



Te Awatea Violence Research Centre



# Women moving away from violence: planning it - doing it

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## **Acknowledgements**

The first acknowledgement for this research must go to the women who generously shared their stories so that others could learn from their experience. They have given us a glimpse into the terror of their worlds and the courage it took to make change happen.

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## Foreword

Intimate partner violence affects many families/whanau and their children in Aotearoa. It is a growing concern in communities particularly in regard to the effect of such violence on outcomes for children and young people. Much of the existing research is focussed on exploring incidence and prevalence data on this phenomenon. There is less research and focus on the ways that women leave such violent situations and the strengths they bring to this process.

This study is based on the stories of women who have moved away from violence and was specifically designed so that the voices of women could be heard. It is timely in that the seriousness of the problem is widely acknowledged but less attention has been paid to the strategies and skills that women themselves bring to the moving away process.

Yvonne Crichton-Hill already has a practice and research background in the areas of child protection and intimate partner violence. She has worked extensively with the Pacifica community in a health-related project which seeks to respond to family violence. Currently Yvonne is a member of the Pacific Advisory Group to the Ministerial Family Violence Taskforce and is also a member of the national Glenn Inquiry into intimate partner violence and child abuse.

This study offers intimate stories of women's lives and the reflections of women over the years they were caught in a web of violence. These new insights provide readers with a wealth of information of the many ways in which women sought to protect themselves and their children as best they can under extraordinary circumstances. The narratives highlight the significant role that families/whanau can play in helping to end the cycle of violence and the important role of critical response services such as the police and the women's shelters.

It will become clear to the reader that some family and service responses were unhelpful. This new information is an opportunity to reflect on the implications for our legal system, response agencies and family networks.

This research provides firsthand accounts of women who have lived with violence and moved beyond it. It is clear from the findings that the voices of children have yet to be heard and it is

hoped that their stories will soon be told so that the full implications of intimate partner violence can be understood.

The evidence from this research points to the courage of women and children in the face of violence and the urgent necessity for communities to learn how best to support their loved ones who may be affected. This report suggests that families/whanau and community responses need to be as brave as the survivors in their efforts to find solutions.

Dr Annabel Taylor

Director Te Awatea Violence Research Centre

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## **2 Executive summary**

The purpose of this collaborative project is to listen to the stories of women who have moved away from violence so that their experiences can inform policy and practice responses in the area of intimate partner violence. Christchurch Women's Refuge and the Family Help Trust, two Canterbury based NGOs, contracted the University of Canterbury's Te Awatea Violence Research Centre to undertake the majority of the research. The study was funded by the Lottery Community Sector Research Fund of the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board.

### **2.1 Purpose**

The statement of purpose of this study was as follows:

To understand the decision-making process for women in addressing violence in their relationships and to develop an empowerment resource that is useful for other women in similar situations.

This report constitutes the major resource for the agencies involved and for the wider public on the experiences women moving away from violence. A further publication and a resource booklet are additional outcomes which will be completed in 2013.

### **2.2 Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this research and covered a range of issues associated with intimate partner violence (IPV) which the research team developed and applied during the interview and analysis processes.

What is the turning point for women in order to move away from intimate partner violence?

Is this a gradual process involving a number of separations?

What role do social services have in assisting women to make changes?

How are children supported during the process of change?

What have been the helpful responses for women in addressing violence in the home?

What have been the not so helpful responses to the violence experienced at home?

What skills and strategies did women use in order to address violence at home?

How can best practice approaches be informed by women's experience?

## **2.3 Methodology**

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling involving the agencies managing the research. The majority of participants came from Christchurch Women's Refuge with some coming through word of mouth contact. Interviews were conducted in places that the women chose, more often than not in their homes at the time of interview. Ethics approval was granted by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury. Each interview was usually two to three hours duration.

The narratives were broad ranging life histories which reflected complex interplays between different elements. The stories were analysed inductively by employing a method of narrative analysis which involved three levels where different clusters of broad research questions were checked against the stories. At the same time the researcher was alert to new experiences recounted by the women that did not fit within the original framework envisaged by the research team. Each story was re-visited at least three times in order to explore unique aspects, how these related to shared experiences and to what extent the experiences resonated with existing research and scholarship concerning IPV.

The project began with a substantial literature review which was completed in December 2011. This report can be read alongside the earlier literature review which is available through Christchurch Women's Refuge. Key literature has been summarised for the purposes of this report with a small amount of repetition and with a stronger focus on material directly pertinent to the research questions.

Management and peer review of the research was provided by a collaborative team of personnel from Christchurch Women's Refuge, the Family Help Trust and Te Awatea Violence Research Centre. The Director of Te Awatea provided oversight of the research outcomes ensuring that the research reflected the wishes of the agencies involved. The

agencies were particularly interested to know the implications of the research for practice and policy and the findings contribute to development in these two areas.

## **2.4 Findings**

The findings are grouped under four meta headings that were drawn from the research questions; turning points, the process of separation, skills and strategies, and helpful and unhelpful responses. These will be dealt with under each heading:

### **2.4.1 Turning Points**

There were shared patterns in the point at which women decided to make changes and to address the violence in their relationships. However these patterns were heavily influenced by individual differences in terms of culture and context. There was a sense in which the women came to an end in their ability to cope with their partners and this was expressed as exhaustion and defeat. Out of this position women came to recognise the risk of lethal violence and that unless they took some action, there was a high likelihood that the violence would escalate towards them and their sometimes their children. They also recognised at this point the higher risk of violence in the process of leaving and this influenced the care which they took over their preparations to leave. They were deeply affected by the impact of the violence on their children but were also influenced by the need to survive and for their children to survive. Turning points were reached through frustration with broken promises and in some cases the failure of authorities to respond. The brave actions of informal supports and authorities and services interacting with the women contributed to their decision to leave.

### **2.4.2 Process of separation**

The internal voices of the women reflected wider societal expectations in regard to being a wife and to motherhood. They wrestled with the need to take responsibility and the recognition that no one else could protect them or their children unless they made this possible. They were fearful of loneliness and isolation once having left and for some this contributed to their delaying in making changes. The consequences of leaving sometimes outweighed the potential benefits particularly where they had lost confidence in themselves and system responses to keep them safe once having left.

The process of separation began while the women were still in the violent relationship, continued once they had left, and carried on past the point when the violence had stopped. For some women this process took a number of years.

### **2.4.3 Skills and strategies**

The women developed an amazing array of skills and strategies in planning their moving away. This needs to be understood in the context of years of physical abuse and injuries sustained which sometimes affected their cognitive functions. They feigned compliance with partner demands; they secretly planned their departure by hiding a suitcase and money. They embarked on personal development opportunities outside the home and employment played a critical part in the confidence to leave. They drew on their informal supports and after years of relationship stress with their own families, this sometimes involved one last person sympathetic to their situation. Finally, they called on the support and resources of authorities such as the police, lawyers, women's shelters and health service personnel. There were mixed experiences based on the external contacts they made.

### **2.4.4 Helpful and unhelpful responses**

The women interviewed had contact with the justice system (court and legal processes), the police, specific IPV services, individual or group counselling services, and medical practitioners. While only one woman had contact with care and protection professionals, all the women were aware of the child protection system and held concerns that because of the IPV their children were at risk of being removed. Women's experiences of professional support were mixed; some professionals were described as wonderful and as saviours, because what they did contributed to the women's survival and made them feel worthwhile. On many occasions these professionals provided women with the courage to change their situation. These are the professionals women said they would never forget. Other professional responses left the women feeling bewildered and frustrated, unprotected and feeling worthless. These professionals acted as a barrier to the women moving on from IPV; professional inaction, lack of care, and minimisation of the women's IPV situation reinforced the women's lack of belief in the 'system', and in their own ability to survive and change their circumstances.

Finally, the women suggest that services for women should be easily accessible, should be conducted through face to face interaction, and must be non-stigmatising, and non-judgemental.

## **2.5 Implications for practice**

A number of practice implications arise from the study. These are as follows:

### **2.5.1 Containment of violent partners**

Many women found that the ex-partners continued to stalk and harass the women and their families after the women had left the relationship; for one woman the stalking continued for 8 years. This is despite the presence of protection orders and the involvement of judicial processes. According to the women in this study, more needs to be done by the justice system to contain violent partners.

### **2.5.2 Safe housing alternatives**

Access to immediate shelter and support in the leaving process was critical for the majority of the women. A greater range of safe housing is need for women. The predominant model has been to provide shelter for women and children in refuges; there are safety technology options that have been used internationally that could offer women quality protection.

### **2.5.3 Acknowledging competency**

The women used a range of skills and strategies to enhance their survival, and that of their children, through the process of moving away from IPV. Services delivered to women would be enhanced if professionals working in the field acknowledge that women experiencing IPV, whether still in the relationship or having left, possess a range of competencies that they employ to resist IPV.

### **2.5.4 Professional discretion and education**

The process of moving on from IPV is complex and unique to each woman. Professional responses to the women were variable. Professionals who work with women living with IPV will enhance their practice by displaying a professional, non-judgemental attitude towards the women; by demonstrating care for the women; by working in a way that is supportive of the

woman's time frames while doing all they can to protect her and her children. IPV specific education needs to be provided to IPV providers and other workers in the field.

### **2.5.5 Holistic responses**

Strong suggestions are made throughout the study as to the kind of service that will help women move away from IPV. A complex response system is required that incorporates safe housing; personal development and determination enhancing activities such as individual or group counselling, and assistance with gaining employment; and, health, nutrition and exercise programmes. Services need to be responsive to the physical, practical, and emotional needs that women have.

### **2.5.6 Alcohol and drug use**

Some of the women reported that the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs helped them deal with the IPV, but also impacted on their ability to leave. The women would be more likely to access women-only treatment services.

### **2.5.7 Programmes and counselling for women**

Individual and group counselling was viewed positively by all of the women who had sought counselling support. However, the number of subsidised sessions available to them was limited; as one woman described "10 sessions for 10 years of shit" alluded to the incongruence between the years she had suffered from IPV and the number of sessions available to help her healing process. Children's programmes were also viewed positively. The women asked for more counselling support to help them maintain, and in some cases, rebuild their relationships with their children.

### **2.5.8 Public education campaigns**

A number of women sought help because they had viewed the Ministry of Social Development supported "It's not OK" social marketing campaign. Greater visibility of information about IPV, and IPV services should be considered.

## **2.6 Recommendations**

There are two key recommendations that arise out of the findings. Detailed recommendations are provided in the full report. The two key recommendations are:

### **2.6.1 Enhancement of safety for women and children**

There are a range of sub recommendations that fall within this key recommendation. One of the key findings in the research is related to the severity and frequency of the violence experienced by the women in the study. Most of the women feared for their lives and those of their children, it is clear, therefore, that more work needs to be done to enhance safety.

The sub recommendations include:

- Women living with IPV need to have access to safe advice and support relevant to their IPV context
- All women living with IPV need to have access to safe housing
- The protection offered by security technologies should be explored
- Consideration should be given to the safety and housing needs of women who belong to different cultural and ethnic groups.
- Women living with IPV need a justice system that is responsive to their safety needs.

### **2.6.2 IPV service provision**

Within this key recommendation fall a number of sub recommendations. IPV service provision should be well coordinated in order to meet the needs of women as they attempt to move on from violent relationships. The set of sub recommendations include:

- The development of an educated and aware IPV workforce that is able to respond in a knowledgeable, caring and non stigmatising way to the needs of women moving on from IPV.
- The ongoing development of a coordinated IPV service delivery system that works as a team to deliver services to women in rural and urban areas.
- Intervention strategies should meet the practical, assessment, and personal development needs of women.
- Women focused and child focused IPV services should continue to be developed. Greater funding attention needs to be given to this area.



### **3 Introduction**

Women's experiences of living with domestic violence have been explored in a range of qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in New Zealand. In the main the studies have concentrated on prevalence rates, health outcomes, and service provision within the justice system. This study, a collaboration between Christchurch Women's Refuge, Family Help Trust, and the Te Awatea Violence Research centre, collected women's stories about the process of moving away from domestic violence. The project was funded by the Lottery Community Sector Research Fund.

International research examining the process of moving away from intimate partner violence (IPV) is predominantly based on interviews with women who are residing in shelters or refuges. In New Zealand, studies have tended to focus on women's experiences of moving away from IPV at the end of a formalised process, such as court proceedings (Morgan, Coombes, Te Hiwi & McGray, 2007), or on women's coping strategies in relation to a specific form of IPV, such as Murphy's (2002) study on psychological abuse. New Zealand research has also examined women's experiences of the legal system (Hann 2004; Robertson, Busch, D'Souza, Sheung, Anand, Balzer & Paina, 2007), of particular services (Crichton-Hill, Coker & Taylor, 2010), and women's attempts at help-seeking (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010).

Studies in New Zealand have also examined the long-term consequences for women who had rebuilt their lives after IPV; highlighting the impact of abuse and the factors that contributed to women rebuilding their lives (Lewis, 2006). Still another study by Giles (2004) examined the process of recovery for women who had been in abusive relationships. Robins (2010) studied women's experiences as mothers separating from a violent partner. Here, the focus was on those factors that supported or undermined a mother's ability to keep their children safe.

While there has been considerable research on IPV in New Zealand there have been few studies that combine an investigation of the factors that prompt women to move away from situations of intimate partner violence, the process of moving away, the strategies they use to move away, and the factors that have supported women's move toward safety from IPV.

The aim of the study is to understand the decision-making process for women in addressing violence in their relationships and to develop an empowerment resource that is useful for other women in similar situations. Through hearing women's narratives we may be able to identify the skills and strategies women develop in order to bring about change so that they and their children can forge lives for themselves that have positive outcomes and are free from violence. Additionally, a better understanding of the dynamics of moving away from violence will provide policy makers and practitioners an understanding of women's moving away experiences and suggestions about how services might better respond to women's needs.

### **3.1 Research Questions**

The study posed the following research questions:

What is the turning point for women in order to move away from domestic violence?

Is this a gradual process involving a number of separations?

What role do social services have in assisting women to make changes?

How are children supported during the process of change?

What have been the helpful and not so helpful responses for women in addressing violence in the home?

What skills strategies did women use in order to address violence at home?

How can best practice approaches be informed by women's experience?

## **4 Review of Literature**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a well-known characteristic of many societies around the world; New Zealand is no exception. There is a profusion of literature that outlines the prevalence of IPV, and the impacts of IPV on women and children. Additionally, there are a range of services that provide support to those who have been subjected to violence in their personal relationships, and services to those who perpetrate violence. Less well understood are the processes women employ in their journey through IPV.

### **4.1 Prevalence and incidence**

New Zealand rates of violence are on the rise. In 2009 violent offending rose by 9.2% (New Zealand Police, 2010a); this rise was largely owing to an increase in the occurrence of family violence which rated at 18% (Boshier, 2011).

The prevalence and incidence of IPV nationally have traditionally been measured through the New Zealand National survey of crime victims. The survey asks people about their experience of crime. The first survey occurred in 1996 (Young et al., 1997). The second survey was conducted in 2001 (Morris, Reilly, Berry & Ransom 2003). In 2006, methodological changes were made to the crime survey; despite these changes the authors contend that the risk of personal assaults and threats had altered very little between 2001 and 2005 (Mayhew, Reilly & Morris, 2007). Ratios for men and women who had experienced offences by partners were the same when considering prevalence rates (how many had been victimised at least once). However, women experienced a greater number of crimes than men (incidence rate, or number of offences per 100 households). The 2009 New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey (Ministry of Justice, 2010) reports that confrontational crime by partners decreased slightly from the 2006 survey, however, women were still identified as slightly more likely to experience partner violence. The Crime and Safety Survey data sit at odds with District Court data that show an increase in the number of male assaults female charges prosecuted, and sentenced between 2000 and 2008 (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2012). Additionally, New Zealand Police culpable death statistics (NZ Police,

2010b) show that in 2009, 75% of female victims of murder and/or manslaughter were killed by a partner, ex-partner, or family member.

Further evidence of the vulnerability of women to violence from their current or ex male partners is found in the number of women who seek refuge from IPV. The New Zealand Women's Refuge provides a range of services to women and children. These services are provided through community initiatives and safe houses. For the June 2010-June 2011 period the number of women using safe house accommodation increased by 11.6% increase (New Zealand Women's Refuge, 2011). In addition, Women's Refuge received 6000 crisis line calls; this works out to approximately one call every nine minutes (Women's Refuge, 2011).

One must treat IPV statistics with caution. IPV is a sensitive issue and it is likely many women will not report to police or emergency departments; or let others know of the violence they are experiencing.

## **4.2 The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence**

It is understood that IPV has immediate and long term psychological and physical impacts on women and children. IPV has been associated with a range of negative health outcomes for women including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and eating disorders (Evans, 2007). Women suffer immediate injuries when an incident of IPV has occurred, but there are also longer term physical consequences including back pain, digestive problems and chronic fatigue (Campbell et al., 2002).

An international 2010 study on the psychosocial impact of IPV explored the personal perceptions of health held by 132 women recruited from an IPV service provider (Brewer, Roy & Smith, 2010). The study found a strong association between IPV and health. Fifty percent of the recruited women reported suffering from headaches, migraine, eating disorders and disturbed sleep, and their use of negative coping behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse, smoking, unsafe sexual behaviour and the absence of social supports, increased the likelihood of illness.

In New Zealand, a study of IPV undertaken in the Auckland and Waikato regions found that women who had experienced IPV were more likely to have attempted suicide (Fanslow and Robinson, 2004). This is confirmed by World Health Organization research (2005), where:

...ever-partnered women who had been abused by their partners were much more likely to have ever thought of suicide ... and to have attempted it than non-abused women. This is consistent with other research in developing and industrialized nations... (p.16).

#### **4.2.1 Impact on children**

IPV also has an impact on children who may witness the violence by viewing the violent event, hearing the event, or seeing the results of the violence. Children may also have been directly harmed as a result of attempting to intervene to protect their mother from the violence (Koloto, 2003). The Hamilton Abuse Intervention Project (HAIPP), from their data collected between 1991 and 1994 (Maxwell, 1994) found that children witnessing IPV may have tried to stop the violence towards their mother by yelling or screaming, and some had run to tell neighbours, or had contacted the police. In the process of intervening some children had suffered physical or verbal abuse themselves. Witnessing violence has an impact on the health and well-being of children, and international and New Zealand literature has found that children may experience sleep disturbances, emotional stress, and reduced appetite (Pocock & Cram, 1996).

Women may be motivated to leave the violent relationship because they are concerned for the safety and wellbeing of their children. Apprehension about the influence of the violence on their children may include concern that the children would perceive violence in relationships as normal (Davies et al., 2005). Women may also be troubled about the influence of IPV on their own parenting. Internationally, Levendosky, Lynch & Graham Bermann (2000), in a study of mothers' perceptions of the impact of IPV on their parenting, have identified a range of factors which make parenting difficult. Included is the impact of violence on health (physically and emotionally), negative and tension filled interactions with male partners; managing as a single parent once the abusive relationship ended; and, concerns about the impact of IPV on the well-being of their children. The study revealed that a number of women perceived an improved relationship with their children because mothers felt greater empathy for their children and attempted to protect their children from the harmful effects of the violence (Levendosky et al., 2000).

#### **4.2.2 Economic cost of service provision**

In the last twenty or so years a growing body of IPV literature has attempted to estimate the economic costs of IPV (Laing & Bobic, 2002). International differences in the types of costs included in an economic analysis of IPV make inter-country cost comparisons difficult. Typically, studies on the economic cost of IPV examine both direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include goods and services that respond to and prevent IPV, including; the justice system, the health care system, social systems, the cost of providing refuge safe houses and other safe accommodation; and, the cost of legal services. Indirect costs refer to what has been lost as a consequence of IPV. Examples of indirect costs include loss of income, loss of training opportunities, and loss of promotion potential; and for employers, the cost of sick days taken and the loss of productivity (Walby, 2004).

Employment losses due to IPV affect the individual women through loss of income, training and promotion potential, and affect the employer through the costs of sick days taken and loss of productivity (Walby, 2004). It is understood that “cumulative domestic violence can have negative effects on economic capacity many years after the violence occurs” (Lindhorst, Oxford & Rogers Gillmore 2007, p.812). IPV affects women’s employment in a number of ways. Women may be concerned that colleagues will see the visible physical signs of violence; women may be unable to concentrate on the job due to the emotional and psychological stress experienced, or their partner may prevent them from working.

While most studies have found that IPV has a negative impact on work attendance, one study found that people who had experienced IPV in the past were likely to have higher rates of absenteeism than current victims (Reeves & O’Leary-Kelly, 2007), reinforcing the idea that the impact of IPV on wellbeing can be long lasting. The authors stated that, for current victims, attending work may be a way of coping with the violence or may be a sign of the victims’ strong motivation to retain employment in order to have the financial means to leave the violence and abuse.

### **4.3 Managing violent relationships**

Women who live with abusive partners reveal that violence can occur at any stage of the relationship. Women actively respond to violence in diverse ways, and these responses may change over time. Women's responses are dependent on a range of factors including gender socialisation and perceptions of relationship roles and motherhood. For some women one violent incident may be enough for her to make the decision to end the relationship; for others that first unexpected violent incident is minimised, and once the partner has promised it won't happen again, all is forgiven, and the violent incident is perceived as a one-off event. Typically, the first violent incident is followed by other escalating incidents of violence. However, the violent events are interspersed by periods of non-violence in the relationship. Over time, women develop a range of strategies for coping with the violence while simultaneously reflecting on what might happen to their relationship.

#### **4.3.1 The influence of gender role socialisation**

A number of studies suggest that gender role socialisation has an influence on how women balance their expectations of their role in the relationship and the reality of the violence they experience. Gender role socialisation may be the reason women, when the first violent incident occurs, blame themselves and seek to find ways to make the relationship work (Giles, Curren, and Adamson, 2005). Further evidence of gender socialisation is found by Towns and Adams (2009) who argue that women have to traverse two conflicting perceptions; one, their continuing optimism for equity in the relationship, and secondly, their cultural belief that it is incorrect to defy their partner's place as head of the family. Towns and Adams (2009) describe cultural beliefs that influence women's perceptions of the female and male role in relationships as 'perfect-love discourses'. These culturally maintained beliefs contribute to the silencing of women and encourage women to keep working at their relationship because "the true love of a woman is understood to be able to cure all of the man's problems" (p.580).

#### **4.3.2 Violent relationships: the process of change**

The process of moving on from a violent relationship is not straight forward. How women remain in, and move on from, violent relationships has been conceptualised in the research

literature as a process or processes. Thus, some studies describe moving away from IPV as consisting of a series of stages or phases that explore women's emotions, thoughts, and actions throughout the period of the relationship until leaving; other studies include the period of time after a woman has left (post separation).

An example of a phased process is the work by Church and Church (1981) that highlighted the role that fear plays throughout the course of a violent relationship. Church (1984) suggests that there are four phases of fear and during any of these phases a woman may decide to leave the violent relationship.

The pre-fear phase begins with disagreements leading to the first violent incident. Following this first violent assault the violent partner seeks forgiveness and is forgiven by women. In the second phase of selective fear women learn to fear some situations but not others. Women may respond in an assertive way and this may prohibit violence from occurring in some situations, but at other times her assertive response may serve to escalate the violence. The selective fear phase is followed by generalised fear where women are fearful when in the company of their partners and failure to be agreeable and comply with her partner's demands results in increasingly violent attacks. During this phase women may feel trapped and helpless; leaving her partner becomes an option. Finally, in the gross stress reaction phase, women experience constant fear as the severity of the violent attacks has escalated. During this phase women may leave the relationship. In Church's study, of 45 women who had reached the final fear phase, only four remained in the relationship.

The work of Giles and Curren (2007) identified five phases that women go through from entering to ending a relationship. The first phase, falling for love, describes how women enter a relationship with romanticised ideas and traditional beliefs, and without the skills to manage conflict. When violence occurs women blame themselves and work to maintain the relationship.

In phase two, taking control, women become focused on surviving in the relationship; maintaining compliant behaviour and focusing on the mothering role. As the violent relationship continues, women have periods of anguish and confusion. These periods are



highlighted by an awareness that the relationship cannot continue. In this phase some women make plans to leave, while others are more uncertain.

Phase three, securing a base, relates to the time after women have left the violent relationship. The violence continues and women are fearful for their own safety and that of their children. This phase is characterised by mounting pressure from the continued abuse, financial burdens, and emotional turmoil; leaving women exhausted. The relationship with the violent partner may continue, especially for women who have children and who believe the children should continue to have contact with their father. During this phase, women may seek support from friends and family, or from social services. The support may be helpful or unhelpful and often there is pressure to reconcile.

In phase four, women reflect on their relationship and their responses to the violence; thus, this phase is called, 'making sense of it'. Women may experience some safety and stability, however, fear and concern for themselves and their children is still present. During this phase, women resist reconciliation while at the same time mourning the loss of the relationship. Phase four is a time of personal growth and the development of independence and self-sufficiency.

The final phase is 'being myself'. Even though fear remains, women become more future-focused; they are stronger, feel more secure, and are more energetic. Some women may become involved in helping other women who have experienced IPV.

### **4.3.3 Skills and Strategies**

A number of international studies argue that women in violent relationships act passively in response to the violence in order to keep themselves safe.

Some literature suggests that the strategies and skills women use to cope with violence are better represented by a circular moving backwards and forwards process than a linear process such as that suggested by Church (1984) and others (Giles & Cureen, 2007). In Hand et al.'s exploration of women's decision making process in violent relationships, women emotionally distanced themselves from their violent partners in order to gain strength, and to plan leaving. Once women had separated, though, they reflected on their decisions to leave the relationship

and this, along with pressure from their ex-partner to return, led to some women reigniting the relationship with their ex-partner.

An earlier study by Church (1984) examined women's experiences of living with violent partners. Church (1984) found that women who fought back against the violence were often subjected to further and escalating violent attacks. For 10% of the women in his study, assertiveness was successful, but this was not due to the particular assertiveness strategy used by the women; rather, Church argues, it was because the women's partners were more socially mature, and less self-centred and chauvinistic.

Murphy (2002), who examined women's experiences of psychological abuse, claimed that the skills and strategies women use to cope with violence can be described as a decision-making process:

Women have to interpret, label and attach meaning to their partner's behaviours and intention and then make decisions about how to respond. These decisions are influenced not only by their own psychological attributes, but also by the dynamics of the abuse itself, their partner's responses and cultural, social, political, economic and historical factors. Coping with victimisation comprises both constructive and self-destructive processes. (pp 4-5).

In her study, Murphy (2002) found that women used a range of strategies to cope with the violence. These included tactics such as withdrawing, changing their appearances, wearing clothes that made them look frumpy, avoiding arguments, and not expressing their own views. Some of the women in Murphy's study used anger or physical abuse to cope with the violence. Other strategies included focusing on activities that they could achieve in their own right, such as mothering, or contributed to their self-development, such as tertiary study or other social activities. Hand et al. (2002) found similar examples of women employing compliance to keep their partner happy.

It has been suggested that keeping silent about the violence can be an important strategy for women (Morgan, Coombes, Te Hiwi, & McGray, 2007). Not letting others know about the violence prevents women from being judged and allows them to try to work out a solution by themselves. Jury's (2009) study of the shame experienced by women in violent relationships, established that non-disclosure is a way of avoiding the shame and stigma that come from

being labelled as a victim of violence. If others find out about the violence women may protect their partner (and themselves from stigma and shame) by finding inventive ways to explain injuries and to justify their partner's behaviour. Protection from shame may be the reason women do not disclose to the authorities, especially if they wish others to view them as the successful person they are in their public life.

In considering the skills and strategies women use to manage a violent relationship, it is important to acknowledge the influence of socio-cultural factors that support attitudes towards gender roles, and that impose shame and guilt on women. These strongly held cultural beliefs impact on a woman's ability to disclose to both informal and formal supports. Even once a woman leaves a violent relationship socio-cultural beliefs can continue to stigmatise her for not remaining in the relationship.

#### **4.4 Leaving violent relationships**

Since the 1970s research conducted about women's responses to IPV focused on why women remain in violent relationships (see for example, Shainess, 1979; Walker, 1984). This early work highlighted patriarchal oppression and gender role internalisation as barriers to women leaving IPV situations. Moreover, the studies viewed women as inactive in relation to the violence they were experiencing. However, a growing body of research recognises the actions women take to address the violence they experience. This work has concentrated on investigating the process of leaving (Chang et al., 2006; Koepsell, Kernic & Holt, 2006; Oths & Robertson, 2007). Studies suggest that leaving is a gradual process of change marked by turning points or transitional events resulting in movement from one point of change to another. The dominant and socially acceptable view is that moving towards safety from IPV means leaving the relationship (Johnson & Sullivan, 2008) and that staying in the relationship signifies a lack of readiness to move towards safety (Brown, 1997). Studies examining women's responses to IPV concentrate on stay/leave decisions rather than on the many ways women resist domestic violence (Cavanagh, 2003; Chantler, 2006). Cavanagh (2003) posits that focusing on women's stay or leave decisions is reductionist and ignores the complexity of intimate relationships.

Another recurrent theme in the literature on the process of moving away from IPV is the idea that for many women a 'turning point' is the precursor to leaving a violent relationship. A

‘turning point’ is a transitional event that redirects a direction in life (Elder 1985). Morgan, Coombes, Te Hiwi and McGray (2007) describe this as one or a number of ‘tipping points’. There are diverse descriptions of what the ‘turning’ or ‘tipping’ point might be. For women in Morgan et al.’s (2007) study these points were when women finally realised they “couldn’t really tolerate living with him, he was very angry” (p. 83); or the turning point might have been when women realised they did not want to be “treated like shit anymore” (p.84). For women in Murphy’s (2002) study, turning points occurred when they realised the relationship would not improve, or when they realised that remaining with their violent partner was endangering their life, and the lives of their children.

#### **4.4.1 Assessing the risk of leaving**

The decision to leave is courageous suggests Seuffert (1996), as at this point women are often exhausted, sometimes requiring medical attention, and often in need of financial support, accommodation, and legal protection. In her holistic risk assessment model, Hamby (2008) suggests that women evaluate the risks of leaving in relation to three broad categories: the risk of personal physical harm; the risk of harm to others; and, the financial, social, and legal risks to staying or leaving.

##### ***4.4.1.1 Risk of personal physical harm***

Research suggests that violence may escalate when women make moves to leave the violent relationship. Seuffert (1996) contends that some women remain in violent relationships because it is “easier to know where he is and have some ability to predict his actions than to always be hiding in fear of his sudden, violent discovery” (p.40). Abrahams (2010) writing about the context of leaving IPV in England and Wales states that “leaving may not be the safest course of action” (p. 24) especially because the homicide data from these countries show that most women were killed by their ex-partner; making leaving, or having left, dangerous. Robertson et.al. (2007) have described the time of separation as one of the risk factors for future violence. Women report that ex-partners continue to intimidate, stalk, and threaten to kill, once women have moved away from the violent relationship (Murphy 2002). In New Zealand, Fanslow and Robinson’s (2010) study of women who in their lifetime had experienced IPV found that women sought help or left violent relationships because they had

suffered serious injury and feared the violence would escalate resulting in a threat to their lives.

Research indicates that women may be at risk of personal physical violence if the perpetrator demonstrates beliefs that condone the use of violence towards women. In a New Zealand survey measuring attitudes about family violence (McLaren, 2008), 15% percent of respondents agreed that “a man who doesn’t fight when he is pushed around will lose respect as a man” (p.9); 7% believed that in an intimate relationship it is OK to hit if you’ve been hit first” (p.9); and 5% believed that “sometimes hitting is the only way to express your feelings” (p.9). According to survey results, the participants who held these beliefs were Maori and Pacific men, and men from ‘other’ ethnic groups. For refugees and migrants a pattern of rigid gender expectations may develop that highlights male supremacy and female subservience. According to Boutros, Waldvogel, Stone & Levine (2011) this is known as “cultural freezing” and is the result of immigration and resettlement experiences (p.10). Threats to male domination may result in violence within the home.

For some women, the move to leave is associated with a recognition that their own physical and mental health is at risk (Hand et al., 2002).

#### ***4.4.1.2 Risk of harm to others***

The time of separation from a violent partner is the most dangerous time for children (Radford & Hester 2006; Seuffert 1996). Ex-partners can threaten to kill the children as a way of trying to maintain control over women (Murphy 2002). Robin’s (2010) doctoral thesis research into New Zealand mothers’ experiences of separating from an abusive partner reports that post-IPV-separation mothers, even though the children lived with them, remained concerned for their children’s safety.

Women are rightfully concerned for the safety and wellbeing of their children (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). This concern may translate into a barrier for women wanting to leave a relationship, contribute to women returning to a relationship, or be a critical factor in women’s decisions to leave the relationship. Abrahams (2010) reports, in her study of IPV outcomes for women, that the realisation that their children were in danger was one of the factors that propelled women to move away from the violent relationship.

#### **4.4.1.3 Financial, social, and legal risks**

Women who are contemplating moving away from IPV consider a number of other risk factors. Each of the risks outlined below are considered and balanced in relation to other risks.

##### **4.4.1.3.1 Financial risks**

Women may be concerned that they will not be able to support themselves or their children and that they will not have anywhere to live. A number of authors have highlighted that the biggest obstacle to leaving a relationship is being able to obtain suitable accommodation impacting on a woman's ability to leave IPV or facilitating a woman's return to her violent partner (Abrahams 2010).

Crichton-Hill, Coker, and Taylor (2010) examined how women with protection orders (a legally binding order issued by the Court to protect people from IPV), and how women without protection orders used Christchurch Women's Refuge services. The authors describe protection orders as "an important legal marker of the ending of an abusive relationship" (p.13) but acknowledge that for a range of reasons, including financial, some women do not access a protection order. Findings also indicate that programme funding policies may not provide women with the best chance of staying IPV-free:

The current practice of restricting funding to the provision of one programme may limit women's ability to access the information at times when they can best understand and use the knowledge gained (p.13).

##### **4.4.1.3.2 Social Risks**

The idealised view of mothers as intuitive nurturers has been criticised by feminist theorists for at least three decades (Krane & Davies, 2007). Mothers have been cast as carrying out a role that is natural and intuitive, no matter what the circumstance, resulting in healthy, well-adjusted citizens. According to this view of mothering, the emotional and physical resources required to mother become invisible. Paradoxically, when home environments do not fit these perceptions of the mothering role, mothers are cast as responsible for the detrimental home environment. In the context of IPV, attention may move away from the violent behaviour of the male perpetrator and towards the woman's inability to parent (Jackson &

Mannix, 2004). Women who experience IPV may feel guilt which is reinforced when they are criticised for remaining in violent contexts with their children or when they leave the home.

#### **4.4.1.3.3 Legal Risks**

Women seek assistance from the legal system for a number of reasons. These include application for a Protection Order, legal representation, police assistance, and custody and access arrangements in relation to children.

Robertson et al. (2007) found that while women were positive about aspects of the Domestic Violence Act (1995) there were aspects that left women feeling frustrated. For example, a number of barriers existed to the acquisition of a Protection Order. Barriers included: lack of information about Protection Orders; the cost of attaining legal aid was described as prohibitive for some women and for non-resident women whose violent partner was their sponsor, attaining a Protection Order was not an option. For women who were able to acquire a protection order the response of the Police to breaches of the order were described as inadequate.

International research highlights the challenges presented by the need to follow strict rules in relation to fathers' access to their children (Shalansky, Ericksen & Henderson, 1999). Sometimes women are forced to have contact with their violent ex-partner because of laws related to custody and access. With reference to New Zealand, Robertson et al. (2007) raised a number of factors that can have a detrimental impact on the mother and child. These include: the father attempting to undermine the relationship between mother and child; the father's lack of parenting skills, including neglectful and irresponsible parenting; exposure to threats of violence towards the mother; and, risk of abduction. Children may also not wish to spend time with their fathers and may be distressed following access visits (Giles, Cureen, & Adamson, 2005).

There has been some attention in the literature to mothering in the context of intimate partner violence (Lapierre 2008; Radford & Hester, 2001). However, the focus has been on intimate partner violence as a child protection matter with mothers playing a central role in protecting their children. Although there are mixed findings about the impact of intimate partner

violence on mothering (Radford & Hester 2001), the emphasis has been on women's 'deficiencies' and 'failures' as mothers in the context of violence (Lapierre 2008). It follows that women weigh up the risk of being identified by child protection authorities as a child abuser knowing that the outcome may be that her children are removed from her care.

That women in violent relationships need to continually evaluate a range of risks provides some insight to the difficult and convoluted process that women may need to work through in resisting IPV and moving towards safety.

#### **4.4.2 Planning to Leave**

Once women have evaluated the risks associated with staying or leaving, and they have decided to leave, preparations must be made. The planning process may take several years notes Murphy (2002). Often plans to leave require careful consideration as leaving can be dangerous (Giles et al., 2005), and thus, plans must be made secretly. When women are planning to leave the violent relationship they must be mentally and financially ready. Jury (2009), discusses how women had to employ secrecy and impeccable timing in their plans to leave because the consequences of the violent partner becoming aware of their plans could be terrifying.

Planning to move away from violence is "a process of accumulating insight, knowledge and information, a gathering of resources" (Martin and Hand 2006, p.50).

#### **4.4.3 Leaving**

Leaving has been described as the most dangerous time in the violent relationship (Radford & Hester, 2006; Seuffert, 1996). Leaving may also be a time of sadness for women whose dreams for a happy and fulfilling relationship with their chosen partner have been replaced by a much more horrifying reality. Jury (2009) reports that women in her study talked about their grief for the loss of relationship post-separation, describing their feelings for their ex-partner: "And it was quite hard because you do grieve, I suppose, the loss of a relationship" (p.123).

Acts of violence may not stop once women have left the relationship. Violent partners may intimidate, threaten, and harass women in order to maintain their power and control over women's lives. Conversely, violent partners may seek to maintain contact after separation by promising to change their behaviour and appearing cooperative and remorseful.



One way that violent partners can maintain contact with women is through contact with the children they share together. Powerful cultural beliefs can influence women that it is best for children to have contact with their father despite his violence towards the mother. In Robin's (2010) study of women's experiences of separating from a violent partner, women felt responsible for maintaining the child's relationship with their father "and went to considerable lengths to encourage contact" (p.107). The women found that contact arrangements with the violent partner provided ongoing opportunities for him to abuse the mother, sometimes physically.

#### **4.5 Responses to IPV: the New Zealand Context**

In the late 1970s, the women's movement in New Zealand, as it had around the world, brought to light the extent to which women's lives were subjugated and controlled by male domination. The early 1970's was a time of "radicalism and militancy in the cause of women" (Dann 1985, p.24). During this time, the Women's Liberation Conference was held; the second women's liberation magazine (*Broadsheet*) began publication; and, women protested about a number of issues, including IPV.

The first New Zealand women's refuge was established in Christchurch in 1974 (Dann, 1985). By the 1980's a number of women's refuges had been set up around the country. In 1981, the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR) was established as an Incorporated Society with 11 members. There are now 51 refuges in New Zealand (NCIWR, 2000).

During the 1980's, New Zealand underwent a range of neo-liberal economic changes which in turn created major social changes. As a result, there was an increase in Maori rates of unemployment and a reduction in Maori rates of household income. Consequently, inequalities between Maori and non-Maori in relation to health, education, income, and housing, expanded (Blakley, Tobias, Atkinson Yeh & Huang, 2004). At the first Hui Taumata (Maori Economic Summit) in 1984 these social and economic issues were discussed; particularly welfare dependency and tino rangatiratanga <sup>1</sup>Hui Taumata led to what

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<sup>1</sup> The term "tino rangatiratanga" has been interpreted by the Waitangi Tribunal (1987) as meaning 'full authority'.

has been termed a “cultural and economic renaissance for Maori” (Hudson cited in Durie 2005, p.ii) and indigenous ideas grew in force as Maori development came to be viewed as a way of being liberated from colonization. One example of ‘renaissance’ was The New Zealand Ministerial Advisory Committee report to the then Minister of Social Welfare entitled, *Puao te Ata tu* (1986). This report signified one of a number of actions that promoted change in the way social services responded to Maori. As a result of the growing recognition of the impact of IPV on Maori women, and the need for more culturally responsive IPV services, the NCIWR transformed its service provision to Maori in 1986 with the introduction of tau iwi and Maori parallel services.

The NCIWR has been effective in promoting legislative changes in relation to violence against women. Until 1970, the Police did not intervene in IPV unless there was a serious injury or death (Ford, 1993). In the 1970’s Police became more involved in domestic disputes, however, the involvement was negligible and police generally held a mediating role between the two parties in order to pacify the situation and stop the violence. Generally, charges were not laid (Cross & Newbold, 2010). The 1982 introduction of the Domestic Protection Act is a result of the political and social lobbying carried out by the NCIWR. Further legislative changes were to come including the criminalization of rape within marriage (1985) and, in 1995 the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act which extended the definition of relationships covered by a protection order, provided a rehabilitative focus, and widened the definition of domestic violence to include children who witness the violent event (Barwick, Gray & Macky, 2000). While the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act has advanced positively the judicial response to IPV in New Zealand, there remain discourses about violence which are obstructive to the effective protection of women (Busch & Robertson, 2000). These include defining IPV as the result of communication difficulties in relationships, and identifying provocative behaviour by women as a cause of IPV, thus making a distinction between women who are deserving of protection and those who are not.

The late 1990s has seen a more collaborative response to violence within families. Of significance here is the move towards a ‘family’ perspective of violence which includes a number of forms of violence including child abuse, IPV, elder abuse, sibling abuse, and adolescent violence towards parents (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). A number of

authors argue that the use of the term ‘family violence’ places family at the centre of analysis thereby obscuring the fact that the most common form of violence in the home is male against female (Candib 1995; Merry 2009).

Responses to IPV over the last 40 years have altered considerably. New Zealand now has a range of non-governmental services providing advocacy and support for women alongside support services and programmes for children, and men. There is now recognition that IPV occurs across a range of societies and cultures and that the nature of IPV and the level of social support for such violence varies greatly from setting to setting (Krug, 2002). This suggests the need for theoretical explanations and practice responses that are strongly connected to the cultural context in which IPV occurs. As a result, New Zealand has experienced a growth in the range of ethnic services responding to the needs of Maori, Pacific, Asian, and refugee and migrant populations.

These changes in service provision signify an incorporation of holistic models of intervention following a growing recognition that perspectives of IPV that have at their core a single disciplinary focus are inadequate in explaining why men’s violence towards women occurs. Predominantly, theories used to explain IPV have been one-dimensional and ethnocentric in origin and are employed across a range of cultural and ethnic groups (Bent-Goodley 2007). In addition, Goldner (1999) states that “feminist psychological/psychiatric and cultural perspectives, which clearly modify and enrich one another, have been framed as mutually exclusive oppositions, creating a polarizing context of forced choices between inadequate alternatives” (p.327).

Multifaceted collaborative approaches to IPV propose a synthesis of perspectives, recognising the potential of each perspective to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of IPV, and ultimately in our professional responses to women, men, and children.

## **5 Methods**

This study employs a qualitative narrative research methodology. Qualitative researchers seek to portray people’s experiences and this is often couched in terms such as “giving women a voice”. The purpose of narrative methodology is to uncover the meanings research

participants give to their experiences. These narratives are interpretive procedures through which people represent themselves and their worlds to others. The culture of the storyteller, therefore, affects the content of the story told.

Riessman (1993) argues that we must consider how we depict the participants in our research. She contends that researchers deal with “ambiguous representations” (p.8) of another’s experience. These representations enter at various points in the research process and are divided into five types of representation.

*Attending to experience* involves reflecting and remembering; it is the process of recalling aspects of the experience. *Telling about experience* is essentially the re-presentation of events. The storyteller (research participant) provides an overview of the story, defining a setting, characters, and a plot. Storytellers may tell this story in different ways to different people – essentially the storyteller tells others what he or she wants them to know. Thirdly, *transcribing experience* refers to the way in which the story is recorded. Riessman (1993) makes the point that there is no one correct representation of the spoken language; transcribing is “incomplete, partial, and selective” (p.9). The researcher will need to make decisions about how to record and what to record. *Analysing experience* is the process the researcher uses to make sense of stories; through this process the researcher decides what is important. Finally *reading experience* refers to how the story is presented in the final report. Every text is open to multiple interpretations from readers. Every report of stories is bound in a particular context and time.

## **5.1 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for this research was sought from the human ethics committees and approved by the University of Canterbury on the 17 March 2010.

Women participating in the research were provided with an information sheet to read that outlined the parameters of the research. Participants then signed the consent form and were advised that they could withdraw their involvement at any time prior to completion of the research.

## **5.2 Sampling**

At the inception of the Te Awatea research project, the agencies concerned stated the need to capture a diverse range of experiences of women in moving away from violence. Both the Family Help Trust and Christchurch Women's Refuge have a comparatively high proportion of Maori clients and clients of other ethnicities. Both services have a small number of women in same-sex relationships. It was agreed that purposive and snowball sampling be utilised in order to capture a breadth of experience of IPV. Purposive sampling can be defined as the selection of participants who are knowledgeable of the experience under study, are willing to talk, and represent a diversity of views (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Snowball sampling identifies participants from those known to others who have possible data-rich sources (Creswell, 2007).

The target population for the project was women who have been violence free in their relationships for two years or more. All women had experienced IPV and were supported through the process of moving away from violence by the Family Help Trust and CWR. Staff of the Family Help Trust and CWR identified the women and made first contact with them. Following this, each agency went through a process of screening to ensure that the participants were violence free. At this initial call the agency workers explained the project to the women and asked if they might be interested in participating; it was made clear to women that their involvement in the project would be voluntary. At that point, the women were told that the researcher would be in touch with them to further discuss their involvement in the project.

## **5.3 Participants**

Eleven women participated in the study. The women were diverse in terms of age and ethnicity; they were aged between 20 and 56 years. In terms of ethnicity, one woman identified as Maori, one as Polynesian, and 9 as New Zealand European or Pakeha. At the time of interview all women lived in the Canterbury and South Canterbury region. All the women were mothers and all had responsibility for children during the process of moving away from violence. At the time of interview two of the women were grandparents.

## 5.4 Data Collection

Interviews were organised with each of the women and conducted at a place and time of their choosing. At the beginning of the interview each participant was once again informed of the purpose of the project and the approximate time commitment expected of them. An information sheet was provided, any questions answered, and then participants signed the informed consent form. Each interview was audio taped on a digital tape recorder. Minimal notes were taken by the interviewer so as not to distract from the participant's storytelling.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim onto a computer that is password protected. To make sure the transcriptions were an accurate paper-based recording of the interview, checking occurred by listening to the digital recording while reading the transcript. A copy of the transcriptions was saved to a pin drive kept in a locked file cabinet. Transcripts were printed and kept separate from any identifying data.

## 5.5 Data Analysis

Narrative analysis of data provides an in-depth understanding of each participant's point of view. The intention is to capture the stories of the participants to gain insight into their lived experiences. Narrative analysis takes as its focus the participant's telling of the story (Frost, 2009; Kramp, 2004) and involves a process of considering the content and form of narratives and the context in which they are told (Frost, 2009). Throughout the data analysis process checking was done with the project team<sup>2</sup> who analysed segments of text. This operated as a systematic process of peer review where different perspectives were applied to the data. The data analysis process used was in three stages: interpretive readings, defining story segments, and story identification.

### 5.5.1 Stage 1: Interpretive Readings

Transcriptions of each interview were read multiple times using a process of interpretive readings of the data from different standpoints as advocated by Arvay (2003). The first interpretive reading is *reading for coherence* of the content. The data were organised into a temporal order so that there was a coherent timeline for the story.

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<sup>2</sup> Project team members were Annabel Taylor, Libby Robbins, Lyn Ford, and Bill Pringle.

In the second interpretive reading, the transcript was read for the *narrator's sense of self*. The purpose of this reading was to gain insight into the ways the storyteller constructs herself in the story by reading for the various "I" positions the narrator occupies. Relevant questions here are: Who is telling the story? What metaphors does she use to describe herself? What are her challenges? What meaning is she trying to express? What parts of herself does she share, and what does she keep hidden and why is this so?

The third interpretive reading looked for *responses to the research questions* thus focusing on how the narrator told her story of resisting IPV through moving away.

The final reading was to look for *the reflection of power and other socio-cultural influences* in the women's stories. This involved reading for the influence of the social, political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts that influence the meaning the narrator gives to her story, thereby moving from micro to macro analysis of the data.

### **5.5.2 Stage 2: Locating narratives for analysis**

The next step was to identify bound stories; these are story segments within each woman's narrative. The segments were identified in relation to each research question; *turning points, separation process, role of social services, support for children, helpful responses, unhelpful responses, and skills and strategies*. So, while reading through the transcripts for stories about turning points, the question would be asked: *Does this segment of the transcript contain a story about turning points?* To determine the beginning and ending of stories several factors were taken into consideration including: identification of the setting or context, actors, characters, and plot.

### **5.5.3 Stage 3: Interrogating the stories**

The analysis of each bounded story was conducted by incorporating the interpretive reading analysis that included any themes identifying how each woman positioned herself within the transcript, responses to research questions, and the influence of socio-cultural, political factors. Alongside the already conducted interpretive analysis, in order to develop themes within and across the stories, a number of questions were asked:

- Under what circumstances is this description of the research question area, for example turning points, different from other descriptions (of turning points)?

- Why are these descriptions (of, for example, turning points) different from other descriptions (of turning points)

## **5.6 Limitations**

The chief aim of the research has been achieved; however, there are some limitations to the methodology. Firstly, the research was conducted with a smaller number of participants than anticipated; the research gained ethical approval in March 2010 and planning with agencies began during 2010 to identify and recruit participants for the research. The earthquakes in September 2010, and February 2011 plus continuing major seismic events throughout 2011 have had an impact on the time frames for the project and possibly the availability of women to take part in the project. It was important, given events in Christchurch, that we were mindful of the appropriateness of interviewing women about a sensitive topic such as IPV in the context of natural disaster.

The small number of participants involved means that caution needs to be applied in regard to drawing conclusions from the findings based on the small numbers. This is offset to a degree by the extensive interview process undertaken by the researcher and the detailed stories produced by the women. There are extensive rich data generated by the interviews that encompass the retrospective life stories of the women. At no time, were there restrictions or curtailments on the extent and breadth of the stories; in a very real sense the women were narrating their life histories.

Another limitation is the lens of the researcher that has been brought to bear on the accounts as they were told. Inevitably, the perspective of the researcher has contributed to the reporting, the analysis and the interpretation. However, the data were peer reviewed throughout the research process by the collaborative team of stakeholders who met regularly to discuss progress and to consider the findings. A system of peer review of the findings was instituted towards the end of the project so that other lens could be brought to bear on understanding the implications of what the women had to say and whether their messages had been clearly heard. Without exception the women spoke at length and on more than one occasion about their experiences.



## **6 Findings**

This section of the report provides an introduction to the women who shared their stories of moving away from intimate partner violence. The findings are ordered, in the main, around the responses to the research questions. The questions were not asked directly of the women, but they are the areas the women included as they were storytelling. The research question area “Supports for children” is a theme that runs throughout this section so it is not an area examined on its own. “The research question regarding “the role of social services” is captured in the section “Skills and Strategies”.

Throughout the findings discussion, each of the women who participated in the research will be briefly introduced. Pseudonyms are used for all story characters and place names have been altered in order to preserve confidentiality. The report is structured in such a way that verbatim stories are recounted by the women under key themes. After each key theme is reported a summary analysis of that theme is provided.

### **6.1 Turning Points**

In this section a selection of the women’s stories about various turning points are presented. Amongst the women interviewed, turning points could occur at any point during the relationship, and all of the women described a number of turning points that included: an end to coping; the possibility of death from violence; broken promises; and external encouragers.

#### **6.1.1 An end to coping**

##### *Sharnie*

Sharnie met Donald when she was young – Donald lived in the house next door to her flat. He was living with junkies next door. Donald went away to jail for a period of time and when he came back he was different – he stopped using drugs, but substituted alcohol. Early on in the marriage Donald started leaving Sharnie for periods of time. Also, things would go wrong at Donald’s work and he would get down on himself and start drinking, going out for a night and not returning. Sharnie and Donald had two children, Kevin and Bella. When Kevin was about two or three years old, Sharnie decided she’d had enough of staying at home, and so she found herself a part time job. From this point on, it is Sharnie’s view that Kevin lived in fear that Sharnie would leave him. He became increasingly distrustful and jealous of

Sharnie, her family and friends, and over time he became extremely unwell. He became more and more controlling of the clothes Sharnie wore, where she would go, and he never wanted her to go out on her own. He was extremely possessive. Donald's drinking became worse and he began binge drinking and stopped doing some of the activities he used to be involved in previously. Throughout the relationship Donald was emotionally and verbally abusive towards Sharnie, and at times he would damage material possessions. He would keep her up for long periods of time, not letting her sleep or rest.

In her story Sharnie reveals a major turning point for her in the relationship. It is a turning point mentioned by a number of the women interviewed and relates to the ability to manage the ongoing impact of the violence on health and wellbeing.

*We moved overseas. I thought well all the pressure here, this might be a good start; it's something he had always wanted to do. He had a job over there and we had friends, so away we went, and went out in the back of beyond, into a Cray fishing village where he was a Cray fisherman.*

*Bella was 5, so Kevin would have been 10. But the culture over there, it couldn't have been worse, because they worked hard from 5 in the morning till lunchtime on the boats every single day; but it was like 40 odd degrees and he would drink, and he was small, and I would think his liver was probably damaged through the drugs or whatever, because 6 beers would knock him over, whereas, you know, to other people it wouldn't. And so that didn't work. So, one night, in the middle of the night, because he was just getting really bad, he was drinking every night, he was threatening. It was like, "you sit up here*

*and you'll talk about this' and this sort of thing, and you just had to sit there, and I'd go to bed and he'd come in and he would take the blankets off me. "No, you'll come up and you'll talk to me about this', so, you'd have nights of not sleeping and it just got really bad and I just couldn't handle it. The drinking was out of control and I thought 'Right, this is it, I'm going home'. In the middle of the night he went to get more alcohol, so I said to the kids "right, pack up the car' and we hid in that bay, because there was only one road in and one road out, so we hid in another woman's house for the night, and in the early hours of the morning me and the kids jumped in the car and drove all the way back to the city, sold the car, and came back.*

In this story, Sharnie provides context to the eventual turning point event by outlining Donald's growing reliance on alcohol. She reveals her attitude towards Donald's behaviour stating that she "just couldn't handle it". In examining the content of Sharnie's story, the reasons for this turning point are clear. Her account of how Donald's drinking was "out of control" suggests that she is at his whim, and there is no telling what he might do next. Further on in the interview Sharnie provides another story highlighting the, *I can't handle it* theme, but key to this next story is the realisation that Donald could kill her.

### **6.1.2 The possibility of death from violence**

Most of the women interviewed described how the threat of severe and potentially fatal violence was a turning point in how they perceived their relationship.

#### ***Sharnie***

Here Sharnie shares how it was the first time she realised Donald could kill her.

*I'd come home and then he got into this you don't love me, you don't love me' and I didn't love him, I didn't. I was only with him because I*

*thought, 'hell, have I got the ENERGY' ... what's he going to do, he's got time to cope, he's not mentally well anymore, he could get drunk and he could kill me! So, I didn't love him, and that's all he kept wanting, he wanted all of a sudden me to be happy, spring to life, and I just couldn't do it anymore, The end of it was one night when I went to bed and again he said 'No, you're not sleeping, we're going to sort this out'. So, I just couldn't.....I knew I couldn't have another night of not sleeping, 'cos he'd sit up and he'd be drinking, the whole time he'd be drinking, so I knew that it's going to get worse and worse and worse, and that if I said one thing wrong he's right up in your face or there'd be a punch to the side of the wall, you know, never parked on me, but I tell you what, it's frightening enough if I got a few snaps, he'd kill me.*

Sharnie presents this story firstly by outlining her feelings towards Donald explaining that she no longer loved him and he had awareness of this. In reaching the turning point Sharnie employs two areas of knowledge; firstly, she understands the escalating pattern of Donald's behaviour, and secondly, she appreciates the impact of the ongoing violence on her health and wellbeing.

Other women identified fear for their lives as a turning point.

### **Vicky**

Vicky was married at a young age; that relationship was abusive. The couple had twins. After they separated, when the twins were still in nappies, Vicky met Tama who was a bouncer at a local night club. She fell in to a relationship with him and this lasted about a year. Tama was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive from the very beginning of their relationship.

*Everyone gravitated towards him, so I thought, oh he must be doing okay if I can score a man like him. I had such low self-esteem. And then he just started really, and I remember he just started lashing out, and he didn't lash out at my twins, but he lashed out at me quite often, and first of all I would hit back and I would think to myself, I'm going to die fighting – I'll die fighting this man. But you quickly realise you don't do that; you just put your helmet on. I always think, put my helmet on.*

Vicky begins her story by describing Tama and his popularity with others. She was attracted to him and thought he would be a great catch. She positions herself in two opposing ways in this story. Firstly, she introduces herself as someone with low self esteem; secondly, she describes her realisation that she could die, in the context of how she fights and stands up against him. Finally, she makes a comment that she also realised she wouldn't die because she would find ways to protect herself against him. In conclusion, at the end of her story, Vicky states;

*... but if I'd stayed with him any longer I wouldn't have survived it. I would have killed myself or killed him. And I think he started favouring one of my twins and that was another factor. And they started questioning, and you know spitting in his food and doing that didn't become fun anymore...*

### ***Lisa***

Lisa came from overseas and met Steve in New Zealand and they were married for 6 years. During the course of their relationship Lisa and Steve broke up several times and lived both overseas and in New Zealand. In the time they were together they had three children. From the beginning of the relationship Lisa noticed that Steve displayed some odd behaviour. In short, Steve had what Lisa calls “a whole lot of baggage”. Steve was physically and

emotionally violent towards Lisa throughout the course of their relationship. Lisa explains how fear for her life was a turning point.

*I was assaulted so hard; I had gone through strangulation and being hit in the head, hit in the stomach. I miscarried overseas because of being kicked in the stomach, just because I was standing in front of the TV trying to talk to him about something important; he kicked me in the stomach and I miscarried the next day, horrible things like that. Back here in New Zealand he twisted my arm up behind my back and I heard a pop and a crack, very painful, my whole wrist was swollen and bruised and I was putting ice on it, and I said 'I need to go to the hospital my wrist is broken'. It was at that point he said 'no, because, he said 'the hospital will ask questions and you'll tell them.' And it was at that point I realized he does not really give a shit about me at all. I could die and he probably just wouldn't care; dump my body somewhere. That was scary.*

Lisa's realisation about the possibility of dying from one of Steve's violent attacks is accompanied by a recognition that Steve does not care for her. Her analysis of the situation is strongly informed, not only by the previous violent events, but also by his overriding need to protect himself, even amidst Lisa's need for hospital attention.

### ***Maggie***

Maggie lives in a small town in the South Island. Maggie met Chris when she was newly out of a long term relationship. She had two small children at the time and was staying with a friend who introduced the two. At the beginning of her relationship with Chris, Maggie had thought that their meeting would go no further; but Chris was persistent. As the relationship

continued, and following the first violent event, the violence escalated. Chris was physically, verbally and emotionally abusive to Maggie.

*And people could have him in the house, even with friends in the lounge, you know, and he would be manipulating and threatening me; no-one had a clue. People just didn't know, because, you know, there were two different sides to him. Simply, the turning points were the realisation that he was going to kill me at this stage, or kill me if I went, so I might as well have a go at going.*

Maggie introduced this turning point half way through the interview after describing in-depth the violence she had endured. She includes in her story the presence of others who were not aware of the violence that characterised her relationship with Chris. Simply put, a second reality exists alongside the reality that is shown to friends. But, in describing the turning point, Maggie moves quickly in her story from sharing the hidden aspects of her relationship to describing the fear she has for her life. The two themes in this story do not seem strongly connected; perhaps the fact that the violence has continued to escalate coupled with the fact that it was so well hidden leads Maggie to think that she is in more danger. Maggie also introduces in her story that staying or leaving the relationship could end in her death.

### ***Adele***

Adele was married to Todd for 12 ½ years and during this time Todd had a number of affairs with other women. They had tried to have children; however, she had suffered a miscarriage and a still birth. Adele and Todd adopted a baby boy named Oscar. Not long after adopting Oscar, Adele realised that she was burnt out and her relationship with Todd was very difficult. Eventually she met Tonya and left her difficult relationship with Todd to set up a home with her and Oscar. Her relationship with Tonya became intimate but they didn't live together. In their relationship Tonya was physically violent, controlling and manipulative. Adele describes the recognition that she could die from Tonya's escalating violence.

*I also knew that the reality is 'I'm gonna die.' There's no way out of this, I am gonna die.....because she would quite often say 'I'd be happy to do murder for you, blue eyes', things like that, or....I'd be quite happy to kill for you'.....you know, and I knew they weren't words spoken lightly either. She knew them. She had another family inside, and she didn't care.....she didn't CARE.*

The stories shared by Sharnie, Lisa, and Maggie highlight that the realisation of the possibility of death from violence came from the acts of violence themselves. However, Adele's turning point is the result, not only of the acts of violence that have preceded the turning point, but the verbal threats that Tonya used to convey her willingness to kill others on her behalf. Adele recalls in her story that her estimation at the time was that there was no way she can get away from the violence; the possibility of death from violence is firmly stated; *I'm gonna die*. Like Sharnie and Lisa, Adele realises that Tonya does not care, but we are left wondering if this means that Tonya does not care about Adele, or whether she does not care about the impact killing Adele would have on Tonya's family.

### **Ana**

Ana and Levi have a child, Cooper, together. Ana was 21 when she met Levi, who was visiting from overseas. It was about a month into the relationship when Levi confessed his love for Ana. At the time Ana appreciated Levi's emotional support as she was depressed from having to manage difficult family relationships at the time. Early on in the relationship Levi lied to and tried to manipulate Ana; he became increasingly controlling and emotionally and verbally abusive. Physical violence was also a feature of the relationship.

*One day I woke up, we had an argument the night before and I was crying. I cried myself to sleep and I said I need to get out of this, this is not good. So I tried to leave and he pretty much stood in my way.*

*"Look, I need space. I need to get away from you." And he wouldn't let*



*me leave and I really got frightened, I think that was a breaking point; This one particular fight was when I tried to leave and it almost got to the point where I was telling myself he is actually prepared to kill me, and that's when I was telling myself I really need to get out. So, I think survival mode kicked in and then I just gave in. I was like, "Fine, I'm going to stay. I don't want to talk about it anymore and you're right and I'm wrong." I mean, had I continued... cos there was no one else in the house, it was just us two, and I literally believed that he was ready and prepared to kill me.*

In her narrative, Ana describes how she tried to leave Levi after a fight, but he wouldn't let her go. Rather than call this a turning point, Ana states that this was a *breaking point*. She then goes on to say that she knew Levi could kill her; she had assessed that she was home alone with him and so to keep herself safe, she decides to agree with Levi and decides to stay. She ends her story by stating that she *believed that he was ready and prepared to kill me*, introducing the idea that Levi had reached a point where killing her was an option he would be willing to take.

### **6.1.3 Protecting my child**

All of the women interviewed had children at the time the violence occurred. The following stories highlight the ways in which their children provided the impetus for change.

#### ***Tui***

*Tui was raised by adoptive parents (whangai; customary Maori practice of raising another's child ). She has one child, Lana, from a previous marriage. They lived overseas at the time. That relationship was violent and when the marriage ended Tui returned to New Zealand where she met Cooper. Because Tui travelled for work the couple did*

*not live together all the time. As the relationship progressed, Cooper became violent, often punching and kicking Tui. In the following story Tui outlines one of Cooper's violent attacks and the turning point it became for her.*

*So, I think that was the turning point for me -breaking the cycle. I wouldn't give him money; I'd hidden my Eftpos card, I'd hidden the car keys, which he found after a while, but because I'd done those three things and I wouldn't budge and when I said 'no' he knew that 'no' was meaning 'no', he grabbed me real quick, 'cos he was a kick boxer, you see, and he was HUGE, and for some reason he always came from behind. That's to me what I think I found so GUTLESS, was his always coming from behind. He grabbed my pony tail, smashed me onto this thing, and then by the time I came up and went down again, it was just so quick, that the next minute he sort of pulled me back, down on the floor I went, and as I was going down, smacked me; right in the nose so that you're seeing stars. I'm on the ground and I can feel myself going back and being knocked out, and I'm trying to fight being knocked out because my daughter is standing in front SCREAMING 'Leave my mother alone! Leave my mother alone!' And she's screaming at me, knowing that I'm hurt, and I'll never forget going, you know, you're about to go unconscious, my only thought was 'You can't do it – why? It's not safe, it's not safe'. Then, having seen my child about to be left so vulnerable, I wouldn't be there to protect*

*her....that was it. That was it for me. No man was ever, EVER going to put me in a situation like this. That was the last straw for me, because that's when I realised how downright low and dirty he was prepared to go.*

As she introduces her story, Tui talks about *breaking the cycle*. She is referring here to an earlier discussion about the abuse she had witnessed and experienced as a child, as well as the violence in her relationships with her first husband and Cooper. The words in capitals are such because Tui said them with great emphasis. Tui's attempts to resist Cooper have resulted in another violent attack on her that is seen by her daughter, Lana. This story highlights the awfulness of IPV while simultaneously evidencing the strength of resolve a woman being beaten can find in order to protect her child.

### ***Sharnie***

In this next story, Sharnie describes another turning point in her relationship with husband, Donald. This time the turning point develops out of Donald's tense interaction with both Sharnie, and their son, Kevin.

*So, this night Kevin was 14 at the time and he had a sleep-out. Okay, Donald would never touch the children or anything, so I thought "right" I just picked stuff up and went out to the sleep-out and I said to Kevin 'Can I sleep on the floor tonight', I said 'I've gotta go to sleep'. He said "Is Dad being a dick?" I said 'yes, he is. I think Kevin had a friend there that night too. Anyway he came out to the sleep-out and he said "right, you get in the house' and Kevin said 'No dad, mum's sleeping here tonight, she's gotta go to work tomorrow, just leave her alone, she's sleeping here.'" And he said "No, she's coming in" and Kevin got in the way, you know. That's it. And actually I was violent.*

*I just lost it. When he went to push Kevin away, that was it, I just said to Kevin 'you get out, you run, you ring the police' and I just held him back, I don't know how, I think I leapt on his back and I just turned into a wild person. Then I thought 'right, this is it. Kill me, do whatever you have to. Donald, that's it.' I grabbed Bella, and we ran, the police came, and I ran, and we ran...*

Sharnie's realisation that Kevin is in the way of violence spurs her into action that takes the form of violence, leaping on Donald, and convincing Kevin to run, followed by herself and Bella. In this story, Sharnie identifies herself as having *lost it*; she is a *wild person* suggesting loss of rationality, although she has the presence of mind to organise what needs to be done next to provide safety for her and the children.

### **Rose**

Rose was in a relationship with Brad. She has a daughter from a previous relationship, and with Brad, she has a son, Jack, who was about 8 when the violence started. Brad had ill health and needed a kidney transplant, and so Rose donated her kidney to him. Both took some time to recover; during recovery Brad developed a different side to his personality and became physically violent towards Rose.

*We went back home, he would come up, he'd be half drunk half the time; he'd just start screaming and yelling at me, all sorts of bullshit and obscenities in front of our boy. Then one day at school Jack had a really hard day at school...a really hard day at school where he had been bullied by some kids and pushed on the ground and they just all went for it. When his dad came home, he'd been drinking after work, and he'd come home and he was tiddly as and Jack told him what happened at school. He asked him to 'come here, and I'll show you*

*how you get out of a strangle hold'. I just sat there and looked at him and thought 'you bastard' because that's just exactly what you did to me a couple of weeks ago. And Jack was like 'no, no, no Dad'. And he was like 'come here then' and he jumped on the floor with his father and started having a wrestling thing, like they do, in the house. And next minute, Jack's dad had his arm around his shoulder and his neck, sort of like, a choker hold, and Jack asked him to let him go, and he asked him three times, 'cos it was starting to hurt him. He didn't let him go, so Jack bit his father on the arm. Well, his father turned round and bit him on the face. Jack got up, he screamed, he hid underneath the kitchen table, he was too scared to go near his father. The very next day I got him out of the house, brought him up here.*

Rose constructs her story of the turning point around several contextual factors; Jack was home from being bullied at school, Brad had been drinking and the wrestling where Brad uses a technique on Jack that he had used when violent towards Rose. In her account Rose has positioned herself as the observer, a role which we assume Rose remained in until the fight between father and son is over. What she has observed is enough to encourage her to make a decision to leave Brad, which they do the next day. Two societal narratives (socially and culturally held ideas) are present in Rose's story; firstly, a gender narrative about how males should stand up for themselves by use of force (*I'll show you how you get out of a strangle hold*); and secondly, a gender narrative about what is acceptable behaviour for boys and men, in this case the wrestling together (*having a wrestling thing like they do*).

Later on in the interview, Rose shares another story that highlights the resolve she has to protect her child and in this she is future-focused.

*I didn't want my boy growing up thinking its normal to disrespect your partner, your children, to hurt them.*

### **Vicky**

In the following story, Vicky describes the influence of Tama's violence on her children.

*They (the twins) weren't even at school. They were three. He tried to take them from preschool once, and they wouldn't let him. I was getting beaten up one night and one of them yelled out and said, "Leave her alone." I'll never forget that. And then he never touched them, but he threatened to and he favoured one, and he would go in and shake their bunks. And the times that I thought that he might do something to them, I contacted the police and they came out, and told me to get away from him. But I kept going back, to be honest. We'd separate and I'd keep going back.*

In Vicky's narrative the children witness Tama's violence, and are also subjected to it (*he would go in and shake their bunks*). Vicky through her concern for their safety would always contact the police when she thought they were at risk. She doesn't want us to think that this is all there is to this story, so she finishes by letting us know she will be honest – she returned to him.

### **Briana**

Briana was married to Wayne for 16 years and they had one child, Morgan. Wayne was verbally and emotionally abusive to Briana throughout the relationship; Briana describes him as extremely controlling and belittling in his behaviour towards her both privately and in public. When Morgan was 6 years old, they moved overseas where Briana was isolated from her supports. In the following account Briana identifies the point when her child's actions created a turning point moment for her.

*I had 16 years of that marriage, before I did my move, and it was only when Morgan kind of woke up to it, and it made me wake up. She put a plastic bag over her head after we were kind of rowing, kind of, you know, having a disagreement, and I was kind of slowly waking up, and he didn't like that idea. He wanted the power still over me, and she said 'I just don't want any more of this' and put the plastic bag over her head and I nearly died ...*

Briana tells this story in the first few minutes of our interview. In this account Briana defines the turning point as a waking up created by the actions of her child Morgan. In her story, Briana describes what was happening as a row or disagreement. However, we are not told whether the argument was heated, or what was said because Briana's focus in the telling of the story is her child's actions, the impact on her own awareness, and her feelings about what Morgan did (*I nearly died*). A few minutes later Briana adds a little more information relating to her concerns for Morgan.

*She was only 6, or 9 or something. At her school work, her stories, and everything like that, if you look through the lines of her sentences and things, you could see that she didn't like the situation at home, it was affecting her.*

Briana's description of her child's responses as a turning point differs from that shared by Sharnie, Maggie, and Rose. In Briana's account, her child Morgan does something to herself to get her mother's attention; Morgan must have felt desperate about the situation in order to take such drastic action. In Sharnie, Maggie, and Rose's stories it is the child being caught up in the violence that propels the women into action.

#### **6.1.4 Broken promises**

This turning point refers to the continuation of the violence despite other interventions and support, and regardless of promises that have been made by the violent partner to stop being violent.

##### ***Ellie***

Ellie met her husband, Carlo, when she was 23. He was from the Mediterranean and the two eventually made their home there. Within the first few years of marriage, Carlo had a motorbike accident, and suffered a head injury. Nine years later their son Leo was born. As Leo grew older Carlo became more belligerent and controlling towards Ellie, drank heavily and eventually was physically and sexually abusive.

Ellie's story about a turning point begins after she and Carlo have had a period of time apart.

*In the beginning, and it's all very distant when we haven't seen each other for 6 or 7 months and I really sexually I had gone off him anyway, which is kind of understandable when somebody treats you and calls you all these things. Yet the sexual side was something that was very strong for him, so, there was actually sexual abuse that went on as well on top of everything else. I mean, it was forced on me on more than one occasion, and, you know, it's just that he had this idea that if he had sex with me enough that was going to cement the relationship and keep it working, whereas it was kind of doing the opposite in many ways, and it was just 'oh, I don't want this at all'. And I think that was probably the last deciding factor for me because although his behaviour in many ways had become better, he was still trying to control me in this way, and really, I mean, he needed to work*



*on himself, and just wasn't willing to admit or accept that there were things he needed to work on.*

For Ellie, the time apart created distance, not only geographically, but in terms of their emotional connection with each other. She refers to the sexual violence that had put her off Carlo, but the turning point came when she realizes that despite the break they have had in their relationship, he still wishes to have control over her. This signaled to Ellie that Carlo had no personal insight to the changes he needs to make.

### ***Celia***

Celia had been with Dion since 1996 – during that time they had been married and divorced twice. Celia has three girls. She describes Dion as someone who she will always love. Dion was diagnosed with bipolar. The violence in their relationship began a short time after they first married and as time went on the violence became more severe and Celia became more and more worn down. She describes Dion as very controlling and manipulative stating that he was always in control.

*He had been to counselling this day, we were coming home, and I knew that he was going to be violent because he was throwing peanuts in the air and catching them in his mouth and giving me this look as I drove the car, like real horrible. What happened with me was I got angry and he was on probation, so I just pulled into the drive, got out of the car and instead of buying into it, come straight in and rung his Probie, (probation officer sic) and said "Look, I think something's going to happen here soon" and I've never done it before. So she unbeknown to me, she called the police. In the interim I called my brother for support, I called a friend for support and they were on their way over, and he was outside storming around kicking stuff around the yard and*

*then coming in and standing over me and going “I’m going to fucking kill you” and I just decided “well, no you’re not, you know, this is getting ridiculous Dion”. So he would storm outside and do the shit, you know, but I was angry, real angry, real sick of it before I left him for those three and a half years. The last words I said to him, so everybody arrives at one time, the police, my girlfriend, like it’s happening in the backyard, and um....I go out and he’s sitting on the bench, you know, by this stage, and so I go up and....’cos what he was saying to me was “I need time out from you” you know, like he’s just being an ass. So I go up to him and say “enjoy your fucking time out”. And that was the last I saw of him for three and a half years.*

Here Celia introduces the violent event itself as a turning point, however, she chooses to focus most of her narration on the number of people that come to support her, and her final statement to him. Further on in Celia’s story we find that the couple reunite and marry, and this time it takes four months until the violence begins again.

*This is the second marriage, but this is like about our fourth relationship. it probably took about 4 months that time which was a long time, and so it was even more gutting when it did start happening ‘cos there was hope, you know, there was a lot of hope. Honestly we had so much help and support from all areas, like friends, whanau, church (at that stage we were both going to church). That changed, we stopped that. But people were really.....like, I mean, hours of support. I don’t just mean a call and ‘how you doing’, I mean people would just rock up. Like, I’d rung and say I don’t want to ring the police; he’s*

*getting out of line, so people would rock up and support. We had so much support. Which has been good, it took all that for me to realize that he's had everything ... you know, I haven't seen a person more supported or helped more. Yeah, he still chose violence.*

It is not until the very end of her story that Celia shares her awareness that Dion is going to continue to be violent. The rest of her story sets the scene by describing the number of relationships they have had with one another, and the enormous amount of support received from others. Celia's last words indicate her belief that it is possible for Dion to make a choice about violence, but perhaps they also signify her realisation that Dion chose violence over her.

### ***Tui***

In this next story, Tui recounts her relationship with her ex-husband Todd; we pick up her story just after their daughter has been born.

*I will admit whilst I was pregnant my ex-husband never touched me; he treated me like a queen. For the first 3 months of her life he treated us like queens, but then, when finances started, you know, putting pressure ... 'when are you going back to work?', yeah, that's when he wanted me to go back to work and just shove our kid into a day care centre or Kohanga. I had waited to be a mum too long. I wanted at least the first three years, I felt was important to be with her before she went onto kindy, but, we had this promise. He promised me before we had her that we would do this, and then when he went to break the promise that's when the violence started, because I wasn't prepared to put up with someone that had broken a promise, (laughing) and he wasn't prepared*

*to put up with me not wanting to work. See where the father, was that was a big 'No No'. Because both of us had talked extensively about our abusive upbringings, so it was already stipulated before we had our child. We had already discussed discipline; we discussed what was to go on; and when the promises were broken after she was born, yeah, that was the biggest insult for me, because I realised 'oh my God' even though we agreed on this, his upbringing and what he'd been subjected to, wasn't going to allow him to embrace this new cycle (of non violence).*

Tui has insight into the impact that witnessing and experiencing violence has had on her life. In this narrative she recounts the process of decision making and the agreement that both she and Todd embraced prior to the birth of their daughter; and the resulting disappointment she felt when the violence continues and she realized that the violence Todd experienced as a child had was a powerful influence on his behaviour as an adult and would be too difficult for him to change. In the story, Tui presents as strong and committed to the decisions she makes; she indicates to us a belief that promises and agreements made should be kept.

### ***Maggie***

In the following narrative, Maggie describes the opportunity she took to write to the Courts about her partner Chris's ongoing violence.

*His mother asked me if I'd write a letter for the Courts 'cos he was going to jail and that I'd write a nice reference ... and I said "Yes, sure I will" and by this stage I'd had absolutely had enough. I mean, I wasn't coping any more, I saw exactly where the fault was, what his problem was, and that if he didn't stand up and take responsibility, and*

*be ALLOWED to take that responsibility, and people stopped making excuses for him, that it was going to keep going on. Enough is enough. So, I wrote this lovely letter for the lawyer and I took a copy in for the Court, I took a copy into his lawyer on the day of the court case, and for Victim Support to put before the judge. The letter basically said that he kept drinking, he'd been court ordered to do alcohol drug counselling, which he'd done; he was always very apologetic when he ended up in court, and he said this will never happen again; but over time he was never apologetic, he was always violent ... I didn't think he was ever going to change.*

A number of points made by Maggie are pertinent to the broken promises discussion. Maggie points out again the two different realities that exist in her relationship with Chris. To the authorities, court, social services, he is apologetic and compliant; but in his private world with Maggie the violence continues, and there is no apology. Maggie suggests a solution to this predicament; she tells us that Chris has to take responsibility for his actions; moreover, others, she suggests, have to stop providing excuses for his behaviour.

#### **6.1.5 External encouragers**

The turning point 'external encourages' refers to those other people or activities who have provided the motivation to women to make a change in their responses to violence. The women talked about the people and activities as significant turning points.

#### ***Lisa***

Lisa found motivation through a television advertisement.

*I'd seen the ads on TV that the government brought out that "Violence is not okay" and thought 'if they are putting in all that money, I'm not going to cry over him; they'd been putting all that money in saying*

*'it's not okay' obviously they mean it. It mustn't be okay, so if I go, someone will help me; and I went to the lawyers, I snuck out ...*

Here Lisa positions her understanding of the “it’s not ok” campaign in the context of the amount of money that is spent on it. She figures that if this is the message the government will pay to have on the television and then perhaps violence isn’t ok, and if this is the case, then if you seek help it will be there. Lisa’s questioning of whether violence is ok is part of a larger gender narrative that women should be compliant, while men are in control. Lisa moves on to her eventual meeting with a lawyer.

*When I got to the lawyers I just sobbed and told him my story and he wrote lots of stuff down, and said ‘do you feel safe to go home’? I said, ‘not really’. He said ‘well, I can ring Refuge and the police and get you out now’, and I said ‘oh no, we’re alright, all our belongings are in the house, passports and stuff’. He said ‘well, if that’s the choice you’re making’ I said ‘yes, to go back and get my stuff’. He told me to come back the next day at 10 o’clock, and I did, and he handed me an emergency protection order, a parenting order and tenancy order. I was stoked. It was hard, you had to just pinch yourself, ...just this magic, almost like a weight off your shoulders, like, God.....someone does care, someone’s listening, someone thinks that me and my kids are worthwhile ...*

Lisa takes us step by step through the conversation she had with the lawyer emphasising how she felt when the lawyer paid attention to her needs. Lisa interprets the lawyers’ response as indicating that he cares for her and this means she, and her children, are worthwhile.

### **Briana**

In thinking about how she decided to separate from her husband, Briana relates the following story.

*Well, I had been going to my doctor and she'd been kind of counselling me, which was really good for about 4 months, every week. They have Medicare over there, so it didn't really cost to go, so I could do it. She'd been lovely, she'd been great, and she gave me a question; whether I wanted to stay or go. And I said that I've been through enough, I'm sick of it, and I want to get out of it. And she kind of helped me; I said 'Oh, look I can't' because I'm not very confident, and I said 'I can't do this, I can't go to the airport by myself, I need someone with me to tell me what to do', and she said, 'Look, you'll be fine, you'll be fine, you'll DO IT, you'll DO IT!' She kind of gave me the courage.*

Here Briana's narrative suggests that she is conflicted about what she should do – should she stay, or leave? Not surprisingly, she is lacking in confidence, but her belief in herself is encouraged by the Doctor.

### **Adele**

In this story Adele describes how her growing sense of self coupled with messages from various sources provided her with the impetus to change her situation. Adele recounts this story at a particularly difficult time in her journey towards freedom from violence; her child had just been removed from her care and placed with her ex husband.

*It kept growing, my sense of self. I knew I could quite easily commit suicide. I actually had the rope, I had a knife, I didn't care if it hurt, I*

*didn't care, at least I'd be feeling something on the way out, because I wasn't feeling anything. I knew bubby was okay 'cos he was with a really good dad. He was a shit husband, but a wonderful dad, and I knew just having those two together was the right thing to do in life. So that's what it was down to, but then there was this voice inside me that also said 'But you're worth it too' and it was just little comments say, from that detective, the lawyer, the little messages started to pop up on TV that I'd take out of programmes; just started to highlight to me, started to kind of resonate with me. So it was that and I started to kind of grow within myself.*

The three women's stories demonstrate the power that professionals have to either advance or discourage a woman's movement away from violent relationships (see Section 4.4). In addition, public education campaigns such as television advertisements and information in programmes had a part to play in whether women considered moving away from violence, or continued in their move to safety.

#### **6.1.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: TURNING POINTS**

The women's narratives about turning points reveal that these periods of change may occur at a number of junctures throughout the course of the violent relationship; when the woman is residing with the violent partner, and when she is not; when she has decided to remain in the relationship, and after she has left. While the women shared similar turning points, the narratives presented by each of the women indicate that context, cultural values, violence experience, and partner characteristics, influence how the turning point is perceived by each woman, and what they might decide to do about it. Simply put, turning points, while shared, have different meanings for different women.

Through their narratives many of the women demonstrate their analytical ability to assess the patterns of their partner's violent behaviour, how it begins, how it progresses, and where it could end. The ability to harness this knowledge at times of crisis, especially expressed in the



‘possibility of death from violence narratives’, provides us with some indication of the strength of their desire to survive. The turning points narratives indicate the potential risk to life that many of the women experienced. This recognition for some of the women spurred them on to think more seriously about getting out of the relationship. For others the recognition that they could die meant that they reassessed their strategy for handling the violence in the moment they recognised the danger; it might be that the women decided to calm the situation down in order to keep themselves safe (as is expressed by Ana); or, as in Maggie’s case, she realised she may as well leave as the possibility of being killed was there if she left, or stayed.

Alongside the women’s fight to survive is their need to protect their children. They realise, at various points in the relationship that their children are at risk. The women are in the position of needing to take care of their children. Their ability to critically analyse the risk to themselves, and their children, and then to move positively to protect their children should be recognised as a great strength. The women interviewed privileged the protection of their children at the height of extreme violence. In the stories shared it is clearly the violent partners that create the risk for the children, not the mothers.

The same skills used by the women to assess risk and danger for themselves and their children are used to determine the likelihood of positive change in their violent partner. They conclude, based on past experience, their understanding of their partner’s backgrounds, and based on their values about responsibility and accountability in relation to behaviour and relationships, that change is not likely.

The turning points, while presented under different headings, do not operate in isolation from one another. For example, a woman may be experiencing a severe beating while her child is watching (as in Tui’s story), and sometime soon after she may see the advertisements on the television as part of the Government’s Family Violence, “it’s not ok campaign” (as was the case for Lisa). During this time, as the narratives demonstrate she is resisting by considering the likelihood of her partner’s potential for change and how the result of this assessment will determine her next course of action (as shared by Maggie).

While the turning points described may have been interconnected for many of the women in this research study, it must be remembered that turning points often happen at times of great crisis and chaos – the essence of which is difficult to communicate on paper, but which was communicated with strong emotion by all of the women interviewed.

## **7 The process of separation**

In this section women discuss the process of separation from their violent partners. For most, the process is gradual taking a number of years. The women's stories indicate that the process of separation extends beyond the time when they leave the relationship because often harassment, threats of violence and actual violence continue past the point when they physically end the relationship. The process of separation includes the following themes; concern and justification; taking responsibility; loving and needing; family, wife, and motherhood; and, consequences to leaving.

### **7.1.1 Concern and justification**

The women's narratives indicate that early on in the relationship their partners behaved in ways that gave the women cause for concern.

#### ***Sharnie***

Sharnie's account of her concerns begins with Donald leaving her.

*It started really with just leaving me, I think, just running, keeping his life going the same, but things would go wrong at his work and he would start going downhill into this depressive state and drinking and then going out and not coming back for a night and things like that. So that's how it started. No physical violence but it was emotional, and the first real fear I had if I can remember it, is when one of his friends told me that he had had an affair with somebody else, and he was going to go out and get them. , He was going to go out and shoot them. Yeah,*

*do it to his friend for telling me what he had done. So that was probably the first time I was absolutely freaking out thinking My God!*

Sharnie, in this narrative, shares how drinking and depression became a part of Donald's behaviour early in the relationship. But her concerns about his behaviour are emphasised by the last sentence in her story; it was Donald's reaction to the fact that his friend did not keep secret Donald's infidelity. He stated that he will shoot his friend and this early indication of Donald's thinking about violence is what alarmed Sharnie.

### ***Lisa***

At the beginning of her interview Lisa describes how Steve's behaviour early in their relationship concerned her.

*...from the beginning there was odd behaviours and he said that he had ADHD, that he had been adopted and that his adoptive parents divorced, and that he had met his biological mother; that he basically had a whole lot of baggage and it's taken me a long time to realise. I thought not my problem and I don't deserve to be treated this way, but he behaved that way, and I thought okay, that was an excuse for his behaviour. Then there was odd behaviours, like going bonkers if you open an umbrella inside the house by accident; he would just go spastic, he would throw things at me hard when he was passing it to me, almost aggressively, he would lose his temper in a split second with other people, although in the early stage of the relationship he wasn't losing it with me. He was losing it with other people, which was a little bit odd, and you could hear the little alarms going 'oh well that's a bit weird' but then he just sort of put it down to ADHD. It's like you just*

*keep going back to those excuses and those reasons and how he's so hard done by, and that's why he's so high strung or short tempered.*

The way in which Lisa began her story about her initial concerns provides us with clues as to how she will interpret Steve's behaviour. She shares with us how she uses her knowledge of Steve's family background to justify his odd behaviour around others, his quick temper, and his aggressive behaviour towards her. In her narrative Lisa recognised that it is not acceptable that she is treated in this way, but she dismisses this recognition by justifying and then stating "not my problem". Further on in the interview Lisa expands on the justification of initial concerns.

*He had me convinced that he can't help it, that's the way he's programmed or wired, and I suppose in a sense he is, because even after the years we did counselling together, marriage counselling, and we did one-on-one counselling, he'd even break down at times whether it was an act or not, saying, you know "I'm sorry" and "I'll do better". Even in court when we separated here in New Zealand he.....the judge said 'is there anything that you have done better or anything you would like to say to Lisa' and he said 'I would just like to say sorry I wasn't there to support you'. You know, there's a side of insanity he believes he's so hard done by and that his behaviour is this way and he can't change himself while there's another part of him that recognises it, you know, so he was very strange and weird (laughing).*

Lisa is convinced by Steve that his background is the reason for his behaviour. She provides examples of situations throughout their relationship where Steve would apologise for his actions and he indicates that his will change. However, on reflection, at the end of the story, Lisa speaks from the present when she laughingly says that Steve's perception of himself is

like “insanity”. In the telling of this story Lisa appears to have drawn a line between the way she saw things in the midst of their relationship, and her more relaxed reflection of Steve’s justifications today. The narrative shows us how context influences her reading of the situation.

### ***Ellie***

In Ellie’s interview the following account is told after she has described a particularly violent beating she received from Carlo. In this story Ellie recounts how her attempt to leave is difficult because she is living in the Mediterranean, and because she tries to make sense of Carlo’s violence by exploring the reasons why he is violent.

*It was a couple of years later, because my son was only about 2 or 3 when that beating event happened, he must have been about 6, because out of the mouths of babes, when I just said “Look, I just don’t know what to do” and he just said “Well, why we don’t just go, mum’ and I thought ‘Well you’re right”, and that’s where I took this money, jumped in the car with the tent and left. Then I thought “Well, this is okay temporarily, but what can I do?” There is no benefit. I don’t have any sort of qualifications as such to just get a job, and how would I be caring for my son, being in that country I could lose the care of him, there was a lot of thinking to do in this time. So I went back into the relationship trying to look at the positive sides of it, and just appealing to his better nature, because he was also a very loving, caring and kind man. It’s just that he had his own horrific history of domestic violence, absolutely horrific. He remembers from 2 years old hiding under the bed while his father beat his mother, and he was the youngest of three*

*children. At 5 years old when they split his father took him for a year and he didn't even speak for that whole year. So, you know, there was absolute psychological damage done to him, the kind of thing, when you are a nurturer, you think I'm reaching out and feeling even more loving towards him. But unfortunately, they come with all of this damage, which when our child was born, this is what started to come out. I think it was the panic, he did not want to be like his father, he did not want to be like his father, but unfortunately, I was a lot like his mother as well, I've been told, you know, very sharp, and quick with answers and things like that, and he just couldn't cope with it. So, you know, it was really history repeating itself and that's not what he wanted.*

Ellie initially left the relationship, but found she could not support herself and Leo; made even more difficult because she was living in the Mediterranean. On her return to the relationship, Ellie tries to be positive. In her story, Ellie talks about how she does this by considering the kind of family background that Carlo came from. She positions herself very strongly as nurturer; interpreted by Ellie as a person who reaches out and shows her love and support. To this end, she rationalises Carlos' violent behaviour by sharing with us the violence he had suffered as a child. This is part of a larger societal narrative, influenced by social learning research (Bandura 1973, 1977, 1979) that links childhood experiences of violence with later use of violence in adult relationships. Ellie positions Carlo as a loving man, who wants to be a good father; perhaps without the difficult background he could have been, is what Ellie seems to be telling us.

### **7.1.2 Taking responsibility**

Sometimes, a way that the women explained the violence was to take responsibility for what was happening.

### **Briana**

*I thought about leaving a LOT of times, a lot of times, but I just thought 'Oh God, it's my head going silly again'. I'm a bit more confident now, but I was NOT a confident person then and I was thinking 'Don't be silly, don't be silly, it's just pre-menopause or something, you're talking and you're thinking all depression'.*

In this narrative, Briana explains the complex thinking that she did as she contemplated leaving her marriage. Her thoughts about leaving are complicated by her concern that she is not reading the situation correctly because she is unwell.

### **Adele**

In a similar vein, Adele shared her interpretation of the validity of her assessment of Tonya's violent behaviour:

*I had nothing else.....no-one else to talk to, who do I go to with this?  
What do I do? She returned my car, gave me the keys back, and gave me a little touch on the hand and said 'Hope you're okay' and left. So I felt completely mad.*

### **Celia**

In the following story, Celia tells us about her response to a violent event.

*That night that he kicked a hole in the wardrobe door, I'm like 'get the fuck out of here', and so he storms up the hallway and I follow him because I'm mad, to make sure he doesn't make any more noise. And so he does this real violent thing, he takes his time putting his boots on,*

*and I'm getting real bloody mad I'm fuming because I'm like 'get out here', you know, you're not doing this shit, and I don't know what he said to me, but I picked up the TV remote and dinged him on the head. But it was one of those old square ones, he just took it off me and snapped it, that's how strong it was, he was a big boy, 6 foot 4. Eventually he stormed off and did what he did, I don't know where he went, and I went to bed. I didn't sleep. To me, that was a one-off incident. We hate fighting and I've always been a person to look at my own behaviour. So I was lying in bed thinking, yeah well, he could've just left that, 'cos like I said we were both volatile, and I was very aware that perhaps it didn't have to get to that point.*

While the violence described in Celia's narrative is initiated by Dion, Celia examines her own behaviour resulting in a description of herself and Dion as "volatile". She extends her story.

*Of course I didn't understand then why, but of course I challenged and what I've learnt since is that amping up the anti because it was a power thing, I would challenge. So the more I challenged, and of course the more he got bad, the more I challenged. So it got worse, because I wasn't going to leave, but I wasn't prepared to bow, and I didn't know about holding my tongue and stuff like that.*

Celia continues her story focusing on her own behaviour and the impact she thinks it has on Dion's actions. She positions herself here as a woman who is strong and is not going to give in to Dion, but at the same time she expresses her belief that she is naïve in her understanding of how she is supposed to behave. Celia's narrative suggests that there is a societal narrative, socially and culturally promoted that promotes the way she is supposed to be in this



relationship. Much later in the interview, Celia describes how she has changed when after a separation she and Dion meet again.

*We bumped into each other, three and a half weeks later we remarried. We were having a ball. My kids aren't, nobody else is, they don't think it's a good idea. But of course, I want to keep them out, because I don't want them to ruin my joy, 'cos like, we're actually like having a ball. We're feeling positive and talked about all the stuff that had gone down. I talked about how horrible it was. So, we got together it was good for longer. I really, really loved him and I decided that someone had to change because all that volatile stuff wasn't working. I knew I could do things, I knew I could do things quieter and milder, and I just knew I could and still be happy. I wasn't resentful about it, and I wasn't selling myself short. I just knew that I could and literally one of us had to, or it wasn't going to work, and I wanted it to work.*

This time in the relationship, Celia tells us that she has changed and she has learnt not to be so volatile. She explains that someone had to change, implying that it won't be Dion, and so it is up to her. While she discusses how she could be calmer and milder, at the same time she points out that she didn't mind trying to be different nor is she demeaning herself in any way. The impetus for changing her behaviour is that Celia wants the relationship to work.

### ***Ellie***

In the following narrative, Ellie is responding to a question she has asked herself about why she didn't leave Carlo earlier in the relationship.

*If you think about the myths and realities in domestic violence that, well, I made my bed and now I have to lie in it, I have to do the best I*

*can with this, and I kind of went into it with that attitude. So I thought, well, no, I made these choices, they tried to warn me about them, you know, they'd come over and visited me in the earlier years, and I kind of felt, well I didn't listen to their advice then, and I can't sort of go back crying like this now, you know, I've got to stand on my own two feet and sort this out.*

Even though Ellie is unhappy and struggling in her marriage to Carlo, she accepts responsibility for her situation by utilising a powerful social narrative; she should expect that she will suffer because she made a poor decision in marrying Carlo and moving to the Mediterranean. The power of the social narrative is deepened by Ellie's unease that her family had provided a warning to her and she paid them little if any attention.

### **Ana**

At various points throughout the interview, Ana talks about the breakup of her parents. The different discussions are pieced together here into one story.

*Later, during that time I was thinking of my mum, my real mum. Like this is how she must have felt when she found that dad didn't want to be with her anymore. I tell people now that my mum was really devastated because my dad didn't love her the way that she wanted him to love her, when she had given him everything. You know at the time it was like, just the picture of mum and how she looked popped up in my head and I didn't make the connection then at the time but over the time I was like, well you know my sister and my brothers call my mum crazy when she talks about my dad... I think that's part of the reason why I*

*stayed for so long, because I thought I was paranoid and crazy like my mum.*

Ana uses her perception of her parents break up to reflect on her own relationship with Levi. She remembers how her Mum was when her relationship with Ana's father ended. In her story, Ana shares that witnessing her Mum's behaviour, and hearing the interpretation of this behaviour by her siblings probably had an influence on how long she remained in her relationship with Levi. She suggests that her assessment of her relationship with Levi was flawed because she was "crazy and paranoid".

### **7.1.3 Loving and needing**

In this section some of the women share their stories of how they felt about their partners. The emotional connection in their relationships, and their need for contact with their partners often complicated their thoughts and plans about leaving.

#### ***Adele***

Adele felt a strong emotional connection with Tonya. Here she explains how the emotional connection led her to question the validity of her concerns.

*There was this real protective loving side to her; if she walked in here now, you'd look and go 'Oh, she's lovely, she's so humble, so beautiful, but there's this other side that people don't get to see. I mean, she is a protector all of a sudden. I felt MAD, I felt completely MAD. But, those little moments are what makes you fall in love with them again, that you fall deeper, so the swinging from the lows to the highs, suddenly she became my oxygen tank.*

A little while later in the interview, Adele continues her story about how she feels about Tonya.

*I still had these feelings of being so in love with her, so I completely wanted to stay in this relationship. I just wanted the violence to stop and these anger outbursts. Then, I got a protection order in place for her and I thought 'This is going to kill me, she is going to kill me' but at least it's on paper. 'I'm gonna get killed for doing this against her' and she broke that Protection Order, I can't remember, I don't know how it worked or what happened, lots and lots of hidings, you know, sort of like that, and she went to prison for 4 months. The cops ended up pressing charges and putting her in jail, and of course, it was **ME**, out there every Saturday taking her money and magazines, visiting her, and the prison officer said to me 'What are you doing here, you know she's got a girlfriend in here as well, don't you? Please stop wasting money on Tonya, please get yourself some help.' The prison officers out there were just fantastic and I'd go 'I know what she's like, but it's her I fell 'in love' with her, you know? And every time I left that jail I couldn't drive, I couldn't walk to my car; I was literally sobbing and gagging. It was **horrible** .....because 'something' was better than 'nothing' .....having someone is better than no-one. And it was hell.*

In this story Adele describes her strong feelings for Tonya. Throughout the story Adele is torn; she accepts that the relationship is not healthy, that there are “lows and highs”, but she is in love. She conceptualises this by describing how there is just one thing to change in the relationship; the violence (“I just want the violence to stop”). The love can remain. In the

second part of the story, Adele describes how she takes action in relation to the violence, but again that dual conceptualisation is there as Adele continues to visit Tonya in prison when she breaches the protection order. Adele justifies the dual position she has arrived at by stating that “something was better than nothing ... having someone is better than no-one”. For Adele having a relationship, having someone, is important.

### *Celia*

In the following passage, Celia describes how she felt about Dion’s abusive behaviour.

*His behaviour was abusive and mind games and that was done deliberately, and the withdrawing, the eye rolling; all the signals that say, ‘look out’. I wasn’t really making sense of it; I was in my early 30’s and I was quite volatile myself so to me it was just a relationship. Sounds weird, doesn’t it, but it was, it was just a relationship, and it would be sorted out because I really loved him, you know, I was in love with him. I loved him, and so, you know, I wasn’t going to go anywhere. It might as well be sorted out, you know, as if I could. But like, you know, we’ll jolly well sort it out*

Celia introduces this story by outlining Dion’s behaviour and how this was a warning for her (“look out”), but she just couldn’t make sense of it. She states three times that she was in love with him suggesting that this is a powerful motivator for her not to recognise the warning signs. She wants the relationship to be sorted out, but there is more than uncertainty expressed by Celia when she states “as if I could”. As is the case with Adele in the previous story, Celia expresses a dual conceptualisation between the warning signs hinting at violence, and her love for Dion.

## **Ana**

Ana shares how she feels about Levi.

*I honestly don't know how I managed to survive a year and a half with him. The first three months when he came back we were on honeymoon and he said that to me too ... "We're in a honeymoon period and I'm worried that afterwards we're just gonna end up not liking each other," and, I said, "Well, we'll see when we get there." I said, "That's how people get used to each other. You either do like them or you don't after a while ... he was my first boyfriend and I wanted him to be my only boyfriend for the rest of my life. And he was the love of my life for a while, and I did love him. I really did truly love him.*

Later on in the interview Ana explains further.

*All the stuff that both my parents were telling me, my dad being one of the guys ... he's never admitted it, but he was like, "No, I don't like him. There's something about him I don't like. I don't trust him. I just have this feeling." I'm like, "Well then you need to get over your feeling because I love him." And then my dad's like, "You don't love him," and you know, that's what just made me want to stay with him longer. 'Do not tell me what to do!' You know, I have this thing, I don't like it when people tell me how to feel and that's because my parents have always told me how I felt was wrong.*

Ana tells us that her father had shared his concerns about Levi (“I don’t like him”). Ana’s response is to state that she loves him; her father denies that this is the case. Here Ana provides background information about her relationship with her father and the influence this has on her decision to stay in the relationship with Levi longer.

#### **7.1.4 Family, wife, and motherhood**

The women in the study shared their experiences as wives and partners, and as mothers. The following stories illustrate the complex choices made by the women as a result of the violent relationship.

##### *Lisa*

Lisa tearfully explains how Steve provided her with a choice; she either cut contact with her mother, or she would not see the children again.

*When I was having my third son I had to choose between my children or my mum. I was very, very close to my mum, and he? didn’t like that either. I was close to her and told her everything, so he gave me that ultimatum in the end. The whole pregnancy I never talked to her, didn’t see her (crying).... In that situation I thought I was doing the right thing because I was keeping the family together (crying).*

In this narrative, Lisa shares how she has to make a terrible choice; between her mother: or her children. She is positioned here as mother and daughter and ultimately chooses to have no contact with her mother on believing that she is keeping the family together. She expresses a common societal narrative which is; that families should stay together. Lisa then goes on to talk about the responsibility she takes for being a good wife:

*I watched my mum and dad get divorced and I swore I would never get divorced, you know and I tried.....and because he had been so hard done by, because he was adopted, because his family broke down, you*

*know, I swore that I would make a wonderful wife for him and, you know.....do it right.*

Lisa made a decision that she did not want to get divorced as her parents had. Taking into account Steve's difficult background she makes a pact with herself ... to be a wonderful wife. Next, in response to a question about what being a wonderful wife means to her Lisa says;

*Supporting him. Alright, like, do everything he wanted, I would even neglect the kids sometimes to give him what he wanted; they got shut outside so he could have peace and quiet, all those sorts of things. I had to leave one child screaming because he wanted dinner and the baby needed breastfeeding. The baby missed out, for his own demands, just giving and giving and giving.*

The interviewer probes further by asking what would happen if Lisa didn't do everything Steve wanted.

*He'd become verbally abusive, possibly physically abusive. There was one occasion that stands out; when I would make dinner, when it wasn't ready on time, he came and he took the pot and jug of milk that was there and he threw it all over the kitchen floor and he wouldn't buy me a mop either, so I had to grab clean stuff I had to use and would be scrubbing the floor, and all that sort of stuff. Even though dinner was being made, it wasn't good enough if it wasn't on time, so you would have to start all over again.*

From Lisa's story we understand that her desire to be a perfect wife, based on her past experience, is also informed by her experiences with Steve. She knows that not doing well as



a wife will result in verbal and physical abuse. Her view of the perfect wife is also informed by a societal narrative that it is the wife's responsibility to cook meals and have them prepared on time.

### ***Adele***

Like Lisa, for Adele, her role as mother was used by her violent partner, but in a different way to what Lisa has explained.

*She played mind games, mind, lots and lots and lots of mind games. And the police would turn up and she'd go 'Oh, no, it was a misunderstanding. Sorry'. And she would send them away. She knows how to speak their 'speak' and they know her, she knows them. One day when we were watching a TV programme, just being real normal, happy, had dinner, and I was feeling quite contented. I thought she was too; suddenly she's on the phone and I said 'Oh who did you just ring?' She said 'I just left a message for CYFS, I don't think you're a very good mother, they're going to come and take baby'. And I pressed redial, and she really had, she really, really had, so then I was thinking 'Oh my God'. So there was like these threats that I had no compartment to put in it, so I would just leave it, so I didn't know how to process that, I didn't know what to do about it. I never had any social workers though turn up or anything ...*

Adele's story is built around Tonya's manipulation of Adele's role as mother. We learn that Adele has no way of ordering or making sense of Tonya's behaviour; therefore, she doesn't do anything about it. At a later point in the interview, Adele explains what she wanted as a mother.

*I was fighting to be an authentic mum, to start with, as an adoptive mum; fighting to keep my sanity on some level; fighting somehow to have the freedom to live as I choose; but...give me a chance to find the right way. I was fighting for all these things on the outside, but inside I was just dead, just hollow, and I felt like it was all these “shoulds”... “should be doing this” and “should be doing that” you know, that I was putting on myself as well.*

Adele’s words, from the point of view of an adoptive mother, demonstrate how for her an adoptive mother is not as ‘authentic’ as a birth mother. She emphasises that she feels she ‘should’ be doing many things as a mother, but inside, as a result of the violence, she felt empty.

### ***Ellie***

Ellie, in this story, relates her thinking that when back in New Zealand she could stay and not return to the Mediterranean.

*I only got back to my country like every 4 years for about 3 months in that 17 years. In fact, the first time I was 7 years there before I came back. So, you know, I was fully immersed in this culture, and its deprivation, (laughing) ....one of the times when our son was quite young, in fact I think it was when he was 13 months the time I came back, alone at that time even, and it’s surprising, but because I’m a loyal person, you know, part of me thought ‘Oh I could just stay here and get a benefit and make myself a life’ but I couldn’t. I thought, no, this is his only son, he thinks the life of this kid, and he absolutely, loves him to bits. I’m going to give him another chance ...*

She returns because Carlo loves his child ... this is the basis for giving Carlo another chance. Ellie continues with her story.

*I tried to split up with him many times over the 5 years here, I had tried, I tried to, but he would not take “no” for an answer, he would just talk me out of it, and go “What about this, and what about that,” and like I was saying, “what about these plans, but we have this, and we have that” and I said “No, you can’t do this” and he would talk me rationally through things, so that I would think “Oh, well”. It was not a happy family and I think it was that wake-up call of “Hang on a minute”, this isn’t a happy family we’ve created for him, we might have it in our head that idea, and we both love him deeply, but the environment and atmosphere when we’re together here is not happy. He became a master, our son, at playing us off one against the other, I mean, if I go back to when he was younger, he knew if I had said no about something, he could go to daddy, and daddy would go “Of course you can” and then I would go “Na na na na ...” and he would go “na na na na”, and I would go “na na na na”, and suddenly the little boy who had started it all would be sitting in the corner, very, very quietly looking really worried because he realised what he’d set off. It was a really hard position for me and at times I would even feel resentful towards my little boy, because I knew that he was purposely doing it, not that he wanted that outcome, of course, but he knew that by doing this he would get what he wanted. It was just such an*

*unhealthy atmosphere, and I mean, one of my greatest regrets is that I really didn't make a clean break at the time, he was 7 years old at least, because I think he was 13; he's 19 now, and he's a lovely young man with very strong values.*

Ellie begins her story by telling us that she had tried to part from Carlo for many years. She then goes on to describe the kind of family they had; one that was unhappy. Towards the end of the narrative, Ellie provides an example that highlights the difficult situation she would find herself in as a mother, when their son would unintentionally create an argumentative situation between Ellie and Carlo. She reveals how her demanding relationship with Carlo would impact on her feelings as a mother towards her son. Finally, Ellie shares her greatest regret; that she didn't leave sooner.

### **Rose**

Rose describes the process of mediation she has to go through in relation to access between her ex-partner, Brad, and their son, Jack.

*I'm hoping that the mediation is going to be cancelled because Jack has a lawyer and I have my own lawyer, he has his own lawyer...I've already tried to do a mediation before, and it was a complete waste of time. There is no protection, no police. It's in a room upstairs and there's only one door in, and one door out, and there's only a lady by the name of Camile, I think, she's the mediator. Then me and my lawyer, Jack's lawyer, and then Brad and his lawyer, in this room. And I just.....I don't want to do it. I don't want to sit across the table from him because I know what it's going to be like. He's not going to like anything.....anything that I have put in my affidavit. I don't*

*particularly agree with anything he's put in his affidavit. I think it's a load of hogwash. If he'd have sat there and written it, but, then maybe, you know, he has mucked up; he has made some stupid decisions. He's done really wrong, and he'd like to know what steps could he take to fix the relationship with his son, because I don't think it's fair on Jack not having a father. I think that's so unfair. I believe every child should have their rights to both of their parents regardless whether their parents are together or not.*

Even though Brad has been violent towards both Rose and Jack, the three have to go through a mediation process. Rose explains who will be involved in the mediation process and where the mediation will be held; she then highlights her concern that there is no protection available. She describes her understanding about how Brad will behave; that he will agree to nothing. Having described the mediation process and her feelings towards it, Rose then shares her views about contact between father and son. She believes this contact is important and to explain she highlights a societal narrative; that children have the right to have contact with both parents. The violence as a contributing factor is not included in this passage, rather Rose builds her discussion of rights of contact around the fact that she and Brad are not together anymore.

### ***Celia***

In the following passage, Celia describes how she responded when her daughter decided to leave home. Celia articulates the conflict she feels between her roles as mother and partner.

*When Ginny turned 18, Dion and I were in our first relationship, she said, "mum, I'm leaving home, I can't live here and watch this happening to you, watch your spirit die". So she went flatting, and I was gutted because I knew I wasn't going to leave him, and here I was*

*having a daughter leaving home. Oh, it's just its ... it's ... I cried buckets. And I felt stuck, because I knew I wasn't going to leave and I felt like such a failure as a mother, I knew I could be doing things differently and should be. I had this thing in my head. I had an idea in my own head of what a mother should be and a mother ... well, a mother wasn't going to be someone that stayed with someone violent where their children were unhappy. And to me I felt like I was choosing him over them, and that's what it felt like for them too, because they've talked to me about it. And for the woman, for me, it was a horrible place to be; nasty, and so I'm not very well, like emotionally, and I've had a breakdown.*

In this narrative, Celia explains how her daughter, Ginny, made the decision to leave because she could not *live here and watch this happening to you, watch your spirit die*. Ginny has made the decision that she does not want violence to be a part of her life. Celia knows that she is not able to make a similar decision. She describes the pain of the choice she felt she had to make between her partner and her children. She knows at this time that she will not leave Dion, and this is set in opposition with the idea she holds about what a mother should be. The result of this struggle is that Celia becomes unwell emotionally and has a breakdown.

### ***Sharnie***

The following excerpt from Sharnie's interview occurs after she has described how she left Donald in Australia and returned to New Zealand. Her stay away from Donald is short-lived as she returns to him for the sake of the children.

*Well, it was all over for me. I had no more fight in me. When I came back and he did that, I only moved back into that house because of the*

*pressure from the kids, I think, you know, and I guess all his promises,  
but I shouldn't, I should never have done that, but it was ...*

In this brief story, Sharnie shows how exhausting it can be to leave a violent partner, and stay apart, especially when feeling under pressure from the children.

### ***Tui***

In this story Tui explains how IPV had an impact on her daughter Lana.

*One night, there was a knock at the door, it was a neighbour. Well, Lana's standing upstairs and she's all cotton-eyed. She's like, "are you alright, mum?" Because she'd done so much of jumping out of windows – "be quiet", "hide under here", "hide in there". She was always prepared, she was ready for it. I turned around and I said to her "Darling, you're meant to be asleep", she said "oh well, I thought that was Cooper". I said, "Come here". So she came down and I sat her on me and I said "Hey". She went "what?", and I said "you don't ever have to worry about Cooper again". She said "but mum he could come and hurt us", and I went "he will not do that again, do you know why?" and she said "why?" and I said "cos if he ever EVER shows his face on our doorstep I'm gonna kill him!" (laughing). I should never have said that, but do you know what, she turned around and she went "yeah, mum, yeah!" The little one, she said "but a little kill" (laughing). Not a serious one, "just a little one, eh mum?" And I went "yes darling" and I said "don't ever worry, because mum's going to tell him when he comes here that I'm serious". I spent years having to*

*convince her I was NOT going to go back to him, 'cos she saw it happen three times. We split, went back, we split, went back. She didn't trust me. So I had to spend all those years building her trust back up.*

The IPV had an impact on the relationship between Tui and her daughter; Tui believes that her returns to Cooper, after having left, damaged Lana's ability to trust her mother.

### **Ana**

Ana's view about motherhood and her relationship with Levi differs from those presented by Rose, Ellie, Adele, and Lisa. Ana became pregnant to Levi when they very briefly got together one night after she had left him. She introduces how they met again.

*I was at a party and I got left behind and I was fighting with my friends who looked after me after the break-up and then you know he wanted to have a chat and I was like, sweet [laughter] the opportunist – sweet, “can you pay for my taxi for me to go home?”*

She then describes her feelings about the night they spent together.

*For me it was just that one night, you know, it was I guess goodbye sex be done with it, out of the system, move on and I felt good [laughs] to be honest. It felt good, like you know and I was finally getting to say goodbye and that's why I'm happy, happy, happy. And then he texted three days later, “How are you doing?” “I'm good, what are you doing?” He tried to have a conversation ... I was like, “Cool, cool, I'm fine, moving on, bye.” Next day, I was like what the hell, this is not happening again Alarm bells, like I don't want to do this again. I really*



*didn't trust him, didn't really want to because you know at that stage I was really over it, I was happy with the life that I was currently living and moving on and getting on with it ... And then in the process I must have said yes because we got there and he took it for, yes we're back together... And then you know he started doing the manipulating thing, 'You know I do this all the time, you know I hook up with girls and tell them it's going to be something, but I don't call them back again,' I'm like, "Okay that's you."*

Then Ana discovers that she is pregnant.

*I don't want you in my life, ... and he misinterpreted it as being I don't want you in our lives, the baby's life. I said, "You're the baby's dad, that's fine, but for me, I don't want you, I don't need you and please don't be offended."*

*"Look, we can do this together, but we're not going to live together." I said that to him, "I don't want to live with you, I don't want to be in a relationship with you, I don't, but you can be a part of your son's life."*

Ana, in her mind has left the relationship and has no wish for there to be a relationship with Levi as there had been before. She makes a distinction between Levi's contact with her and contact with their son.

#### **7.1.5 Consequences to leaving**

All of the women found that there were consequences to leaving their violent partner. There narratives highlight their experience that the process of leaving continues after they have physically left their partner.

## **Vicky**

Vicky, in the following story, describes how she had left Tama but the consequence of leaving was always too great to contemplate staying away.

*There was huge consequences... like when I eventually found the courage. What he did to me: like he rang my employer, because I'd graduated and got a job. He rang my employer, he rang my landlord. He got rid of my flatmate. We would be sitting there at night and next thing you know, Tama would be walking in. She just felt so insecure, and he would just walk in. And just like, oh my God, there's Tama there. He was in the ceiling. I'd be lying in bed; I was thinking "What's all those holes in the ceiling?" He was in the ceiling and he'd put holes in so he could see my bedroom*

Vicky describes the consequences to leaving as 'huge'. Tama then infiltrates many parts of her life, her job, her landlord, her flat mate, and her home.

## **Tui**

Tui explains how Cooper was a threat to her family. In this narrative she talks about a conversation with her brother.

*So I had to then go and tell him exactly that. Then he proceeds, the stalker, proceeds to get a relationship going with my brother so that he can sort of come back in my life. My brother, THANK GOD, got to see through him and then realised "Shit girl, here I am telling you, you gotta stop running and face your fears", and yet MY GOD! I mean, my brother had a Pacemaker and he overheard Cooper ... my brother's*

*inside having a cup of tea with me at my flat, Cooper's outside going "Hey bitch! Tell you fuckin' brother I'll be kick-boxing him in his Pacemaker the next chance I get" or whatever they do in kick-boxing. He was going to GET IT straight to the Pacemaker. And my brother is just sitting there looking at me. "Do you SEE, are you now listening? How long has he been there?" I said "He's been outside for 3 hours now". And he was going 'Well, why don't you do something about it, sis?' I says "I did. I just turned the TV up" (laughing). Because I realised at that point that he was holding onto anything he could just to keep in my face all the time, so that there was no me getting over him.*

In this narrative Tui has started calling Cooper "the stalker", indicating that this story is related to a time after she has physically left, and ended the relationship with him. Most notable in this story is that Cooper's threats of violence now extend beyond Tui. Elsewhere in the interview there are other examples of violence directed towards her friends and family.

*We moved back to my parents, because we can't get a Housing Corp home in between, so we moved back home. He finds us there. He steals the cat. If he couldn't get to me, couldn't get to my daughter, he'd get to anything I cared for. My friends were another one he'd go for. We also believe that he poisoned my mum's cat because this cat wouldn't go to a stranger and there was even a Kentucky Fried chicken, which was her favourite food, he knew this. Bullet hole through mum and dad's window, next minute I get a phone call from a friend saying "Hey be careful, Cooper's in town and he is really mad with you and he reckons he is going to slash your tyres". So I happen to see*

*him, you know, in a public place, he wants to meet so I told him I'll meet you in a public place, and he goes "Bitch, I'm gonna get you", because if I went to a mate's place and she had friends there and we were talking, he would be outside the window listening. On this occasion it was only my mate's dog that alerted us that there was someone out there, so we closed the windows. Well from that point on, I was a 'mongrel mob slut' you know if I was going with another man. Any man I talked to, any man that smiled at me ...*

### ***Maggie***

In the following account Maggie talks about what she learnt about leaving; that leaving creates a great deal of stress for her. The result is that leaving does not become a viable option for Maggie.

*So I learnt very quickly, as I said, not to stand my ground and say "You've got to leave". Because if I did that...I would lie on the bed each night and this DID HAPPEN. You could hear it, one night that he driving a Landover, and I heard this Landover coming down the road, and I thought "Oh hell!" and, you know, you lie in bed listening to the sounds, the stress of having him not with me, of wondering when he was going to turn up ...*

Maggie continues her statement about the dangerousness of leaving.

*... All society too, says "Get out". I knew if I got out, if I shifted, or ... not even shifted, if I stood up to him, that that was not the safest option, ... it was everything coming together at the right time.*

## *Sharnie*

In the following story Sharnie describes how Donald increased his threatening behaviour once *Sharnie met a new partner*.

*It all revved up again when I met Larry, my husband now. I was unaware, but found out by Donald's new girlfriend; she had two children the same ages. She told me, every morning he got up at 4 o'clock and came past our house.*

*Larry had a wooden house and he would come and pick me up from work. We'd go down to his house, he would get ready for work, then he'd take me into work. Donald would be sitting dead centre in the middle of the road as we were going past, just watching every morning.*

*Then one night, the first night that Larry stayed, he got up in the morning and all the tyres of his truck had been slashed, and then it started. Donald burnt my car out; he was going to burn our houses down. This was probably about 5 or 6 months after we separated and it carried on...*

Sharnie's ex husband continues to harass her five or six months after their relationship had ended. Now Sharnie has a new boyfriend, Larry, and Donald is directing his violent behaviour towards both Sharnie and Larry. This is despite the fact that Donald himself is in a new relationship.

## **Briana**

Briana who suffered consistent verbal and emotional abuse determines that her relationship is natural.

*He did have good times, we did have good times, and I was just having a fun life but then what we had was yucky; I was just in a dream and thought it was just natural.*

Briana's account, along with the others, illustrates some of the critical safety issues that need to be considered. The following section summarises the process of separation as shared by the women.

### **7.1.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: THE PROCESS OF SEPARATION**

One of the options for ending the violence is to leave the violent relationship. The process of separation is described by the women as an emotional, cognitive, and physical process that begins at the first sign of violence and continues beyond the point when they had physically left the relationship. Moving out of the relationship to finally being safe from violence took years for most of the women.

Early indications of violence are described by the women as both verbal and physical, and either directed at the women or towards friends. Context influenced each woman's reading of their violent partner's behaviour. An example is the societal narrative that influences Lisa's view of the violence; social learning theory. The social learning hypothesis states that IPV is learned, therefore, men learn when, where and against whom to use violence. Bakker (1998) in a critical examination of social learning theory, states that men learn to use violence against women "in order to achieve certain goals, when they feel frustrated or angry, or when they have been drinking" (1998, p. 65). According to social learning theories, men learn to use violence "in the privacy of their own home" (Bakker, 1998, p. 65) and learn to use violence against "a subordinate, or less powerful person" (1998, p. 65). Violence towards women is maintained by the rewards or reinforcements that men perceive are gained as a result of the violence. There may be differences in how male and female children perceive IPV, for example boys may feel pressure to behave in ways that meet societal expectations of

what it is to be male (O’Leary, 1988). Research has found that youth exposed to IPV hold normative stereotypical views about gender roles (Phillips & Phillips, 2010), and that exposure to severe IPV during adolescence increases the possibility of being in an adult relationship where IPV is a feature (Smith et al., 2011).

The women provided a number of explanations to make sense of the violence that was occurring in their relationships. For some this centred around blaming themselves; coming to the conclusion that they were mad, depressed, unwell in some way, or, as Celia describes, volatile herself. Acceptance of blame stemmed from the women’s ideas about how they should behave in the relationship. When women took responsibility for the violence themselves, they believed that the impetus for changing the relationship must also come from them. Explanations for the violence were also influenced by past experiences. For Ana, it was her family’s labelling of her mother’s behaviour as “crazy” that had an impact on how long she remained in the violent relationship.

Love and needing was a strong theme presented by all of the women in the study. Each of the women had made an emotional commitment to their relationship. Their love and need for their partner impacted on the separation process; a number of the women were of the view that they needed their partner and would not be able to survive without them.

The process of separation from their violent partners was influenced by their fear for the safety of their families. Tui expressed the threats of violence that were directed at her brother, while Lisa told the story of the choice she had to make between contact with her mother, or keeping her children. She found herself having to make an impossible decision, one that served to further compromise her ability to separate from her partner.

In the women’s stories they expressed personal views about how a wife should behave. Lisa expresses this view in her story about her partner’s reaction to dinner not being ready on time; and exposure to further verbal and physical violence. Her ability to care for her child was also impacted.

Another powerful influence was the women’s views of relationships, in particular their role within the relationship, and motherhood. The stories highlight the influence that societal narratives have on how the women constructed motherhood; if the women did not measure up

to widely held views of motherhood they perceived themselves as faulty and therefore as 'bad' mothers. Societal narratives, therefore, had the impact of further victimising the women. Celia's story is a good example of the result of struggling with societal narratives of motherhood alongside her need to stay in her relationship with Dion because she loved him; the consequence for her was an emotional breakdown. The women's stories emphasise the importance of considering gender roles in any analysis of IPV.

Ana and Adele presented different experiences of motherhood and IPV. Ana was firmly of the view that she would no longer have a relationship with her partner once she became pregnant. Perhaps this is because she became pregnant once she had already left the relationship. Adele demonstrated how her partner, Tonya, used motherhood as a form of violence towards her, knowing that any reports of poor mothering could be followed up by the authorities. In addition, Adele highlights that there is a societal narrative about women who are unable to have their own children and then adopt. For her the societal narrative suggests that women who adopt are less authentic than women who can conceive a child.

Even after the women separated there were processes that forced them to remain in some form of formal contact with their ex-partner. Rose highlights this process when she describes the mediation process she had to enter with her ex-partner over access arrangements. While the process is stressful to Rose, she believes that all children have the right to contact with their parents and so in some way she puts her own concerns aside and takes responsibility for maintaining father-child relations.

IPV is likely to have an impact on the mother-child relationship. Tui reports that she had to build trust again with her daughter; Celia knew that her decision to remain in the violent relationship would have an impact on her relationship with her daughter. Of relevance here is whether mothers who have experienced domestic violence talk to and help their children cope with their feelings and emotions about the IPV. There will be variation in how women and children perceive the IPV and their relationships with each other. How women manage relationships with their children will also be influenced by the cultural context in which the parent grew up, the experiences they have had with their own parents, other parents in their environment, and the experiences they have with their own children (Xiong, Detzner, Cleveland, 2004).



As is stated in much of the IPV literature, separating from a violent relationship can be a dangerous time for women. Almost all of the women suffered from ongoing threats of violence post-separation, and threats were often extended to friends and family. The continuing violence hampered the women's ability to be completely free of their violent relationship.

## **7.2 Skills and Strategies**

This section examines the methods that women used at different times in their process of moving away from violence. The skills and strategies used by the women include compliance, secretly planning, working to gain independence, personal development and determination, using informal supports, and, contacting the authorities.

### **7.2.1 Compliance**

This section elucidates the strategy of compliance used to either pacify the violent partner; the strategy is also used as part of a process of separating.

#### **Ana**

Ana recounts an escalating argument with Levi that she ascertains will result in physical violence. The theme of this story is how compliance acts as a protective factor by de-escalating the situation.

*... The fight was pretty much drowned out by the need to stay alive right now. It's important for you to figure out how to get out properly. You know, and, [whispers:] don't do anything stupid. I felt like someone was over my shoulder telling me, [whispers:] "Don't do anything stupid." And I said, "Right, I'm tired. I want to go to bed. I don't want to fight any more. You're right, I'm wrong. Can we just go to bed?" He was amazed. He was gearing up for a fight. Like he really wanted to push my buttons ...*

Ana describes how complying with her partner through agreeing with him, helped her to survive. In this story she describes the concept of a ‘voice over my shoulder’ telling her to not do anything stupid. The compliance tactic works.

### **7.2.2 Secretly planning**

The following stories highlight how the women planned in secret to get away from their violent partners. The planning was secret because there was high danger associated with leaving.

#### ***Ana***

Ana eventually decides that she must leave Levi. Once the decision is made she plans how she will leave.

*It took a lot of planning [laughs] and it probably sounds quite conniving but it did, it took a lot of planning and it took a lot of confidence building as well to finally stand up and just walk away. It didn't go down very well but I just tried to extricate myself from him slowly.*

Ana's process of leaving the home shared with Levi took about 3 months. Ana responds to a question from the interviewer; *what did you do?*

*I don't know, but I know I was compliant the whole entire time I was with him. So I really didn't want to give him a clue that I was actually in the process of leaving him. So he didn't notice. I don't know if he did notice, but I was pretty much compliant, back to the old me. And there would be, you know, certain times where the strong me would come up and like, "Oh, I can't be fucking bothered, can you just do it yourself?" And then he'd be like, "That's not the you I know." I'm like,*

*“Oh, sorry. I’m just not really,” you know, I was always on edge, tense, just waiting.*

Ana explains that her process of leaving draws on a strategy she had used before; compliance. Within the narrative, Ana describes how this was sometimes difficult as she would temporarily revert back to her desire to fight back verbally.

### **Rose**

Rose, like Ana, plans how she will leave her partner. We pick up Rose’s story after there a violent event that was directed towards her son.

*I ended up having to stay down there for a week pretending that everything is fine. I left my car with my daughter and my son, so then I knew that when I left there I could get out and I could get my bike, ‘cos I had my own motorcycle. So I organised it to ride up on my bike and spend a week of the holidays as well, and I never went back...*

After a violent event Rose, like Ana, pretends that all is fine and then she puts her plan in to action; she had her own motorbike and managed to use this to get away.

### **Maggie**

Here Maggie shares the intricacy of the secret planning process, and the importance of having friends who can help.

*One day when I was trying to get away from him and he found another place and had gone there, I trying to keep it quiet that I was going. I had friends move me out, and he didn’t know that morning that I was going. We’d managed to pack the whole house; everything that was packed away that he wouldn’t have noticed missing, hopefully, and just*

*had the threadbare stuff in the house. Then friends came in that morning so that I had back-up to tell him I'm going.*

### ***Briana***

Briana was living overseas with her husband when she decided it was time to leave him and return to New Zealand.

*I had a case packed, he never knew, it was in the wardrobe right up the top... for about a month or more before...yeah, about a month. Two months before I did do the big move I'd lay in bed and I'd.....me being me, I gotta have things organised, kind of. So I'd be in bed saying 'I'd do this, get a ticket this way, go through customs, and go...*

### ***Adele***

As described earlier, Adele did not live with her violent partner, Tonya. However, Tonya would often make contact with Adele and when this happened Adele would contact the police. Here Adele explains how she planned to increase her chances of survival.

*As I heard from her I called the cops. I started to call the cops. I started to buy extra cell phones, money; I had money stashed all round the house. I put a lock on my bathroom door, so if she ever broke into my house I knew I had a cell phone, money and car keys in the bathroom and I could lock the door. So quite often I would ring the police from there and she would be thumping on the wall.*

Later on in Adele's story after being away from home and beaten again by Tonya ...

*...I went home and what I started to do was I got this wire that I had been saving up (laughing) to kill myself with, to put round my neck, but I started to lock all the windows so she couldn't just break in. I just had this ... like, built this fortress around me. I rung my husband and said "Please you know, go get bub, he's here. I want you to keep him until I ring you, and you have to return him, 'cos that's what the judge said, remember? And, you're not allowed to ask any questions". And he goes "No, no problem". So he did so, I mean bubby was okay, I couldn't go anywhere else, where else could I go, I had no friends ... it was all her side, you know? So I knew "Right, I just need to do.....play this out" you know. And I got money, I had groceries, I did everything I could to be prepared for a 'war' if you like. And I think I stayed like that for weeks, kept inside in my own house. I couldn't believe, you know, just absolutely petrified. And then, I never heard from her, but then of course she would have been way up north with the tangi, and everything like that. So I started to kind of step outside, got life back to normal, decided to go check out a career, you know? Look at training....life started to open up for me. But then what started to happen was, I come home one day with an armful of groceries, oh...it was about 6 o'clock at night, it was fairly dark, and I had my cell phone in my hand, like I always did, ready with finger on 111, turned on the lights, and here she is! 'Cos she was a burglar, so she could get straight into your house, there really was no holding her out, she just*

*appeared, you know? And she just looked at me with these eyes and I'd go "Babe, where have you been?" I started to play the mind games with her. "I miss you, where the hell have you been?" And I'd get in first and throw her off guard, you know? I started to get really, really good at that sort of behaviour. So then she'd go again, go "Alright, okay, just as long as you're alright". She'd go again. And then I found out that she was with another ... had another girlfriend, had another relationship, which didn't surprise me, and ... it affected me, you know? It was like "You bitch!" I thought all this time and life and blood on the line for you and you're with making happy families with someone else? So I was in that kind of raw emotion, and then, this partner would keep turning up. I was at the lights one day and suddenly the back door opened, Tonya jumps in, she's in my back seat, and she's putting mum's ring on my finger, and at the same time beating me round the head, and "I'll fucking kill you, you bitch! Drive to the beach, I'm gonna leave your body in the sand dunes" ... just ... horrible. So, where do I take that information? Where do I go with those moments? It was all about survival, you know. Carry on with your life Adele, do what you gotta do. I was scared she was going to ruin everything though and I got onto a course. I was scared she was going to turn up and ruin it.*

In this story Adele describes a range of tactics she used including hiding car keys and money in different parts of the house, locking windows, and then, deciding to 'build a fortress' against Tonya. In preparation for this she returns her baby to her ex-husband, knowing that

this is safer for her child; that he can take care of their baby until the ‘war’ is over. She begins to play mind games with Tonya and this would sometimes prevent the violence from escalating. Adele’s planning involves developing a mindset that she is entering a battle and her planning is directed towards winning.

### **7.2.3 Gaining Independence**

A key theme contributing to the moving away from violence process was the gaining of some form of independence. For the women interviewed, this was achieved through employment, or through study.

#### ***Sharnie***

In the next passage, Sharnie begins her story by talking about finding work while she was still in a relationship with Donald.

*Once I started working I never stopped, because sometimes I’d be left with no money, I’d have to go out and get work. So, once I got a job I was determined, come hell or high water, I was holding onto it; that little bit of independence and money ... And, of course, I kept on working, which of course he knew I had to work, but he didn’t like that either...*

Sharnie shared this story early on in the interview. Later on, she talks again of how important her job was to her.

*But I reckon that my saviour was that job. There was nothing that was going to stop me getting to that job, you know. I think it was about independence, I think it was that I had a break from that person, coping with that at home, you know. We had our uniform, it’s not like I had to worry about clothes, you know, ‘cos I didn’t have money, so I didn’t*

*have to have fancy clothes where you had a really lovely uniform. So, I guess I put it on and I walked into the bank and I was a different person. They didn't know anything about what was going on.*

In talking about her job, Sharnie reflects that the job gave her a chance to be someone else. Important to her is the idea that others do not know about the violence she is suffering at home. The job also provides Sharnie with the opportunity to be away from Donald. Sharnie expands further;

*It was completely two lives, and that was what I was wanting to hold onto. Because I'd often thought, even in my work, that there was 100 of us working there then, so I had all those friends. He didn't know them, he couldn't get to them, he couldn't embarrass me in front of them. I can remember once being really brave one New Year's Eve and going to a party and, of course, every time, like Christmas, birthdays, any big party, we would be going to, it would come to just before, and he would spit the dummy. I don't know what it was, we either didn't get to go, because he would sabotage it completely. We wouldn't get to go, or he wouldn't go and he would embarrass me so much by drinking and in the end I didn't want to go, I didn't want to. Once I did, I went to a New Year's Eve party. I should have realised that I shouldn't have actually gone, but I went, and he charged in and marched in and grabbed me in front of everybody, threw me over his shoulder and marched out... in front of all my friends, fighting like a demon and ...the humiliation and the embarrassment.*



In the continuation of her story, Sharnie, explains how work provides her with a range of friends that Donald knows nothing about. The reason this statement is so important is explained later in the story. Sharnie had experienced embarrassment and humiliation as a result of Donald's actions in public. Sharnie's work place is hidden from Donald so he is unable to "get to them".

### ***Lisa***

After separating from Steve, Lisa begins work. Here she provides an account centred around the benefits of working.

*I started doing in-home childcare. So I didn't have to pay the childcare fees and it boosted up my socialising skills; socialising with other people and families and it boosted up my self confidence. I hadn't worked for I don't know how long, cos I wasn't allowed to work when I was in the marriage, so now I have this awesome résumé building up with this work experience and these certificates because I am actually achieving aims and goals through the course and becoming course approved, and I'm currently studying for my certificate 3 in Early Childhood Education.*

Lisa searched for work once she had moved out of the relationship with Steve. She reflects that she had been forbidden to work while she was married. Working and studying has provided Lisa with skills in socialising with others, and self-confidence.

### ***Ellie***

For Ellie, studying was something she started once she had left the Mediterranean and returned to New Zealand. In the following story, Ellie outlines the challenges and the benefits of studying.

*The first thing I did was a Certificate in Learning and Behaviour Support at the College of Education, cos I thought, "oh, that looks pretty good". It was a year part time, and I did it in 6 months, and it still seemed like part time, and I didn't even know how to turn a computer on at that stage! I was totally ready for it, but it was quite a frightening sort of time, I didn't even know where the "On" button was, (laughing) and, of course, my first assignment I completely lost, and then went crying to the lecturer and he gave me my first floppy disc, (laughing) and said "My dear, now next time, what you do is you save, save, save! and this is what you put it on".*

*I think that's what also started me feeling more empowered within myself; realising that I had the intellect and the courage and the ability to move forward and make a life for myself. I sort of dared to dream about it slightly before that, but was still quite uncertain about whether I could do it not ... oh, I'm already 40, but that was it. You know, life does begin at 40, and that became my motto, and so after that six months, we went back for a couple of months to the Mediterranean and then when I came back I got a wee job supporting this very, very difficult child at School who basically needed a tracker and someone with him for everything. I saw in that, the stuff I wanted to do with this kid was beyond what my wee qualification was enabling me to do ...*

As was the case for Lisa, for Ellie, study provided her with some much needed confidence. She describes in this narrative how she was empowered, but also how she was awakened to

her ability; an ability that she had been uncertain about previously. The study Ellie undertook opened up work opportunities and a desire to take part in further study.

#### **7.2.4 Personal development and determination**

Most of the women found ways to develop their sense of confidence and well being in order that they could find the courage to begin the process of separating, and the strength to maintain the separation. Personal development in this section refers to how the women developed their thinking and analysis of their situation; some describe the learning they achieved through attending programmes; some describe the part that spirituality played in their journey. The women's stories illustrate the determination needed to move on from violence.

#### ***Lisa***

Despite painful physical injuries, Lisa took her children and walked to find a lawyer.

*I wasn't allowed to drive the car. So, I had the newborn, 6 week old, a couple of months old in the carry pouch, on one pack. I had the oldest sitting in the pram, and then I had the next oldest sitting in front of him, this is a single pram, pushed it for 45 minutes with a busted wrist. I had to push with one hand, or if I needed two hands to do a step, up and down footpaths and stuff, I would have to push with my knuckles to keep my wrist straight, cos if I bent it up or down it was just excruciatingly painful. And when I got to the lawyers I just sobbed and told him my story.*

In this brave story, Lisa focuses on the range of injuries she experienced and how she found ways to take her children to a lawyer for assistance.

## **Tui**

Tui displays determination in how she alerts other community members about her violent ex-partner.

*When we came back from (name of town) we went straight to ...  
Women's Refuge ... and we were there for about a good three months.  
Well, whilst we were there, he was trying to find where the Refuge was,  
where we were, and we got relocated to (name of place) from the  
Refuge, ... I informed ALL my neighbours, showed them a photo, if you  
see this man around phone 111 – this is the stalker.*

## **Ellie**

In the following story, Ellie provides an account of how Christianity has been a feature of her life. Ellie practiced Christianity while she was trying to manage the violence in her relationship; sometimes to barter with God.

*I had been following the Christian religion through these years too. The  
main reason I kind of hooked back into the Christian religion was  
because of my affirmation of following God's will, and because it  
brought me here so quickly, I thought "Well, okay God, see...I made a  
deal with you there, so I'm going to follow your will, and I'm going to  
join a church and I'm going to make a really lovely healthy moral,  
atmosphere for my son". So we did do that for the next 5 years, but it  
really wasn't an atmosphere that was conducive to my son and it didn't  
really work for him, and I felt quite disappointed by the end of these 5*

*years because I felt in a way it was holding me in a marriage that I didn't want to be in.*

*I've dabbled in spirituality throughout all of my adult life, I had a sister who was a really strong Christian, my sisters were 10 and 12 years older than me, and it was the one 10 years older than me that died. The one that was 12 years older than me is still around and she was a very strong Christian from about 20 or 21 so I was sort of initiated into this from quite young. She would say, "If you don't accept Jesus into your heart, you're not going to have eternal life" and had the fear of God put into me from when I was about 10, and I'm like, "Yes, I do", you know, (laughing) and that lasted till I was about 16 and then of course all spiritual discipline went out the window when I discovered boys and things like that. But then I was still interested in music, we were of spirit, you know, I knew that, and I had dabbled in things like tarot card, like I-Ching, I had things like that for many years and read those kind of things, so I guess I was kind of always open to that kind of information coming to me. And it was quite interesting how I chose to return to the Christian religion, I mean, I really wish I had discovered what I have now, when I first came to New Zealand, cos it would have been perfect for me and it would have really helped my life go in an even more positive direction.*

For Ellie, Christianity has been an important part of her experience as a child and as an adult. Ellie constructs this story around what Christianity and spirituality mean for her. She

positions herself as an open person who has always welcomed new spiritual understandings. Ellie completes her story by describing her wish that she had returned to Christianity when she first returned to New Zealand as this could have provided her with a positive direction in her life.

It is six years since Ellie left her relationship with Carlo. In her story, Ellie suggests that women considering leaving their violent relationship should enter an introspective process to consider whether they want to stay or leave. Ellie wants women to realise that they are not a part of their abuser and they have a duty to make a better life for themselves.

*I think you've got to be honest with yourself, you need to do some deep internal work on yourself, looking at what it is that's keeping me here ... what is it that I'm giving up in staying here; doing sort of cost benefit analysis thing, the pros and cons of staying and of going, looking at that kind of thing, looking at the list, what outweighs what, put it down on paper. Having things to look at sometimes really hits you, I mean, I also used a journal and I've looked back on these journals recently and I could see that same theme running through it, there was the same stuff going on, and our memories actually aren't that great, because they are selective, so I think journaling is important, looking at how it is you're left feeling in this relationship, and, really, like I say, be true to yourself, you know, you need to realise you are an individual, you're not part of that other person, and your duty is to yourself. In fact, your life is the best life you can make it, because that's the way you will make it better for everybody else, and if that means leaving a relationship then that might be what needs to be done. But it could also just mean that you choose to start working on*

*yourself. Stop the blame game; stop the complaining thing about what they're doing all the time. Work on what you've got.*

## **Tui**

Like Ellie, Tui held strong spiritual beliefs. Here she describes the origins of those beliefs, and the part they played in helping her to cope with the violence in her relationship.

*We're from the East Coast; and back up that way; it used to be known years ago that they were very spiritual. Quite a few of the old people that I'd talked to would say to me, "Jesus! You look just like your mum" and "Did you know that your mum was very spiritual?" "Yeah, I know".. Well, a lot of people when they hear 'spiritual' they think 'went to church'. No. Mum was very clairvoyant. She saw, she heard, had dreams. But I knew of this because I was being told this by my adoptive parents; they always let me know the spiritual side of my mum, and plus things had happened through my life where I've needed to know what it is in order to know it is. But before she died ... I showed all my sisters a photo of Cooper. Mum takes one look and she's never laid eyes on him, she went "Uh...there's more to a person than looks" and that's all she said. I was quite offended by that and I thought "Oooh, that's not nice, you haven't even met him, that's typical of you being nasty". Boy was she right. But, I'll tell you something, when the knockout violence happened, the time when I decided that was it, see, before she died, twice I heard this voice, twice I believe it was my adoptive father that had died. All this voice said was 'Tui' REALLY*

*LOUD, and it was at a mad time, like, it was my dad yelling out when I was about to do something naughty, or if I'd done something naughty. It was that yell; enough to make you stop and say, "Shit! Who was that?", "Was that me?" But, when I look back now, the two times that he did it, I was actually about to walk into death. They were warnings. So when I realised, and this was only when Cooper was around, when I realised what was happening, it was like "Oh, okay then, this is a warning".*

The key theme in Tui's narrative is how her understanding of spirituality has developed. She clarifies that the sort of spirituality she is referring to is not about going to Church, but is spirituality based on how her birth mother could see, and hear, and dream. The last part of Tui's narrative connects her spiritual belief with the violence she experienced. In this way her spirituality becomes a protection, acting as a warning system against Cooper.

Tui used another strategy against Cooper, one that surprised him and her.

*I'd taken so much crap from him that I was no longer scared 'cos I realised the evil of one's mind, what a GUTLESS! GUTLESS person to be doing this to someone smaller, weaker, vulnerable, more vulnerable than oneself. I got mad at the fact "How DARE YOU!" There was one point there where I just got sick of it; I'd got sick of being hit all the time without a reason. Our life revolved around how he woke up in the morning, or how good his day was going. I got sick of it. So there was one point there where he went to hit me, and I actually lashed back, and the REACTION on his face was like "Oh....Oh....." you know, a big girl act, and it was "Oohh! ...". I REALLY lost a lot of respect.*



*You know, the big staunch man that I was scared of was no longer. Once I saw that, I realised there and then that “You ain’t as tough as you’ve been making out” and the whole realisation of what he’d been doing to me, in that one moment of seeing him taking ONE hit from me, after me taking HUNDREDS from him, and his reaction to ONE LITTLE HIT from me; I realised there and then, right! I just lost ALL fear ... any fear I had of him was gone.*

### **Celia**

Part of Celia’s journey to being free of violence includes attending a group. The group starts her thinking about what she wants.

*So I can go there and everything’s out; this is happening, that’s happening. So I’m getting a realistic view. There’s no feelings to hide, I know where I’m at, what I want, I’ve got a complete view of me, and I’m thinking....I’m starting to think, I’m waking up and thinking I could be getting up out of bed and watching the sunrise by the beach, but I haven’t got a loving partner to do it with, and I’m thinking this is not living. I’m not meant to be on this earth to serve one person, because I like people and I’m good with people, I’ve got a family; I’m making choices just to be with one fucking arsehole. At one of the lowest points, I stop being scared of being without him. I start to picture a life; it starts to get exciting the picture of life without him (laughing). I journal, I keep a diary every time I’m going to these groups, I’m talking with friends*

Celia goes on to describes how she felt after she had taken action to make her separation from Dion final.

*It was excruciating to do so, but I had got to a point over those months of realising, I'm worth more, and I choose life ... I choose.....I choose..... even if it hurts to live without him, I've chosen to have a life with love and people and family and friends, so I knew what I needed to do to protect myself, because of love for him. I was really clear.*

*It hurts, and it hurts so much. And, it's hurt throughout the last two years; there hasn't been a period throughout the last two years or a day where I don't miss him or something, and yet at the same time I'm okay. I'm happy. I'm happy. And there's been excruciating times of just wanting to see him, because we talked so much.....like we were friends....like we talked.*

The narrative that Celia shares demonstrates the personal growth she had experienced over the years of being in, and out, of a relationship with Dion. So that we don't miss the point, Celia repeats words for emphasis; "I choose", "it hurts", and "I'm happy". The context surrounding Celia's personal growth is the knowledge that she must do what she can to protect herself.

### **Rose**

Rose outlines how strength of character, gained from her father, and from raising her daughter on her own, helped her to move away from violence.

*I've always been a really strong person, all my life. I've always had to be. I brought my daughter up on my own, her father was a violent man,*

*and I ran away from New Zealand, from him, I just vowed and declared. My dad's always a very strong man. There's four girls in my family and I was always the tomboy. I got a lot of strength from my dad, and my dad taught me how to take care of myself, because I was only.....you know, I'm only a short little bugger!*

Rose is still in the process of recovering from the violence and becoming violence free. Later in the story, Rose talks about how difficult it is to find the energy or time to improve herself because of exhaustion resulting from the IPV, and the numerous lawyer, court, mediation, and counselling appointments she has to keep. While she is struggling Rose is determined to get through this challenging time.

*At the end of the day I've done nothing wrong here, except for wanting to protect me and my son. If I break, I'm really scared of what I might do. I really am. Because I feel like I have been put through and pushed to my absolute limit, in every way and shape and form. It's like a roller coaster ride. I'm really up, next minute you're down, I'm really up, next minute you're down, and it annoys me to the extent that I don't feel that I can get out there and do anything at the moment, you know, like to get myself back out there; like back out into the work force, because things are so unstable. I don't want to commit myself to something and then not be able to do it, because I would just be setting myself up to fail and I couldn't do that to myself, and I couldn't do it to be unreliable to anyone else either. It's unfair because I can't better myself at the moment because of the situations and the court cases and counselling appointments, and lawyer's appointments it's just like,*

*right, well here we go, you know, you're gotta get up and we've gotta do it. You've gotta do it. I mean, at the moment, you know, I could go to bed and I could sleep for a week. I really could. I could stay in bed for a week. I can't.....I can't give up ...*

### **Ana**

In the following narrative, Ana reflects on how she was prior to her relationship with Levi.

*I was upset; got all my stuff, don't want to go back to my house because I'm afraid for my life. I mean we had copious amounts of fights, that week leading up to me finally going. He kicked me out, so I was like, right, I'm not going to call him, I literally turned off my phone, I even got a new number. Cos the old me was coming back, I was getting stubborn, like I don't want to put up with this bullshit anymore, I don't want to believe in his lies, I don't want to go back.*

Ana's story differs from the other stories presented in this section. She had been kicked out of the home by Levi and she goes to stay with a cousin. In her story, Ana remembers how she was prior to experiencing IPV, and how this previous identity returns to provide her with the strength to stay away from Levi.

### **Tui**

In response to a question about how she managed to stay away from Cooper, Tui stated the following.

*....a lot of my friends say, what they wanted me to do it, is by not being in a relationship for the last 9 years either, I just ... because of my ex-husband, my daughter experiencing what she experienced with me and*

*my ex-husband in her short ... two years that she was there ... and then going on to meet Cooper who proceeded to put another three more years of violence into her life; I didn't trust myself after that relationship. I realised that I needed to work on ME. I didn't consider myself damaged goods, but the word kept coming back from partners ... them having that picture of me, and they also talk about how you teach people how to treat you. Well, if that's the way I was teaching them, I was teaching WRONG (laughing.) I think I need to sit back and get a new strategy.*

The opening to Tui's narrative is the presentation of an idea suggested by her friends; that she should stay away from (intimate) relationships for a period of time. The rest of Tui's story describes how, after considering the impact of her violent relationships, and the messages received from partners, she decided a new strategy was needed.

### **7.2.5 Using informal supports**

In this section the women share how they used informal supports as a strategy to separate from the violence.

#### **Vicky**

When asked a question about what supports she used, Vicky explained.

*There wasn't anyone. I had a girlfriend at teachers' college, but she didn't know what to do, and one day I was at KFC and I tried to pay by cheque, because he wanted some KFC, and I started crying and I said, "I've gotta have KFC, you've got to take this cheque". I had my boys with me, and one of my lecturers at teachers' college was there, and she gave me \$20. Then I couldn't give the money back. I gave my*

*friend the money to give to her – I couldn't face her. And then she came to me and I said, "Oh yeah I've just had quite a few problems." She said, "oh do you want to repeat another six months of teachers' college"? But she didn't understand that that would have been not graduating and explaining to my family which just wasn't the answer. And then I got really worried that they weren't going to graduate me, so I just hid it all.*

In the following narrative Vicky tells how meeting another man helped her to move away from Tama.

*But how I got out was one day I was at the pub with him, probably looking really shell-shocked and downtrodden and a guy came up to me and said, "If you're ever in trouble, you ring me," and gave me a bit of paper; he just came up to me. They'd had a bit of a confrontation, some fighting outside, and Tama was crying. He was really emotional, he was crying, and Sam, this guy that came and gave me this note, he said, "Oh God this guy's really hung up on you, but he's not good for you. If you're ever in trouble, ring me". Well I rang him two days later. Well I think he was a bit shocked that I rung so quickly. I arrived on his doorstep with two boys and a bag, and he was like, well you can't stay here, "I can't put you up," sort of thing, but he was really the catalyst, and I think it was... I was kind of physically attracted to him and there was no hope there, and he just gave me strength.*

*And Tama just kept stalking and all that sort of thing, and then I started to form a relationship with this guy, and I now think that's what his intention was really as well, and he was like 15 years older than me, and he was a really nice guy, but he'd just come out of a divorce, and actually I saw a lot of him. Anyway, he was around at my house one day and Tama had left; we weren't together but he was still stalking me, and Tama pulled up and he'd keyed my car, so he was in a right mood, and was trying to get in the house. And I thought, well God, Sam's here, if he gets in the house, Sam can stick up for himself, but when he's in this sort of mood... And so I said, "You've got to hide, you've got to hide, you just can't..." So I was just saying, "Just go away Tama," just yelling out at him, he kept me in, and then he ran around the back and I couldn't lock the door in time, and so Sam was crouched down and he was leaning against the door, and Tama was trying to get in and he was going, "My God, where did you get your strength from?" ... He thought... Oh God you've got tough all of a sudden," and then he hopped onto the kitchen, and I still remember he put his arm into the window and he was unlatching the window, and that's when Sam jumped up and Tama said, "Oh you fuckin' bitch, you've got someone in there", and he was trying to break the windows and oh God. And do you know you wouldn't believe this; I can't actually remember kind of what happened next. I don't know whether Sam went out and confronted him. The result was, I didn't get beaten*

*up. And Sam didn't get beaten up. And I think he just went away. I think Sam was a bit of a match with him. I don't know. But anyway, he continued to stalk and that, and then one day I was on my own, at home, knock knock on the door, knew it was him, and I just thought, I can't deal with this anymore. I opened the door and I looked him straight in the face and I said, "I don't want to be with you. It's over". And he goes, "Tell me a really good reason". And this was not true, but I said, "I've got someone else". And I thought, I'm going to get killed here. I said, "I've got someone else". And you know what he did? He went, "Oh," and walked away. I still can't believe it to this day. And he didn't stalk ... nothing.*

Vicky's catalyst for leaving Tama was the strength she gained from meeting another man, Sam. Vicky could have told her story without the detail of what happened the day Tama found Sam at her house, but it appears, from the way that Vicky organised the story, that this is a key event. She is unable to recall all the details of that day, however, she concludes that Sam is too much of a match for Tama, and this in the end, gives her the courage to stand up to Tama. Her statement to Tama that she is now in a relationship (knowing that Tama would assume her new partner is Sam) is enough to keep Tama away from her permanently.

### ***Maggie***

Like Vicky, Maggie met another partner who was a great support to her. Maggie met Harry while Chris was in prison. Initially, Maggie states;

*I got into a relationship with Harry and that gave me another body in the house.*



Later on in the interview Maggie again describes how a relationship with Harry was helpful to her.

*I got the Protection Order, I had trespassing orders at some times, but if he turned up on the doorstep I wasn't going to stand in his way, because he would have just removed me from his way, so I could never make it stick, 'cos he'd just come back again, and every time of course he got arrested. He'd be so sorry, and to start with I think people believed him, and he would never drink again and he wasn't never going to do this and the other thing again, and then, yeah, bit by bit, after the threat had passed, then he'd just revert back to type, so in the end of it, it was those factors, those simple factors that came together. It was, Harry, my current partner that was the major one. Harry and I, which is not helpful to somebody who doesn't have a partner, but, we worked out, okay, if he turns up, you grab that phone, I'm going to grab this phone, ring 111, and throw that phone onto the bed, then I'm gonna take off out the window with the phone. We worked out how to cope if he did turn up, and that would also work for a female by herself, to just work out a plan, because once you can envisage different scenarios and you can work out a plan, and then you can relax because you've got a plan in mind if it happens.*

Maggie provides some background to her story by outlining how difficult it had been to keep Chris out of her life; she describes having a trespass and protection order so anytime Chris arrives at her home he gets arrested. Maggie describes her new partner, Harry, as the major

reason she was able to finally end her relationship with Chris. With Harry, Maggie works out a plan for how they will respond should Chris come around to the home.

### *Celia*

Throughout her interview, Celia described how her relationship with a male friend helped her to leave and stay away from her partner Dion.

*I went to my Friday group. I got home and about a block from home I felt like I was going to vomit, I knew Dion wouldn't be here. I felt sick. And he wasn't here, and there was no note, and so I spent some time with my mate Craig, and I came back to get some stuff and he rang, and he said "I've done it again", and I said... "what do you mean, you've done it again". He said, "I've slept with someone". This was my bottom line, and this is what he rings and says, what it was meant to do was let me know that I don't threaten to leave home, he's boss. He didn't think I was going to leave him. You see he didn't know I was ready, I was ready to. So he does that, and there's a very small amount of talking and I forget what he said, but I hung up on him. I hung up on him, and I cried. I went round to Craig's and absolutely howled. I rung the Stop Violence to let them know what he'd done, 'cos he was on the course, court ordered, and then I went straight to WINZ and took his name, said he had left and he wouldn't be back ... I'd made the decision and I said to Craig, I need you to hold me accountable, this is what he's done, I told people, this is what he's done. If I say I want to*

*go back to him, please support me through those moments because I'm not doing it. I did set it up so that I couldn't fail.*

While the precipitating factor to leaving in Celia's story is Dion's infidelity, the first person she turns to is her male friend Craig. He is also the one that she asks for help from should she want to turn back to Dion. She enhances her chances of staying away from Dion by asking Craig to make her accountable for her decision.

### ***Briana***

Briana found that she had support from her parents; they paid for her ticket back from Australia and when she returned she stayed with them because she needed their support.

*I rang mum and dad, we're really close to family, we're really close, and they got a ticket from over their side, so they'd got it through the Flight Centre ... I was in town with mum and dad; I had to be with my family for support because I was just a mess when I came home.*

### ***Sharnie***

While Briana found her family to be a great support, Sharnie preferred to keep her family uninformed about the relationship.

*Well, I tell you, my family ... why I wanted to get away ... I couldn't stand the humiliation of all of them being involved in it anymore, you know. And I mean, it was really putting them in danger sometimes, you know, it was almost like "I can manage this better without having to worry about the rest of you", I can manage him better when, you know, I'm thinking "well, you've got us now, you've got nothing else, we know nobody"*

### **Vicky**

Like Sharnie, Vicky preferred to hide from her parents the violence she was experiencing. This means that Vicky's parents are not a support she can draw on.

*I had to hide it from my parents. So, all the doors had holes in them.*

*And the very first time he did it, he saw my response, and from then, it was everywhere. And I was forever trying to cover it up...*

*They knew, but they didn't say anything. They just said, "We don't like him," and I tried to hide the relationship often.*

Vicky's parents looked after the children at times and this gave Vicky a much needed break. However, Vicky worked hard to keep the violence invisible from her parents.

#### **7.2.6 Contacting the authorities: the role of social services**

In this section the women talk about how contacting the authorities is a strategy they used to keep themselves safe while in a violent relationship, and on leaving the relationship. The Police and Women's Refuge featured in many of the women's stories. Views of how helpful contact with the authorities was to the women are discussed later in the report.

### **Ana**

In the following narrative, Ana describes one of the few times she contacted the Police.

*You know I went to the Police a number of times. You see before I moved out of my flat I actually went to the police and reported Levi for stealing my stuff... So he stole some stuff. So I asked my cousin, "Look, has Levi been over?" And she goes, "Oh yeah, I let him in the other day." But she was quite negative about it, but I didn't tell her what had happened. Me and my sister and my friend rock up into my room and it's trashed, stuff's broken, my favourite basketball singlet's been cut to*

*shreds. My favourite dress that my step mum had made for me was ripped to shreds. Jewellery was missing, you know jewellery from my 21<sup>st</sup>, gifts from my friends missing, stolen, so I reported it. A few months later they get back to me and say look we believe we have sufficient evidence to charge and he was in the room with me when I got the call and I turned round and said, "Look, I'll just drop the charges and we won't go any further". I thought you know this is my gift to you my dear, please, please have changed. [Upset]. And that was the final straw I guess as well. Like I gave you this and you pretty much shit on me again and threw it back in my face. We're done.*

Ana makes contact with the Police after she has ended her relationship with Levi. He had continued to harass her and on this occasion Levi has trashed her room and taken personal belongings that were important to Ana. Even though the Police returned with enough evidence to charge Levi, Ana capitulated and did not press charges; she was hoping that Levi had changed.

### ***Tui***

In the following story, Tui shares her experience of contact with the Police and Battered Women's.

*When I talk about this experience I had at Battered Women's, the woman, Pania, that was dealing with me at the time, she was a Maori woman, she had been through it before; she had no psychology degree, in those days it was run by women that been there, done that. She knew the signs. She even knew how to get through to me, like, took me round the corner, "you wanna a fag? Have a fag, you can talk, you wanna*

*talk, you talk; if you don't, you don't, it's entirely up to you. Feel free to come and approach me when you want to". Never pressured me, she allowed me to open up when I opened up, but in saying that, she knew there was more to the story than I was letting on. One day I positioned my daughter at the shower and said to her "Can you just stand by the door and make sure none of the other ladies come in?" Well, the door went open, I heard my daughter say "Sorry Pania, mums in the shower" and then I heard Pania IN THE SHOWER, saying "Sorry darling, I'm just putting on a load of washing, it's all right, mummy's got the shower closed". Well, next minute, she's still talking and I'm getting out, and I've got my towel around me and all the bruises are on the back, because he was gutless, he always came round the back, and I'm standing there and she goes "Come on, get dressed, I'm a woman, seen it before". So, I stepped out, and as I stepped out she quickly looked behind me, and as she noticed she turned to me. She went "I knew it, I KNEW IT", and I just burst into tears, and she said "Why the hell didn't you tell me, Tui?" I went "No, I don't want CYFS involved". "What do you mean you don't want CYFS involved?"(laughing). And I just let it out, and she said "Darling, I've gotta get this photographed, I've got to get this documented". Before I knew it, the police photographer was there.*

Tui shares another story about contact with the Police.

*I went to the Police Station to reconfirm with them “No, I’m NOT in a relationship with Cooper” after he’d been there five times to tell them “Oh yeah, we’re back together again”, and the police officer said to me “How long have you got, love?” and I said “why’s that?”, and he said “I want to show you something before you go”. You know the data printouts you get? Well I could hear this machine while we were talking, printing, printing, printing, printing, and on the floor there’s a pile about this long.....about this high. He goes to me “See that pile of paper down there?” and I went “Yeah” and he goes “That’s Cooper’s record”, and I’m like “WHAT!” and he goes “we’re only half way through”, I went “PARDON” and he goes “And at least three-quarters of that is assault against women.”. I WAS HORRIFIED! Because if someone had told me this at the beginning...*

Tui’s strategy of contacting Battered Women’s and on another occasion, the Police, enabled her to gain some useful information about her partner, Cooper, which contributed to her eventually leaving the relationship. Tui also had contact with Womens Refuge on a number of occasions. The following story relates to a time when Tui and her daughter were travelling throughout the South Island trying to get away from Cooper.

*We only stayed in the small town the night and, it was quite funny, because once I got there, I rang up and the lady said “Is there any possibility of you going to the motor camp?”” I said “Darling, if I could go to the motor camp I would have driven straight there. Financially, I can’t”, and I said “And I’m really too pooped to drive through to Dunedin”, and so they allowed me to have the keys for me*

*and my girl, for the night at the house. She came and settled us in but, unfortunately, the situation at the time was we had to be there on our own, which I didn't care, because, you know, Oh God! Just having somewhere safe, just to chill out. It was actually awesome to have the place on our own.*

### **Maggie**

Maggie was on the run from Chris who continued to stalk her each time she tried to leave him. On one occasion she moved to a new rural community and decided to take preventative action by visiting the local police station.

*Well, I went to the police here, and I said, you know, new community, and wanting to make friends and that, and not really wanting to be targeted as one of those ... yeah ... I was on the benefit as it was, so, you know, I've always been very conscious of how other people view me or view my children, and so I didn't really want to make a big scene, but I went into the police station here and said "Look", you know, "I've had a bit of a problem with this guy in the past, he's just found me here, he's quite violent".*

In this narrative, Maggie is conscious that being on a benefit may result in her being perceived negatively, but she struggles to put this into words. Even so, Maggie contacts the Police to let them know that in the past her partner has been violent.

At a later point in the interview Maggie provides a description of how she contacted the Police when Chris was violent.



*And I was in the study room, studying, and I heard a vehicle coming down the road, and I thought “No, it can’t be” and there’s mighty screech of brakes at the driveway and he came up the driveway. So that was the first time he got arrested here. So I went out the back door and locked it, and he came in through the bedroom window, through the house. When the police turned up he thought he’d locked us out, but I actually had the keys still in my hand, I don’t know how the hell I managed to do that, I just walked out with the key, locked it and took the key with me, it’s amazing (laughing), and the policemen said “are the kids inside?” and I said “Yeah, I don’t think he’ll touch them though’ because they alright asleep. There ended up being a huge kerfuffle with the police and that happened in my son’s doorway, and I had a glass table with a big glass vase on it and he went down on top of that ... Chris went down on top of that and there was this glass vase broken and cut him all up through the face and there was blood all up the walls... I’m just glad he got arrested and taken off.*

### ***Ellie***

Ellie found that, once back in New Zealand she could contact Women’s Refuge as a safe place to stay if needed when Carlo visited from the Mediterranean.

*I knew that Women’s Refuge existed, and I knew if I found a number there would be something like that, because I had been quite aware there was a lack of them in the Mediterranean, whereas I knew this kind of service existed here. That’s what I meant, you’re now, now that*

*we're in my country, you'll play by my rules, you know, I'm not going to tolerate this kind of thing, maybe in your country I had to, because there wasn't any choice.*

### **Rose**

Rose explains how her contact with Women's Refuge was through her lawyer.

*I rung them ... my lawyer gave me their number and I rang them 'cos I was staying with the girls and it was just getting ridiculous to the extent that he was turning up all hours of the night, screaming out abuse, going like this ....to my daughter. My son's looking out the window at this the whole time.*

### **Maggie**

Maggie presents a different view of contact with Women's Refuge than Tui, Ellie, and Rose. As part of a stand against her violent partner, Maggie did not make contact with Women's Refuge.

*I didn't want to go to Women's Refuge 'cos this was my house where I'd bought this place 'cos we shifted so much, I shifted four times, three times in four months when we got here, and I said to the kids "We're going to stay here for at least 3 years". And this was my house, I was not going to move ... and I'm from this area, I love this area, and I wasn't ... yeah, I wasn't gonna let him chase me from my house. That was one thing I stood up to him on.*

### **7.2.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: SKILLS AND STRATEGIES**

The range of skills and strategies presented in the women's stories were used at various points in their journey away from violence. Some skills and strategies were used to cope with violence while they were living with the abuser, while others were employed after the women had physically left the relationship. Each woman's use of skills and strategies was influenced by her past and present context; her understanding of the resources available to her; and the physical, emotional, and cognitive impact the abuse had on her wellbeing. The women also considered their strategies in light of the knowledge they held about the patterns and personal characteristics of their violent partner.

Compliance was employed both as a strategy to calm potentially escalating violence and as a way of making sure that plans made to leave remained secret. To protect themselves while they planned, the women planted money, car keys, and extra cell phones various parts of their home (for Adele it was in her bathroom).

In planning to leave the women were careful and secretive because of a clear understanding that leaving was dangerous to them and their families. For many of the women, the planning process could not be rushed; the time between planning to putting the plan into action, varied. The women drew on their skills of pretence; they carried on as though nothing had changed, sometimes becoming more compliant than usual so that their partner would not become suspicious of their plans to leave. In the stories shared, the women carefully considered their plans, going over them in their heads, as Briana described in her story. The plans made often included enlisting the help of friends. To gather belongings the women packed up small amounts at a time, and never anything large or conspicuous; again, this was so that their partners would not catch on to the women's plans to leave.

Another strategy employed both during the violent relationship and after physically leaving was the gaining of independence; achieved through undertaking study after leaving the relationship and through gaining employment. For two of the women securing employment was a crucial part of becoming financially independent and confident. Employment provided an opportunity for Sharnie to get out of the house and have less contact with her abusive partner, Donald. The contacts made in the workplace provided Sharnie with the prospect of having an area of her life that was not tainted by Donald's violence, or by his often

embarrassing and humiliating public behaviour. For Lisa, gaining employment and studying after she had left her relationship with Steve helped her to develop her skills in socialising with others. This gave her personal confidence. Research has identified that maintaining employment is often difficult for women in IPV relationships (Pouwhare, 1999). Moreover, the impact of violence can last for years, even after women have left the relationship, and sometimes this has an impact on a woman's ability to work (Reeves & O'Leary-Kelly 2007). However, both Sharnie and Lisa's stories provide an alternative view; that employment can be a wellbeing enhancing activity during and after IPV.

Personal development and determination were key components of managing IPV, leaving IPV, and building healthy lives once IPV had ended. Being determined, was a personal mindset and attitude that motivated many of the women to take action. A determined attitude is displayed by Lisa when she has to walk a long way, bruised and injured, with her children to seek legal support. Tui's demonstration of determination includes physically fighting back against her partner. There were times when it was difficult to find the resolve to resist the violence. For some women, having a spiritual belief system provided the means to find motivation and determination within themselves. Spiritual beliefs also acted as a protective factor that warned one participant of impending violence. Spirituality provided the foundation for the development of strength and courage. The opportunity for personal development and determination emanated from a strongly held belief system about spirituality, or about strength, attendance at groups or programmes, a need to do something to enhance the chances of survival of self and children.

Seeking help from friends and family was an important survival strategy for the women. The help sought and provided can be organised into three areas. Physical support provided directly in relation to a violent event was critical. In this context the friend or new partner physically and emotionally resisted the abuser on the women's behalf. Emotional support sustained women throughout the separating from violence process by providing care and understanding, but was also important for accountability for decisions made. Practical support included being a part of separating plans; helping taking care of children, assisting in the packing up of household items; providing a place to stay or finding accommodation for

women. Some of the women found that a male friend was sometimes a catalyst in two ways; motivating women to stand up to their abuser, and by acting as a deterrent to the abuser.

The Police and Women's refuge were the two key agencies that women most often used in the process of resisting and strategising to move on from violence. The women identify numerous contact times with both agencies. The Police were contacted by the women mostly when there was a violent event, but sometimes contact was made by the women (outside of a violent event) to alert the Police as a prevention measure, or to clarify information. Women's refuge was mostly contacted by the women when they needed a safe place to reside for a while.

The strategies women have used raise some interesting questions in relation to service provision; should IPV social service programmes provide vocational training and prepare women to enter the workforce? How do formal services encourage personal growth and determination in women and how is emotional support, physical support, and practical support encouraged? Extending on from this, how do providers support extended family and friends, to support the women?

Against the background of IPV, the women have shown that they consistently resist violence by using a diverse and context driven set of skills and strategies. It is not useful, then, to think of one set of skills and strategies as the most useful, rather, it is important to think of skills and strategies as unique to the women and their situations.

### **7.3 Helpful and unhelpful responses**

In this section the Women share stories about the usefulness of the help received from formal and I services. Responses were from the justice system, including courts and lawyers, the police, IPV providers, and a range of other professionals. This section also includes narratives about how services should be delivered.

### 7.3.1 Justice system

#### **Vicky**

*I was trying to think about that this morning. I don't think we made a year, but it took longer to get rid of him. Like he stalked me afterwards – like terrible. So I think it was about nine months. I remember going to a lawyer and asking for a protection order, if I could get one. She said, "You're not married to him". Because you know, 17 years ago, if you're not married to him you can't get one... Yeah, I couldn't get one. And then after that it took me longer to get rid of him ...*

Vicky's reflection about the help she sought is set in a time 17 years ago when Vicky attempted to leave Tama. At that point the Domestic Violence Act, 1995, was not in operation. Vicky unmarried status barred her from receiving legal protection, which from her point of view, extended the period of time that she stayed in the relationship.

#### **Rose**

Rose finds that the court system is not helpful to women.

*..it's just been awful, it really has, to the extent that it's ... how much? How much do you actually have to take? How much of the process do you actually have to go through? ... he walks away every time and gets a slap on the wrist. The police and the safety team and Women's Refuge work their butts off, and they work their butts off to make women feel safe, secure. You don't have to do this, you don't have to put up with this, you don't have to live like that. You don't have to live in fear of your life, you know? But the court systems fail them, just*

*about 9 times out of 10, and they literally have to physically God dam  
harm you, or near God dam kill you...*

Throughout this narrative from Rose runs the theme of frustration. She states that the police, the safety team, and refuge, work hard but the Court system fails *them*. In this part of the narrative, Rose is saying the court system is a failure on behalf of the agencies mentioned; she doesn't say the court system fails *her*. Rose presents herself as frustrated that her ex-partner can get away with hurting her and she estimates that he would have to kill her before anything would be done, by the Court, to stop him. Rose positions herself as very much external and powerless in relation to the court.

### ***Maggie***

*I get very angry and annoyed when I hear about people breaching  
Protection Orders and the Courts basically dismiss it, or let them off  
with a warning.*

All it does is give the court some teeth. It doesn't actually protect you, ...you cannot always pick up a telephone and ring the police, you'd be able to get your cell phone ... he broke one of my telephones once, just a landline, but it was, a portable landline, and I picked up the phone to ring his mum to come and get him, and he just snapped the phone in two, and I had no phone. I was way out in the country, had no phone, I had nothing to get any help that night ...

Maggie, like Rose, is frustrated when she speaks about protection orders and Court. In her experience protection orders do not actually protect.

### ***Adele***

Adele finds that being in a same-sex relationship is a barrier to accessing legal support.

*She kept coming to the new place and that was a nightmare, because  
what happened then, my husband had the car repossessed, he had these*

*people turn up and take the car, and, and then I was looking for a lawyer, and I'd gone to two or three, and these were male lawyers, and as soon as I started to say that I was in a lesbian relationship that had problems and....yes, it is violent ... "No, we don't want to work with you".*

In Adele's story it appears to be the intersection of the violent relationship and the same sex relationship that stops the lawyers from working with her.

Later in the interview Adele finds, through the Citizens Advice Bureau, a lawyer who is responsive to her needs.

*I then, rang Community Citizens Advice and I spoke to this elderly lady there and I said "I need to find a lawyer that works for women". She said "I've got just the person", and she gave me this lawyer's name ... and I made an appointment with her and went and met her, and I sat there for hours and just talked, and she just listened and she just kept writing, she just kept taking notes, you know? And she never said anything that first meeting, I did the talking, and I told her what I wanted but didn't know how to go about it, and ... anyway, I built up a rapport with this lawyer and she basically said to me "The relationship will take care of itself as you grow stronger" and little moments of wisdom like that I held onto and they became my mantra, you know?*

Adele appeared before the Court in relation to custody and access arrangements when their son, Oscar, had been removed from her care as a result of Tonya's violence towards Adele. Adele had a positive experience at Court, even though this was not her expectation, as she explains in the following narrative.



.....the thing that worked for me was when the lawyer got the Family Court date. Suddenly my partner was nowhere to be seen. Where was there support? I didn't feel like I had a backbone, I didn't feel any strength in me, and I just thought today's the day my husband gets the custody papers signed and sealed, I'm gonna do that, and then I'm gonna kill myself. That was it for me. It was either ... there was no other decision; it wasn't going to swing any other way. I'm that much of a V person, you know, and I can't provide for my son the way he deserves, my husband can. And I remember it was distressing and I was very dissociated, I was just a shadow of myself ... Going off to court, and then my husband being all sneery with his lawyer, and we sat in this room, me beside my lawyer, ex-husband with his lawyer, and the judge ... old ... as soon as I saw it was a really old man, I just thought "This is it. Welcome to everyone's ego, I'm just going to play along here, that's it". Anyway, this old judge ... my husband went to say something and he said "'Excuse me, I'll just speak to Adele first, if you don't mind". And I remember this judge just looked at me with the most kind eyes that I had seen in a long time, and he just looked so wise, you know? And I thought, this man will make whatever decision is best for the baby, that's okay. And him and my lawyer talked for a bit, and then he asked me a question, I can't remember what the question was, I couldn't tell you, I remember just being wrapped up in this judge's face, and I actually stood up and I just spoke from the heart

*to this judge and I said to him "I have an abusive partner in my life. I'm trying to get out of it. This is what I've done, and I'm trying to wean myself off, 'cos it's like an addiction". And I just spoke purely and honestly ... and I remember him saying to me (tearful) "What do you need?" And I said to him "I need my son to be safe, and I think my husband can keep him safe, he's a good dad, and I want that to continue, and I want help and support to allow me to do that, but I have a right to be mum. I have a right to be a mum, if I can keep myself safe and my son safe, and I need help to do that 'cos I haven't been able to". And I said so much more, and I remember my lawyer just patting me on the knee as I sat back down, and the judge turned round to my ex-husband and said 'And you need to pull your head in!' And for the first time I felt ... like humour around me. The look of indignation on my ex-husband's face! And he says "Adele, what days would you like your son. If you could assure us in Court that your partner won't be around on those days, that gives you room for your partner then too". Great! That's what I've been looking for, I just didn't know it, you know? And I didn't want someone else outside saying "No, you can't be with her". I wanted to do it ... natural progress ...*

On the face of it, this is a good news story; the Judge listens to Adele and seems to understand her plea that Oscar should remain with her ex-husband because of Adele's violent partner, Tonya. But there is also so much sadness here; Adele has planned to kill herself if Court does not go well; she has lost strength and describes herself as having *nobackbone*; her child cannot live with her; and, Adele has thus far been unable to separate herself fully from Tonya.

**Lisa**

Lisa's first escape to the lawyers occurred when her partner was asleep. She had been badly beaten and was suffering from a broken wrist. In excruciating pain she walked with her children to the nearest lawyers.

*And so I went to the lawyers, the closest lawyers. Then "oh no, we don't do legal aid, you'll have to go to this other one, which was a 45 minute walk away. I had to walk because I wasn't allowed to drive the car. I had the newborn, I wasn't allowed to drive the car, it was his car.*

Lisa continued her difficult walk to the next lawyer.

*When I got to the lawyers I just sobbed and told him my story and he wrote lots of stuff down, and said if you feel safe, he said 'do you feel safe to go home'? I said 'not really'. He said 'well, I can ring Refuge and the police and get you out now' and I said 'oh no, we're alright, all our belongings are in the house, passports and stuff', and he said 'well, if that's the choice you're making' ... I said 'yes, to go back and get my stuff'. The next day, he told me to come back the next day at 10 o'clock, and I did, and he handed me an emergency protection order, an urgent protection order, a parenting order and tenancy order. I was stoked.*

### 7.3.2 Police

#### *Rose*

Rose has positive comments to make about her experience of Police involvement when reflecting on her experience of IPV overall. In other parts of the interview Rose presents another story; this time her view of the Police is changed after they arrive at her home with her drunken ex-partner.

*I was staying with the girls and it was just getting ridiculous to the extent that he was turning up all hours of the night, screaming out abuse ... my son's looking out the window the whole time. The police did bash on my door at 5 o'clock in the morning 'cos he's been done for drink driving and .....In between this time I've gone and got a Trespass Order.*

*And ... they still knocked at my door at 5 o'clock in the morning wanting me to drive him back to (name of town).....drunk! I'm like, you got to be joking? I said "I've got a trespass order against this man". She goes "well". I said "I'm not driving him all the way to (name of town) when he's drunk". She goes "Well, he's not that bad". I said "Well, he must be bad enough 'cos you've just bought him here. You've done him for drink driving". And then Jack woke up and yelled out "Don't go, mum, don't go mum" and the police lady heard him and she goes "Oh, no, no". I said "I can't, I can't do that" and she goes "No, no, no" and walked out. Then I got a mouthful of abuse, from Brad, "Thanks very fuckin' much you bitch!"*

When asked to talk about how she felt about the Police action, Rose said;

*I just thought “You disrespectful....do your homework”, you know?  
You got a man here that’s drunk. Don’t you think you’d get in touch to  
see who that woman is, have a look see if there’s anything going on?  
You know, use your initiative? What is this man from (name of town)  
doing up here, drink driving at 5 o’clock in the morning? I was ...I was  
devastated!*

In this story Brad’s harassment of Rose continues when the Police bring him to Rose’s home, even though there is a trespass order in place. Rose’s description of events shows that the Police minimized her concerns until they heard Jack’s plea, “Don’t go Mum”. Rose shares her feelings of devastation and questions Police procedure and competence.

### ***Maggie***

Maggie shares how her pleas for help from the Police in a rural town were minimized.

*I went into the police station here and said “Look”, I’ve had a bit of a  
problem with this guy in the past, he’s just found me here, he’s quite  
violent”. The policeman here, he’s now retired, the policeman I spoke  
to, elderly Maori chap, very, very nice man, but he leant over and he  
patted me on the knees “Don’t you worry about it dear”. And I thought  
“you’ve got no understanding of what I’m talking about”. This isn’t a  
guy that likes to give you a slap when he’s been to the pub, this guy is  
dangerous. And it was shortly after that, that I had to call the police  
here, and ... and it ended up he bit one police officer, he bit the dog  
handler, he put the local policeman off work for a couple of weeks. He*

*was a violent, violent man, and he went to jail after that, um ... and then the police sat up and listened to me, once something had happened to THEM (laughing).*

Maggie, in her next story talks about what it is like living in a small rural area where the abuser's family and the Police are well respected and long serving members of the community.

*He had to take responsibility for his actions, and his mother and everybody else, even the police in (name of town), used to take him home 'cos "he's only a kid, you know, and we don't really want to cause an issue here, and act up kid, you know, we'll take him home". Once, he threw himself out of the car one day in (town), one night, and ... I don't how badly hurt he was, but he hurt himself as he landed, the car was moving, so I shot back down the road to a bottle store further back and I ran in and said "ring for an ambulance please, a guy has just fallen out of the car" and went back, and because he'd been drinking the ambulance wouldn't come near him. Well, he was NUTS anyway, he was ... one minute he was hugging the ambulance officer and telling him he was okay, and the next minute he was going to kill him, he was just ... he was just NUTS! He was drinking and on antidepressants at that stage, which you don't do, because it doubles up the effect of alcohol, so he only had a couple of jugs but he was OFF HIS FACE! And the police came along and put him into the car, and then he went in to do something and then he kicked the policeman in his*

*face and broke his nose. Well, that was a stupid thing to do to a policeman, so they put him in the back seat of the car and he booted him up the face, and he said “Well that’s it, I wasn’t going to lay any charges, but now I will”. I mean they weren’t going to, you know, they let him away, and they let him away, they were so soft with him and it doesn’t help.*

### ***Adele***

During her interview, Adele talked about what it was like to ask for help for IPV when in a violent lesbian relationship. Adele shared how a law firm had acted towards her when she had asked for help – they had denied that they could offer any services to people in her situation. Adele went on to describe another situation when she felt judged on the basis of her sexuality.

*I remember, we had ... she had some friends over, at the time; of course, they’d become my friends as well, had some friends over, there was no drinking or anything, just talking and stuff. And anyway, they left, and as she was saying goodbye to them and I thought I’ll wander down to Coffee Culture, buy us a couple of coffees, and just did it without thinking, go buy a coffee to surprise her, you know? The closer I got to that front door I had this horrible ... I can feel it now, it’s like a sinking butterfly nervous fear inside, and I just thought “What’s that about?” I walked in ... I don’t know what hit me ... bang! Now I don’t know how many days this went on for that I was in this house, but, you know, I’ve got no idea what happened, I’m completely blank ... um ... what I do remember is sitting in a chair in the lounge, and I couldn’t*

*stop my body shaking, and I remember this arrogant police officer holding up in the light, my hair with scalp on it, and I've still got the bald patch there, and him putting it into a plastic bag, and I remember seeing the blood dropping off it. I just remember this very, very clearly and I remember this police officer just looking at me like I was dumb, and talking to me really arrogantly "Um, now, well here's the number, I'm not going to get Victim Support to phone you, you can phone them, um ... have you got someone to come and fix your front door?" I was thinking "what's wrong with my front door?" I couldn't think, you know? And he just said "So you don't want to press charges?" And I said "Press charges to what?" And I just kept saying "No". I said "No" and him leaving...*

Adele has difficulty recalling the violence that occurred to her; however, she very clearly remembers the response of the Police officer that spoke with her about further service involvement and pressing charges. For Adele the intersection of gender and sexuality create a barrier to her receiving the appropriate intervention.

### ***Tui***

Tui described one police officer as her 'saviour'.

*I was just so grateful that I came across a gentleman ... and he was an older gentleman. I'll never forget him, and he basically knocked on the door and he said to me "Is Cooper here?", and I went "No". He goes "Are you being instructed to tell me he's not here?" And I just was wide-eyed and he said "You mind moving aside". Cooper WAS there,*



*and I'll never forget that....it was like "Oh my God, you saviour you know, he saw the fear in my eyes, he saw that I was being stood over! So they got him straight out and that's when he came back to me and he goes "Do you know that he's a ticking time bomb?" and I just broke down and I said "I'm TRYING, I'm TRYING to get away him. He's stalking me. No-one's believing me. I'm TRYING", and that's when he turned around and he said "Right, it's like this, second time we get called out on a person we're supposed to ring CYFS". I went "Yeah?" He goes "This is your fourth call-out in ... if you don't get rid of him, if there's no way of getting of him, ... and this is going to carry on happening, 'I'm gonna have to call in CYFS. The only reason I'm not, Tui", and I went "Why's that?". He goes "Cos I do truly believe that you are doing everything in your dam power to get away from this man". And I said "I AM, I AM, I just don't know how to dam well do it".*

In this passage Tui explains her contact with a particular police officer who recognised the danger Tui was in and appeared to understand the challenge Tui had faced in trying to move away from her violent relationship with Cooper. Tui shares that she is trying, but she doesn't know *how to dam well do it*. Further on in the interview, Tui articulates how this Police officer helped her to relocate to another area in New Zealand; where she and her daughter were safe for a little while.

### **Ana**

Ana begins this story after talking about the ongoing threats of violence she is receiving from Levi. For Ana the process of getting a protection order was straightforward due in part to the work of the police officer involved.

*...well he sent another text you know "I'm going to bomb your house". So he practically threatened to kill me while I was carrying his child and so then I decided well you know what, you're a fucking asshole, you're done. What you have to do is just go away, settle yourself down, sort yourself out and then come back – then we could talk about it. He didn't see it that way, so he's trying to force his way back into my life by I guess striking fear. Yes, I was scared, but no I was not stupid enough to go back to that or to take him back just because he threatened to kill. So I went and got a protection order and on the advice of the, I can't remember, no, look I don't know how I remembered to get a protection order, but I was like I'm going to the police station and I'm going to report this because I don't know what to do. So I got the protection and then I went in and I sat down, "Look I'm getting these threatening text messages from my ex-boyfriend, I'm carrying his child and I'm actually fearful for my life and the life of my family". Then, you know the police officer was very helpful and he said, "Look we'll get a protection order sorted for you, you need to go and see a lawyer, I'll refer you to this one, you can go and see her in the morning and you'll get that sorted, but you need to take this police report with you". And I said, "Fine, I will do that". I immediately went the next week, booked an appointment on the Monday, took myself to the lawyer, explained my situation, she processed it.*

## *Adele*

We have already explored Adele's experience of unhelpful Police responses. She also had positive experiences such as the one she shares here. This story occurs at a point in the interview when Adele is talking about her decision to empower herself and survive through her relationship with Tonya.

*I had no car, I couldn't walk anyway because of my arthritis, I had no confidence and I was scared. I was frightened. I had no food in the cupboards, you know? Because the benefit stopped, and down onto a sickness benefit to pay rent as well, wouldn't do it. So I was losing my house, and then I got this phone call from a detective, I don't know his name, and I heard this lovely soft fatherly voice and he says to me "Can you talk, Adele" and I said "Yeah"; and I was just sitting in the hallway for hours talking ... listening to this man. He said "I'll ring you back again, okay honey. I'll just ring ... and if it's not safe, you just say 'blue' okay?" And I said "Okay". So he had this kind of caring ... I don't know who he is ... I'd love to go and find out, but he was so ... he was very significant, I don't know who he was, but he was a detective, and um ... and then these phone calls, he would ring, he'd go "Can you make contact with your family?" I said "No, they won't have anything to do with me". He goes "What about the church you used to go to, can you go back to them?" He was trying to kind of reconnect me, and I said "No, I'm too ashamed". And he said "You need to find a lawyer that can listen to you", and then he just ... he'd say "Honey with the partner that you've got, there is a million to one of*

*them, they're everywhere. She's not that rare" (laughing). "And she has charges against her that are two forearms length". And it was kind of his, sort of, voice that was kind of giving me strength. I felt like I mattered.*

### **7.3.3 IPV service providers**

This section presents the views of the women who had contact with IPV service providers. Approximately 80% of the women interviewed reported having contact with IPV providers.

#### ***Rose***

Rose talks about the programmes she attended, with her son Jack, at Women's Refuge.

*Every day I used to dread getting up. Every day I used to dread him turning up when I went back there. I only lasted back there 4-6 weeks maximum, and that's when I had to do my planning, and I took my son out of school and he never went to school for at least 3-4 weeks. And the whole time I had my lawyer backing me up. I had Women's Refuge ... I did that course. Jack did the Tamariki Programme, absolutely loved it. I think it's one of the best things in the world for the kids, for them to go. He still talks about it today, and he's actually even spoken about wanting to go and do it again.*

#### ***Tui***

Tui also went to women's Refuge. Here she talks about being provided with some information about IPV.

*I think the most powerful thing for me at Women's Refuge was to be sat down and be told by a total stranger, about my partner through and*

*through, ten points that work. Given a pamphlet that said if you have two problems out of those 10, then you need us. I ticked the whole 10 and could add a couple. You know, so to actually have someone hand that information to me, I mean, Oh my God, this sounds just like my ex-husband and the stalker. Oh my GOD! So realising that, oh shit! This is actually more common than I thought and if this is ME, then HOW MANY OTHER WOMEN out there ... in order for this pamphlet to have been put together, then it's more common than I thought ...*

Tui identifies that the most powerful part of Women's Refuge services was the information she received that helped her recognise that she was not alone in her violence experience. \

### ***Lisa***

Lisa explains how she would end up at Refuge because some arrangements had not been made, or there was no concern for the children; then the Police would suggest Lisa go to Women's Refuge.

*I've been to Refuge twice in New Zealand and once overseas, ... you just don't....didn't get the support, didn't get orders in place quick enough and having to cope with the children, or because there was no evidence of the children being hurt when I rang the police and they came ... they said "oh well, all we can do for you is take you to Refuge, we can't take the children out of his hands because we don't think ... we've got no evidence of their being abused" ... just no support... help whatsoever.*

Lisa has experience of Women's Refuge type support both in New Zealand and overseas. Here she describes the first experience at Women's Refuge.

*So ... I had to move into Refuge here in New Zealand, for the second time ... but I went but Refuge here was just horrible, not supportive, very pushy, very cranky old ladies, almost like. It was quite....it was "you've done the wrong thing if you stay together, you can do better". But that's not how you see it; it's like by staying there you're doing the right thing by keeping your family together; yeah, that was horrible.*

The second time at Women's Refuge was a little more positive, but there are aspects that Lisa found difficult.

*This time was a bit more positive; but they ask you a lot of questions ... why didn't you leave? What was going on? What did you experience? I understand that they do some of it for the research and to better understand you and to get to know what's going on, because, you know, there are some women off there who bludge off Refuge, who "cry wolf" a lot, and use that as an interim place to get to wherever they're going, or because they can't get where they're going and keep falling back on Refuge to provide housing or support, and they get that, ... but it wasn't that helpful. I wanted a safe place, you know, I didn't necessarily want to be there. It's horrible, they've got these other women who are constantly crying or screaming abuse at their own children in front of your children, or, you know, sneaking around at night. You go into Refuge and they say "we'll give you a padlock for your door because*

*sometimes other women steal, or other children". That's really horrible. Or they would take your food out of the cupboards, so you would have to keep your food in this one bedroom where I had me and my three kids crammed into ...*

*They didn't do any positive courses; they did one of those overseas when I ended up in Refuge there, and you had to attend, that was part of the agreement to being in the Refuge you attended, it went for 1 ... 1½ hours one day a week, in the morning, you had to be there, unless of course you had a court hearing or something, that's okay. They would talk about the cycle of violence and really educate you, which I thought was fantastic. You get to sit there with a closed mind, or you can sit there with an open mind, it's ... you know, you had that information there for you to grasp if you wanted to, but here in New Zealand they didn't have that ... the only time they wanted to talk to you was about what was going on, and getting you out of Refuge and into a home somewhere else, finding you accommodation somewhere else, yeah, really pushy to get you out. "Oh, we can't ... you can't stay here long term, and ... there are other women who want to come in", which I understand as well, but it's really horrible.*

The interviewer then asked Lisa what she wanted from a Women's Refuge type service.

*I guess, and love and care, you know, concern and support. I mean, yes they're supporting me by giving me an interim place and a safe*

*place and supporting me when I went to the Child Youth and Family interviews because the children's father had said that I was abusive, so they had to interview me ... and they were able to back me up and say "well, she's been here for 4 days and, you know, everything we've seen has been positive", which was really good support, but I guess you want someone to listen to you, someone to hug, someone who knows or understands. They were all very stand-offish, whether or not they're in that 'role' because they have experience with domestic violence themselves or not, you don't know, and they don't tell you, they don't ... they're not on a personal level, which is what you need in that situation.*

Contact with Women's Refuge, was experienced differently by many of the women. For Tui, the information she was given was useful. In Tui's interview she shared how she had stayed in Refuges in different parts of the South Island; and in the main these experiences were positive. For Lisa there were positive aspects in terms of the professional support offered to her in her dealings with the Department of Child, Youth and Family, however, Lisa did not feel cared for, and she disliked staying in the house with other women.

### ***Adele***

Adele spent one night in Women's Refuge, but she was alone in the house and felt unsafe.

*I still felt very much under threat and I was gonna die. This was gonna kill me. I did take myself to the Women's Refuge one night. I had to go there actually two nights, one was on my own and one was with bubs... she had been at work. I got this call at 11 o'clock at night "Who have you been talking to, and why are you puffed?" And I says "I just woke*



*up and ran to get the phone””, she said “I’ll be there”. I just thought “Oh my God, I’ve got bub in the car”. I rang in to Refuge and said “what do I do?”, and they said “Meet me at a corner” or something and then they put me into this old house, showed bubby his bed, and me with my bed. And I remember this little teddy bear, and I think it’s from SANDS, the neonatal death support group, being there. I remember thinking “Gosh, that’s the only thing I’ve been given in such a long time”, and I’ve treasured it. It was so lovely. But I was left there, there was no-one else in the house, I was by myself, I felt completely scared and ... vulnerable, that she was going to appear at a window or something. So I left. I thought safer to be at home than here. So I just turned round and left, went home to deal with her.*

*What had happened, the second time that I had taken myself to the Women’s Refuge, one of the workers was talking to me, asking me what had happened, what had brought me there, you know, and I can’t remember if I ... yeah, I think I drove myself that time, and I remember the phone going, and then this worker saying “Adele, your sister’s on the phone” and I remember saying to her “I haven’t got a sister”, but she kept handing me the phone, and so ... I felt completely alone in this lesbian relationship because it was ... from her side of the family it was like.....oh.....even they knew what she was like, it was always “oh the girls are having a quarrel” or “the girls are quarrelling”, it was*

*always minimised into that sort of a category, all the time, as “the girls are fighting again” ... but, they love each other.*

Adele went to Women’s Refuge twice; the first time she was left alone and felt vulnerable and so returned home. The second time Adele’s violent partner, Tonya, managed to speak with Adele by pretending she was Adele’s sister. In Adele’s view, Women’s Refuge did not manage to keep her safe from her female abuser and Adele feels that violence in a lesbian relationship is often minimised and perceived as less serious than male violence against women.

### **Ana**

Ana was one of the women who did not use women’s refuge, instead she used family support.

*For me I had my mum and I had my family, but sometimes family... I think it was also a blessing that my mum had actually turned a new leaf, that I had come to her at a time when I really needed her and she didn’t turn me down. I mean, that’s how it felt when my dad reacted the way... I felt like the way he reacted he turned his back on me.*

However, Ana believes it is important to develop safe places that Polynesian women can go to when they need to ‘run away’.

*I guess I needed support, to know that it was okay. That it was okay that it happened and not be judged for it, cos no offence, but Polynesians are really good at hiding emotional, personal distress... I do feel there needs to be, I guess, a safe place for Polynesian women especially, anyone in a domestic - there needs to be a safe place that’s not obvious. It’s hard, it really is hard when there are a lot of women out there who don’t think that they’re worth what their abusive partner is telling them*

*and they do need to be able to run away somewhere where that person won't find them.*

#### **7.3.4 Other Professionals**

While the women were still in the violent relationship, and when they had left, they had contact with a range of professionals.

##### **7.3.4.1 Child Protection Professionals**

*Lisa*

In the following story, Lisa describes the background to her contact with the Department of Child, Youth and Family.

*First of all, when we first met was here in New Zealand and we planned our first child here in New Zealand. When I went into hospital the child was premature, he was 5½ weeks prem. He was in foetal distress and I had to have an emergency caesarean, this was at 19, I was freaking out ... hadn't even thought of such a thing as a caesarean, I was all ready for a natural birth and then I talked to a counsellor the day after I had the birth because my husband at the time, the boy's father, he assaulted a nurse in the hospital and got trespassed, and they talked to me and I blurted out everything because I was so stressed, I mean, I was getting pushed around while I was 8 months pregnant still, and smacked in the head, I mean, I remember crying and running down the streets in the middle of winter with no shoes on, screaming for help so that was one of the first real big instances. Child, Youth and Family got involved.*

*All I did was turn up to their conference, 'cos they said the father couldn't see the child without a social worker being there.*

The interviewer asked why Child, Youth and Family were involved.

*... I broke down and told the social worker at the hospital what had been going on, about the violence and, so Child Youth and Family stepped in; he wasn't allowed to see the child unless there was a worker there. I couldn't go back to my own home in Christchurch, I had to go out to (name of town) where his family was to stay with them with my newborn baby... because of my family is overseas.*

*Then we went to a conference meeting with Child Youth and Family and brought everyone into the room including him and me, and his family, and I had no family, and talking about it ... well, I broke down in tears and said 'oh, it's just a mistake', and I was so drugged up on morphine and all that sort of stuff, and ... they said "okay". They did nothing and they left it and they took away the orders and that was it (crying). It was lonely, scary; it was traumatic, absolutely traumatic. It was um....just horrible. I was so alone and I just had to comply, I couldn't do it any other way.*

*I felt I'm not worthwhile you know, that nobody cared, 'cos even though they stepped up and they did follow what the procedures are, ... if they have concerns ... they did that, they followed the legal procedures, but when it came to actually showing care and concern for*

*the child, they didn't believe me, and I had to take responsibility for that, but then that's their job ...especially at 19, I can't even comprehend half of what's going on and at that age still getting a grip of your own feelings, in the sense of being married, the whole....you know, working out..... they really dropped the ball, they didn't step up, they didn't investigate it further, they didn't say "No, I'm sorry I don't believe you, Amanda" and "We're gonna care for your child" showing that you can't go near Steve without a social worker...*

Lisa shared this story at the beginning of her interview to introduce herself, her relationship with Steve, and their decision to have a child. The story of introduction turns into a story about her involvement with the Department of Child, Youth and Family (CYF) and the Family Group Conference process. While Lisa understands that CYF have a job to do, and in this case she believes they followed the correct procedure, Lisa found the experience traumatizing.

A number of the women expressed concern that CYF would become involved because of the IPV that was occurring in their relationships; however, no other women described any contact with CYF.

#### **7.3.4.2 Medical Practitioners**

In this section the women describe their contact with Medical Practitioners.

*Tui*

*I ended up putting myself into depression, through boxing myself up, and the four walls started to close in on me, ... when you go to the doctor and the doctors tell you that "Oh, you should be on a disability because of domestic violence" you know, straight away you're branded and you're gotta take these "dippy pills" I call them. I could never do*

*it. I could do the first week on them, and then when they were making you feel like a “numb nut” you know, where you couldn’t even operate, you know, properly as a mother, I wouldn’t do it. I’d do my two weeks on them, feel like CRAP taking them, and then get to the end and ... nah! It’s not for me. Well, in the end, 9 years later, this is like ... no, 8 years later, ‘cos it was last year that I decided to do it, I thought “I can’t do this anymore”. I’d moved from that home, back home to mum and dad, ‘cos Cooper had found us and knew where we were staying.*

*...I’d thought, if I leave there I won’t be so depressed, I’m going back home. Well, it didn’t work, it actually got worse. When I got into my LITERALLY four walls out in the garage, it really started getting bad to the point where my daughter would come home in the afternoon, and she would go “Shit mum, you still in bed!” “Yeah babe”, and she goes “Hell, get a life!” And my kid getting older, and me getting more hopeless, and just her getting older, and her responses to me, like “Are you depressed mum?” Well, I decided there and then, I’m cutting the drugs. So I went to the doctor and I said “I don’t want any more depression pills, I don’t feel that they’re the medicine I should be taking. I want counselling”. And he goes “Pardon?” And I said, “I think I need to talk things out. I think I need counselling more than I need those pills so, could we basically go 6 month’s worth of counselling, and then get me off the depression list” (laughing).*

*The man I did counselling with asked “Have you ever considered counselling yourself?” (Laughing), I said “Pardon?” He said, “because from the story you’ve told me it sounds like you’ve self-counselled yourself to get to this stage”. I was always worried that I hadn’t addressed certain things in my life, hence why memories kept coming back, little things would trigger things, I couldn’t go places because they had memories, you know what I’m saying? They were really getting prominent for me, but they’re there no longer. I can hear songs, I can go places, I can do anything, and no longer is it “Oh Cooper! Ooh Cooper!” No more. I won’t give him that power any longer.*

Tui has experienced many years of stalking by her ex-partner, Cooper, illustrated in this story where we learn that the ongoing harassment has occurred for approximately 8 years. Tui articulates how the violence led to isolation and depression for which she received medication. Tui expresses the stigma associated with IPV and how this can lead to a medical diagnosis that requires women to take medication. The medication was not as helpful as the counseling she received that helped her manage her memories and take back power over her life.

### ***Maggie***

Maggie was also prescribed anti-depressants for her anxiety.

*I learnt, but it took me a long time to lose that level of anxiety, that flight instinct, and both times that he was arrested here for violence, which is only a drop in the bucket of the amounts of times he was violent; but the two times he was arrested here for it, I went into shock*

*afterwards and it would take me a long time to get over each instance. The second time I ended up going to the doctor 'cos after a week or so, my anxiety levels were still pretty high, and if somebody just opened the door unexpectedly I would just jump. So I went to the doctor and said "This is going on for too long, my anxiety levels are way too high"; you know, I didn't want to risk getting post traumatic disorder, because I mean, anxiety is normal, but that sustained amount for a length of time ... So she put me on, a very low course of low dosage of anti-depressants to work as anti-anxiety medication which probably threw me down into a depression (laughing), bit shocking, but, yeah, I came off them ...*

### ***Sharnie***

Sharnie describes unhelpful advice suggested by a Doctor.

*His drinking was just really off the wall. He was drinking, he was not getting on with his boss, so he'd start drinking as soon as he finished work, and ... I couldn't stand the kids to see him like that. He was never loud or shouting, very, very quiet, withdrawn, but you know, it was really freaky, you know, it became really freaky, and there was always that threat of the smack, you know, I always sort of waiting for it, because I could see the deterioration. I got a doctor to him when we were there and his answer to it was he gave me pills, he said put some of these in his beer and it will make him go to sleep.*



### ***Adele***

Adele describes her plea for help to her partners' Doctor.

*I even went to the doctors with my partner, to her family doctor, and talked about what was happening and how her eyes would go dark, and my partner would nod, being all humble and beautiful self, you know? Yes, I want it to stop, you know. So he started her on Arapax and these other anti-medications and things, but still I kept thinking "You're not hearing me....how violent this is. I don't know what to do, I'm out of my depth here" you know? And the doctor just sat there and let me cry in his office and left.*

### ***Briana***

As shared earlier in the report, Briana's doctor was the person who gave her the courage to separate.

*The doctor said to me, and I didn't really click until later on, the doctor ... and she said, she shouldn't have said that, she said that I was like his mother, and having him in bed with me (laughing), and I didn't quite click until later on, because I WAS like a mother to him ... looking after him and everything*

#### **7.3.4.3 Counselling and Group Services**

A number of the women sought counselling services.

### ***Celia***

In the next narrative Celia describes the support and counseling she received.

*I know that I'm not gonna leave, so the first time I'm gonna be treating myself, and I'm just gonna tell my friends and family where it's at. So, I don't actually let them know that violent stuff is happening ... I chose to hook up with an organisation ... for women that have alcohol and drug problems. Things got pretty messy with Dion and I self medicated with booze. And it was great, I mean, we were great drinking buddies, it was fuckin' fantastic. Well, I got real messy, like it was more with the violence than the drugs and alcohol, but ... I needed a break, but I'm in the health system, oh god I wasn't loopy enough to go to Hillmorton<sup>3</sup>! So, a friend suggested that I go into a full house detox, and so I did. Like, they saw me, knew me, I knew one of the guys that worked there from my field of work, and they knew Dion, so they took one look at us and said "right, you're today". I spent a month there, and I was introduced to this organisation.*

*.... Oh, look, I still go there because I love them, they are incredible. That's what saved me ... no judgments. It's for women; you had to have had an alcohol and drug problem, like I referred myself there. And it's about healing, they do everything, they do absolutely everything ... they had all sorts of groups .... like on a Friday they have a group about reflecting on the week and how you've looked after yourself, what you've done, and how you are going to look after*

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<sup>3</sup> Hillmorton Hospital in Christchurch delivers a range of acute, forensic, and rehabilitative mental health services, and drug and alcohol detoxification services.

*yourself over the weekend, what are your goals, yeah...specific groups on goals, groups on how the brain works, access to counselling. To get a case worker, if you wanted counselling you had to prove that you were serious, so I did that, but the staff and they're pro-women, not anti-men, that's what I liked. And so I'm trying to stay away from Dion, you know, so I go to detox and that way I'm trying to stay away from him. Because it's a choice, my kids are like, you know, you're with him, you're losing us. And basically they had all cut me off. So I lost my kids. And so this organisation saved my life, the staff there saved my life because ... there's no judgment. For the first time in my life one of them ... one of the counsellors said to me "Celia, whose life is this, and is it okay for your children to cut you off, what do you want to do?" And I said "I want to be with my husband, I'm not done yet". She said "well you need to honour yourself". And no-one had ever given me permission before, and I knew she was right, I knew she was right, and it was really hard and really painful, and I thought maybe it to be the wrong decision but it had to be right ... I wasn't done yet, and I knew I wasn't done yet. And I thought I need to do this until I'm done, 'cos I'm not going to let him go until I'm done.*

Celia is adamant that she knows she is not going to leave Dion, so she chooses not to tell family and friends about the violence; instead she gets help for her alcohol dependence from an organization that specializes in work with women. The organization offered groups on a range of topics, and individual counseling. What worked for Celia was the non judgmental and accepting reaction to her decision not to leave Dion.

### **Briana**

*I went to a group over there, in (name of town), when I came over and it really helped me and gave me a new group of friends and it really helped me and made me happy ... happier ... it's people from all over the world that have come, newcomers, and it's even New Zealanders, and they all get together and become really good, good friends ... it made me ... a wee bit independent. Also, what kept me going in (name of town), I used to go to counselling at the Alcohol and Drug ... because they knew my story I was able to go there on a free service kind of thing, and they could see through me, you know, you could see all the bits and pieces.*

Briana received support from a group that was directed towards new people in the area and this helped the development of independence and, importantly, her feeling of happiness. It appears that in relation to counseling Briana is pleased with their ability to deal with the complexity of her situation.

### **Rose**

Rose left her violent relationship two years ago. At the time of interview Rose was struggling to keep herself and her family safe. Rose found counselling to be extremely valuable but she found that ten subsidised counselling sessions were not enough; especially in light of the years of violence and trauma she faced in her relationship with Brad.

*I've had family violence counselling, protected persons counselling ... she was absolutely amazing. She did me wonders. I only finished with her about 2 months ago. I could have done with more. I could have*

*done with a lot more. Only 10 sessions, and that's through Family Court. You only get 10 sessions, and 10 sessions for 11 years of shit ...*

### **7.3.5 Service Provision**

In this section the women share their ideas for how service provision should be carried out with women in IPV relationships.

#### ***Tui***

Tui has been apart from Cooper for nine years now. She has not been in another violent relationship since then. Tui found her new found freedom difficult to manage after spending so long under the control of her partner Cooper. Tui found that counselling was not available when she needed it. She recommends that service contact with women be face to face.

*Because what I found when ... how do I put this? When you're kept in a cage and then you've got the opportunity to get out of that cage, this is how I think, ... you find it hard going, even though the door's open you find it hard stepping out.*

*See, my case was a bit different because normally in domestic violence, they had to go to jail, but this way round, we were having a bloody boomerang keep coming back, it was really hard to get on with normal living afterwards because you were just running so long on adrenalin, that it was really hard to get back to being normal. Normality is ... I put it this way, I took my daughter to school, I'd get back home and I'd end up on the couch, like that all day, because even though I was free, I didn't know what to with the free, my daughter was totally taken care of. I was being told that there were meetings you could go to with*

women and things like that. You really need to give yourself a wee bit of time first, before you go straight into the counselling and straight into this or that ... but then again, I don't know, if I had been **MADE** to do it, maybe it might've given me a bit more up and go a lot sooner than I did.

Because when it was offered to me [counselling] ... 'oh, you do realise that you can go to counselling and you're entitled to do counselling after domestic violence for the next 3 years after getting out of it'. I was actually ready to go to counselling for years when it wasn't available to me any longer (laughing). So, yeah, I don't know, I needed more assistance right at that beginning, learning how to live a violence-free life is what I needed.

I think more hands on at home once they're relocated, to help them adjust back into the norm, ... direct help, because you've gone from making no decisions to all of a sudden you're making all of the decisions, and even though as a mum I knew how to operate on my daughter's behalf, I didn't actually know how to operate on MY behalf.

See, when I got relocated, I got one visit. I'd get phone calls, but "Hi, how are you", "Oh, I'm good thank you" ... NOT! (laughing). You're able to hide too much just someone coming into your home and making you realise "Hey kiddo, I'm here for you you know?" 'You're not gonna hide any more' (laughing), you know? Having someone actually

*directly help you ... I had no-one around me at the time to say “Is it normal that you feel like this, is it normal...blah blah blah”. I had no-one, because no-one around me at the time had been stalked (laughing).*

### ***Adele***

Adele has been out of her violent relationship for 6 years. Adele highlights how she focused on first healing herself so that she could be available to have a relationship with others; in particular with her child. Adele advises women in IPV relationships to take care of themselves physically, and emotionally. In relation to social services, Adele argues for services that are easier to access, and that provide a consistent workforce, so that a woman moving on from a violent relationship has one constant worker who remains with her throughout her journey.

*Find your voice. Find your voice, and it’s not about the kids, that everyone keeps telling you, it’s always about the kids, it’s about you ... and that **YOU MATTER** (crying). Everyone’s always saying, “Oh c’mon, think of your children” ... you’re past that! You don’t ... it’s not about that ... it’s not saying “You do love them; you matter, it’s **YOU** that matters”. You have to have a relationship with yourself before you can with anyone else, and that includes even with your children, so you’ve have to start finding your sense of humour, start finding your absurdity and how absurd life is, and then that will bring little moments of joy that start giving you that little bit more power, a little bit more sleep at night. Get back to the primal stuff, start eating properly, drink lots of water, stay off drinks and alcohol, keep your physical strength,*

*and then do something healthy for your mental health. Real, real, basics first.*

*I think services out there, for starters, are so inaccessible, I couldn't find anyone. Where do you find them? Where do you find them? And yet, I've spoken to other women who have had amazing outcomes with Women's Refuge and have built up that rapport and relationship and I actually ... I look back and seem jealous and think "Oh, you lucky thing!" That what it comes down to, is building up relationships outside of that intimate relationship that you're in. Services need to be thoroughly more visible, more accessible. It's not just through a referral, and when they keep changing workers too. You know, no sooner have you built up a rapport with one, you've suddenly got this other worker that's managing your case ... It needs to be solid, for at least 6 months, you know, you can't just come and go. It's gotta be 6 months at least to build up that rapport and trust. Because if you keep changing the workers you're not going to reach the women's side, they're not going to help you make changes in their life, or...and that will only happen when they are ready to, and then they start picking up the messages.*

### ***Sharnie***

Sharnie's violent relationship ended 20 years ago. Sharnie believes that services can be harmful if they introduce women to a different way of living, for example in rehabilitation,



and then place the women straight back into their former life with no way of supporting themselves.

*I think you've got to have; they've gotta have something, you know. I really get really sad when you put someone into rehabilitation, like into a drug and alcohol programme. They've come from a grotty little flat and they've been living alone. They go into a rehab, they get all these friends, they have all this nice food, they're living in a sunny little place. It's like you pick them right up and then you put them back in there, and you drop them from up, you know, from a higher place.*

*I think we need to give them something to do, because if you put them back in that house where that partner can come round and all day they've got to think about being at home and they're miserable and they've got no money and they are seeing nobody else, and their partner can get easy access to them. See, I've blocked all calls at work, they all knew I needed to block all calls from him, he couldn't get into that building, you know?*

### **Maggie**

Maggie has been out of her violent relationship for six years. Maggie's story is directed towards the professionals working with women, and towards women who are coping with IPV in their relationship. She stresses that women do not invite violence upon themselves. In terms of the time it takes women to escape the violence, Maggie is determined to stress that women in violent relationships are trying to do the best for themselves and their children; they should not be judged as the process of moving away from violence is complex.

*I would never ever judge any female that's in that situation because it's not straightforward like people, especially men think, and nobody in that situation wants to be in that situation, nobody in that situation is inviting it upon themselves. I know that women are changing, especially young women today are very much what young men used to be like; they go out, they get drunk, they start fighting, but I really don't think there's very many women that would deliberately provoke somebody into hurting them, so those women who are in that situation are doing their best, they are doing their best just to survive and they are doing what they think is the right thing. Judging them, their knowledge of the circumstances, they are doing what they believe is the right thing for them, and if there are children, also the right thing for their children, they are not willingly submitting their children to violence. As I said, my children weren't hurt, I don't know what would have happened if they had been, that would perhaps changed my perspective again, I don't know, it was it was dammed if I do, dammed if I don't, that gave me perhaps the impetus to actually leave and then everything else fell into place.*

*Try not to lose sight of your priorities, on a day to day basis. Keep your focus on what needs to be focussed on for the day. Yeah, day by day.*

### **7.3.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: HELPFUL AND UNHELPFUL RESPONSES**

The majority of the women interviewed had contact with the justice system (court and legal processes), the police, specific IPV services, and either individual or group counselling services.

Women who experience IPV are involved in Court processes in relation to protection orders and child custody issues. Generally, the women who talked about the justice system had different experiences. The justice system has changed over time; in the past, as described by one participant, help was not offered by the justice system if the couple were not married. Now, with the Domestic Violence Act, 1995, provision is made for a wider range of people to gain protection from violence. As in other industrialised nations, New Zealand, in part, has taken a criminal justice approach to IPV where victims are to be protected, however, “criminal justice agencies ... have been judged as insufficiently responsive to the issues” (Stewart, 2005, p.3). The women in this study expressed frustration in the Court system which, in their experience, did not do enough to contain their abusive partners. A positive experience is shared by one participant who had expected an insensitive approach but instead found that the Judge presiding over her custody case was perceptive in his understanding of the challenges facing her. In terms of legal assistance, again, some women found lawyers to be understanding and competent while others experienced lawyers who were discriminatory in their response. This was particularly the case for one participant who was in a lesbian relationship and was refused assistance.

The women had contact with the Police when they informed the police about the possibility of violence; when they wanted to clarify information, for example, the whereabouts of their ex-partner; when a violent event occurred; and, in between violent events when the Police may have been in ongoing contact with a woman in order to offer support. The women’s stories indicate a wide variety of responses from the Police. One participant described a Police Officer as her ‘saviour’, and another described Police officers that were supportive and encouraging. However, there were also stories of Police Officers who minimised the violent event and this was devastating to the women concerned. For another participant, Rose, the Police mistakenly brought her ex-partner to her home without checking their records first. Concern was raised by one participant who lived in a rural area when in a violent relationship.

She questioned whether Police who are members of small rural communities are able to be impartial professionals when involved in policing violent individuals who belong to long standing, well respected rural families in that community.

Studies indicate that Police use discretion (professional judgment) in apprehending IPV offenders (Cross & Newbold, 2010; Green & Kelso, 2010). A number of factors influence discretion, including race and ethnicity; the severity of the offence; the demeanour of the offender; whether the complainant wants apprehension to occur, or not; the rule of law; police policy and organisational customs; and finally, community characteristics (Green and Kelso, 2010). Another study (Horwitz et al., 2011) found that Police officers felt powerless when some IPV offenders were not punished and therefore the wider justice system has an influence on Police officers decision making in IPV situations.

The main IPV provider the women had contact with was Women's Refuge. In the main, participants found the experience of staying in a refuge safe house challenging. While the availability of a safe house to go to when escaping violence was valuable for participants, the stay at the house was generally described as stressful and uncomfortable. For one participant, whose abuser was female, the refuge safe house was not a place of safety as her abuser knew the location of the house and was able to make contact; most probably because she was female.

Participants included in their narratives positive experiences with Women's Refuge. The information provided was enlightening for one woman, while for another the course that her child attended was extremely valuable. There is disparity in the experiences the women had with refuge workers. Some expressed positive and supporting experiences, while others suggested that workers were cold and 'cranky', and asked a lot of questions about the IPV experience; a demonstration of caring was needed from refuge workers. Overseas literature suggests that living in a refuge environment can be challenging (Glenn, 2010) and sometimes having to live within the rules stipulated in the refuge environment can leave women feeling powerless, disheartened and alone (Glenn, 2010).

Medical practitioners, child protection services, and individual and group counselling services were also accessed by participants. Again, women's experiences of the services provided are

mixed across all services except for the experience of child protection services. Only one woman had direct contact with the statutory child protection agency, the Department of Child, Youth and Family (CYF). Her experience of a Family Group Conference process in relation to her newborn child was traumatic as the conference was held with her abusive partner's family present and none of her own. Other participants, even though they did not have direct contact with CYF, were in fear that CYF would be informed that they were living in a violent relationship and their children would be removed. The women's narratives demonstrate they are very aware of the role of CYF. The difference between refuge services and child protection services is well documented and these differences are exacerbated in work with women and their children, thus child protection services would "focus on the child's needs first, with the women's role as mother as the emphasis in the situation (Appel & Kim-Appel 2006, p.233).

Medical practitioners were sought for help with the violent relationship generally and for help with levels of anxiety experienced by participants. The help received in terms of the violent relationship is described by women as unhelpful and empowering. For the women who sought help for anxiety medication was prescribed but neither woman stayed on the medication for long because it left them feeling depressed. In the participants experience medication was prescribed because being an IPV victim was like having a disability; the women felt stigmatised by the IPV victim label.

Participants entered into individual and/or group counselling at various stages of their moving on from violence journey and reported in their stories that counselling was a positive experience. Counselling provided the women with an opportunity to explore their inner selves in order to reach a better understanding of their situation and decision making processes. The experiences of counselling shared by the women integrate with the personal development strategy used to manage, leave, and stay away from violent relationships.

In general, participants maintain that services for women leaving IPV relationships should be easily accessible, this is especially important in rural areas where there IPV services are not available. In the delivery of services face to face contact is important because it is too easy to tell an anonymous worker on the phone that everything is going well, even when it is not. Another point made by participants is that consistency of workforce is important for women

who have experienced IPV; that is, women advocated for one worker throughout their journey away from violence.

## **8 Implications for policy and practice**

A number of key themes have emerged from this research; that have implications for service and policy development. This report concludes with an overall summary of the issues involved in responding to IPV which have been highlighted by the women's accounts.

### **8.1 Containment of violent partners**

Death from IPV was a strong possibility for most of the women who participated in the study. Two of the women's stories pre-date the 1995 Domestic Violence Act, however, a number of women had left their violent relationship within the last ten years; and, their abusers continued to be able to stalk and harass the women and their families. In one instance, the stalking continued for 8 years. The approach to dealing with IPV has been to afford the women protection through protection orders; however, according to the women in this study, more needs to be done by the justice system to contain violent partners.

### **8.2 Safe housing alternatives**

The stalking and harassment that continued for women after they had physically left the relationship suggests that more is required in terms of safe housing for women. Access to immediate shelter and support in the leaving process was critical for the majority of the women. Women's Refuge is one alternative for housing and while the experience of residing in the shelters was mixed; there was strong acknowledgement that these are necessary for women to be able to leave. Women who had less positive experiences to report still acknowledged the key role of the shelters, however, they found it difficult to stay with women who in some instances were more traumatised than they were, or who seemed to be abusing the hospitality of the service. The cramped facilities were also difficult to manage where they felt their children needed extra support.

Current refuge safe houses in the Canterbury and South Canterbury regions are not necessarily culturally responsive to the needs of Polynesian women, and perhaps to other ethnic groups. Additionally, refuge safe houses are provided in various locations throughout

the South Island, but for rural women safe housing is limited. This is especially the case in small rural areas where the abuser may be part of a family who are long time members of the community and are well known to the police and service providers. Other alternatives for safe housing need to be found; perhaps a gated community where women can feel they are protected, and where they do not have to share a home with other women and children.

Funding issues underlie many of the experiences reported above. Shelters rely on a mixed funding environment where they are funded by the family court to provide sets of mandated services which are strictly contained. The quality of the housing is determined by access to appropriate facilities and the ability to provide consistent, skilled staffing is reliant on pay scales and level of staff support available. All these factors rely on considerable resources to achieve.

The ability of shelters to respond more effectively to IPV relies on increased funding of mandated programmes and recognition that the harm many women have sustained over many years will take years to repair for both the women and their children. The provision of parallel services to Maori women offers a flexible response that can be tailored to cultural needs.

Security technologies have been used as a way of protecting women in their own homes with cell phones supplied and CCTV (Closed Circuit Television) systems in operation, at least until the violence has stopped. There are programmes in place internationally that use security technology to protect women. The Abused Women's Active Response Emergency (AWARE) has been in operation since 1992 in the United States and Canada. The AWARE programme strategy is collaboration between law enforcement, security services, court services, and IPV providers. ADT, a security company, donates and installs security systems in the homes of victims of IPV; victims are also provided with electronic necklace device which is monitored twenty four hours a day, seven days a week (National Crime Prevention Council, 2012). Another example of security technology protection for women is an ankle bracelet worn by the abuser; phone triangulation and global positioning systems help to indicate if the abuser is in a prohibited area. Economic constraints impact on the provision of such services; the AWARE programme is government funded with a sizeable contribution from the security systems company.

### **8.3 Acknowledging competency**

Through the strategies and skills employed to resist IPV and leave violent relationships the women demonstrated that they are competent, strong and determined. While there is no question that IPV has a traumatic impact on women emotionally, physically, cognitively, and spiritually, the women in this study reveal competency in the attitude, knowledge, and skills they apply to their situations. The attitude displayed is in the determination and motivation to survive; knowledge relates to understanding the violent partners personality characteristics and patterns of behaviour; skill is the way the strategies for resisting violence are put in to place at the right time. Services delivered to women may be enhanced if professionals working in the field acknowledge that women experiencing IPV, whether still in the relationship or having left, possess a range of competencies that they employ to resist IPV.

### **8.4 Professional discretion and education**

The process of moving on from IPV is very complex and not straightforward. The societal narrative that questions why women stay is ignorant of how the abusers power and control permeates violent relationships; the social narrative also discredits the agency of women to decide for themselves and their children on a course of action. Professionals that come in to contact with women who have experienced IPV need to adopt a positive and non-judgemental attitude; they need to demonstrate they care about their IPV clients; and they need to work in a way that is supportive of the woman's time frames while doing all they can to protect her and her children. Professional responses were varied and whether women received useful supports often appeared hit and miss; professional responses within any system or service area could not be guaranteed. This indicates that education needs to be provided to IPV providers and other workers in the field.

Professional education about IPV should include information about the dynamics of violent heterosexual and same sex relationships, as well as content on non-stigmatising approaches to working with women and children victims of IPV. Resources for staff training and ongoing professional development will ensure that workers in the IPV field are able to continue to improve their interpersonal and practical responses. However, such improvements are contingent on the ability to recognise staff qualifications and professional skills and this is additionally a question of funding.



#### **8.4.1 Police**

Clearly police were often the frontline agency called on by the women and their friends and families and they are commissioned with responding to IPV by our criminal justice and family court systems. They need flexibility in their practice to support women moving away and the resources to provide consistent and persistent responses. While it is likely to be frustrating to police that women return to their violent partners, the accounts show how critical support from police staff was in helping women to make changes. Where police actions were based on empathy, on providing practical assistance, were skilful in recognising the potential for key turning points; their actions contributed to women leaving. Conversely, where their actions failed to recognise the seriousness of the violence, where the violence was minimised and where mistakes were made, the women's lives were put at further risk. Police training and education needs to be comprehensive and ongoing in order for staff to be effective in their responses. Monitoring of attitudes towards victims of IPV would assist in ensuring that police responses are at all times professional. There were unsung heroes in the individual police staff who exercised their discretion and successfully moved women away from violence.

#### **8.4.2 Primary Health Care**

Primary health care offers another frontline response for women. General practitioners and accident and emergency departments featured in women seeking treatment for injuries sustained in the home. The tendency to medicate the symptoms of violence rather than offer counselling and other forms of intervention seemed to do little to assist women; rather the prescription drugs involved affected their decision-making capacity. Ongoing education and training of health personnel is necessary to ensure that responses are effective and appropriate. A number of the women recounted experience of being knocked unconscious and years of sustained physical violence. A comprehensive assessment of traumatic brain injury and other injuries needs to be considered by practitioners dealing with women victims. In addition, children who were present in long term violent situations need to be assessed as a matter of course for potential injuries they may have sustained. Close working relationships between the police and health services are necessary to protecting women and children in IPV situations and to attending to the potential long term health consequences.

## **8.5 Holistic responses**

Strong suggestions are made throughout the study as to the kind of service that will help women move away from IPV. IPV is very complex and requires a complex response system that incorporates safe housing; personal development and determination enhancing activities such as individual or group counselling, assistance with gaining employment, and support in building connections with others; and, health, nutrition and exercise programmes. Services need to be responsive to the physical, practical, and emotional needs that women have, and contact with women in the process of moving away from IPV needs to occur face to face. The women also reported their appreciation of, and reliance on, worker stability. In these examples women described forming strong rapport with some workers and they appreciated consistent support where they did not need to continually re-tell their stories in order to access services.

Responses are needed that provide services for women and children throughout the course of the violent relationship; from the early indications of violence through to the point when violence has ceased. Even at the end point of violence, services may be needed to help women and children manage the longer term impacts of the violence. Family Help Trust is an example of a service that provides intensive, long term, family based and child focused support to families. There seems to be considerable support through the women's stories for this kind of response to IPV.

## **8.6 Alcohol and Drug Use**

A number of the women reported that the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs impacted on their ability to leave. Where they accessed alcohol and drug support and the practitioners were flexible in their approach, they managed to make major changes. This meant in one instance at least that the alcohol and drug counsellor focussed much of the service support on IPV counselling and in so doing empowered the woman to leave. It was reported as important to the women that they had women-only treatment services as this made them feel safe in accessing support.

## **8.7 Programmes and Counselling for women and children**

Women who had taken up individual or group support were positive about the experience; however, they also reported that the number of counselling sessions available under mandated programmes was insufficient. In one woman's words, "10 sessions for 10 years of shit" alluded to the many years of accumulated traumatic stress she had been under. Counselling was described by the women as assisting the healing process and in "learning how to live a violence-free life" In regard to the children's support programme, the number of sessions was also reported as inadequate; even though the women viewed the counselling as instrumental in helping children heal from IPV.

The process of separation from IPV can take years and during this time women may move in and out of a relationship with the violent partner. The women managed the violence as best they could, whether they were living with the abusive partner or not, and at the same time did their best to care for, and protect their children. Many of the women in the study described the impact IPV had on their relationships with their children; how they had struggled with maintaining a strong mother-child relationship. There is scope to develop programme and counselling responses that provide women with the skills to maintain or rebuild their relationships with their children.

## **8.8 Public Education Campaigns**

The national 'It's not OK' campaign led by the Ministry for Social Development was referred to by some of the women as instrumental in changing their attitudes about their self worth. For some, this was a life changing moment, to recognise that not only was their experience shared, but that there were potential solutions. The information that such campaigns provide can potentially educate families and whanau about how they may be able to assist. There is further opportunity to expand on such campaigns in order to provide detailed information on leaving processes and where to access support.

The findings also indicate that some women found it difficult to know where to go for help and therefore information about the IPV help available needs to be more visible.

## **9 Recommendations**

Two key recommendations are made, and under these are a number of sub recommendations. The recommendations rest on the underpinning idea that the process of moving on from IPV occurs over a period of time; while women are physically still in the relationship; when women have physically separated from the relationship; and, after the violence has stopped. Support for women living with IPV can be based around the various needs of women at different stages of the moving away process.

### **9.1 Enhancement of safety for women and children**

Being in a violent relationship and moving on from violence is dangerous to women and children.

- Women living with IPV need to have access to safe advice and support relevant to their IPV context; whether they have experienced early indications of violence, are still in the relationship and managing the violence, or, have left the violent relationship.
- All women living with IPV need to have access to safe housing or to measures that enhance their safety wherever they are residing.
- The protection offered by security technologies should be explored so that women may be able to live in their own homes once they have left the IPV relationship
- Consideration should be given to the safety and housing needs of women who belong to different cultural and ethnic groups.
- Women living with IPV need a justice system that is responsive to their safety needs.

### **9.2 The field of IPV service provision**

Women living with IPV need access to a range of services across justice, health, education, and welfare sectors. The services need to be provided by qualified, competent professionals.

#### **9.2.1 Educated and aware IPV workforce**

- Provision of IPV training across the IPV workforce in urban and rural areas.
- IPV training should include content on the cultural diversity of women's experiences of IPV (including heterosexual and same sex relationship experiences of IPV).

- IPV training and practice material should be non-stigmatising and have a resilience enhancing focus.
- IPV training and practice material should include information on the attitude, knowledge, and skills competencies that women living with IPV use to resist the violence.

### **9.2.2 Service Delivery System**

- Services for the population of women who experience IPV should be provided. This requires building on cross-sector and cross-agency teamwork already in place.
- Improved teamwork is needed across criminal justice services, child protection services, IPV specific services, and mental health, and alcohol and drug services.
- Consideration should be given as to how coordinated services will be delivered in rural areas where women living with IPV are isolated.

### **9.2.3 Intervention strategies**

Services to women living with IPV should work to advocate for, and meet the needs of, women moving on from IPV. Contact with women should be in person (face to face) rather than over the phone or email system.

The following needs should be met by the team of coordinated services responding to IPV

#### ***Practical Needs***

- Immediate and ongoing safety needs
- Housing and accommodation needs
- Financial needs
- Transport, childcare needs

#### ***Assessment Needs***

- Comprehensive physical and psychological health assessment of women and their children.
- Comprehensive drug and alcohol assessment
- Nutrition and exercise assessment and support for women and children

### *Personal Development Needs*

- Individual and group counselling opportunities to assist with healing.
- Independence enhancing activities that prepare women for employment, and or study.
- Meaningful connection enhancing activities that support women to build relationships with others who share similar interests, or to explore new interests

#### **9.2.4 Women focused and child focused support**

There is an opportunity to build on current practice, such as women and child focused individual and group programmes.

- There should be an increase in the number of individual and group counselling sessions available to women and children.
- Public education campaigns influenced a number of women in the study and therefore were an effective way of reaching women living with IPV. Therefore, education about IPV and about where women can go to seek help should be well advertised.
- Women would like assistance in maintaining and building relationships with their children. There should be a focus on providing women with the knowledge and skills to talk to their children about the violence, the process of moving on from violence, and about the ongoing relationship their children may have with the abusive ex-partner.
- Services provided should be women and children specific; for example, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services specifically for women; nutrition and exercise programmes designed specifically for women.
- Specific resources for women should be produced to inform women about the skills and strategies other women use to keep themselves and their children safe from IPV.

## **10 Further research**

There are a number of key areas identified by the women that would benefit from further research and policy development. As the researchers move to writing a publication based on

the women's stories in 2013, more gaps in existing knowledge will come to light. At this stage, the areas of health responses, the legal system, police practice and the role of social housing for victim survivors of IPV are major domains where further research is warranted in the context of Aotearoa, and effective responses to IPV. The turning points that the women described in triggering their moves away from violence give us all some insight into the factors that may support women in making these decisions. The fact that some individual police, lawyers, shelter workers, and friends and family played key roles in supporting women to make their moves bears further investigation. What was it that motivated the police officer to go to the extent of arranging alternative accommodation in another city for one of the participants? Clearly this was instrumental in her ability to move away and did this happen despite the organisational requirements on our police force or was this action strongly supported by police management? What was it that enabled a family court judge to intervene in a way that empowered a woman to regain her voice and her confidence? Who recognises, supports and rewards lawyers who act quickly to put in place protections for women and intuitively know what to say to their IPV clients? What are the aspects of women's shelter education and support that have inspired women to move away from violence and what was the difference between one shelter service and another? Some friends and family managed to maintain threads of relationship with their abused loved one in such a way that a door was always open for the mother to find protection. What skills and knowledge did they apply in supporting their family member? Last, but by no means least, the indirect references to the children throughout the women's stories raise significant questions about how we protect and support children whose mothers have been exposed to years of instrumental violence. Who is making sure that children are routinely examined for the effects of concussion and for fractures where it is likely that at some point they have been involved in the IPV physical violence? Who is ensuring that when women present at their general practitioners' rooms and at accident and emergency departments that they are similarly checked for other injuries? The long term psychological effects were described by the women and these need further investigation for both women and children.

Unfortunately this research has also highlighted deficiencies in service responses which warrant further investigation. Police practice at times fell short of what might be expected from those who are commissioned with protecting the safety of vulnerable individuals. The

frustration of some staff was evident while others remained consistent, empathetic and persistent. The challenges that women's shelters face in providing the necessary standard of housing and support for women and children bears further investigation along with understanding more about the very effective work that some shelters were able to provide. Families/whanau and friends need to know more about how they can support their loved one and resources to sustain informal supports need to be explored in order to increase their effectiveness. The situation of children in homes where IPV has been of long standing urgently requires attention. It is clear from this study that children are many times put at risk due to their caregivers' violence and in some instances over many years.

## **11 Conclusion:**

This study would not have been possible without the openness and generosity of the women who wanted to share their stories of IPV. One of the key themes in the moving away process was the growing awareness by the women that they were not alone; that many others had had similar experiences and could support them from this position of shared knowledge. It is a testament to their courage, their tenacity and their spirit that they devised the means to leave without further endangering their children or themselves. The stories of the strategies they employed will offer other women knowledge and hope that it is possible to escape potentially lethal situations without further lethal violence. The techniques they employed and the resources they called on tell us all something about how we might support women in the moving away process. There is no question that better systems and resources are needed to increase their safety and this is the other powerful message contained in the stories. The ability of many individuals to know exactly what to do and what to offer at the right time was critical for helping to precipitate change. We are sure that the last word needs to be reserved for the children and young people who emerge from the backgrounds of these stories. The women love their children, protected them at great personal cost, yet it can be seen that their stories have yet to be told. In order to build on the incredible courage of these women, we need to learn how to support them and their children more effectively so that their pain and suffering does not endure and is not repeated in years to come.



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## 11.2 Appendices

## College of Arts

Dr Annabel Taylor, Senior Lecturer

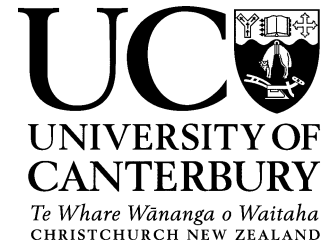
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### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### **Moving away from violence: Women igniting change**

You have been invited to take part in a research project about what helps women to deal with violence in their lives. The agency you have been involved with has referred you to this project because it believes that you have successfully dealt with domestic violence in the home. The purpose of this study is to understand what might help women and what might make this process more difficult. The study is supported by a grant from the Lottery Community Research Fund and has been commissioned by the Christchurch Women's Refuge and the Family Help Trust.

The researchers would really like to hear from women about their own experiences so that other women and social services personnel might learn more about what they can do to assist women. We would like to meet you some time between June and December 2010. We anticipate that our interviews with you will take up to two hours however this may vary from person to person. Interviews will be audiotaped.

Our names are Yvonne Crichton-Hill and Annabel Taylor. We are employed as Senior Lecturers in the Social Work programme at the University of Canterbury and have been here since 2001. We both have social work backgrounds of working with women and families where violence has been an issue in their lives. We have a strong commitment to trying to make things better for women facing violence.

We are aware that you may have concerns about confidentiality and safety and for this reason we would like to talk to you about any concerns you may have before the interviews take place. Your identity will not be revealed at any stage of the research. Records of your name and contact information will be stored separately from the information that you provide us and once you choose an assumed name for the purposes of the research your real name will be deleted from our files. There will be reports produced from this project, a PhD thesis undertaken by Yvonne Crichton-Hill at a later stage, possibly a book and the agencies may develop a training package.

We understand that some of the information about your experiences that you share with us may raise some emotions for you and you have the right to decline to provide any information that is too distressing to share. You can withdraw from the interview at any time and any information provided by you would be destroyed. There are support people available in the two agencies involved with the study who you can talk to. You might wish to have a support person with you for the interview and this can be arranged.

This research project is being supervised by Dr Annabel Taylor, Director of Te Awatea Violence Research Centre at the University of Canterbury. The project has received approval from the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury. If you have any queries you can ring Annabel at the University on 03 3642444 between 9-5pm weekdays or you can write to her at:

Dr Annabel Taylor  
Director Te Awatea Violence Research Centre  
University of Canterbury  
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## College of Arts

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## MOVING AWAY FROM VIOLENCE: WOMEN IGNITING CHANGE

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I (name)..... have been fully informed about the aims and objectives of the above named study and have understood the written information provided. My confidentiality and safety concerns have been discussed and accounted for. It is on this basis, with the understanding that my personal details will remain anonymous, that I agree to take part in this study and consent to publication of succeeding written reports and a PhD thesis. I am aware that I can withdraw my involvement at any given stage and have my information returned to me on request. I know that if I am not happy about any part of the research that I may contact Dr Andrew Frost, Social Work Programme Co-ordinator of the School of Sociology and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury on Tel: 3642443.

Signed.....

Date.....