their women clients who are disadvantaged.

### **No links between services**

The Refuge workers identified that there is a lack of links and communication between different agencies that provide assistance for women who have been abused. They believe that this causes complications for the women using the services as well as difficulties for Refuge workers.

*It's a vicious cycle. That whole part of it, there's a big hole there [between agencies] and it all needs sorting out. (Mavis)*

*And its about the inter-agency thing, that there's not enough links in between for them to identify that "hey wait a second, this woman's in Refuge" and put two and two together...(Nicole)*

Because of this lack of information sharing, Refuge workers find that the clients have to go through the story of their abuse many times. It is often a traumatic time for women when they come into Refuge, and this is made worse by the procedures that need to be followed when seeking assistance from other organisations. One of these procedures involves the women having to say why they are in need of assistance again and again.

*...I mean its horrible having to repeat it, having to repeat your story over and over again to every single different place you have to go to.(Nicole)*

*I find it difficult if a woman has to go through too many times and tell her story...and think "boy I wouldn't like to be having to tell the story over and over again" and I think at times with so many agencies that can be the case. (Anna)*

It is the advocates' belief that Refuge clients should only have to tell their story of abuse once, so that they do not have to relive the trauma over again. Ideally, when a woman comes into Refuge, she should be entitled to assistance from other agencies without having to tell her story to any one else except Refuge.

Refuge advocates talked about seeing the benefits of different organisations working together, sharing information and training together. They said that by doing this, they gain a more thorough understanding of how each organisation/agency works, enabling them to pass this information on and give a better quality of service to women. It also helps Refuge workers get an idea of the different viewpoints held by each organisation/agency in regards to D.V. This in turn helps advocates decide where the best places are to send clients, while also highlighting specific training needs, and giving opportunity to offer training in D.V. to these agencies.

*...we often have times when we will get together with other agencies and just sit on a very informal basis, like just having a coffee and just talking about what they do, what we do, introducing new staff to each other and things like that. And so I think that's positive you know. (Anna)*

*Information sharing on what function we have in the community I think is really positive, because it helps us to give a better service to the women who come to access our service. You know, "what can I do if I need this, what can I do if I need that" and if we know what the other agencies are offering, what they are about, at least we've got a better understanding and can also give a better service. (Anna)*

*...She is doing a study through the hospital at the moment on family violence and there's all sorts of organisations involved in it and they're going to have meetings once a month and you can voice your concerns and everything, that will be awesome, cause that's what we need. (Mavis)*

An example of a Ministry of Health initiative to increase communication between service providers for abused women was published in the New Zealand Health Care Strategy 2001 (New Zealand Health Strategy DHB Toolkit. Interpersonal Violence. To reduce violence in interpersonal relationships, families, schools, and communities). Healthcare professionals were encouraged to liaise with advocates of abused women, and/or appoint a

D.V. liaison person within their work setting, who would be a source of information for the staff. However, despite initiatives from the Ministry of Health, Refuge workers still notice a lack of links and communication between agencies, and find this problematic from their own experience as well as a barrier to clients receiving the best possible assistance.

## **The System**

When talking about working with other service providers who work with the same women, the Refuge workers discussed what they perceived as problems within the systems of various organisations/institutions. When speaking about systems, the advocates were referring to the policies, procedures and processes that are used by these service providers. Refuge workers found that many of these systems do not work in favour of women who are seeking assistance for D.V. related issues. This theme is strongly related to the theme of structural violence – practices used by organisations that contribute to the oppression of women – but focuses on the actual systems themselves, rather than the effects of certain processes within systems. The advocates talked about four particular systems: the legal and justice systems, the health care system, and the welfare system. When talking about these systems the advocates referred to lawyers and judges when talking about the justice system, and the police in regards to the legal system. The health care system included doctors and hospitals, and they referred to WINZ when speaking of the welfare system.

- ***The Justice System***

In many of the stories the advocates told, the justice system was portrayed as being inadequate. The main concern in respect to the justice system was the perceived lack of accountability for abusers. Refuge workers felt that procedures needed to be put in place to ensure that offenders *are* accountable for their actions.

*...and I actually don't see the system that's actually set up for men to pay monetary apart from child support for the damage and the destruction that they've actually created through their own stuff, through their own cycle that they've brought this woman into and the children from this family... (Maxine)*

Where accountability procedures are already in place, advocates believed they were not being adequately used or enforced by the service providers. For example, when a protection order has been granted the court must direct the man to attend a men's violence

programme (Domestic Violence Act 1995, section 32). Under section 42 (4) of the Domestic Violence Act 1995, it states that if the man is non-compliant with the above direction from the court he may be punished with imprisonment. However, the Refuge workers said that they do not often see any punishment for men who choose not to attend the programmes. They said that the programme coordinators do not always report absenteeism to the courts, and when they do, there is little follow up from the courts.

*...if men don't turn up to the programme...you know, like, there's not much accountability with the court at the moment, but we're saying that they need to take responsibility to follow that up, to make sure they do get back in the court system. They need to be accountable. (Lesley)*

Current literature supports the advocate's observations. In a process review of the Domestic Violence Act it was found that only 20% of men who were reported to the courts for failure to attend mandatory programmes were sentenced (Barwick, Gray and Macky, 2000).

One participant spoke of the difficulties in supporting women when systems are set up in a way that makes it hard to do this. For instance, there is often no opportunity for women or their advocates to speak in court, due to legal processes, or other barriers such as feelings of intimidation or confusion around legal procedures. This results in women victims of D.V. feeling unheard and misunderstood and Refuge workers feeling frustrated with the system.

*... it was really terrible I was in court the other day supporting a woman and the judge was talking and his lawyer was talking ...and he was saying "yeah well she didn't need a protection order because...he pushed the door open and then she fell over" but you know he knew – they all knew that [the perpetrator] knew that she was behind the door, and [the lawyer was] saying "but he was upset", and I really felt like saying "and you think that's okay?" I was really angry. I didn't say it because I was a big chicken and also*

*because I would never be able to support another woman in court again, but (laughs) I just really felt – it just really got at me, I had to really be very professional about it.*  
(Petra)

There is the tacit understanding that people must act 'professionally' in situations such as court hearings. According to the advocates, Women's Refuge is not seen as a 'professional' organisation, therefore advocates feel as though they are not entitled to their say in certain matters such as legal proceedings.

The intimidation and frustration felt by women utilising the justice system has been reported in literature (Hart, 1993; Morris, 1999; Pond, 2003 cited in Morgan, 2003) however, it appears that this experience relates to service providers such as Women's Refuge also.

- *The legal system*

Although it is a police family violence policy that all D.V. incidents must be recorded in a pol 400 (reporting form) and entered into the national database, Refuge workers do not in their experience find that this occurs as often as it should. Some are not aware of the existence of this database, as they have not had an experience of it being used or spoken about by the police officers they work alongside. The result of this inadequacy of the reporting of D.V. incidents is that cumulative damage caused by abusers is not taken into account if they are eventually charged with a D.V. offence.

This means that there is often no acknowledgement of 'serial' abusers unless the offenders are actually charged *and* convicted every time. The police may attend a domestic incident five times, but if policy is not adhered to and the incident is not recorded in a pol 400 there is no record of any of these events. Advocates believe there should be some accountability for re-offenders, no matter how minor the offence, and see this as a problem within the police system.

*...because it isn't being recorded it doesn't show up...the history of how ever many previous abuses have occurred and how many other call outs have been or whether there's been hospitalisations or you know, the degree of the abuse or anything like that...it's not until they get the address and they recall being there before...*

Although Refuge workers attributed problems they encounter when working with other service providers to many different aspects such as a lack of understanding about D.V and not enough links between service providers, they believed that the problems should be resolved at a higher level. They believed that if the systems by which other organisations/institutions run were altered, problems to do with individual workers would decrease.

Refuge workers were not always aware of certain policies and procedures such as the mandatory arrest policy, which stipulates that all perpetrators of D.V. must be arrested and charged if there is a protection order against them. This indicates that these procedures are not being followed through with; otherwise the advocates would be more familiar with them.

*...And that's the big thing – [the police say] “it doesn't matter because once we get there, she's not gonna press charges against him anyway”. Well if that's the case then you need to put things in place as a government in regards – within the police force that regardless of whether the woman wants to press charges or not, the police do it on her behalf. Because often she's not pressing charges because she's afraid of the repercussions from it, not because she doesn't want to”. (Nicole)*

Inconsistency in the quality of police assistance and failure to utilise the D.V. Act 1995 have been noted in literature, and government initiatives have been created as a response to these findings. For example, the NZ National Survey of Crime Victims (Morris et al., 2003), and a process evaluation of the Domestic Violence Act 1995 (Barwick et al., 2000) both reported that women were less likely to report emotional or psychological abuse as they felt less entitled to assistance, and more afraid of not being taken seriously than those

who are subjected to physical abuse. The Free from Abuse research, funded by the NZ health research committee, made recommendations to the Commissioner of Police to instruct police officers to abide by the National Family Violence Guidelines, reinstate monitoring practices and ensure education on D.V. in police training (Hand, 2000). The NZ National Survey of Crime Victims (Morris et al, 2003) encourages police adherence to the Victims' Rights Act in terms of paying more attention to victims' statements and taking them more seriously.

- *The welfare system*

Throughout the interviews, the Refuge workers told many stories about other agencies failing to meet the needs of the women seeking their assistance. Many of these stories involved the health care and welfare systems.

Women who have left or are in the process of leaving an abusive relationship are often in great need of assistance from the welfare system. It is common for a woman to have no money, food or clothes by the time she leaves, and many of these women need to live in Refuge safe houses at the time. Refuge workers expressed concerns about the modest amount of assistance in the form of daily living essentials that these women are entitled to. They also spoke of inconsistencies in regards to how much assistance the women are entitled to and whether they are entitled to it at all. These problems make it difficult for Refuge workers to advise women about their entitlement, and even more seriously, make it increasingly difficult for the woman to sustain herself and her children without relying on her ex-partner.

*We often struggle with WINZ in regards to their entitlement and things like that. "Well she's already been in here several times, she doesn't have any food entitlement left". And its like "well unfortunately she's had to get up and run from her home because her life was in danger, she wasn't able to pack all the food out of the cupboards, she needs a food grant", "well I'm sorry, we can't give it, we'll give her a letter to go to Salvation Army and get a food parcel". And it's like "well, thank you but that's not enough food to tide*

*her and her children over for four days, or five days or six days or however long, or get the essentials that she needs in regards to nappies or all that kind of stuff". (Nicole)*

*Like I've been in there at times for food grants or a bus ticket and it's been perfectly okay, you know, these women who I have taken in have had a huge debt with WINZ but it's been okay, they've granted it. The next day I might go in and the women's debt isn't quite so high but they won't give it because "the debt's so high". (Mavis)*

One advocate spoke of how easy it is for abusers to use systems against their victims. For example, a man may move into a woman's house, but refuse to support her or her children financially. It may also be the case that he refuses to move out – or is on the lease agreement. The women must therefore stay on the DPB in order to keep her children fed and clothed and the bills paid. In my experience, this situation is extremely common. If the woman tries to force him to leave, or tries to leave herself, the abuser then has the power to inform WINZ that she is technically committing fraud, and he therefore has even more control over the woman.

*...The majority of the women who come through our safe house are on DPB and their partners are living with them, that's the reality of it. But the reality is also that they are not supported by him, not at all...they are more of a bloody leach than anything else...these women are too scared to ask that man to leave and all the time he's using "I'll do you in"...(Aulbry).*

The welfare system is extremely important for women who are attempting to leave a D.V. situation, as this is often the time when their financial situation is at it's worst (Hand, 2001). However, through inconsistent quality of assistance, with-holding of vital information and systems set up in ways that allow for abusers to use them to their own advantage, women are too often re-abused by the organisations they seek assistance from (Hand, 2001). This secondary-abuse instigated by agencies such as WINZ is an example of structural violence, a concept discussed in a further section.

- *The Healthcare System*

Refuge workers spoke about the difficulties their clients have with the healthcare system. The main concern was the cost of medical assistance, and how it is common for women in D.V. situations to be unable to afford doctors fees for various reasons (i.e. having no access to or control over the household income). This can result in women having to utilise hospitals for treatment of D.V. related injuries. However, the waiting times at the hospital are often extremely long – too long for a woman who may need to be home before her partner returns from work, or needs to be home to look after her children.

*...we took a woman up there [the hospital] and she waited seven hours to be seen...As far as just going to the doctor, sometimes that can be difficult because it's pay up front and half the time the women haven't got the money, so yeah that's a bit of a hard one too.*  
(Mavis)

Ideally, women who disclose to their GP that their injuries are D.V. related should be given a subsidised fee. This would not only enable women to be able to access medical assistance more easily, but would then give GP's an opportunity to inform women of other services that provide assistance for abused women. Although health-care professionals are now being encouraged to screen all women for D.V., this still does not address the issue of women not being able to afford the time or money for medical assistance due to the circumstances and nature of being in the D.V. situation in the first place.

### **Others' view of Refuge**

Throughout the interviews, Refuge workers talked about how they believe that other service providers do not always see Refuge in a favourable light. They gave examples of how Refuge is considered to be 'marginal' in the way the organisation is run, using management procedures that are 'on the fringe' because they are outside of mainstream practices. Refuge does run differently from many other organisations. Since Refuge fights against what is perceived as patriarchal power, common managerial systems that embrace a hierarchal 'power over' structure are not utilised to run Refuge. Others who use more common managerial systems do not always understand this. This can result in Refuge being seen as unprofessional.

*Cause although Refuge is a lot more accepted than it was its still like – we are still on the fringe. And you'll find that agencies are still like a bit wary of Refuge. (Lesley)*

*They see us as a tin pot organisation, a bunch of amateurs, that's how I see it or the feeling I get about them. (Petra)*

Because of this view of Refuge, advocates have experienced the feeling of being marginalised themselves, and find that they may not necessarily get the same opportunities that they may have had if working for a more mainstream organisation.

*You know [name] at [location]? She was all set – part of her thing for her diploma, she was gonna do a pilot [study] and go out with the police at night and that. Soon as their district commander knew that she worked for Refuge it was squashed. (S) And you reckon it was cause he found out she worked for Refuge? (L) Oh definitely, definitely.(Lesley)*

*Like the police don't get us in to do the true blue training, like they always fob us off... There's good individual officers but the culture of [location] police has been a bit anti-Refuge.(Janet)*

Two lesbian women originally started Refuge in 1979. According to the advocates interviewed, this appears to have influenced how people view Refuge and results in Refuge having a reputation as still being run by lesbian women only. One of Refuge's cornerstones is 'lesbian visibility' because Refuge opposes all types of oppression against women including homophobia and heterosexism. They acknowledge that all women can be subject to abuse including lesbian women. Another cornerstone of Refuge is 'feminism'. This term is often misunderstood in the public eye as meaning anti-men as opposed to 'pro-women'. When combining all of these things, the result is that Refuge can be thought of in an undesirable way.

*I still believe that Refuge still has a stigma about it with some of the Police. Like we are all just a pack of lesbians and go round breaking up families and all that crappy stuff that went on years ago, they're still holding onto a lot of that. (Mavis)*

*There is still a lot of ignorance around that you come up against in society. I mean definitely when people say "what do you do" and I say I work for Women's Refuge and you do still get very strange looks or you know "oh okay..." and you know what's going on in their mind "she's one of those" or you know. (Anna)*

Because of the differences in ideas surrounding domestic violence between service providers, Refuge can sometimes be seen as 'trouble makers'. A Refuge worker's job is to advocate for the women they are working with, but other organisations see them as being difficult when they are attempting to get the best assistance available for their clients. Often advocates find resistance from others, when trying to advocate for women, which is perceived as being related to the general view of Refuge that is prevalent within society, as mentioned in the above section.

*And like the police...they think we're difficult because we challenge. Because we challenge systems or processes that they use that disempower women or you know,*

*challenge the system, they think we're being really difficult. Instead of actually looking at what we're trying to do they just consider us to be really difficult, you know. (Lesley)*

*But they get really – like he was really stroppy – well she was because she probably thought 'bloody Refuge workers being difficult'. (Lesley)*

*...they want you to follow their policies and things, but you know, we have ours too, its not about being difficult. (Lesley)*

As highlighted, how other service providers view Refuge can have a profound effect on advocates' ability to provide services for women. If other organisations/agencies see Refuge as marginal, home-wreckers, and difficult, they are not as willing to assist advocates in supporting women. The Refuge advocates see this attitude as counter-productive and believe that service providers need to work together in the best interests of women. For this to happen, there needs to be more links between service providers, more sharing of resources and more education about how Refuge – and other organisations - run. They also felt that if the negative attitudes towards Refuge were shifted within the professional realm, this might alter the myths and misunderstandings about Refuge that are prevalent in the public realm.

### **Structural Violence**

The term 'structural violence' refers to the processes and procedures carried out by organisations that perpetuate and contribute to the oppression of women. Structural violence is a result of patriarchal beliefs prevalent in society that privilege men and disadvantage women. Examples of this type of violence in relation to victims of domestic violence include withholding services, downplaying women's problems, disallowing women to have their say on legal issues and blaming women for problems relating to domestic violence.

Although Refuge workers did not refer to structural violence by name, they did give examples of how, in their perspective, women are abused by the agencies they are seeking help from.

*... it's a struggle sometimes with different departments, you know when it comes to the women's rights. (Mavis)*

*...There's so much more than just the WINZ and things. I mean, the police, the courts all sorts of areas have abused her in ways as well in regards to not giving her the right assistance that she needs. (Nicole)*

Refuge workers related stories about certain systems in which they spoke of organisations/agencies deliberately withholding information in regards to entitlement for women. They believe that systems such as welfare are set up to give as little assistance as possible to people seeking their help. Some advocates saw this as a power tactic and another form of oppression.

*And he [WINZ worker] said, "why don't you tell your women – how many of your women have this EMG?" and I said "what the hell is an EMG?" and he said "Emergency maintenance grant". Never heard of it...I have been at Refuge for six or seven years and I don't know...aren't they naughty not letting us have this information...it's wrong, it's*

*wrong aye. I think it's a bloody power thing myself...they have this huge power... (Aulbry)<sup>7</sup>*

In Hand's (2001) 'Free from abuse' research the issue of WINZ withholding information pertinent to their women clients is documented. This is seen as part of a number of practices used by WINZ that assert power over women, rather than being a service which enables women.

The Refuge workers brought up incidents where there appears to be a type of conflict of interest when it comes to providing women the assistance they request. In situations such as this, the organisations/agencies may not be helping the women to the best of their abilities because they are putting another party's interests first. In some cases this may be their own interest. This results in a disadvantage for the women and makes it all the more difficult for her to get help.

*...like the last crisis call I had, the woman wasn't able to get far enough away from the situation for it to be safe for us to go and collect her, so the police were contacted in regards to escorting her, picking her up and bringing her in and the police said that it wasn't their job to go and pick her up. And it's like "no excuse me, it is your job, this is what you're supposed to be doing". And then when the police actually get there, I mean they did eventually agree to it after I said "nah don't worry about it but you'll be the one getting the call if I'm in danger, either you assist me in preventing that and do your job now, or you're gonna have even more paper work later", kind of thing. So they brought her in and her children. And when I thanked the police officer when he was there, for doing it, he said, "oh that's alright, it's our job". (Nicole)*

*I'm angry about – they're [the Police] supposed to report to CYF about family violence, do they? No. No they don't. (S) So you find out that they don't – not reporting when*

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<sup>7</sup> An EMG is a grant that is similar to the Domestic Purposes Benefit, but allows for a woman to still live with her partner if she is in the process of trying to leave a domestic violence situation.

*they...(P) I know they're not reporting. (S) Why don't they do that? (P) I don't know, more paper work I suppose. (Petra)*

In these two cases, Petra and Nicole are talking about the Police not doing the job they are supposed to because it creates more work for them. This is a type of structural violence because it is an abuse of the power police officers have and results in the women being disadvantaged. These types of practices may even put women in more danger. If domestic violence was considered a more serious issue or the practices of agencies were monitored more closely, this type of incident would not occur so frequently.

A common type of conflict of interest experienced by Refuge workers and clients has to do with Child Youth and Family. Although the best interests of the child are the priority of this organisation, it is often the mothers who suffer due to the lack of control they have over the situation that led CYFS to investigation.

*And it's the process at CYFS that I don't like either. Like if a child is taken out of the parents' care the process that they have to go through and the lengths they have to go to, to get that child back is amazing. Like they are told to go away and they've got to do all these things. So they do these things and they go back and there's something else they've got to do, you know and a lot of those parents, I believe there was really no need for the child to be taken from them. And the damage that that must do is terrible. (Mavis)*

Because of the processes of welfare agencies, some women end up being labelled as 'bad mothers', particularly if her children have been uplifted from her. This label can have a profoundly negative effect on the mother, and can make it increasingly difficult for her to 'prove' that she is capable of having her children back (Crogan & Miell, 1998).

Not only may the policies and procedures of other organisations/agencies be unsafe, but Refuge workers also report that the proceedings that occur within these agencies, by individuals, can be questionable.

*But in that particular case her husband – her father in law’s best friend is the Chief at the police station, so when she pressed assault charges against her husband, it wasn’t until two weeks after that they actually arrived to serve him with the assault charge, with the papers. She made a stipulation that it needed to be after six o’ clock at night because he worked during the day, and they turned up at one o’ clock in the afternoon, knowing that he wouldn’t be there. She then said, “you need to come back at a reasonable time, he’s not here, I’ve told you the time that you need to be here”, so they rang the following morning at seven am to speak to him and tell him about the assault charge and she refused to allow them to talk to him on the grounds that she was the one that was left in the house with him. He had already assaulted her, she was pressing charges against him and with the police ringing up and saying “we need to come and serve assault charges against you that your wife has laid”, was putting her in direct danger. So they wouldn’t come and serve the papers – well they said to her that they wouldn’t come and serve the papers without speaking to him first, so she said “fine, fuck you then, I’ll drop the charge, because you’re not doing it this way, you’re putting me in danger”. And that was basically because of the friendship, because the police have an obligation to do something about it, but if they can do it on the sly or in the wrong way, then you know...(Nicole)*

It is often the decisions that are made by service providers that do further damage to already abused women. This idea is related strongly to the lack of education given to service providers, which results in unfair, uninformed and/or unsafe decisions being made. Decisions made by professionals working in the legal system such as court advisors, lawyers and judges impact heavily on women’s lives, sometimes in a negative way. However, because these people hold such a position of power in society, it is extremely difficult to rectify the situation once a poor decision has been made.

It is important to emphasise that in doing their job, judges must abide by and work within legal limits. When women are subject to structural violence due to decisions made by those in power it is usually a systemic issue rather than an interpersonal one.

*...We've had some strange decisions from judges and that's something that's frustrating to work with too because they put the women back into unsafe situations. It's an endless process really, we – for all the successes we have, we have an awful lot of what we would deem failures in terms of providing safety or ensuring that the woman remains in a safe space, because of other people's decisions. And I mean when a judge sends a man to prison for nine months for the severity of an attack on a woman, but also suspends the sentence and gives him leave to apply for home detention back to her home, then you have to ask yourself, well where is the penalty in that? It's mind-boggling.(Barbara)*

*You know sometimes you get a good judge but more often than not you get a crappy one who thinks that they know best. And they actually destroy lives, they destroy children's lives. You know these custody battles and stuff, saying "oh he has right to have access so many days a week, which is quite a lot and this child is going to have to spend time with this psychological abuser, and that is very damaging for the child and the mother sitting home waiting for that child to come home. And these judges decide "oh no I know best". And you know, how accountable are they? Five years down the track that child's stuffed up mentally. And the one who has to stay behind and fix it up is mum, the one the judge has abused by not really listening to what she has to say. (Petra)*

The issue of women's safety being jeopardised by the decisions made by legal professionals has been shown in literature. For example, in research on women's access to legal services in New Zealand/Aotearoa (1999), women reported that some legal professionals' inadequate analysis of D.V. put their safety in jeopardy, leaving them open to further abuse. This situation has also been documented in other research (Morris, 1997; Pond, 2002, cited in Morgan, 2003).

It is the experience of Refuge workers that women feel they are not listened to or taken seriously by the legal system. They often feel intimidated and bullied into either keeping quiet, or agreeing with everything that they are told to, despite the reality of the situation or of how the woman feels. The legal system allows for women to be silenced, and continues the abuse she has sought help for in the first instance.

*But again I've got a client at the moment who – her last three lawyers are in jail for fraud. The last six lawyers that she's had haven't represented her properly. One of them at the court hearing ended up going off and doing bargaining with her husband, although he was there to represent her. To basically make it easier for him to do his job because he didn't feel that the things she was applying for would be granted, so they tried to make an agreement amongst them without consulting her to change it, basically. And she was applying for occupancy, custody of the children and a protection order, and they made – well they walked into the court, sat down and her lawyer stood up and said "I've spoken with Mr blah blah blah, and we've come to an agreement", and she stood up and said "no no no no, we have not come to an agreement, I know nothing of this judge", and he told her to sit down and shut up basically. It wasn't her place to speak; she was speaking out of turn. The lawyer continued and said "we've made an agreement, if the protection order is dropped then he will gladly give her occupancy of the matrimonial home and custody of the children", and so, it was slam the hammer on the thing, done. And yet she was left without a protection order and the police will not remove him from the matrimonial home unless the order is accompanied with a protection order so she's spent the last seven years in the house and he's been there as well. So she's continued to be in that abuse...(Nicole)*

*I mean we are having horrific things happen like a man who beats his partner very badly, his family was putting pressure on her to get back together with him. She was saying to us "I don't even know whether I want him back", but then the victim advisor said "oh no, she told me that she wants him bailed back to her house while he waits for the case to go to trial". Now imagine the pressure on that poor woman for the three or four weeks that she's got to wait from the time that she's made a complaint until he's actually charged, he's bailed back to live with her. And by the time the court case happens, she will definitely write a victim impact statement which says "it was partly my fault and I'd like him back and we're happy", cause she will be too scared not too. And to me it's a shocking thing. The victim advisor here says that what ever we think about the legalities of it, the woman has the right to say what she wants to say, and she's only just reporting*

*it. But my contention is that she actually has an incredibly bad analysis of family violence if she thinks its appropriate for the woman to say its okay for an abuser who's knocked her unconscious to come back and live with her while he waits to go on trial for that crime. (Barbara)*

The failure of service providers to listen to women, the minimisation of the impact of abuse and the imposed silence on women has also been documented elsewhere (Morris, 1997). Pond (2002, cited in Morgan, 2003) found that the minimisation of the impact that abuse has on women has been used by legal professionals as a way of shifting blame and excusing the perpetrator. Morris (1999) reported that the legal jargon used and the dismissive attitudes of legal professionals towards women are two of the ways in which women are alienated from legal proceedings.

Although the Refuge advocates felt that service provision for abused women has improved significantly over time, particularly since the D.V Act 1995 was introduced, they still felt that much was needed to ensure women receive safe, informed, and consistent services. They stated that there should be more communication between service providers and more sharing of resources. They believe that systemic changes should be made at government level to safeguard women from structural violence and to direct service providers to act in the best interests of abused women. Overall, the advocates thought that the obvious lack of education about D.V. demonstrated by other service providers is a serious issue that precipitates and perpetuates many other problems faced by women who access service for D.V.

Because this research is focused on Refuge workers' experience of working in the D.V field, alongside other service providers, the above section of the analysis is the largest and most detailed. However, participants also talked about other issues relating to their work, such as what it is like to work for Women's Refuge, what impact working for Refuge has on them personally and common beliefs and assumptions the public have about Women's Refuge and Refuge workers. These narratives are also important as they contribute to the

whole experience of working for Refuge. The following chapters give examples of these common narratives found in the participant's conversations about their work at Refuge.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MYTHS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

During the interviews, the advocates made reference to common myths and misunderstandings about Refuge that are held by members of the public. The advocates talked about how this makes their job more difficult, how it affects them personally, and how they deal with it. Some of these myths and misunderstandings are about the work that Refuge does while others relate to issues such as feminism and lesbianism, two concepts that are addressed by the cornerstones of Women's Refuge. Other issues revolve around the public's general misunderstandings about D.V. The advocates told stories of times when they have been faced with negative comments and/or actions from people in the general public.

Because Women's Refuge assists women in leaving dangerous relationships, some people in society see them as 'home wreckers'. This notion perhaps stems from the idea that 'what happens in the home stays in the home' and that issues such as D.V should be kept private; that it is no-one else's business. The problem of D.V is now more out in the open and talked about than it used to be, particularly in the health care and political realm, but is still silenced to a certain extent by members of the public. Refuge workers find this difficult as they are made to feel bad for the job they do and may find themselves questioning whether they are doing the right thing by the woman and children by helping them to leave.

*...Like we are all just a pack of lesbians and go round breaking up families and all that crappy stuff that went on years ago, they're still holding onto a lot of that (Mavis).*

*...a lot of the time – especially people who are perhaps thirties plus, still have an idea that Refuge has a certain mindset about women and society and men and society... we are not here to break up families, we are not here to destroy people, our role is positive for them. (Anna).*

*We had an interesting one with the appeal, when we were standing outside The Warehouse and a woman came past as I said "would you like to make a donation to the Women's Refuge" and she said "it's disgusting what you women do", and she had a girl with her, a college age girl, and the number of college age girls that we work with who have had a sexual assault is quite high, and I just thought "wow, you know, one of your girls or maybe one of her friends one day might just need our services and she just might have a different idea." (Anna).*

*...and they don't understand the extent of the work that we do either...we are home wreckers...well sorry, I'm more than happily gonna wreck that home if her and her kids are being bashed! Or her and her kids are being subjected to constant emotional and verbal abuse. Of course I don't mind, label me a home wrecker, do as you please! That's your analysis of the situation; you don't know the full picture. You know, at first those comments used to affect me and I used to go home and think "Am I really wrecking homes?" you know, at first I'd think twice, but then " no fuck off, I'm not, no way. It's their choice to come into Refuge". And it's my choice to educate them that they don't need to live with that sort of crap, that they deserve better. (Nicole)*

The term 'feminism' is one that is not always understood by people in the public. It is sometimes thought of as 'anti-male' and has connotations of lesbianism attached to it. Because feminism is one of Refuge's cornerstones and Refuge is a pro-women organisation the advocates find themselves being accused of being 'men-haters'. Some people also appear to have the impression that women's Refuge is run completely by lesbian women. When the advocates spoke of being subjected to these attitudes and comments, the terms 'man hating' and 'lesbian' were connected in many cases.

*...the only thing that I've had in regards to Refuge that's been negative is other people's remarks in regards to the whole "oh, you're one of them" you know, "you're a man hating lesbian" or you know, that whole "[you think] all men are abusive"(Nicole).*

*And because our organisation as a body advocates for lesbian visibility at quite a high level, I think there is probably also some misconceptions that come around that as well. And perhaps there's a group of women who are [thinking] "I'm not sure that I want to leave my partner yet but I want some help, but I don't want to be sort of bludgeoned into leaving by thoughts and ideas that men are terrible and all men are terrible and all men are women beaters" and you know. I think that has been a bit of a misconception in the past as well... (Anna).*

*I think there's still a huge perception of Refuge workers as being man-hating lesbians. We've had the odd situation in family group conference here where I will offer the woman a place on our women's education programme and the man will say, "I'm not having her working with you lezzies" and things like that...(Barbara).*

*I get tired of being badmouthed as a man hater and those sorts of things. It's such nonsense, and I think it's frustrating...it does hurt - its not nice to be known as something unpleasant (Barbara).*

Some of the misunderstandings that members of the public appear to have come from different understandings and points of view held about the nature of D.V. These misunderstandings appear to mirror those of the service providers, such as assuming that the woman should 'just leave' the abusive relationship and that only physical abuse constitutes D.V. Other misunderstandings talked about by advocates included the public's view of the victims of D.V., and the prevalence of D.V. in New Zealand.

Refuge workers are often faced with people who think that it is the woman's responsibility to end the abuse in a relationship. Often they say that she should 'just leave' and they question why a woman would return to an abusive partner. This puts some blame for the abuse onto the woman in the sense that she is responsible for the continuation of the abuse by staying in or returning to that situation.

*...The first question that people ask me when I say that I work for Refuge, is "how do you cope with the women who just keep going back?" And its about - we're giving them the opportunity to do something better for themselves and for their children and if they don't choose to do that at that time cause the timing's not right for them, then basically you just wait until the timing is. Whether they come in two times, three times, twelve times, it doesn't matter, you still need to be there for them (Nicole).*

The Refuge workers talked about how the abusers are often excused to some extent for their behaviour due to certain experiences they might have had in their lives such as being abused themselves. By doing this, the perpetrator is given a reason and permission - to a certain extent - to be abusing his partner. Often the women who access Refuge services are already carrying some amount of guilt for various reasons, whether it is because they are taking their children away from their fathers, or because they have made the decision to end the relationship. Because of the nature of D.V., women who are subjected to it may suffer from low self-esteem and often already have a sense of responsibility for the abuse due to the insidious nature of D.V. It is believed to be counterproductive to the woman's healing to give her reasons (-excuses) for why her partner abused her.

*...Regardless of whether he was abused or not, it was his choice to change that behaviour, he knows what it was like for him, so what gives him the right to inflict it upon somebody else, knowing what its like (Nicole).*

The Refuge workers spoke of a perception prevalent in society that only certain women are subject to D.V. There is a belief that only women of certain racial or cultural backgrounds and/or from low socio-economic situations are abused. The advocates said that this creates a stigma about D.V, which makes it more difficult for Pakeha women, and women who come from wealthier backgrounds to seek assistance and leave D.V. situations. It is very difficult for women to approach Refuge in the first instance, and because of the misconceptions around who abuse victims are, Pakeha women feel they cannot approach Refuge for help for fear of how they will be viewed by others in society. This means that a greater percentage of Maori and Pacific Island women receive

assistance from Refuge, which in turn perpetuates the idea that only these women are abused and results in Refuge being seen as a non-Pakeha organisation. Research shows that women of all racial/cultural and socio-economic backgrounds are subject to abuse from their partners (Matlin, 2004; Semple, 2001).

*...I do think there are myths for sure, there are still myths in the community about who are victims of domestic violence, and you know, what type of people, what socio-economic people are victims of domestic violence...(Anna).*

*...There's "who are the victims of family violence?" Like if you talk to anybody on the street, I would say you'd get a majority response of "oh they're poor or they're drunk or they're Maori or Pacific Island or they're Asian". But only low socio-economic groups – that is the perception of where domestic violence occurs. So people who are experiencing family violence who don't fit into that - maybe the banker's wife – isn't going to call Refuge cause then she's a double failure, cause not only is she being abused by this "beautiful man" who is a good provider and a great dad and a stunning member of the community, but she also has to ring Refuge where all these poor drunk brown people go, and they're not gonna call us. So that societal perception of where family violence occurs and who are the victims of family violence has a huge impact on who uses our service (Janet).*

*I think a lot of people out there think that it's a Maori organisation. I mean, if you talked to my mother she'd say that we're all about giving everything to Maori and nothing for ourselves – that's how she perceives it...So there's that view that it's really pro-Maori and it's for Maori and it's a Maori service which isn't the case (Lesley).*

The Refuge workers talked about how there appears to be a belief in society that D.V is not a real problem in N.Z. This means that people in the general public do not really understand the role of the Refuge advocates, resulting in the advocates feeling undervalued and unappreciated.

*And so it's quite unreal sometimes the comments that you have and the things that you hear from people you know. People will say "what do you do" and I say "I work for Women's Refuge" and they say "why?" (laughs). And also there's the thing "why do you work for Women's Refuge because there isn't a problem, what do you guys do all day?" Kind of thing, "there's nothing to do, there's not really domestic violence, not an issue with it – not in this town". And then you name a few statistics for them and people are "really?" And I think really a lot of the time people are just ignorant as to what's going on around them you know (Anna).*

The advocates said that perhaps the idea that there is no or little D.V. in NZ ties in with the idea that only physical violence constitutes domestic violence. Emotional or psychological abuse does not seem to be taken as seriously as physical violence, despite research showing that the consequences are just as great if not greater than those of physical abuse. If people are unable to identify the actions and behaviours of D.V. they can falsely assume that it is not prevalent in NZ because they do not recognise it when they come across it.

*I think perhaps [D.V.] for the general public means physical violence, and I think there is more understanding for that. When you say domestic violence they are thinking about receiving physical violence. For me it's one of the interesting things when we have the initial contacts with people, just sitting with them and chatting with them and they are detailing all these different things and they have got no idea that they are suffering from abuse in different forms. They think "oh, you know I was always worried that he was going to do it, I was always scared, then he finally did it" but boy for about five years she has been going through this extreme abuse (Anna).*

When taking into account the view in society that 'what happens in the home stays in the home', along with peoples' lack of recognition of D.V., the silence around D.V. and the secrecy is upheld. Advertising campaigns and NZ television programmes are targeted to reinforce the idea that D.V. is a crime, and that it is in fact a common phenomenon in NZ. However, Refuge advocates do not believe that these initiatives are enough. They feel

that education about D.V. should start in the schools, so that children are taught what D.V. is, and that it is not acceptable. They believe the cycle of violence needs to be broken by educating our children from a young age.

*...So it is definitely all about education. And I really think that the education needs to be starting at a very young age, it needs to be in the schools...we need somebody in the schools talking about this stuff...so it just becomes the norm, that no one treats me like that. You know, it needs to be in the colleges so that these young girls actually recognise when these guys are saying "oh we want to know where you are all the time" that they actually recognise it for what it is, and not think "oh he loves me so much" ...(Petra).*

*And it's about educating our children or our nieces or our nephews or our friends' children or who ever about, that there's more to life and that, there's better things to strive for than, you know, being the biggest bully in school (Nicole).*

The Refuge workers believe that there are certain myths and misunderstandings about D.V. held by the general public which negatively impact on women who are in abusive relationships and create a barrier for women seeking assistance for D.V. For instance, because of the perception that refuge workers are 'home-wrecking, man-hating lesbians', women may be reluctant to contact Refuge for fear of also being attributed with these labels, or because they themselves have this perception of Refuge workers. Because some of the responsibility for the abuse is directed towards the victim due to certain beliefs (such as thinking that the woman should leave the relationship, and that men abuse their partners because they were abused as children) women may feel unable to disclose abuse for fear of being blamed by others. Women who do not fit into the stereotypical profile of an 'abused woman' can feel ashamed because they do not realise that other women similar to them are also subjected to D.V. There is a culture of silence in NZ around D.V. whereby abuse goes unreported by not only the victims but also observers of the abuse (i.e. neighbours, friends). This results in the public being unaware of the high prevalence of D.V. in our society which in turn also contributes to the isolation felt by abused women. The Refuge advocates felt that there needs to be more education on D.V. in the

general public and that children should be educated about D.V. in schools. They also believe that if other service providers – who demonstrate similar misconceptions about D.V. as those of the public – had better education about D.V. then this improved understanding would filter into the public.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DOING THE JOB

When asking the Refuge workers about their experience of working for women's Refuge, they told me what it is like for them to be doing this job. The advocates also talked about what it is like to be a Refuge worker, which differs from what it is like to actually do the job. The distinction has to be made between these two themes because they address different dimensions of women's experience. When talking about being a Refuge worker, they told stories of how Refuge affects their lives and how it changes their view of themselves and others. In comparison, when talking about 'doing the job', they spoke of how Refuge is run and what they liked and disliked about this. They talked of the pros and cons of working for Women's Refuge and how it is different from other jobs. They also told me what is needed for people to be able to work for this organisation in regards to personal qualities, training and education. This chapter concerns what it is like to work for Women's Refuge.

All of the participants were paid workers, working between 20 and 40 paid hours a week plus countless numbers of unpaid hours each week also. When talking about their jobs, the advocates talked about the institution of Women's Refuge in relation to the work, and they also talked about themselves in relation to the work. They made connections between these by talking about how the institution of Women's Refuge enables or constrains them in the work setting.

The Refuge workers all told stories of working collectively, highlighting the pros as well as the cons of working from this structure. They spoke of how working collectively empowers them and gives them the freedom to follow their own process and make decisions informed by actual experience gained from working with their clients. They believed that this meant that the client received the best service, because the worker could understand the client's needs better and make decisions based on these. However, alongside this freedom also comes responsibility. Because there is no one 'higher up' to

instruct the workers what to do, the only person to blame if something goes wrong is the worker herself. Because they are not instructed by someone else such as a 'boss' of some sort, the responsibility lies with them individually.

*One of the pluses for me within Refuge is that we do do things differently – that we don't buy into the system and do it the way everyone says it should be done and it was an opportunity to challenge and work differently and for me to be able to go to Collective and say "look I really want to do this, we need to be doing this" and they'd say "yeah okay babe if you think you can do it you can do it" and I'd go off on one of my tangents and string off and do things...(Janet).*

They also spoke of the difficulties using a management structure that is very different from the way the majority of other agencies or institutions run. The advocates find it difficult to explain this system to others and feel that sometimes Refuge is not taken seriously because it does not embrace a mainstream approach to management. This relates to the idea covered earlier about other service providers seeing Refuge as marginal and unprofessional for this reason. Although it can be difficult using a non-mainstream management structure, the Refuge principal of collective organisation is more important than the difficulties arising from it. The structural violence that is perpetrated by organisations that run in the more common hierarchical structure helps to maintain oppressive beliefs and practices in our society. Because Refuge fights against oppression of women, they therefore do not work in a way that is believed to contribute to and perpetuate this oppression.

*I like our management structure -for want of a better word - I like working as a collective. I find it incredibly frustrating at times (laughs) and really struggle with how we do that better cause I don't believe we do it as well as we could. But I believe it's a vision, its something we can keep working towards. And if we get it right we will be stunning and amazing. But while we sort of struggle between two systems its like we're stuck between a rock and a hard place. We want to be – or we aim – our vision is to be collective. I'm not sure we all want to be but we're stuck in a system that's hierarchical and therefore we*

*have to play their game to get funding from CYFS and we still have AGM's with 'presidents' and stuff like this going on. So we're sort of stuck between playing the game within the system, but I think it's a vision and if we work towards it...Oppression's what keeps women in an unsafe place, so as long as we have a management structure where someone will tell us what's good for us, someone will always be oppressed (Janet).*

Working for Women's Refuge requires a common understanding about Domestic Violence. This understanding comes from the training that is required for every Refuge advocate. Refuge workers then in turn pass on this common understanding gained from training to others in the community. The advocates all saw their training as being very important for the job, not only because it helps them to understand the issues surrounding D.V but it actually enables them to be able to do the job in a way that is safe for them in an emotional sense. For example, they spoke of times when they have been disappointed when a women returns to her abusive partner, but said that because they understand the cycle of violence, they can see that they have actually helped the woman, but she was obviously not ready to leave at that time. It is through the Refuge training that they have been able to develop this point of view of the situation.

*When I first started working at Refuge in [year], it was, I found it quite depressing because I'd come from a background of no violence and abuse, and you'd work with women for days and days and then I'd go into work the next day and they'd be gone and, and like they'd say "oh she's gone home" and I'd feel like what do you mean she's gone home? She can't possibly have gone home to get another hiding? Because back then we didn't do any training either so we didn't understand the whole dynamics of violence and abuse and of how difficult it is for women to leave. Yeah, so that was, I found it quite hard (Lesley).*

The advocates talked about constantly having to educate others in the community about the nature of D.V. They see the job as not just being about helping women but also being about making changes in society through educating others.

*And it's about that constant educating people you know. Regardless of whether we have lesbian or bisexual women in our house or not, it is still a topic we bring up and talk about because a lot of people are homophobic and have really negative reactions or thoughts in regards to people's sexual identity and it's like, well we need to change your view on that so that society is safe as well. So Refuge is a lot more than what I thought it would be because you're constantly fighting to make a difference and as long as there is domestic violence we will constantly be fighting...(Nicole).*

The Refuge workers talked about how working at Refuge is very different from working at other jobs. This is not always positive. They spoke of the difficulties of have so little funding for the organisation, receiving such low wages and having to work unpaid hours. They felt the work they do is unappreciated at times and often goes unnoticed. They also spoke of the frustrations of not being able to help women as much as they could if there were more money and resources available.

*I think it's harder. I get outraged at the lack of funding we get. I believe all Refuge workers should be paid really well because the job they do is hard and its stressful and as you know, there are hours and hours that you do for nothing, all our roster work that we do at night, we do for free (Barbara).*

*There is not enough money, but you know, in an ideal world there'd be lots of things that we could do, but realistically with budget cuts and all sorts of things going on, the reality is that women will continue to struggle and agencies like ours will continue to struggle (Maxine).*

*We have this culture of making do. Refuge has this culture of making do. Always being the poor cousins...(Janet).*

*I think there are limitations in the service that we provide which comes back to a funding thing predominantly because I believe that I've seen a lot of women [advocates] come and go through Refuge, they don't stay, like we lose a lot of talented women in Refuge because*

*they go on because they need to make a living. They have a real passion for the work but we can't afford to keep them. The work is really demanding – well it is in [location] any way – it's really demanding here we all work as many volunteer hours as what we get paid for. And that's just the reality of providing the service that we do. But when you've got families to feed and things to do sometimes that's just not possible and people have to make decisions to move on (Janet).*

Another example of how working at Refuge differs in a negative way from other jobs is the way that it permeates throughout other areas of the advocates' lives. Because of the nature of the job, the advocates are often needed outside of work hours and have no warning of when they might be needed to attend a crisis. This impacts on their families and their social lives, and adds to the stress of the job.

*...there are often times that [my children] have to be with me because of Refuge or they will be staying at mums cause I'm on call and I've had to go out or will be at a meeting till 11'oclock at night... anything that takes that much from me impacts on them as well (Janet).*

*...with other jobs you wouldn't get that, you would get all your public holidays without even thinking about it. You would get weekends without thinking about it. You'd go home from work and that's it, you don't think about it again till the morning. Quite often you take home your work in your head. Yeah, cause I used to work in [another job] which I would never ever do again, but you know at least I know that when that bell went I was home. I didn't think about it again until I turned up again the next day. Whereas Refuge is not like that. Yeah it owns you I suppose. Yeah it takes over your life and that's it (Petra).*

Although working at Refuge is a difficult job that impacts on many areas of the advocates' lives, and can be emotionally draining at times, the support that the workers receive through working collectively helps them to deal with these negative aspects of the job. The Refuge workers often spoke of having a passion for the job and looking at the 'bigger

picture', which keeps them from leaving Refuge when things are difficult. It is this support gained from working collectively and this passion for the job, as well as the feeling of making a difference for others that creates a buffer for the negative aspects of the work.

*Working for Refuge. Its like extremes from one end to the other being awesome or awful. Personally I enjoy it. I would say most of the time I have a real passion for it when I'm not enjoying it anyway. It's sort of a parallel process for me, in my personal commitment to challenging societal stuff, you know, women's rights and things like that (Janet).*

*But I think that's the beauty of Refuge and the beauty of collectivism, is that we can all do that. There's no one that I won't go and sit beside in Refuge and have a yarn to because there's nobody that's above or below me. You know, that's my thinking around collectivism is that we all have something. And that's unique from each of us (Janet).*

*Yeah I think my experience has been a good one, working for Women's Refuge, I really enjoy the work. It is challenging and quite trying at times but I've found it to be really beneficial, you know. It's a service I think that is so necessary in the community (Anna).*

The Refuge workers feel that their job can be more demanding and taxing than other jobs. They find the long hours and minimal pay difficult, and can struggle with issues relating to how Refuge is run. However, at the same time, they feel passionate about the work they do and believe that they benefit from the training provided by Refuge. They receive support, appreciation and comfort from fellow advocates who are all working at the same level as them and share a collective understanding about many issues related to D.V.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BEING A REFUGE WORKER

*It's a parallel journey for me. Refuge and my personal journey is the same thing, it's the same thing (Janet).*

During the interviews the Refuge workers talked about what it is like for them personally to be Refuge workers. When talking about being a Refuge worker, the advocates spoke of themselves and how they deal with the work on a personal level. They talked about how working at Refuge has changed how they see themselves, and how they interact and see others. They spoke of how their perceptions of other things in their lives have changed through the experience of working at Refuge.

Being a Refuge advocate can be a very demanding job and affects people emotionally. Working with women in crisis is exhausting both physically and emotionally. This is compounded when having to deal with being underpaid and under-funded, and feeling that the clients cannot get all the help that they should because of a lack of resources. On top of these stressors are the complicated and difficult political debates and problems that occur on a national level within organisations such as Women's Refuge. The advocates spoke of times when they have felt like leaving Refuge because of these issues, but have stayed working there for other reasons. These reasons occur on a personal level for the workers and involve looking at the 'bigger picture' and seeing the positive in the work that is done by Refuge. It is through seeing the work they do from this perspective that the advocates can find meaning and personal satisfaction in the job, and maintain their passion for working with women and children.

#### **Making a change**

The Refuge workers talked about what is important to them in their jobs and the meaning that they get from the experience of working with women from abusive relationships. They recognised that they help women make significant positive changes in their lives and

felt that this was the main purpose of their work. Because of their training, the advocates have specific views of D.V., which are utilised daily in order to make their jobs meaningful. For instance, advocates feel that with every contact they have with their clients, they are empowering the women to make positive change by giving them the 'tools' for change – education. The Refuge workers are able to manage the disappointment of seeing their clients return to unsafe relationships by knowing that they have still helped her on some level by giving her further knowledge and awareness of D.V. and the reassurance that she does have options. By re-framing a situation that others would call a 'failure', the advocates can see the positive in the work they do every day. The ability to do this is taken from the specific analysis of D.V. that is taught during Refuge training.

*I've found working with the women is really good, even though we get a hell of a lot of disappointments and the few that do make the big change is really a big up (Petra).*

*This new [Refuge worker] was saying..."I just feel totally useless"...and I said "you're not mate, because next time she [the client] will know that she has good support, you were there for her...and she will take that little bit with her"(Aulbry).*

*Well, the meaning I get from working at Refuge is that we really do make a difference in peoples lives (Lesley).*

*A lot of times, you know, I think that I need to get out of this work because I'm so cynical and everything's so ugly, but then you'll be talking to a woman and you can actually see something click in her head and that's what keeps you going, because that one person, that click in her head has made a change that's actually helped maybe three children (Petra).*

### **The bigger picture**

The Refuge workers all told stories of how difficult the job can be in both a practical and an emotional sense. They said that their job interferes with both their family and social

lives and is also extremely stressful and discouraging at times. However, through their job they feel that they are 'fighting' against patriarchy and oppression which gives them a sense of collective understanding and camaraderie with other women's rights advocates, and allows them to feel as if they are fighting for the 'greater good' or the 'bigger picture'. It is this interpretation of their experience at Refuge that enables the Refuge workers to continue to do their jobs, despite being discouraged on a day-to-day level.

*What stops me from leaving? The bigger picture I suppose. Probably because I have a granddaughter, I want to know that there's going to be something there for her if she gets herself in a situation where she's going to need Refuge and yeah, its for the future as well. I realised that I'm here for, you know, all the women, but I'm there for the future women, you know, for my granddaughter to make sure that – to get as much education so that she doesn't be like her mother was, in bad relationships. You know, violent relationships, not bad relationships – violent relationships (Petra).*

*... And one of the realisations for me when we got talking about the oppression of women is that my daughters still experience the same thing that I did and I know that, and the feeling of that just really hit me that they are going to experience the same stuff that I did. And it was like "alrighty, take a deep breath, here we go again" like, that pulled me right back focused into why I was doing this – you know when you get busy and tired and you can't pay the bills and all that stuff's going on and its just 'fuck it!' ? That's the stuff that pulls me back in. Like 'right. What else could I be doing that would be better than this?' And those are the things that I never would have been exposed to outside of Refuge (Janet).*

### **Training**

Every Refuge worker must complete the training package before joining a collective. This consists of a minimum of fifty hours of training on various issues to do with D.V. and Refuge. The advocates told stories of how this training impacted on them and said how much they valued their training. The advocates identified a process that seems to be

started by their training, which alters the worker's sense of self and who they are in the world.

*I know that forever, no matter what ever I do, that the feminism will be the biggest thing for me. Whether I carry on doing it within Refuge or wherever I go, that will be the one that I take with me (Petra).*

*...I learn something every time too [in the women's programmes], like it's a great place for me as well. Personally, I learn something every time I'm in there, about myself or professional growth, everything, it's just a great place to be (Janet).*

*I'd say it's a greater understanding, it's clearer, my thinking around D.V. is clearer, even the societal stuff too, the understanding, the linking of all the oppressions together. I always had this – as a young person I was always just angry – I was just really fucked off with everything – and I couldn't figure out why, it was just "life isn't fair" and "fuck it!" and I had no way of pinning it on to anything. So I had always individually been a strong woman and advocated for women's rights, and thought I could do anything I wanted to. But then getting some formal education through [polytechnic] and coming into Refuge, sort of gave me a base – gave some clarity to that picture. Yeah – it enabled me to be able to think, "oh, this is why it is, this is why I feel this way or think this way is because of this, this and this" (Janet).*

The advocates found that the training they received from Refuge alongside the experience of working for this agency has helped them in a practical sense in other areas of their lives. It has given skills to be able to handle other stressors in life more easily, and the strength to be able to change for the better.

*Your training changes your life. And I mean its like all of us in our past have laughed at racist jokes and sexist jokes and things...I don't laugh at them any more. You know, and I won't, I won't participate in them, whereas I would have years ago (Leslie).*

*I've got a better awareness of domestic violence now that I work for Refuge obviously, so in areas of my own life, I'm able to identify the warning signs where I hadn't been able to before and had found myself in relationships and situations with friends or whoever, that were really abusive in many ways. And I'm unfortunately the type of person that opens arms and lets anybody in, regardless, and gets shat on and shat on shat on. Used to. Until – Refuge has given me...it's given me the confidence to stand up for who I am and to fight for my rights and not take bullshit from anybody or abuse. And it's given me the confidence to challenge anyone I come across whether they be friend or not, in regards to the way that they treat other people, or sexist comments or racist comments that they make that I will more than happily stand up and challenge them about their behaviour, when its inappropriate, or even if its like, you know, sexist jokes or whatever, I'm more than happy to – and now I have the confidence to be able to stand up and say "look" and have my say. So I mean in a lot of areas of my life it has changed (Nicole).*

*Yeah I guess the other thing for me is I work really hard at living it – like walking my talk, undoing everything that I was taught growing up and so its constantly just living it and that's one of the ways I deal with not going there, giving myself a day off, is that I walk it. And work really hard on doing it for me rather than doing it for someone else. I figure if I do as well as I can do its not – you know, you can't change the world but you can change yourself.(Janet)*

These changes in self then affect other areas of the advocates' lives, such as family and social life, in both a positive and a negative way. They talked about how Refuge is not just a job because there is so much of yourself and your identity tied up in the job. The values and beliefs that you develop while working for Refuge are with you twenty-four hours of the day.

*Oh I think Refuge becomes...well for me it's a life long commitment its not just a job, people say "why are you still working in Refuge?" I think I'll be here – it'll be my job forever. Yeah it does affect you (Leslie).*

*...they all know I work for Refuge and just treat me that way. And that way, its just "don't fuck with her" its basically their attitude, because I'll go there. They know I won't put up with shit, and I'll say what I think and do what ever I want to do. So they've put me into a place that that's who I am, like its become part on my identity in the way people interact with me. Some people find it intimidating, but that's their stuff not mine (Janet).*

*I'm more into educating my children you know. On values and also on the dangers. You know my thirteen year old watched Once Were Warriors the other night with me and one that I was not quite sure if he should watch, but he wanted to watch, and actually there's a change in his attitude towards the work that I do. And why I do the work that I do. And he also commented on the suicide of the young girl who the uncle raped – the daughter. He asked me if I would do that if I was raped and I said "no", and he said "why?" and I said that I would want to tell the world what kind of a man that man was, so that he wouldn't do it to anyone else. And he said, "Oh, well that's a good thing". And this is a thirteen year old boy, you know, who has been quite sheltered (Maxine).*

*Since I've worked in Refuge I've let quite a few friends go because their views are too narrow, too racist, too homophobic that I've got nothing in common with them anymore. Yeah, my whole circle of friends apart from a few very close friends has changed quite considerably, because I just don't want to be around people who don't have the same worldview as me, around women particularly (Leslie).*

The Refuge advocates made it clear that they feel their job is more difficult than other jobs because of the pervasive nature of the work. They felt that you could not go through the Refuge training without it impacting on who you are as a person, but could not do the job without having made these changes of the self. The training enables the advocates to do the job in a way that is safe for them on a psychological level. By learning to see the positive in a negative outcome, thinking in terms of the 'bigger picture' and identifying their own changing perspectives on life they gain much satisfaction from their work. They

all felt that being a Refuge worker was not just about doing the job, but about choosing a life path, one that is based around fighting for the 'greater good'.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### DISCUSSION

This study focused on the experiences of women who work for Women's Refuge and asked what it is like to work this industry, alongside other service providers. It drew on the narratives of nine Refuge workers in order to identify and explore various themes. The participant's stories were kept intact by using a narrative analysis, which enabled a greater understanding of how the participants made meaning of the experience of working in their industry. The methodology primarily employed Sarbin's conceptualisation of narrative analysis to analyse the data and identify themes.

Following is a discussion about the various themes identified and utilised in this research, concerning the participants' views of other service providers, as well as their personal experience of working for Women's Refuge. Secondly, there are suggestions for further research and a discussion about the implications of the findings of this research in relation to the industry of D.V. service provision.

When talking about other service providers who work with the same clients as the advocates do, they told stories of the barriers to providing service as well as accessing service. These barriers came in the form of other service providers lacking education and training in D.V. issues; having differing viewpoints about D.V.; having particular views of the Women's Refuge organisation; and a lack of communication and links between services. The result of the above barriers is that systems are set up in ways that allow for women to be subjected to structural violence from the organisations/agencies that are meant to help, support and empower them.

The Refuge workers said that other service providers have a lack of education and training about D.V. Because of this, they struggle to understand D.V. issues from the victim's point of view and frequently ask questions such as "why doesn't she just leave", thereby placing the responsibility for the cessation of abuse onto the women. They don't

understand how and/or why Refuge runs the way it does which leads to complications for Refuge workers and clients. The advocates felt that other service providers are not adequately trained to provide safe interventions for abused women. However, because of their lack of education about D.V. they do not always recognise this. Some of these findings are common to the findings of previous research, such as the lack of education/training about D.V.

Due to the noted lack of education and training about D.V., other service providers develop different understandings and points of view about D.V. than Refuge workers. They have difficulties identifying abuse, and tend to minimise or ignore psychological and emotional abuse because they do not understand the implications of this type of violence. This is not only frustrating for the advocates but is a serious barrier to women receiving assistance for this type of abuse. Once again, other service providers are unsure of how Refuge runs, as they do not have an analysis of oppression and patriarchy so therefore cannot understand why Refuge chooses to use a collective management style.

The obvious lack of links between service providers has been noted in other research as well as talked about by the participants. Many of the difficulties experienced by the advocates in relation to other service providers would be ameliorated if there were more communication between organisations/agencies. This would also give opportunities for identifying specific training needs and a relationship between agencies could be developed that would allow for negotiation around this training. If there were more communication between agencies, women would find it easier to seek and receive assistance from the different service providers they need. Refuge workers felt that it is unacceptable for women to have to tell their story of abuse to every agency they visit and believe that if a woman is a client of Refuge, other agencies should not question her as much as they do at present.

As mentioned earlier, it appears that other service providers may view Refuge in a negative light. The advocates felt that a stigma exists about Refuge workers. They spoke of being seen by others as 'home-wreckers' and 'lesbian man-haters'. They said that their

job could become difficult when other service providers see Refuge as 'difficult' or 'marginal' and therefore less important than other organisations/agencies. They felt that others see them as difficult because they are constantly challenging oppression, which can often mean challenging organisational systems that are set up in ways that re-abuse women. The Refuge workers stated that this view is one that is also shared by the public and is therefore a barrier for women accessing Refuge services, as they are then wary or ashamed of associating with Women's Refuge.

The advocates talked about the systems within other organisations/agencies, and how they do not work for the benefit of their women clients. They believed that these problematic systems created barriers to adequate service provision. For example, they spoke of the justice system employing certain procedures that intimidate both clients and women's advocates, and of there being a lack of accountability for men who do not adhere to court orders. The advocates said that in their experience the legal system is set up to allow for police to ignore protocol and provide inconsistent service, resulting women being exposed to unsafe situations due to inadequacies in police assistance. The welfare system is reported by the advocates to be set up in a way that allows for men to manipulate the system and use it against the woman, and for women to be forced to survive without daily living essentials. The healthcare system is said to be difficult for abused women to access due to the cost and time it takes to receive medical assistance. The Refuge workers felt that there should be healthcare subsidies for women suffering from D.V. in order to reduce the barriers to medical intervention.

The above issues result in women being subjected to structural violence that is perpetrated by organisations and agencies who are meant to be providing assistance but instead re-abuse women who are already in a vulnerable position. The Refuge workers told stories of organisations with-holding vital information, using unethical practices, labelling women, minimising the impact of D.V., silencing women, and placing women in unsafe situations. The Refuge workers felt that the above instances are examples of organisations using power over women and control tactics that make it impossible at times for women to access the assistance they desperately need.

The above six themes that arose from the participants narratives are interrelated and can be understood when examining the effect that each has on the other. For example, due to other service providers lacking adequate education and training in D.V. they develop different points of view about D.V. These different views lead to systems being created in a way that allows for women to be subjected to structural violence. The differing view points also mean that other service providers do not realise that they should be liaising with organisations that are experts in D.V. issues (for the benefit of their clients), and therefore do not actively seek to make connections with Refuge or other organisations. Furthermore, because of this lack of links between other organisations and Refuge, other service providers do not understand how or why Refuge runs as they do. This problem also perpetuates certain unhelpful beliefs that exist about Women's Refuge. The participants strongly believed that the inadequate training and education the other service providers receive about D.V. has a domino effect, creating the other difficulties in service provision and accessing services that were reported by the advocates. Further training and re-education about D.V. appears to be the key to ameliorating many of the barriers and gaps in the provision and accessing of services.

The Refuge workers talked about the difficulties involved in working for Women's Refuge as a result of certain myths and misunderstandings about D.V. and the organisation held by the public. These myths mirrored those of other service providers who work with the same clients as Refuge does. Once again, the advocates spoke of being positioned as 'home-wreckers' and being viewed as a 'lesbian' and 'man-hating' service. The Refuge workers said that the public do not fully understand the role of a women's advocate because they do not understand the issues surrounding D.V. The idea that women should 'just leave' D.V. relationships was said to be prevalent along with the belief that D.V. issues should be 'kept in the home', that only certain types of women are abused, and that men abuse because they themselves were abused (thereby excusing the perpetrators actions to a certain extent). According to the advocates, there is little understanding of emotional and psychological abuse in the general public, meaning that this type of abuse goes unnoticed or taken less seriously than physical violence. The advocates felt that if

change could be made in other service provider's beliefs then this change would filter down into public awareness. They also felt that children should be educated from a young age about D.V. in order to reduce the silence surrounding abuse, and break the cycle of violence that starts at a young age.

When talking about the job they do at Refuge, the advocates spoke of the pros and cons of working collectively. However, the principals that underlie the collective structure were seen as important and outweigh the negatives of working this way. However, by working in a way that is different from other organisations, the advocates felt that Refuge is marginalized by other organisations resulting in difficulties when working with them and advocating for clients. They talked about finding the job emotionally draining but felt that their Refuge training enabled them to be able to continue working in a way that is safe for them on a psychological level. Certain beliefs that are taught during training aid with this and are utilised by the advocates on a daily basis. They also talked about using their training to educate others in the community. The lack of funding available for Women's Refuge was reported to make the advocate's job harder in terms of not having the resources to help clients in the way they would like to. This lack of funding is also a stressor for the workers as they feel they are underpaid but are still required to work many unpaid hours on top of their regular hours.

The advocates talked about how being a Refuge worker impacts on them personally. They felt that the beliefs and values needed to be a Refuge worker are intrinsic and therefore their personal identity is bound up with their identity as a women's advocate. The training they receive through Refuge was said to change how they perceive the world and therefore change them on a personal level. They said that they find the work emotionally taxing, but utilise beliefs about contributing to the 'bigger picture' and 'making a difference' to buffer the difficulties associated with their type of work.

The themes that arose from the analysis of the Refuge workers narratives create spaces for further research to be conducted. It would be of benefit for similar research to be

conducted by a Maori researcher, who could explore the experiences of Refuge workers who belong to the Maori women's caucus of NCIWR. Because a Maori women's experience of D.V. may be different to that of Pakeha women, due to the different effects of colonisation, it is possible that Maori advocates would have different experiences of providing D.V. services. The Refuge workers spoke of certain beliefs and views about D.V. held by the general public. It would be of value to explore these in order to assess areas for possible change through education and public campaigns, thereby possibly reducing the barriers that prevent women seeking help for D.V. related problems. Other appropriate research would include a closer exploration of the Refuge worker role. It would be of benefit to the Women's Refuge organisation to identify areas of the job that are particularly problematic for the advocates, and therefore enable design and implementation of strategies to ameliorate or alleviate these difficulties.

The gaps in service provision and barriers to appropriate assistance have been examined from the view of Women's Refuge advocates and the findings suggest that there is still much to be achieved in this area of service. The issues raised by the advocates about service provision for abused women have been being raised in literature and other research long before this study was completed. The benefit of this finding is that it highlights the fact that despite certain initiatives being implemented, the same problems are still prevalent. This thesis contributes to this area of inquiry that is so important: before we can change systems we need to have an understanding of where the gaps are and an idea of what needs to be achieved - and how to go about this - from the perspective of those who are working at the cold face.

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMATION SHEET

Psychology Department, Massey University, Palmerston North

*A Narrative analysis of Women's Refuge advocates' talk of working with abused women.*

#### *About the researcher.*

Hi, my name is Shelly Hindle. I am an unpaid worker for Palmerston North women's refuge and a Massey University student. As part of a Master of Arts in Psychology I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr Mandy Morgan. The purpose of this project is to give voice to advocate's experiences of working in Women's Refuge. I am asking for volunteers to help me conduct this study.

#### *What is this study about?*

You are invited to participate in a study that contributes towards a broader programme of study of various service providers in New Zealand. It is hoped that this programme will enhance the overall service provision for women who are abused. The aim of this current study is to collect refuge workers' accounts of their experiences as advocates and examine how refuge women understand domestic violence and the work of service providers in this area. It will also enable you to give voice to your experiences as refuge advocates working with abused women, through women's refuge. Any identified problems will be reported so that change is possible. The primary goal of this research is to provide information for NCIWR and to make recommendations and suggestions in the hope of facilitating even better service provision and social interventions from refuge workers and NCIWR. Research results and recommendations will also be circulated through academic journals to address issues of broad concern in the field.

#### *Who will be involved?*

With agreement from National Office, invitations to participate in this research have been sent to all general refuges. From the response to the invitation, I will select as wide a range of participants as possible. This process will be limited to Pakeha/NZ European caucus. As a Pakeha/NZ European woman myself, I do not feel qualified to conduct narrative analysis on talk from women who are of a different culture than my own.

### *What would I have to do?*

You would participate in a semi-structured interview in which you will be asked a series of questions and you will be free to talk about any issues that are relevant to you. It is anticipated that interviews will be approximately one hour, and will vary depending on the conversation. You will contribute to the direction of the interview. After your interview has been transcribed it will be returned to you so that you can review the information you have provided and make any changes you would like to make.

### **My rights as a participant**

All participants have the right to:

- Decline participation;
- Confidentiality;
- All relevant information regarding the study;
- Ask any questions about the research at any time during participation;
- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Turn off the audio tape at any time;
- Withdraw information at any time;
- Withdraw from the study any time up until completion of analysis;
- A summary of the findings of the research.

All private information obtained over the course of this research will only be seen by my supervisor and myself, and is otherwise strictly confidential. All names and identifying information will be deleted or changed, and your own refuge need not know that you are involved in this research. Although National Office will review this project before examination they will not have any details with regard to the identity of participants.

If you are interested in participating in this research, or for further information regarding this study, please feel free to contact my supervisor or myself at the address supplied.

Thank you very much.

Shelly Hindle

Shelly Hindle (Researcher)  
Department of Psychology  
Massey University  
Palmerston North  
E-mail: [shelly.hindle.1@uni.massey.ac.nz](mailto:shelly.hindle.1@uni.massey.ac.nz)  
Phone: (06) 353 8909

Mandy Morgan (Supervisor)  
Department of Psychology  
Massey University  
Palmerston North  
E-mail: [C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz](mailto:C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz)  
Phone: (06) 350 5799 (extn. 2063)

This project has been registered with the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Turitea Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 3505249, email [S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz](mailto:S.V.Rumball@massey.ac.nz)

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

*A narrative analysis of Women's Refuge advocates' talk about working with abused women.*

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE (5) YEARS

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

- I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.
- I am aware that I may turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview.
- I am aware that I have the right to withdraw information or withdraw from the study at any time until the analysis is completed.
- I am aware that I will be provided with a copy of my interview transcript so that I may review the information I have provided. I have the right to change my transcript if I choose.
- I agree/do not agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

For the purpose of confidentiality, my name in this research will be.....

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

## APPENDIX C

### Schedule of Questions

1. What has your experience of working at Women's Refuge been like?
2. What has your experience of working with other service providers for abused women been like?
3. How did you get involved in working for Women's Refuge?
4. How does working at Refuge affect other aspects of your life?
5. How is refuge the same or different from what you imagined it to be? From how you think others imagine it to be?
6. Were there any questions that you hoped or imagined that I would ask you?  
Is there anything else you would like to discuss today?

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