

Exploration of Lived Experiences of
Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Psychology & Counseling
Regent University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By

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April 2014

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**EXPLORATION OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
PHYSICALLY ABUSED FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNERS IN JAMAICA**

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Abstract

There is a dearth of literature focusing on domestic violence within the Jamaican culture. This study addresses the paucity of literature related to physical abuse of females in intimate heterosexual relationships in Jamaica. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was designed to gain insight into the abusive worlds of these women based on their stories told in their own voices. Identification of their reasons for remaining in their abusive contexts was also explored. Eleven women, no longer in their abusive relationships, participated. Results revealed four major themes: (a) faith, (b) hope, (c) poor judgment, and (d) secrecy. A strong call to address faith teachings and application of scriptures related explicitly to abuse within intimate partner relationships emerged from the results.

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It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the Almighty God for His enabling as I sought to complete this dissertation with excellence at all levels. It would not have been possible for me to attain completion if the Lord was not in the midst of it all—during interviews with the women who graciously volunteered to participate, with Dr. Linda Leitch-Alford, my chair, and with me, as I struggled against time, and also through severe physical limitations and the dark nature of this study. I salute Dr. Leitch-Alford and extend deepest thanks to her for her perseverance and sacrifice, as she resolutely led me forward. She is the consummate professional, yet very human, and very much an outstanding mentor. I thank you, my Professor, for seeking to understand, teach, and attend to the needs of this Jamaican woman, with a desire to give voice to her country women. I must also acknowledge Dr. Yvette Stupart and Dr. Lee Underwood, who also provided vital support and guidance throughout this process as my dissertation committee members. I truly had the best dissertation committee, for which I give God thanks. I must also acknowledge those who provided guidance and information along this journey, including Dr. Kai Morgan and Matthew McKenzie.

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Dedication

Even as the Lord has made this research complete, I give it back to Him, with a heart full of gratitude for always being my Shepherd, even when I walked through what was to me, “the valley of the shadow of death.” You have taught me so much about myself, life, and most importantly, about You, as my Lord and God. You did it, Lord! It is Yours, just as I am, to be used by You as you see fit.

In a very special way, I dedicate this research to the 11 strong, valiant, and gracious Jamaican women, who spoke from their hearts about their abusive lives, as tears filled their eyes. Their unified hope was that other women would be helped or spared from such traumatic treatment.

Finally, I dedicate this research to all my fellow-Jamaicans—women, men, and children, who are negatively affected by the phenomenon of physical abuse, and those who have never been affected. My prayer is that we will all see fit to unite in an effort to stamp out this phenomenon that is so prevalent in both the secular and religious realms, in our homeland, Jamaica.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner abuse in general can be widely defined because of the variety of forms that abuse can take, for example, physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological (Johnson & Sigler, 2000). Undoubtedly, males and females have been victimized in heterosexual and homosexual relationships, but the focus of this study was on the physical abuse or battering of females by their intimate common-law or legally bound partners, in heterosexual relationships in Jamaica.

Jamaica is an English-speaking island situated in the central Caribbean, 145 km (90 mi) south of Cuba and 161 km (100 mi) west of Haiti. As of 2012, its population was estimated to be over 2.8 million, with over half a million of its inhabitants living in its capital and largest city, Kingston (<http://www.infoplease.com/country/jamaica.html>). Jamaica has a predominantly black population, with protestant denominations being the main religious groups (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jm.html>). This developing country, like many other countries, is troubled by incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Arscott-Mills, 2001; Cattaneo, Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, & Fox, 2008). The female victims of these violent incidents were the focus of this study.

For the purposes of this study, the term “physical abuse” was used. Physical abuse is characterized by a range of behaviors meant to cause physical harm, and includes pulling of hair, hitting, squeezing, slapping, pushing, kicking, and use of objects

to cause harm or kill (<http://www.paradigmcounselingps.com/abuse/physical.php>).

Although physical abuse may involve aversive sexual contact

(<http://www.paradigmcounselingps.com/abuse/physical.php>), this was only considered within the context of physical abuse, which was the main focus of the study.

An inclusion of homosexual (i.e. gay and lesbian) relationships was considered in an effort to produce a comprehensive perspective on the topic. The homosexual population was excluded from this study primarily because this population is not openly accepted and visible within the Jamaican society (Williams, 2000). More recent articles in the *Jamaica Gleaner* (Baxter, 2013; Reuters, 2004) and *Gay Star News* (Litauer, 2012) also attest to this reality and its accompanying negative basis. Living openly as homosexuals in Jamaica is difficult and dangerous because the Jamaican society is extremely homophobic (Gordon, 2011; Williams, 2000). According to Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary, homophobia is defined as an "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia>).

Jamaica is perceived as "the most homophobic Caribbean territory" (Williams, 2000, p. 106), where violence is threatened and carried out against transgendered and homosexual individuals, especially openly gay males classified as men who are having sex with men (MSM), or even those suspected of being gay (Baxter, 2013; Reuters, 2004; Williams, 2000). Williams (2000) also highlighted the fact that in spite of this negative attitude, it was a "badly kept secret that Jamaica has a perceptibly vibrant gay population" (p. 106). The Caribbean Epidemiological Center (CAREC, 2003) supports these facts, and along with the Human Rights Watch (2005), and White and Carr (2005),

attests to the commonplace violence directed against MSM. In spite of the formation of the Jamaica Forum of Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG) in December 1998 to advocate for the rights of this population, these individuals are still forced to keep their sexual orientation outside of the public view in order to avoid harm or victimization (Gordon, 2011).

Of importance is the fact that Buggery and Gross indecency laws in Jamaica prohibit men having anal sex with men, declaring this activity criminal in nature (White & Carr, 2005). These facts obviously militate against identifying couples from this population for this study. Furthermore, it appears that lasting relationships within this population are difficult to sustain (CAREC, 2003), therefore identifying couples who would fulfill the inclusion criterion of being together for over two years, was difficult.

The occurrence of physical abuse within heterosexual marriages or intimate relationships has become quite commonplace on a global level, and most studies completed on this topic have been done within Western contexts (Yount, 2005). Admittedly, the Caribbean context of physical abuse, including general attitudes and social structures to address it, is likely to have similarities and differences compared to Western or North American ones. Although there are facilities and support structures in both contexts to assist physically abused women, a 2003 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Sub-regional Headquarters for the Caribbean, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (ECLAC & UNIFEM) revealed that some women in the Caribbean have remained in abusive situations until death or serious injury was suffered.

The aim of this study, therefore, was to explore the phenomenon of physical abuse from the perspectives of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica, in order to gain understanding of the influences that impacted their decision to remain with their abusive partners. A transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach was used to explore the world of the women, seeking to extract the essence of their lived experiences of abuse, and give voice to their associated views, meanings, and motivations.

Statement of the Problem

It has been noted that the majority of studies carried out on domestic violence in general, and physical abuse specifically, have been done in the United States of America (USA) and selected areas of the globe (Krahe, Bleneck, & Moller, 2005; Yount, 2005). In a thorough review of the literature, only a few studies were found that were carried out in Jamaica, and these included studies done by Arscott-Mills, 2001; Krahe, Bleneck, and Moller, 2005; Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, and Fox, 2008. In addition, most studies on this topic have sought to prove hypotheses using quantitative methodologies (Barnett, 2000; 2001; Gage, 2005; Hindin & Adair, 2002; Johnson & Sigler, 2000; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Yount, 2005). They have been aimed at identifying reasons for physical abuse and for abused women remaining in the abusive contexts. Comparatively, there is a paucity of studies on physical abuse carried out in Jamaica in general, and specifically, there have been no qualitative studies that have sought to explore physical abuse from the women's perspectives. This study sought to address this lack.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained in physically abusive contexts created by their spouses. The study specifically explored the main influences or circumstances that affected their decision to remain in their abusive situations. In addition, this study illuminated how well the elements of the “Cycle of violence,” postulated by clinical psychologist, Lenore Walker (1977), fitted the abusive contexts of the Jamaican participants. Most importantly, as expected, the findings of this study provided insight into the meanings, motivations, and perspectives associated with the physically abusive experiences of Jamaican women. By extension, greater understanding of the phenomenon of physical abuse, and effective implementation of appropriate, culturally tailored interventions that might encourage physically abused women to seek help, was also forthcoming. Overall, this study served to enhance the body of literature on physical abuse for the benefit of all.

Review of the Literature

Studies carried out primarily in Western contexts and other areas across the globe seem to suggest various reasons for women’s tolerance of physical abuse, including the fear of harm to their children, loss of custody of their children, financial dependence on their partner, insufficient education, and religious beliefs about marriage (Gengler & Lee, 2001; Yoshihama, 2002; & Yount, 2005). According to Yoshihama, and Akhter (2011). Current attitudes in society that might judge the woman negatively, or side with the husband in instances of battering might also affect her decision to remain in the abusive situation. In Bangladesh, for instance, the Bengali proverb, “A drum, a vessel, a donkey,

and a woman are all worthy of being beaten.” (Akhter, p. 1156) speaks volumes about the general societal attitude toward wife/partner beating.

Caribbean Context

Studies carried out by Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, and Fox (2008) within the Caribbean countries of Barbados, Jamaica, and twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago, revealed the prevalence of very high levels of interpersonal violence in general, and intimate partner violence in particular. According to Le Franc and colleagues, these results suggested a high tolerance for such violence among victims, and the possibility of a deeply entrenched “culture of violence and adversarial intimate relationships” (p. 409).

A study on intimate partner violence carried out in Haiti by Gage (2005) pointed to the complexity of the phenomenon of the battered women’s experiences. This study indicated significant connections between childhood experiences of abuse and/or witnessing of parental abuse during childhood. The findings pointed to the fact that as a consequence of these experiences, it was likely that adult relationships would be formed, wherein the abuser-abused relationship could be mirrored or perpetuated for both women and men; the result is that either one could assume the role of abuser or abused. In this study, Gage (2005) referred to the formation of an attitude or frame of reference in women, which embraces physical abuse as normative in intimate relationships, because of their childhood experiences.

The query is commonly made within the context of physical abuse regarding the influences or circumstances that lead to women remaining in their abusive environments. It should be borne in mind however, that in many cases, leaving the situation provides no guarantee of safety for women and children (Burman & Chantler, 2005). This

unfortunate reality also exists in the Jamaican context (ECLAC & UNIFEM, 2003). In addition, Dunn (2005) supported this view about the questionable safety of abused women who leave their abusive situations, based on the findings of her study, which was carried out in the United States of America (USA) on American women.

Revised Image of Physically Abused Woman: Hero or Victim?

A revised or alternate image of women who choose to remain in the abusive environment was also invoked based on Dunn's (2005) investigation. Interestingly, according to Dunn, this is an image that locates the woman as a survivor and hero for her children, rather than a passive victim. Dunn's study referred to "vocabularies of motive" as postulated by Mills (1940). These vocabularies of motive are said to be adopted by these women, and seem to explain their seemingly passive and pathological behavior of remaining in harm's way (Dunn, 2005). The woman is seen to intentionally weigh the advantages and disadvantages of leaving, and consciously makes decisions to remain for her own sake, and that of her children (Dunn, 2005). According to Dunn, this image, of course, contravenes the passive victim characterization that is more commonly upheld. In her study, Dunn postulated that what appears to be passive and pathological behavior, could be characterized as heroic and sacrificial, thereby moving from a victim typology to one of an empowered and calculating survivor. Dunn states that these survivors, "in their strength, sanity, and relative nobility, transcend gendered stereotypes" (p. 22), even as they strategically stay for a period as "agents" who are ultimately planning toward "eventual liberation" (p. 22). She noted that characterizations or images of the "passive victim" or "active survivor" (p. 24), are reductionist and limited in nature, as they fail to

capture the complexity of the women's abusive experiences, and the personal meanings and motivations embedded therein.

Rationale for the Decision to Leave or Stay

Turning Point. Interestingly, in response to the query about influences that result in battered women remaining in their abusive situations, Grauwiler (2008) pointed out that some women's decision to seek help or leave may emerge after a period of time and unfolding of events that might climax at a "turning point" (p. 314) characterized as "critical events," and "moments or epiphanies" (p. 314). These turning points indicate to them the urgent and immediate need to leave and/or get help. Findings from Grauwiler's phenomenological study on physically abused women's perspectives and decision-making process indicated that at these crucial points, most of the women stated they had come to the realization they had taken enough abuse, and quickly left and sought assistance.

Dissatisfaction with Social Structures. Grauwiler's (2008) study was carried out within the United States, and involved American women at varied stages within their abusive relationships. These women had experienced abuse at varied levels of severity over differing time spans, but they all maintained contact with their partners in some way. They had all sought help via the social structures and systems that were in place to assist victims of domestic violence, and the findings of the study indicated their dissatisfaction with these structures. Grauwiler reported that the women expressed their dissatisfaction with these structures' "apparent inability to hold their partners accountable" (p. 320). This investigator can attest to similar sentiments being expressed in counseling sessions by female clients who were physically abused in Jamaica. Many of this researcher's

clients have said they did not feel that social structures, such as safe houses, members of the police force, and even the courts could keep them safe from their abusive partners. The women in Gage's (2005) study also reported dissatisfaction because the system placed undue burden on them to "secure" (p. 320) their safety and that of their children. In addition, the women in Gage's study were also able to highlight very probable repercussions of using these systems, and these repercussions were direct deterrents to their "long term safety and stability" (p. 320).

Validation of Male Partner's Role. In addition to these findings, it is important to note 8 of the 10 participants in Grauwiler's (2008) study valued the role their partner played in their children's lives, and sought help to address the abusive situation without breaking up the family. They also found housing and financial support would be insufficient and unsatisfactory for stable survival away from their partners. These women, therefore, opted to remain with their partners and children, thereby keeping their families together, "partially or completely" (p. 320) and finding their own means of coping. Gaining a greater understanding of the complexities of dependency and intimate partner abuse within heterosexual relationships can contribute greatly toward addressing the issue of physical abuse and also other areas of abuse, where this connection might play a definite role (Bornstein, 2006).

Psychological and Physical Dynamics. Lerner and Kennedy (2000), in their investigation of the "stay-leave" decision-making process of battered women, agreed that a process was involved, and this process, in most cases, included women's departure and return to their abusive contexts several times. Lerner and Kennedy reported these seemingly indecisive and self-destructive actions have fostered extreme frustration,

cynicism, anger, and even contempt in professionals, and also other care-givers, family members, and friends who seek to help. The findings of the study revealed the presence of dynamic psychological factors involved in this process, and these factors included self-efficacy, trauma symptoms, and coping abilities. The factors were based on whether the women were in or out of the situation, and the duration of time since they had left. In addition, the results indicated these time and situational markers were linked to varying perspectives in these women's views and meanings, associated with their abusive experiences.

Interestingly, Bell, Goodman, and Dutton (2007) referred to comparative studies that spoke to the fact that some women who leave their abusive partners may not necessarily be better off in major areas of life, and may still be victimized. Studies have also revealed that women who leave their partners may be subjected to even more severe violence than those who did not leave the relationship (Anderson, 2003; Campbell, et al., 2003; Hotton, 2001). According to Lerner and Kennedy (2000), trauma symptomatology, including levels of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are reportedly high for women who have recently left their abusive partners, compared with those who are currently within the abusive context. In addition, a significant number of physically abused women have been known to leave their abusive partners and return on more than one occasion (Bell, Goodman, & Hotton, 2009).

Conditions that Facilitate Female Intimate Partner Physical Abuse

Male Partner Insecurity. Hindin and Adair (2002) incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the Philippines, in order to examine the context for intimate partner violence. They identified connections between power and

control, educational status, and intimate partner violence. It was found that when there was a greater decision-making scope for men, especially those who were less educated and had limited social resources compared to their wives, the men would physically abuse their partners. According to Hindin and Adair, these violent treatments support the theory that men behaved in this way in order to maintain domination and compensate for their sense of powerlessness and inadequacy.

Of particular note is the fact that within the Caribbean context, females are found to outperform males significantly, making it likely that males experience a sense of being threatened and insecure, and therefore tend to retaliate by physically abusing their partners (Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, & Fox, 2008). Interestingly, these results appear to support findings regarding the role of male insecurities in the Philippines as noted by Hindin and Adair (2002). In spite of the vast difference in geographical locations and cultural contexts, these findings reflect a common thread within human psychology and behavior that is useful to note. This common thread may be viewed as a useful subject for further investigation beyond this current research.

Societal Laws, Customs, and Societal Ethos. Results of a focus group research in Japan with physically abused Japanese women revealed experiences that spoke of a “web of entrapment, from which women saw little possibility of escape” (Yoshihama, 2002, p. 389). It was found that “victim-blaming attitudes of family, friends, and professionals” (p. 389) fostered a sense of debasement and compounded a sense of entrapment. In addition, this study also indicated that inadequate law-enforcement protection and victim-assistance programs promoted an environment of isolation, which was broken only when the victims took the risk of exposing their abuse.

Yount (2005) investigated the influence of certain factors, including household wealth, women's socioeconomic dependence, women's status inconsistency in the marriage, and local family organization, on physical abuse and its tolerance by wives in Minya, Egypt. Results of this quantitative study revealed that women who were socially isolated from their families, less educated than their husbands, economically dependent on their husbands and had sons with them, were more likely to be physically abused, and would tolerate the abuse for longer periods of time. A self-preservation element is brought to light by Yount (2005), who points out that in Minya, motherhood uplifts social status, and having sons engenders this to a greater extent. Since mothers depend on their sons for financial support in old age, and Egyptian laws will grant custody to fathers in the event of divorce, women will bear the current abuse rather than risk such loss of status security in the long run (Yount, 2005).

Barnett (2000), in her study investigating why battered women do not leave their abusive situations, reported major influences are in fact related to the patriarchal and sexist fabric of society, women's economic dependency on their spouse, and the lack of faith in the justice system. In support of the findings of both Yount (2005) and Barnett, Bornstein (2006) reported on the complex relationship between economic and emotional dependency of victimized women in relation to their spouses, and how these factors foster the women's tolerance of the abuse. Bornstein's study was carried out in New York, and it indicated that the level of economic and emotional dependency of the women on their partners was positively related to the likelihood and tolerance of abuse from the male partners.

In an article by Elton (1997), the matter of why abusive fathers were awarded custody of children was examined against the backdrop of the laws and considerations involved in this matter. The article indicated that the legal system itself might unintentionally foster battered women's silence about their abuse, in that the favoring of joint custody awards has its merits tied to both parents being able to get along well enough. According to Elton, a report by a wife about her former husband's battering treatment would reflect conflict between them, place him in a bad light, and raise his animosity toward her. Elton stated that the end result could possibly be that the wife eventually loses out in any ensuing custody battle, should the husband decide to strongly contest her custody claims. As a result, she would maintain her silence (Elton, 1997).

The Role of Religion and Gender. From a religious standpoint, women's decisions to tolerate abuse might be borne out of religious beliefs and a possible lack of a facilitative environment for validation and help within the church (Gengler & Lee, 2001). According to these authors, clergy appeared to have differing responses and attitudes toward wife battering based on their religious beliefs and how traditional or liberal these beliefs were, and also based on their gender. The findings of their study indicated that more fundamentalistic ministers were less likely to facilitate discussions on the matter, and were more likely to adhere to traditional male-led ideals. The study revealed that, as a result of these ideals, willingness to examine the phenomenon of abuse might be hindered, along with an increase in awareness of the possibilities and dynamics of wife battering. Gengler and Lee's findings also pointed to the fact that female ministers were found to be more open to educating themselves about abuse, and opening channels for inquiry and assistance for the women. Therefore in contexts where there were deeply

traditional belief systems and also male clergy, the women might experience a sense of aloneness in this situation, and remain silent (Gengler & Lee, 2001).

Changing Attitudes and Areas for Future Studies

According to Johnson & Sigler (2000), although some physically abused women have reported that they have been blamed for their own abuse or have had their experiences minimized, these authors reported that studies in the United States have reflected more support in recent times for the victims, and a staunch call for criminalizing wife/partner battering. The authors indicated that there has been a movement toward calling for harsher treatment of men who abuse their partners. They also highlighted an emphasis on generating studies that examine the trend in public attitude in support of more severe treatments for perpetrators.

There is also a call for more research that moves beyond women in shelters or elsewhere away from their abusive partners, toward those who have chosen to remain with their abusive partners (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). Although this is likely to foster a deeper understanding of the complexity of intimate partner violence, it might prove dangerous to undertake within the Jamaican context at this time.

Of note is the unspoken “understanding” within the inner-cities of the capital of Jamaica, Kingston, that a man demonstrates his love/care by beating his “woman” (this investigator’s personal conversations with clients). One might consider to what extent do these notions and perceptions truly drive physically abused women’s behaviors and decisions in Jamaica? This study provided insight related to the complex dynamics that characterize the world of the physically abused woman, and undoubtedly enhanced the

paucity of literature on the Jamaican context of physical abuse of female intimate partners.

Conclusion

A qualitative study of this specific nature has never before been carried out within the Jamaican context. This study focused on giving physically abused women a collective voice, thereby improving on the sparse literature on this subject from the Jamaican context. By its very nature, there were certain risks inherent in this study, which required careful forethought and planning. Without achieving ideal conditions, however, rigorous efforts to carry out a transcendental-phenomenological qualitative study on this topic in Jamaica still provided invaluable information that can be considered a gift to the field of counseling in general, and to the Jamaican society specifically, including abusive husbands/partners, abused female partners/wives, children, therapists/counselors, clergy, and all. Critical insights have been gained, that will serve to empower and assist physically abused women in Jamaica.

The examination of how well the findings of this study compared with extant literature constituted an interesting and useful revelation, of benefit to Jamaica and the international professional community as a whole. The findings have paved the way for greater understanding of women's physically abusive experiences, and should help to provide a culture-specific framework for addressing this problem within the Jamaican context—a greatly anticipated reality.

Research Questions

The research questions are noted for review below:

1. What is the essence of the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained with their abusive spouses for some time before deciding to leave?
2. What influences and conditions affected the women's decision to remain in their abusive contexts for the period of time that they did?
3. How do the findings of this study compare with extant literature on this topic?

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained in their abusive contexts over time in spite of ongoing abuse. This chapter highlights the research methodology and procedures used to achieve the stated purpose of this study. The methodology and procedures outlined in this chapter sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the essence of the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained with their abusive spouses for some time before deciding to leave?
2. What influences and conditions affected the women's decision to remain in their abusive contexts for the period of time that they did?
3. How do the findings of this study compare with extant literature on this topic?

Rationale for Research Approach

Qualitative Design

A qualitative approach was selected as the best choice for this study, because the aim of the study was to gain access to the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007) of a cross-section of battered women in Jamaica, rather than pursue figures and confirm theories and statistics. Long and Godfrey (2004) defined a qualitative study as one that “uses qualitative methods in both gathering and analysis of the data” (p. 183). This involves

“visual and verbal (conceptual or thematic)” (Long & Godfrey, 2004, p. 183) data analysis, rather than manipulation of numerical data (Long & Godfrey, 2004). A qualitative approach therefore employs methods that include interviewing, as was used in this study, focus groups, ethnography, participant observation, and documentary analysis of life histories (Long & Godfrey, 2004). Long and Godfrey also indicated that proper use of this approach facilitates a clearer understanding of meanings that individuals associate with events and personal life experiences. In this study, a deeper understanding of the abusive experience from the women’s perspectives was sought, and this understanding was best facilitated by use of a qualitative approach (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Gaining answers via this approach involved careful focus on exploring, describing, and discovering key elements emerging from the study (Bloomberg & Volpe).

Creswell (2007) outlined five distinctive qualitative approaches: narrative research, grounded theory, case study research, ethnographic research, and phenomenological research. Creswell described the focus for each, and the type of problem for which each approach is best suited, as follows: The narrative approach is mainly used to explore the life of an individual, by telling a story of the individual’s experiences. Grounded theory seeks to develop a theory grounded in data obtained from the field, based on the views of respondents. The case study approach focuses on development of detailed description and analysis of one or many cases, resulting in deeper understanding of said case or cases. Ethnographic researchers seek to describe and interpret a group that shares the same culture, by providing details and interpretations of shared cultural patterns. Finally, phenomenological research, which was the chosen

approach for this study, seeks to explore and understand the essence of experiencing a phenomenon. The essence of the phenomenon is derived from different accounts of the lived experience of the phenomenon gained from several individuals.

Masue, Swai, and Ansel (2013) highlighted key features of qualitative versus quantitative approaches in social research. With respect to qualitative research, they emphasized the depth of understanding anticipated from examination of “a specific case...a group, or a small number of cases” (p. 212). This depth, they explained, would be gained rather than “a superficial description of a large sample population” (p. 212). Depth and detail regarding participants’ perspectives on their abusive experiences were crucial aspects of this study, which sought to explore the essence of the participants’ experiences. In addition, a qualitative approach facilitated examination of the impact made by varied elements, including culture, tradition, society, and religion, on participants’ perspectives regarding their experiences (Dharamsi & Scott, (2009).

Methodology

In particular, a transcendental phenomenological methodology was well suited to uncover the essence of the experience of being battered. This methodology was meant to “investigate the meaning of the *lived experience* of people” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 32) in order to garner a sense of “the core essence of human experience or phenomenon” (p. 32) from the participants’ perspectives. In this approach, according to Hays and Singh (2012), the life-world or “Lebenswelt” of individual participants was first examined with respect to a particular phenomenon of interest, and then common elements across participants were sought. The end result was a combined representation

of the experience, with the varied nuances and dynamics involved, based on the account of several participants (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Of note, is the fact that the concept of phenomenology was posited by Kant in the mid-1700's (Hays & Singh, 2012) and later by Hegel, who made the term famous by using it in the title of his work, "Phenomenology of Spirit" in 1807 (Moran, 2000).

Edward Husserl (1859-1935), however, has the distinction of being called the father of this concept (Hays & Singh, 2012). Husserl was strongly influenced to utilize the term, "phenomenology" by Franz Brentano (Moran, 2000). According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl also embraced Brentano's characterization of "intentionality" as the basic concept for fully appreciating conscious behavior and mental activities. Having every mental practice being related to an object constitutes intentionality (Moran, 2000), and this relates to an inner consciousness of experiencing something (Moustakas, 1994).

With its philosophical roots, Husserl sought to apply phenomenology to the mental health field, embracing the fact that an understanding of human experiences cannot be truly grasped by using experimental approaches (Wertz, 2005). In addition to Husserl, other philosophers and fields of knowledge have utilized this concept of phenomenology beyond Husserl's original perspective (Dowling, 2005; Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays and Singh indicated that phenomenology has since been applied to other settings, including counseling research and educational settings, and has brought valuable knowledge to these fields. These authors also emphasized that despite convergent fields and schools of thought, there is a general consensus about the undeniable value of studies about the subjective experience of phenomena and the connection between participants and their worlds.

The phenomenological approach and “heuristic inquiry” are connected, in that heuristic inquiry is seen as a variation of phenomenology, which focuses on both the essence of experience and the individual having the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Heuristic inquiry is rooted in humanistic psychology, with Moustakas as its creator, and its aim being to make discoveries (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In a more specific sense, Moustakas’ “transcendental” phenomenological approach was employed in order to achieve the distinct purpose of this study. According to Moustakas (1994), this phenomenological approach involves the concept of “epoche” or “bracketing,” which was employed during this study, and required that the researcher consciously noted and set aside personal views and experiences pertaining to the phenomenon. Despite the human element that precludes perfect accomplishment of this activity, this approach was meant to promote an understanding, rather than interpretation, of participants’ experiences from a perspective that is as fresh and new as possible, as “if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Data analysis within the context of this transcendental phenomenological approach produced a “textural” description of participants’ experiences, which refers to “what” they experience. This approach also produced a “structural” description of participants’ experiences, which relates to “how” participants experienced the phenomenon within their contexts (Moustakas, 1994). Both descriptions combined, served to formulate an understanding of the essence of the lived experiences, and allowed for assessment and appreciation of participants’ intentionality and motivations, associated with consciousness of their personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Definition of Terms

Transcendental Phenomenology

A qualitative phenomenological approach is one that focuses primarily on a description of the experiences of participants, rather than on the interpretation of these experiences by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche (also called Bracketing)

The word “epoche” is of Greek origin, and means to refrain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche includes the concept of Bracketing, which pertains to the researcher setting aside personal views, judgments, and experiences pertaining to the phenomenon under examination, in order to facilitate as best as possible, a fresh, untainted view/understanding of the phenomenon from the participants’ perspectives (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural Description

A description of what the participant experienced as the phenomenon took place (Moustakas, 1994).

Structural Description

A description of how the phenomenon was experienced, including the conditions, situations, and contexts under which participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Essence (also called the Essential, Invariant Structure)

A composite description of the phenomenon based on the textural and structural descriptions provided by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Lebenswelt

This word is German in origin, and means “the world of lived experience” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lebenswelt>). This refers to the Life-World of the participants as they experience the phenomenon, wherein self and world are inseparable during the experience (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

Heuristic Inquiry

The word “Heuristic” originates from the Greek word “heurishein,” which means to discover or to find. A heuristic inquiry involves an examination by the researcher of intense phenomena from the participants’ perspectives (Moustakas, 1994).

Domestic Violence

The inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another, or a repeated or habitual pattern of such behavior (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence?show=1&t=1385224503>).

Shelters (also called Domestic Violence Shelters)

These are designated places of safety specifically established for abused women and also their children. Here, their needs are addressed, which include food, shelter, safety, and counseling

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shelters?show=0&t=1385226015>).

Role of the Researcher

The phenomenological approach required that the researcher preserved and presented participants’ perspectives gained mainly from interviews (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). This was done by approaching the phenomenon, as best as possible, with fresh eyes, “as if viewing it for the first time” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50)

through the eyes of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon. This action on the part of the researcher is referred to as *epoche*, or bracketing, and was crucial to gaining an understanding of the human experience (Hays and Singh, 2012). Prior views and knowledge of the phenomenon gained from extant literature and personal experience were set aside, and the researcher's values and assumptions about the phenomenon were bracketed. Dowling (2007) pointed out the critical role of bracketing, as it is a "fundamental strategy" (p. 136) in phenomenology. Dowling (2007) and Creswell (2007) also acknowledged that this feat of bracketing is neither easily accomplished, nor can be carried out perfectly. This fact was noted in this study. Both authors emphasized the importance of constant self-awareness and vigilance over the effects of the study on the psyche of the researcher. Self-awareness and vigilance of necessity, characterized the stance of the researcher throughout the course of this study. Dowling also pointed out the fact that some do not favor the term bracketing, including Dahlberg and Dahlberg (2004). Dalberg and Dalberg interpreted the term to connote an "exactness and finitude of mathematics" (p. 272), which seems to dominate or violate. Dowling indicated that Dahlberg and Dahlberg's interpretation is clearly different from Husserl's original view, and is also different from that of Moustakas' (1994).

According to Creswell (2007) and Hays and Singh (2012), the role of the phenomenological researcher stands in stark contrast to those of ethnographic, narrative, grounded theory, or case study researchers. This is based on the phenomenological researcher's goal of understanding the essence of a phenomenon as described by a relatively small number of participants who experienced it. Simply put, according to these authors, the ethnographer examines group culture; the narrator examines significant

stories of individuals; the grounded theorist seeks to unearth a theory from data garnered in the field, and the case study researcher does in-depth study on usually one subject. The phenomenological researcher connects with each individual and aims to present one collective voice to his or her experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Bearing in mind that the researcher was both instrument and major conduit for data collection and analysis, it was important that the researcher guarded against subjectivity and personal response to the data that could affect the validity of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). It must also be borne in mind that in order to effectively bracket and preserve the voices of the participants, this researcher was constantly mindful of her role as a mother, wife, and counselor who readily empathizes, and has cared for, abused Jamaican women over time. The researcher was careful to maintain the role of researcher rather than counselor, yet retain humanitarian awareness and sensitivity to participants' states throughout the interview.

Method

Participants

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, the researcher's aim was to identify 10-12 women who have suffered physical abuse at the hands of their male intimate partners, and remained within the abusive context despite the abuse. Eleven women were actually identified, and participated in the study. They all met inclusion criteria of having been cohabiting or married to their partners for at least two years, allowing as best as possible, for the passage of the early honeymoon phase and some amount of marital adjustment (Greteman, 1995). Efforts were made to recruit women

who were between 20 and 60 years old, to facilitate an examination of women across a wide developmental lifespan, who have experienced possible changes in cultural and social structures. The sample acquired was between 40 and 60 years old, and these women were between 20 and 48 years old during their period of abuse. Participants were sought who fulfilled the following demographic characteristics: (a) Religious and not religious,; (b) parents and non-parents; (c) employed and unemployed, (d) high, medium, and low socio-economic status; and (e) high, medium, and low educational status. This demographic mix was meant to provide a more diverse sample, thereby adding to the breadth of perspectives attained from this study. This aim at diversity was also meant to provide a guide or framework for participant selection; however, interviews proceeded with participants who met inclusion criteria and made themselves available.

Nine participants selected for this study identified as Christians—Evangelical and otherwise—with various levels of activity/inactivity in their religious contexts. All participants were parents, and 10 of them were employed. The women all had a minimum of high school education, with two of them having completed graduate studies, and the others having benefitted from tertiary education of some sort. The participants all identifies as being within the range of lower-middle to middle class in socio-economic status.

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, their exact profiles and descriptions, including demographic information, were withheld. Certain aspects of their profiles were, therefore, changed and presented in a very general manner to prevent identification. The participants also gave permission for use of a pseudonym in place of their real names.

Various studies reflect a “leave-return” behavior (Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; & Lerner and Kennedy, 2000), where the women would have left and returned to their abusive contexts more than once. Eight of the 11 participants in this study reported to have exhibited this behavior, and according to the requirements of the study, all participants were safely separated from their partners at the time of the study. Shalansky, Ericksen, Henderson (1999) very clearly highlighted the fact that women are at risk even after they have left their abusive partner. The authors emphasized the need for particular care and protection, therefore inclusion criterion of participants’ safe separation from their abusive male partners helped to guard against any possible retaliation from said partners.

Participants were sought based on referrals from domestic violence shelter managers, clergy, medical personnel, and other reliable sources. An invitation letter was distributed directly to prospective participants and to contact persons who referred them. This letter was also emailed to interested persons at their request, and researcher or contact person conveyed its contents verbally for expediency and confidentiality purposes. The contents of this letter may be viewed in Appendix A. The sample for this study was recruited based on referrals primarily from medical and mental health personnel. Five nominated individuals failed to meet the inclusion criteria of the study. Potential participants were pre-screened for demographic eligibility as well as psychological wellness to participate. Demographic information required included participants’ age, marital status, parental status, educational status, and socio-economic status. Feedback on these parameters provided supporting contexts against which

participants' stories were evaluated. The contents of the pre-screening demographic instrument can be viewed in Appendix B.

Participants were assessed regarding how psychologically capable they were to tell stories. Psychological screening instruments, the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI II), and the Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 (TSC-40), were used to assess participants mental status as it related to existing levels of trauma symptomatology, including depression and suicidality. Individuals who had scores in the mild range on these instruments were deemed fit to participate in the study. Individuals who scored at higher levels were deselected, due to risk of exacerbating their current psychological condition by having them recount their traumatic experiences of abuse. All participants who were selected for the study successfully passed inclusion criteria for mental health status. One nominee was deselected due to high trauma symptomatology. The contents of these mental health assessment instruments may be viewed in Appendices C and D respectively.

Participants were offered three counseling sessions with competent mental health professionals, to whom they would be referred after the interview, if they felt the need for counseling. These sessions were free of cost for the participants. The intent of making these sessions available, beyond encouraging participants to come forward, was to convey a sense of genuine care for them, and the understanding that their participation may result in some "dis-ease" in their psyche. The sessions were meant to help them regain balance and perspective after participating in the study. Appropriate referrals beyond these three sessions were also made available.

Procedures

Participant recruitment sampling method. Subsequent to appropriate approval by the Regent Human Subjects Review Board, individuals who agreed to participate and met inclusion criteria were informed of all relevant details pertaining to the study. The managers of the domestic violence shelters, pastors, medical and mental health professionals, and other reputable sources/individuals were the first line of contact with prospective participants. Purposive sampling methods were employed in an attempt to obtain a sample with the range of desired criteria (Hays & Singh, 2012). Efforts were made to achieve some level of stratification of the samples based on the range of demographic characteristics specified. However, this effort was not fully achieved, but the sample acquired in its less than perfectly stratified state, yielded extremely useful results. It has been acknowledged that a more stratified sample would have yielded even more distinct information with greater credibility (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Prescreening instruments. Prospective participants were pre-screened using a pre-screening demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B), the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) (see Appendix C), and the Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 (TSC-40) (see Appendix D). The demographic questionnaire garnered key information related to selection criteria such as participants' age, length of time cohabiting/married, length of time being abused, parental, religious, economic, and educational statuses. Pre-screening demographic and psychological activities took place via telephone during brief twenty to thirty minute sessions, based on individual's convenience, prior to main face-to-face interview sessions.

The psychological measures were used to deselect participants who were not psychologically capable of participating in the study, due to the presence of significant trauma symptoms, which might be increased during the interview. The BDI-II, created by Beck, Steer, and Brown, is a widely used 21-item self-report inventory that measures the severity of depression in persons aged 13 to 80 years old (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). According to the authors, this instrument has been proven to be a very reliable and valid measure across varied populations and cultural groups, but it is not used as a diagnostic tool. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging in levels of severity of each item from 0 (lowest) to 3 (highest). The measure is available in paper and pencil format, can be read to respondents, and may be scored by hand or computer. It can be completed in approximately 10 minutes, and scored in approximately two minutes. Raw scores of 0 to 13 indicate minimal depression, 14 to 19 indicate mild depression, 20 to 28 indicate moderate depression, and 29 to 63 indicate severe depression. All items on this measure were designed by the authors to assess depressive symptomatology. Individuals whose responses fell outside of the mild range were deselected. Overall, the characteristics of the BDI-II reflected an instrument that was well suited to the purpose of this research, and coupled with the TSC-40, provided more than adequate screening function during this study. According to the authors of these instruments, levels on both, which meet inclusion criteria, indicated that although there might have been signs of stress, these levels were manageable, and not likely to worsen significantly by retelling of the trauma.

The TSC-40, created by Briere and Runtz, is a self-report measure of trauma symptoms arising from traumatic experiences in childhood or adulthood (Briere, 1996).

The TSC-40 is a 40-item instrument with six subscales as follows: Dissociation, Anxiety, Depression, Sexual Abuse Trauma Index, Sexual Problems, and Sleep Disturbances. Briere rated the symptom items on the instrument based on a four-point frequency scale according to their frequency of occurrence over the previous two months. The scale ranges from 0 (“never”) to 3 (“often”). The instrument yields a total score ranging from 0 to 120 in addition to its individual subscale scores. It was reported by Briere to be a reliable measure, with satisfactory psychometric properties (subscales alphas typically range from .66 to .77 with alphas for full scale averaging between .89 and .91). The TSC-40 is meant to be used to assess adults for research purposes only, can be completed in approximately 10-15 minutes, and can be scored in approximately 5-10 minutes. Respondents may complete the measure in paper and pencil format, or the questions can be read to them and their answers noted. In this study, prospective participants completed this measure by telephone, and one individual who scored over the mild range on the depression, dissociation, and anxiety, scales was deselected. The overall characteristics rendered the TSC-40 to be an appropriate adjunct measure along with the BDI-II, to assess the women’s psychological state.

Data collection instrument. Data were collected via a semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) from pre-screened participants who met selection criteria. Interviews were audiotaped and lasted for approximately ninety minutes. Interviews took place in the safety-designated locations, including selected church and medical facility. These sites were secure and easily accessible.

A conceptual mapping task (CMT), based on methods employed by Martin, Slemon, Hiebert, Hallberg, and Cummings (1989), and Leitch-Alford (2006), was

incorporated as a key element of the interview process. According to Martin et al., the CMT takes the form of a projective, free-association activity embedded in the interview process. During this CMT, participants were guided toward constructing and organizing their experiences in a visual format. This activity facilitated generation of rich data, and also provided an opportunity for participants themselves to be involved in detailed analysis of the content of their stories (Martin et al., 1989). Based on Martin et al. and Leitch-Alford's methodology, the CMT task involved the following two-pronged activity: a process of free association and recall by participants, and a process of organizing concepts emerging from prior free association and recall activity, into a conceptual map that depicted links and connections between ideas and concepts (Martin et al., 1989).

The interview process covered four phases: Rapport building phase, recall of phenomenon phase, organizing of experience/creating conceptual map phase, and interview wrap-up phase.

Phase one: Rapport building. This phase involved setting participants at ease and ensuring they were fully cognizant with the process ahead. The researcher thanked the participant for participating and encouraged her to ask any questions that she had. Explication and signing of the informed consent (Appendix E) also took place during this phase. The participant was told that taping would begin, and was reminded that the entire interview would be taped. Testing and actual taping then began.

Phase two: Recall of phenomenon. According to Martin et al. (1989) and Leitch-Alford (2006), the activity of free association and recall involved allowing participants to relax and reflect on their experiences of the phenomenon being studied,

while the researcher recorded key ideas from their reflections on Post-it® notes (1-7/8 inches x 2-7/8 inches), with only one idea recorded on each note. Questions meant for clarification and elaboration, were asked during this time.

The initial question meant to help participants relax and ease into the interview was as follows: “Please tell me the story of how you and your partner/husband met, starting with the early stages before you were married or decided to live together.” In order to garner desired data, the probing question for a married participant was, “What was your relationship like during the early stages before you were married, and soon after you were married?” In the case of unmarried women who were in a committed relationship, the probing question was, “What was your relationship like during the early stages before you decided to commit to each other, and in the early stages after you started living together?” With participants having gained a sense of relaxation, they were then asked direct questions that addressed their physically abusive experiences, beginning with, “Please speak about how and when the relationship became abusive. Take your time and speak about what your abusive experiences were like, what influenced you to stay, and perhaps what role faith/spirituality had in the course of the experience.” The probing questions included, “What influenced you to stay during the abuse?” and “How does your faith/spirituality impact your experiences of abuse.” Probing questions were all meant to garner rich data, exploring the influences and motivations of participants as they lived through these experiences over time, without removing themselves from the context. These questions were only asked if the participant did not address them in the initial telling of their story. Ideas recorded by the researcher on Post-it® notes were then used in phase three after the participant checked them for accuracy.

When participants were finished with their stories, the researcher handed the created Post-it® notes to the participant and asked them to examine the concepts recorded on the notes to confirm their accuracy. This activity of examining the concepts and ideas noted by the researcher facilitated member checking (Creswell, 2007), which in turn assisted in promoting trustworthiness of the results. Participants were invited to freely make changes and additions as deemed necessary.

Phase three: Organizing the experience. The next step in the CMT activity involved participants being provided with a large sheet of cartridge paper or newsprint, approximately 24 inches x 22 inches, which was placed on top of a lapboard (Leitch-Alford, 2006). The researcher then asked the participant to arrange the notes on the lapboard in a fashion that accurately and visually represented how the concepts related to each other. The lapboard facilitated smooth interaction between researcher and individual participant, including easy rotation and viewing of the activity by them both during the process (Leitch-Alford, 2006). Participants were allowed to adjust their arrangements until they were satisfied with the accuracy of the arrangements, then they were asked to draw circles or geometric shapes around groups or clusters of concepts that were closely related. They were then asked to label the clusters of concepts, then draw lines that connected concepts, or use arrows to indicate directional flow between certain concepts (Leitch-Alford, 2006; Martin et al., 1989). During this process, the researcher encouraged participants to freely use any visual symbol of their choice that best represented their experience.

Phase IV: Reflection. Finally, the researcher encouraged participants to pause for a final look at the map they had created, and take time to reflect on the process and end product. The researcher followed with these questions:

1. “What strikes you as you look closely at your map?”
2. “What do you see as the most important thing to know or understand about your experience?”

The probing question to gather desired information was:

“Please take one last look at your map. Is there anything else that you feel must be said about your entire experience?”

With the CMT at an end, the interview came to a close with expressions of gratitude, commendation, and encouragement to participants for having the courage and willingness to participate in the study to the very end. They were reminded that three counseling sessions, free of cost, were available to them if they felt that they needed counseling after the interview. Another key reminder to participants was that all information from their interviews would remain confidential with full anonymity observed, and said information would be disposed of appropriately at the end of the study. They were also reminded that the researcher was available for any questions or comments that may emerge afterwards. Appendix E illustrates interview schedule with CMT.

Data Analysis

In keeping with rigorous phenomenological data analysis practices as outlined by Moustakas (1994), Hays and Singh (2012), and Creswell (2007), the taped interviews were transcribed as soon as possible afterwards by the researcher. The researcher first

bracketed personal views, knowledge, and experiences of the phenomenon, then personally transcribed the interviews. This was done in order to facilitate the researcher's immersion in the data. The steps involved in Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1959; 1966) Phenomenological Data Analysis, were used as a guide for the process. The researcher took note of nonverbal communication cues and nuances in communication, including tears, laughter, frowns, and pauses, exhibited by participants during the interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher transcribed all data in order to ensure all these important cues and nuances were captured.

The researcher then read the transcripts repeatedly, isolating statements that spoke to the lived experiences of the participants. These statements were coded and grouped together in categories to formulate meanings, which were clustered together to form emerging themes that were common to all participants. This grouping and categorizing activity is referred to as "horizontalization," which was the first step after transcription, based on Moustakas' (1994) guidelines. The data were then reduced to their invariant constituents, eliminating unnecessary expressions, and these invariant constituents were then placed in clusters and themes. They were then fine-tuned and validated, in order to confirm whether or not they were compatible with the participants' record. From the validated invariant constituents and themes, textural and structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences were constructed for each participant, combining the invariant constituents and themes. The individual textural and structural descriptions were then used to yield a "composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience" that represented all participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Verification Methods

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) addressed the matter of rigor in qualitative studies, which was attained by verification strategies employed during the course of these studies. These authors indicated that the strategies were usually tailored to the methodological approach of each study, and would involve proactive, self-correcting activities employed throughout the process.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), and Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking has been acknowledged to be the most important strategy for establishing trustworthiness. This verification method was employed during this study as a key technique in achieving rigor during data analysis. According to these authors, this technique involves allowing participants to be actively involved in data analysis. This is achieved by allowing them to check and confirm how well their stories have been understood, and their meanings portrayed and recorded by the researcher within the contexts of outlined themes. Participants of this study were invited to examine and make adjustments to concepts noted by the researcher during the CMT that was employed as an integral part of the interviewing process. They were allowed to modify the researcher's notes pertaining to their story, until they felt comfortable that what was recorded accurately fitted their subjective perspective. They were not, however, required to confirm the overall findings of the study. This was not reasonable, as according to Morse et al. (2002), the findings were a composite analysis of data across different participants.

Researcher debriefing activities were also an integral element used to strengthen the verification process. According to Patton (2002) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), this activity would involve a peer or colleague external to the research team, who would ask

difficult questions that would help the researcher to honestly and clearly process the impact of the study on the researcher. These authors pointed out the importance of the debriefer's role in forcing the researcher to answer hard questions about the methods used, as well as the meanings ascribed to the participants' statements and overall stories. Creswell (2007) also highlighted the importance of the debriefer in allowing for catharsis and providing sympathy and support as the researcher processes feelings that are being evoked by the research process. This researcher fully submitted to debriefing activities. This was done on more than one occasion, due to the intense nature of the study. During these sessions, the researcher was reminded that in spite of the intensity of their ordeals, the participants were no longer in their abusive situations.

Another very important verification activity employed in this study was that of reflexive journaling carried out by the researcher. Hays and Singh (2012) highlighted the crucial purpose served by documenting reflections pertaining to the impact of the study on the person of the researcher as the study progresses. According to Hays and Singh various aspects of any study may impact the researcher, including reactions to participants, the content of their stories, and the need for flexibility in data collection methods. In this study, the researcher made full use of this journaling activity, using it to off-load the negative feelings that emerged while the participants told their stories, and appeared in some cases to re-live their traumatic experiences. The researcher's journaling activity formed an audit trail that provided a record of the nuances associated with this particular study (Hays & Singh, 2012). This audit trail recorded the flow of work carried out during this study, as well as the pauses, and the changes in strategy, as data were collected and analyzed.

From a total of about eight possible verification techniques, Creswell (2007) indicated that at least two should be used for true demonstration of rigor. In this study, the three techniques highlighted and implemented were member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling. These were found to be adequate, as they facilitated satisfactory trustworthiness of findings.

Ethical Considerations

Re-traumatization of Participants

The traumatic and painful nature of physical abuse warrants the utmost care and sensitivity when interviewing participants. This is important to bear in mind because of the risk of re-traumatizing these individuals, which would contravene the ethical mandate of doing no harm to participants during the process of research. Kaminer (2006) examined the matter of re-telling of traumatic experiences as a component of therapeutic care for trauma survivors. She highlighted the fact that this can re-traumatize the client, and the therapist must, therefore, manage the situation effectively. This information was borne in mind during the study, especially since the context was not a therapeutic one.

Care for Participants' Well-Being During and After Interview

Kaminer (2006) mentioned the positive impact on traumatized individuals when they are allowed to retell their stories within the context of an adequate support system before and after recounting their experiences. Kaminer also highlighted the role played by personality type of each individual, in how they are affected afterwards. In keeping with the ethical mandate of doing no harm, participants were thoroughly informed beforehand of the ramifications of participating in the study. They were pre-screened to ascertain their psychological state and general capability to participate in the study. The

prescreening instruments, the BDI-II and the TSC-40, were quite adequate for this research (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996; Briere, 1996 respectively), as they effectively indicated the level of trauma symptomatology within participants. Their option to discontinue the interviewing process at any point was made very clear, and regardless of pre-screening results, they were closely monitored for undue stress or an oncoming break with reality. The researcher was constantly aware of these risks and possibilities, and was careful to encourage the individuals to pause and recover themselves, when necessary.

Provisions were made for competent mental health personnel to effectively attend to participants' psychological, emotional, and physical needs during the interviewing process, should the need arise. After the interview, appropriate arrangements were made for participants to be referred to receive counseling from competent counselors, for up to three sessions, if needed.

Research Team and Participants' Physical Safety

Of importance and grave concern to many, nationally and internationally, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) (2013), was the fact that certain areas of urban Jamaica are reputedly known for very violent activities, and this violence is reflected in many abusive males who reside therein (Jamaica Observer, 2013). As a result, the physical safety of participants, researcher, and support team might be at risk for reprisals from former male partners or others, if confidentiality about the women's participation was breached. This study represented a situation in which maintaining confidentiality was a matter of life and death. Bearing in mind, therefore, that maintaining privacy and designating safe locations for interviews were

crucial, all interviews were carried out in safe, private, and neutral locations away from risk of sudden eruption of violence, as well as possible disclosure of interview activities.

Researcher's Psychological Care

Very serious consideration was given to the fact that the researcher in this study of very painful, negative phenomena was the main conduit for data collection and analysis, yet human, fallible, and emotional (Hays & Singh, 2012). It was, therefore, most important for the researcher to constantly self-monitor, and to pause and step away from the process temporarily when necessary, in order to address the negative effects of the data on her psyche.

The researcher frequently consulted with her dissertation chair and other committee members for support and guidance throughout this process. Researcher debriefing activities provided an opportunity and space for the researcher to temporarily withdraw from the research process when it became psychologically overwhelming (Hays & Singh, 2012). During these debriefing activities, the researcher was assisted by a trained mental health professional toward effective processing of the unfolding study. This facilitated constant self-monitoring and bracketing of personal views about the phenomenon by the researcher. The untainted emergence of participants' views about their experiences was, therefore, preserved, as well as the psychological well-being of the researcher.

Summary

This qualitative study using phenomenological-transcendental qualitative methodology was expected to provide valuable information about the inner-world of women who were physically abused in intimate partner relationships. For this study,

eleven women were interviewed within designated, secure locations, until data saturation occurred. These women were with their partners for at least two years before leaving, and were between 40 and 60 years old. This study has yielded findings that went beyond the outer world of speculation and hypothesizing, providing definitive information for counselors and the counseling field, caregivers, clergy, family members, and other relevant stakeholders related to this subject. The findings have provided a “face-to-face” view of the victim’s abusive world from her perspective. The counseling world and others can very clearly hear from “her” about what she thinks and feels, the meanings that she places on her abusive experiences, and the circumstances that led her to remain in the abusive situation for the time that she did. This information brings counselors and other helpers to a closer understanding of how victims need to empower themselves and seek safety from the abuse. Based on the findings the impact of a study of this nature, generated from within the Jamaican context, has great potential value for both the nation, and the international community. An examination of the findings of this study, and comparison of these findings with extant literature, are activities explicated in Chapters III and IV—revealing undeniably illuminating, useful, and very powerful information.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A transcendental phenomenological qualitative methodology was used in this study to explore the lived experiences of physically abused Jamaican female intimate partners by their male partners. This methodology was ideally suited for the stated purpose, as it focused on garnering the participants' perspectives on their experiences of abuse, in their purest form. As per Moustakas' (1994) directives for this methodology, textural and structural descriptions were extracted from analyzed transcripts of each participant. The textural description provides details about the nature of the experience, highlighting the elements that illustrate "what" the experience was like for each participant. In addition, the structural description reflects "how" the participant experienced the phenomenon as it relates to the context that provided the background for feelings, thoughts, and motivations during the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

This chapter first describes an overview of the demographics of the 11 women who participated in this study, followed by their individual profiles. These profiles include textural and structural descriptions of their abusive experiences, and the conceptual maps that they created. The major themes and invariant constituents that emerged from their analyzed transcripts and conceptual maps are then illustrated.

It should be noted that each participant's story will be presented in her own voice, using Jamaican patois in some instances, which is a normal way of communicating in everyday conversation. Examples of words used in patois versus conventional words include the word, "thump," which translates to "punch;" "buss ass;" which translates to "beaten up or beating;" "im," which translates to "him" or "he;" and "di," which translates to "the." For ease of understanding, translations for certain Jamaican words will be placed in brackets within the women's quoted comments.

The following research questions guided the data collection process:

4. What is the essence of the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained with their abusive spouses for some time before deciding to leave?
5. What influences and conditions affected the women's decision to remain in their abusive contexts for the period of time that they did?
6. How do the findings of this study compare with extant literature on this topic?

Demographic Data

The researcher sought the assistance of domestic violence shelter managers, mental health and medical practitioners, and members of the clergy to identify and make connections with women who were likely to fit the criteria for the study. These individuals were furnished with all relevant information about the study and its inclusion criteria. There were 15 women who were nominated, but only 11 met inclusion criteria and participated in the study. The women who were nominated gave permission for the researcher to contact them by telephone, and prescreening was conducted via this medium. The individuals who were selected all fulfilled the criteria as per the

demographic and mental health screening guidelines. Due to the delicate nature of this study, only general demographic details will be provided so as to prevent, as best as possible, putting any participant at risk of being identified.

The participants were Jamaican women aged 40 to 60 years old, and they were all living apart from their partners. At the time of their abusive experiences, their ages ranged from 20 to 48 years old. Eight of them were married to their partners during the abuse, and the others were in common-law relationships. With respect to educational status, one participant had not completed high school, two had completed graduate studies, and the remainder had completed, or were in the process of completing, their first degree. With the exception of two individuals, the women were employed within organizations in various sectors, such as banking, teaching, law enforcement, mental health services, and medical services. The other two women were self-employed. Ten of the 11 women were employed during their abusive experiences, and 10 women had separated from their partners and returned at least once during the abusive period. These women all had at least one child present and witnessing the abuse that took place. All but two individuals currently identified as Christians—Evangelical and otherwise—with various levels of activity/inactivity in their religious contexts. At the time of the abuse, three women identified as other than practicing Christians, one of whom identified as Rastafarian. With regard to socio-economic status (SES), the women identified themselves as being within the range of lower-middle class and middle class. None identified as poor or upper class. The mental health screening instruments both produced scores that reflected non-existent or insignificant levels of trauma symptomatology for all participants, which registered well within the mild range for inclusion criteria.

The (optimistic) objective of acquiring a level of diversity of participants was not achieved in an ideal sense, especially in the areas of SES, employment status, parental status, and religious status. It is felt, however, that this participant pool acquired from purposive sampling provided sufficient information for data saturation. These implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

Participant Profiles

This section provides an overview of participants' individual profiles. For the purposes of anonymity and protection, these individuals have been assigned pseudonyms, and their actual personal information has been withheld. Each participant allowed the researcher the liberty of selecting a pseudonym, as long as her real name was not revealed. Textural and structural descriptions are provided within each profile, as well as computer-generated models of their conceptual maps.

Of note, is the fact that each participant approached the CMT in her own unique way, for example, some did not make figures for clusters of concepts, but used “cry” faces, or “smiley” faces along with arrows to make connections, and placed meanings and feelings within their maps.

Selena's Profile

Selena was interviewed at one of the designated locations during the afternoon. She exuded eagerness and excitement to participate in the study, and stated that she was looking forward to the experience. Selena has a graduate degree, and is currently a manager in the corporate world. She expressed being a lover of people and family, which motivated her to volunteer for this study, with the hope that many will benefit from her contribution. In spite of her abusive experience, Selena reported she still wanted a

family. She stated, “I really lost out and my marriage didn’t survive. This is what I always wanted, a family, and I still do.”

Selena moved smoothly into the interview, commencing with a very frank account of the early stages of her relationship with her husband. She kept to task, and maintained focus throughout the process, honestly responding in great detail to the hard questions about the abusive experiences themselves. She maintained her composure, and at the end of her CMT, expressed the following as she sat back and viewed the conceptual map reflectively, “I’m really glad that I did this. This is such an experience; it’s different, it’s therapy like I never had before! I see my life!”

Textural description. An analysis of Selena’s transcript and conceptual map revealed the following main highlights of her experience: (a) hasty/rushed commitment and (b) systematic extinguishing of her individuality

Hasty/rushed commitment. Selena first shared how she and her husband had met in response to the question requesting this information. She made it clear that she was enamored with, and completely attracted to, him from the first time she saw him, because of how powerfully, confidently, and knowledgeably he led a Bible study she had attended. As a new convert who was looking for a mate, she considered how wonderful it would be to have such a man as husband and father of her children. She said she insisted that a mutual friend introduce them, and found that they seemed to “hit it off” from the very beginning. She stated that she was also impressed with his family, which she met very soon afterward, and considered how much of a blessing it would be to have a home like his. She reported that she, therefore, “pushed” the relationship. Her account highlights these facts:

I met his family eventually, and his father was the main pastor of his church. I delighted in that this was a Christian home and a Christian family that preached God's word...I was pushing it because I thought it would be nice to marry a minister and have a family grow up into a spiritual home like that...I pressured him into the marriage thing, and he yielded and decided to get married within one year.

She reported she would attend his church regularly, while still being a member of her own church, and would accompany him on speaking engagements all over the island on a regular basis. She said, "He preached at several places and I followed him; I realized I was hungry for the word, and so I followed him because the word followed him."

Selena admitted to conflict very early into their relationship when they just started courting. She explained:

I realized there were red flags that I ignored. We argued a lot, and he malice me a lot, so I would be the one to have to be calling him to make up back....There would be a lot of shouting, and his mother and my mother would say what is wrong why we shout at each other so much when they hear us talking on the phone. I ignored all of that and said this was all part of the relationship, and I just wanted to get married to him. And then we got married.

Selena mentioned that her parents and family members were not in favor of going forward with the marriage so quickly, especially in light of the constant severe conflicts they witnessed. She said, "My family and close friends were not supportive of my getting married so fast. Marriage was the better option because we were burning, and I ignored the warnings signs."

Systematic extinguishing of her individuality. Selena was asked to describe how and when the relationship became physically abusive. She began by calmly relating how the verbal and emotional abuse began and continued into marriage, even during the honeymoon. She told the following story including her understanding in hindsight:

Everything I liked and wanted to do he wanted to take from me....When we went on our honeymoon, we argued. I don't even remember what we argued

about...He wanted to cut the honeymoon short after the first night because he was angry at me. He wanted to take away something that I was looking forward to for so long...we started the journey back to Kingston, and I had to be begging him...He yielded and so we finished the honeymoon.

She also mentioned that, “he would say things to put me down and make me feel less of a person.” Selena reported the following regarding the first physically abusive incident two weeks after the honeymoon:

He gets so angry, and I remember those couple weeks that was when he hit me. That was shortly after we came back from our honeymoon, and I called my parents and they came over and I had scrapes...I can't remember why we argued but he hit me...openhanded and popped my chain, and I had scrapes on my chest. He hit me probably two times in my chest.

She paused at this point, looked down into her lap for a while, and appeared to be affected by the memories. When asked, she assured the researcher that she was fine. She resolutely resumed her storytelling with the following:

It continued; the verbal always led to the physical and he would put me down saying how I'm not worth anything and I'm stupid and hit me. Anytime we sit to solve something, he had this anger that led to him malice me for days. We had to go to church and pretend that we were doing ok as a couple, but we were not talking.

Selena added her commentary on the dynamics set up by her husband's beliefs:

This big thing with my husband is about submission. If I don't do what he wants me to do, he would get angry. He believed that the wife must follow her husband, so if I have an opinion about certain things, then that would be a problem... because of how he sees my role as a wife, and I think that's the major issue that we have.

Selena then recounted another incident that occurred a few months into the marriage: “I can't remember how the argument started, but he hit me in my face and the impact hit my mouth so it was bleeding and I ran out of the house and somebody saw.” She stated that she had told her parents and her husband's parents about the abusive incidents from the very beginning. Selena said her family was outraged, and his parents

were also shocked and saddened. The parents all spoke to him about the matter, and he appeared remorseful and apologized. According to her, however, things did not change.

Selena proceeded to describe another incident of abuse, and seemed to tremble as she recalled:

We were on the road to my parents' house, and I can't remember what happened in the car, but he was punching me in the face till my cheek was swollen, and I was in my room at my parents' house and he came in and apologized, and I hid it from my family. So a lot of things they don't know. This was six years into the marriage. I felt I was disappearing. He was punching me in the car. I hid it because I believed in protecting him because he was in ministry, and I didn't want anyone to look down on him in any way

With a face filled with emotion, Selena explained how she felt during the marriage:

I wanted to leave but didn't know how, and it was like I was in a prison. I became so disconnected from him although we were in the same house and I was performing like a wife. I didn't feel for him physically, so I wasn't functioning, and he would say, 'This is your fate in life so you just have to accept it.' I would resort to believing this was my fate.

Selena continued:

He had told me twice before to leave because I had no use, and I left and would go to my family, and they would encourage me not to return, but I came back because I wanted to try because marriage is important to me...I went back because the Holy Spirit said I should. I wanted to try. I insisted we get counseling. He started counseling with me and stopped and I continued to insist that we get counseling. I spoke to his father about it, but nothing was really done, so I continued counseling by myself.

Selena said she would repeatedly relate all that took place to his father, but was disappointed with the outcome:

His father knew about every one of these incidents, whenever things happened he was the one I ran to. He saw all the bruises but didn't take any action. It was just me giving him information. He was really sorry about it, but he didn't do anything about it, and it was really disappointing.

Selena proceeded to reflect on the emotional abuse, which was constant, and said:

Everything I liked and wanted to do, he wanted to take from me. If I wanted to do something with my life, he would say, “Why you want to become successful?” and he would discourage me against it. So it would be more me supporting his ministry and him not supporting my dream.”

Selena described her final experience of abuse with frankness and clarity:

The last one was when he told me to leave the third time and hit me in my face. It was the last time I moved out...That was the last straw; that was the last straw [shaking her head], and that was when I left for good....I decided I wasn't gonna go back. The only way I'd go back is if we do counseling separately. I spoke to his father about it, but nothing was really done.

Regarding that last day, Selena provided details about the dynamics of the exchange during which he verbally abused her:

He said something very disrespectful to me...and he walked up to me and hit me in the face and said, “You worth nothing! You worth nothing! Why are you here? You should just leave!” And that was my freedom to leave and I knew it was time to go because it would get worst, and that was when I felt free.

Selena was careful to explain that during her abusive experiences, she also experienced a need to cry out to God a great deal:

During those lonely times, it was just me and God. I fasted sometimes, prayed a lot, stayed in my room just talking to God about the situation, so my faith grew. I didn't understand anything but my faith grew, and I found strength leaning on God.

Selena explained she was finally delivered by this strength from God, which helped her through. She also mentioned with gratitude, her “family and accountability persons and counselor who strengthened me—Godly people who helped me a lot.”

Structural description. Selena's story constantly revealed the context within which she experienced physical abuse at the hands of her husband over the years. This context comprised what appeared to be internal and external elements that influenced “how” she experienced the physical abuse. The following have emerged from the transcripts as key elements of this context: (a) personal dreams and aspirations, (b)

personal and imposed faith beliefs (c) hope: tried and tested, (d) secrecy and pretense, and (e) husband's significant mental/behavioral issues.

Personal dreams and aspirations. Selena had married her husband despite their negative relationship during courting. She explained how she had pushed for marriage, because she loved the idea of being married to a pastor and being a part of what appeared to be a very godly family. She reported that she rationalized, found excuses, and bore the abuses, because of her attraction to men who were confident in what they were doing.

She said:

I took an interest in how he delivered the message. I saw confidence and power and great knowledge coming forth and I am attracted to men like that who are confident and know what they are about...I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored...and said this was all part of the relationship, and I just wanted to get married to him....As I said before, I really wanted to get married.

Furthermore, she reported rationalizing to herself that every relationship has problems.

Selena, therefore, experienced her abuse within the context of her dreams and aspirations to not just marry, but to marry this particular man. These dreams and aspirations motivated her to remain within the abusive situation for over a decade.

Personal and imposed values and faith beliefs. In response to the question of why she remained with her abusive husband for the time she did, Selena made it clear that aside from the fact that she wanted to marry this particular man—which was clearly illustrated in her previous statement—she also believed in the permanence of marriage. She indicated she was, therefore, willing to work through the problems as best she could. Her words clearly illustrated her views as she sadly said:

I had made a commitment before God and man to stay in there, so I got married to stay in there. Before God, I mean, leaving, I think God would be really upset with me, and I really valued my relationship, and I didn't want anything to mess it up.

Selena's statement revealed how much her personal views on marriage and personal views/beliefs about God's expectation of her as a wife, colored/contextualized her experiences of abuse, and influenced her thoughts and behaviors during the abuse. Based on her words, her faith also motivated her to return each time her husband told her to do so, after he had told her to leave. She explained this in the following fashion: "I left two times before, because he told me to leave, but then I went back because the Holy Spirit said I should. I wanted to try." She also said she "knew based on God's word that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change." Clearly, Selena's faith led her to accept the presence of such abuse in her life as trials that, according to the scriptures, must come. She said she, therefore, sought to obey the Holy Spirit when He instructed her to return, and to trust God to carry her through her situation.

Imposed views from others, specifically her husband, and father and mother-in-law, also formed a background or context that impacted Selena's abusive experience. Firstly, she explained how her husband's words to her resulted in her accepting her situation for a time. Her statement illustrated this: "What he did a lot too was use the scriptures a lot to make me feel guilty. There was a lot of manipulation with using scripture, and that was why I had to learn the scriptures for myself." She mentioned in addition to this, he told her "This is your fate in life, so you just have to accept it." She admitted, "I would resort to believing this was my fate." In addition, she said her husband spoke certain negative thoughts and views about her personhood as an individual, and specifically as his wife. The following statement by Selena revealed this: "If I wanted to do something with my life, he would say, 'Why you want to become

successful?’ and he would discourage me not to.” Selena further illustrated these negative views with another statement: “It continued—the verbal abuse always led to the physical. He would put me down, saying how I’m not worth anything and I’m stupid.” In addition, her report of his statements to her during their final exchange, after which she left and did not return, supported his disparaging views of her as noted here: “And he hit me in the face and said, ‘You worth nothing! You worth nothing!’”

Undoubtedly, Selena’s husband’s views and beliefs created a formidable background against which Selena’s abuse occurred. Her father-in-law’s responses and views also added to this context. Selena explained this with these words:

I would talk with his father...and he would encourage me to just work it out. Marriages are never perfect and this is just my cross to bear, so he would talk to my husband about it, maybe one time, and that was it, but he just said the Bible says it was my cross.

Selena’s mother-in-law also added to this rhetoric and reinforced this context. Selena related her comments in the following statement:

His mother knew; his siblings didn’t know, and she would more talk to him than his father, but, I mean, it’s her child, so she pushed me to make it work. She would say, “That’s what you signed up for!” That’s what she would say. She’s sorry I’m going through it, but that’s what I signed up for and I must just trust God. So that was her advice to me all the time.

Selena admitted she had believed them, and wanted to keep on believing them because doing so would preserve her dream of being married to this man-of-God. For a long while, therefore, she said she accepted and believed these views to be true, and lived in a life of abuse against this backdrop.

In essence, Selena’s story indicated she experienced physical abuse not only within the context of her personal values and faith beliefs, but also within a context of imposed religious beliefs—imposed by her father-in-law, who was now her pastor, her

mother-in-law, and her husband. She expressed how these imposed views served to manipulate her and make her feel guilty about leaving her abusive situation. Not knowing very much in the beginning as a new Christian and wife, she reportedly accepted what was said, and tried to live up to these beliefs. She reported that although she did not know much, she turned to God in her own way, cried out to Him, and He kept her and finally rescued her. Selena spoke about this in the following statement:

Always something would trigger his anger and he would malice me for days. During those lonely times, it was just me and God. I fasted sometimes, prayed a lot, stayed in my room just talking with God about the situation, so my faith grew. I didn't understand anything but my faith grew, and I found strength from leaning on God, and I believe that's what carried me through the whole tenure of the marriage. I found strength from God and I believed God had a plan in all of this.

Very importantly, Selena's account emphasized her acknowledgement of the preeminence of God's presence in her painful existence, which emerged as she sought Him in her neophyte way, and with the faith and little knowledge that she had. This was noted in her statement, "I didn't understand anything but my faith grew." Her statement illustrated that God's presence served to overrule and nullify all other views, giving her illumination, strength, and deliverance. She made the following statement:

I didn't know how God saw me, because I took all my counsel from my husband...so God had to mash that down for me to have that personal relationship with Him, so I don't repeat this cycle over again, and then I realized how much God sees me, how He sees me, how much he values me, and that's what I should expect from people. That's the big thing for me.

Hope: Tried and tested. An analysis of Selena's story revealed that she lived out her abusive experiences within a context of constant hope. She was hopeful that things would change because she was being obedient to God. The following statement illustrated this: "I was just hoping that things would just get better as we go along, you know?" She also emphatically said: "Yes there was hope. I knew based on God's word

that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change.” It was clear that Selena’s context of faith also provided a context of hope. This was hope that God, whom she obeyed to return home each time she left, would bring change. Selena added that because she was hopeful of change, she protected her husband at all times, and did not expose his behavior. She stated, “Protecting him was important; he was a minister, and protecting him was paramount. I was just hoping that things would just get better as we go along, you know?” Clearly, Selena experienced abuse and remained therein with hope that was tested throughout her entire experience. Hope for change seemed to have been at its lowest level at times, and might even have died, as she said, “I wanted to leave but didn’t know how, and it was like I was in a prison.” Her admitted acceptance of her fate, after being at a loss to figure out a means of escape from her “prison,” illustrated that for a period, Selena’s hope might have been extinguished.

Secrecy and pretense. An analysis of Selena’s transcript revealed how much she experienced physical abuse amidst a context of secrecy and pretense. She explained her situation in the following way:

Church was difficult. I had to put up a front to show people we were doing ok. Every Sunday and Thursday, it was like a show like we were on stage. He was a very private person, and he encouraged me to be private about what was happening, so I played the game as well.

According to Selena, she played along, and mentioned how normal her husband was at church. She explained this with the following statement:

When he’s at church, he’s more overt, and nobody would know....Things at church that people invite us to...he wouldn’t go, so I would go by myself and lie about it why he’s not there.

Selena explained the importance of protecting her husband in the following way: “Protecting him was important; he was a minister and protecting him was paramount.” This next statement served to emphasize her rationale: “He was punching me; I hid it because I believed in protecting him, because he was in ministry, and I didn’t want anyone to look down on him in any way.” Finally, toward the end of the interview, she made the following statement: “Eventually, I realized how sick God was of that—living a lie. Even though he wanted me to come back, he wasn’t getting counseling, so I wasn’t going to come back to live a lie again.” Selena was referring here to the final time when her husband hit her and she left for good. Selena finally sat upright in her chair, and spoke strongly as she poured her heart out in response to the question about what struck her as she reflected on her conceptual map. She said:

How much my marriage was just a pretense and a lie to cover up wrong because I thought that was what God expected. He would say to honor the marriage by keeping it confidential and whatever went on, I shouldn’t talk about it. But based on the scriptures, that wasn’t true. We need accountability, and if we are in trouble, we must seek help, so I was covering up a lie, and I was also protecting myself too. What people had to say was important and I didn’t want the name over my head to be a loser, that I really lost out and my marriage didn’t survive. This is what I always wanted, a family, and I still do, and I would hold on to anything to maintain that, no matter what.

Selena, therefore, played the game of pretense and secrecy, thinking that was what God required of her, but was also motivated by a desire to protect not just her husband and his ministry, but ultimately also herself.

Husband’s significant mental/behavioral issues. Finally, it must be acknowledged that Selena experienced her abuse within the context of what appeared to be significant mental health and/or behavioral conditions borne by her husband. Selena mentioned that from the early stages of their relationship during courting, he would

behave in ways that were emotionally and verbally abusive to her. She said the following: “The abuse started when we were dating—emotional and verbal abuse. He would say things to put me down and make me feel less of a person.” She also said after an argument on the first night of their honeymoon, “He wanted to cut the honeymoon short because he was angry at me. He wanted to take away something that I was looking forward to for so long.” These words further revealed anger management problems, and a desire to control and inflict emotional and physical pain. Her words confirmed this as she went on to state, “He gets so angry, and I remember those couple weeks that was when he hit me...shortly after we came back from our honeymoon.” She added:

It continued: the verbal always led to the physical, and he would put me down, saying how I’m not worth anything, and I’m stupid. Anytime we sit to solve something, he had this anger that led to him malicing me for days.

Selena continued to speak about the fact that “always something would trigger his anger,” which always seemed to be a precursor to his abusive behaviors. Selena spoke of the following incident: “I can’t remember what happened in the car, but he was hitting me in the face till my cheek was swollen.” One can only image the rage that would fuel such action.

This information provided glimpses of what might be deeply entrenched issues that have resulted in Selena’s husband behavior. Toward the end of the interview she was asked whether there were any meanings that she took from her experiences, and she said, “Now I understand how much he doesn’t like himself, and when you don’t like yourself, you can’t really like somebody else.” Undoubtedly, these statements made by Selena have all provided some insight into her husband’s mental/behavioral condition,

which served to contextualize her abuse at his hands. These issues impacted how Selena weathered her physically abusive experiences for over ten years.

Conceptual mapping task. Selena was excited to get to the conceptual map. She was encouraged to use whatever symbols she found most useful to link her ideas together. She focused on notes that addressed the following areas: (a) her hasty courting and marriage, (b) her abusive experiences, (c) her husband's views about submission and her role as a wife, (d) secrecy and difficulty pretending at church, (e) her in-laws' treatment of the situation, and (f) her time spent with God.

Selena chose to use arrows, lines, and colors from crayons on her map. She ran a thick black line through all the notes that highlighted her hasty courting and marriage, stating that this action was so wrong and a mistake from the very beginning. It appeared that she wanted to obliterate what was written on the notes. She indicated that her experience of this awful phenomenon of physical abuse began with very bad decisions on her part. Her abusive experiences were also marked though with a thick black line, which was also used to cluster them, and they were linked to her husband's views on submission and her role as a wife. Her intention was to indicate the connection between her husband's views and behavior toward her. Selena used red to highlight the difficulty of pretending at church and secrecy, her in-laws' treatment of the situation, and her time spent with God. She placed the notes representing difficulties at church and her in-law's treatment together, explaining how hard it was for her living from day to day. She indicated her time spent with God was all around, but did not know how to display that. She said that God was always there, even when she did not understand very much about how He works. An overview of her conceptual map is illustrated in Figure 1.

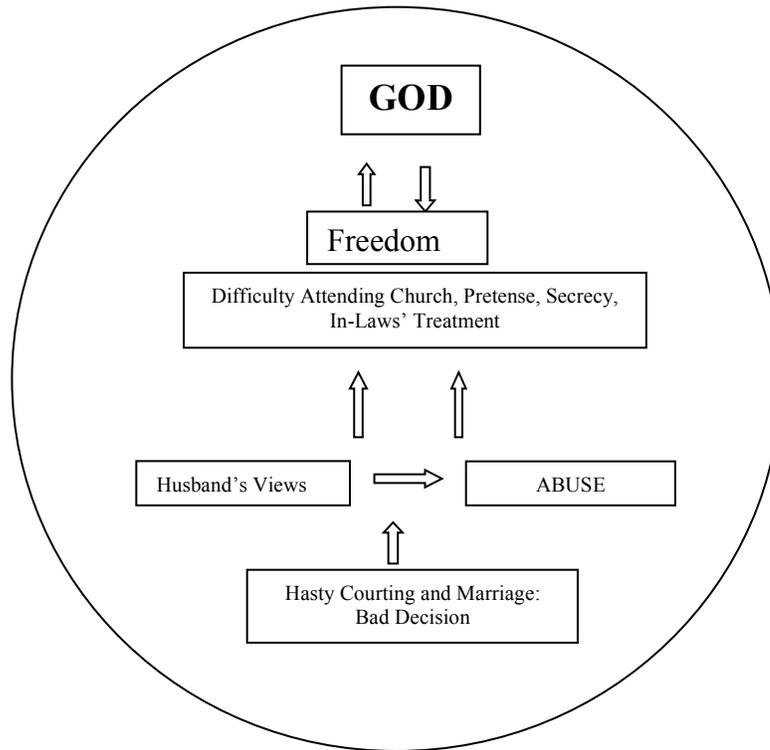


Figure 1. Selena's conceptual map

In summary, Selena's analyzed transcript and conceptual map highlighted the fact that throughout the many dynamics of what she experienced and the context of her physically abusive experiences, she felt she had learned and grown significantly. Her words reflected this as she took a final look at her map at the end of the interview process and resolutely said:

It all comes down to knowing myself and knowing what I'm about and how God sees me, because, clearly, I didn't value myself enough because I allowed my husband to step all over me, and I think my self-esteem was really low, even before I came into the marriage. It just showed itself up even more so, as he did what he did with me, you know? So knowing how God sees me, that should be important, and when I know that, then I would set boundaries, because I didn't have any boundaries at all because I thought it was his right to do whatever he wanted to do with me. I didn't have any rights.

Selena ended confidently with the following words:

I didn't know how God saw me, because I took all my counsel from my husband, because I believed he was a man-of-God. He should know, and I didn't really have to know God for myself. He was the mediator, so God had to mash that down for me to have that personal relationship with him so I don't repeat this cycle over again [a significant pause]—and then I realized how much God sees me, how much he values me, and that's what I should expect from people. That's the big thing for me.

Aurora's Profile

Aurora was interviewed early in the morning at one of the designated locations. She seemed to be mentally prepared for the upcoming activity, and chatted comfortably about what she had encountered on her journey to the location. Aurora is a civil servant who is very successful in her field, and has been separated from her abusive partner for several years. She has a graduate degree and three children, all of whom reside with her.

Aurora proceeded through the interview with determination and focus, ensuring at all times that she spoke clearly into the microphone. Although she was obviously emotionally affected as she recalled certain aspects of her experiences, she composed herself and continued to the end of her interview. Her responses were honest and detailed, and at the end of the interview, she said with emotion, "I did enjoy this, because I feel very passionate about this part of my life."

Textural description. There were two primary highlights that emerged from Aurora's transcript and conceptual map, that provided a textural description for her abusive experiences: (a) faith-led commitment despite warnings; and (b) faith gradually destroyed by abuse.

Faith-led commitment despite warnings. Aurora was first asked to relate how she met her husband, and she responded:

My ex-husband and I met pretty much in the Jamaican term, in the church. I was a young girl...and attended my religion in very strict form, in a very strict household, where my mother instilled biblical principles, not to have sex outside of marriage from a biblical and moral standpoint. She encouraged me to talk to somebody in the church. Going to meetings, I came upon him. He looked like a good candidate as he participated in the church and religious activities and looked like he fit the bill.

She went on to express that she met immediate opposition from her family when she told them of her interest. She stated that their opposition confused her, because she had chosen someone in the church, just as she had been taught:

I was 19 to 20, going to...school. I was getting another perspective that threw me out. My brother was saying this man was...years older than I am at the time, and obviously more exposed than I—never had any children. They sat me down...and said they believed we were of two different educational levels. This was conflicting to me, because this was of the Bible; this was the Lord; this was religion, so I couldn't understand the social aspect of relationships that this could impact things later on. This just did not dawn on me at the tender age of 19 to 20.

She also mentioned that as a young girl, she wanted to have "certain experiences," so she disregarded the warnings of her family:

Coupled with the fact that at that age, you feel that you want to be exposed to certain experiences, but you want to do it the right way. So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about it and weighing and I did face challenges; put aside all weighing of things and considering, as far as I'm concerned.

Aurora said, with her choice to proceed with the relationship came challenges, but it was her husband's physically abusive actions that made her miserable. She explained that she proceeded because she felt her actions were in keeping with her faith; furthermore, she was immature and did not understand certain things:

So I went into the relationship and there was pulling and shoving when he was upset...From that time I was miserable because I am trying to develop as a human being, number one, and number two, not understanding certain aspects of life; I wasn't mature. Some persons, even at 19 would have developed more, but I had not accelerated and matured. I thought this is religion! It must work! What are you talking about?

Based on her faith, Aurora reported she proceeded into a relationship in which she was abused even before marriage, in spite of her family's warnings about the mismatch between her and her partner.

Faith gradually destroyed by abuse. Aurora experienced continued abuse in marriage but still held on to her views that according to God, things must be worked out:

Now married, going through all the engagement with the pushing and shoving, knowing something is not right, and didn't have the strength to deal with it. I don't even know if it's just strength, because in my view, it was all about God, religion, and in my view, God says you must make it work. That was my interpretation.

She described her first abusive experience after marriage:

It was very early in the marriage, within or less than six months, when I got the slap of my life. It was like "Behave yourself! What's wrong with you woman?" I was like, "Seriously?" It was openhanded, not fist, not to floor me, but I got a slap... that night, I walked out of that house at 11 o'clock at night, and returned to my mother's house, so you see, I wasn't very mature at 20 to 21. I went back to safety.

Aurora explained she would regularly leave her husband after he abused her and return to her mother's home. Her mother and siblings would encourage her to stay each time, but she would obey her Church Elders who would intervene and tell her to return home. She said her husband would also come for her and demand that she returned home where she belonged:

I stayed at mama for a while, and he would always come back for me or call and encourage me to come home. And you know the religious body would always encourage you to go back: "You're his wife; you need to work out your problems." But he didn't feel like he had a problem; he didn't feel he did anything wrong... When the Elders come in my family would say don't go back; leopard don't change his spot. I was a very spiritual person at heart, and I went back, and he would be nice and say he's sorry. But I didn't understand the sorry, because he always demanded because you're his wife who belongs—belongs at home, but home? What kind of home?"

Aurora mentioned she would keep sneaking out when she was at her mother's home, and go back to her husband for sex because she felt it was her duty not to deny him:

So I keep going back to my husband; I would sneak out and go, and eventually I would go back to him...the Bible says there is no divorce; You're trying to live a moral life, so I went back.... I would thief out and go to him and have sex without mama knowing...I feel I cannot say no to him.

Aurora described how her husband, who was desperate for sex when she had left him for an extended time, would meet her at her workplace, and once had raped her on the road:

Sometimes he would meet me at the workplace, and by now he was desperate for sex, and he hold me down on the ground on the road where it's quiet at that, in public. I'll never forget as long as I live. Why would he do that to me? I don't think he understands what he did to me....He raped me, and look where he raped me, really? Unconscionable!

Aurora also explained how he physically assaulted her in her private parts when she didn't want to have sex with him:

I'm trying to tow the line because I don't want the child to see this. If I don't want to give him sex, it's another trauma—you know, you living but it don't mean anything anymore. He pushed his finger in there and pulled, and I screamed! I had to go to the doctor because he damaged me.

She also described how he beat her badly on the road when he had returned home to find that she had left after a beating:

He came and realized I was gone, and give me the beat-up of my life on the road. My boss came out and saw and said he was going to shoot the man. On the road, downtown—Lick down, kick, thump, and mi fight im back!

Aurora recounted an incident she labeled as her wake-up call:

After I had the baby I decided I would leave, and he cut up my sheet to show me what he will do with me if I leave. And I was saying "I'm tired of this, tired of this," and he just shot me a box [sudden slap in the face]; you could stay in the living room and hear it, and he didn't realize that the baby saw the box and ran into the room. And one day while taking the baby to kindergarten school, he was doing something wrong and I said, "If you do that I'm going to slap you!" He said to me, "I-If u lap me a goin tell daddy mek him bass you!" [If you slap me I will tell daddy and make him box/slap you]. Jesus, I nearly dropped down! He

was four and the child looked at me and said...if I slapped him, he would tell his bad daddy and let him box me in the face. I tell you, that-was-my-wake-up call!

She also spoke about her husband's abusive behavior toward her older son who was 10 years old at the time, and explained that this incident was a major motivator for her to leave:

When he saw my son was always on my side he beat him, break up some mop stick on him and tell him he's always taking up for me. I carried him to hospital and reported it. His hand was swollen instantly. He was taking out his anger on the child because the child looking like he recognized what is going on and did not like what he saw, but he's not disrespecting him. He doesn't like when you're not on his side. At the hospital he came running in, "Everything alright?" I said, "This is his father who beat him like this." The doctors just did the X-rays and that's it. I didn't report it to the police. So I got my act together, and planned, and left. I said he would have to kill me.

When Aurora was asked about the role of her faith in the midst of the abusive experiences, she said:

My spirituality died! My faith was so broken down. You know you love God and you want to serve God, but now you no longer believe in it, because there are so many persons living a lie and all of those things have weakened you spiritually...My spirituality broke down. I tried following the teachings, and it is a part of you. And you don't believe anything better exists outside there...I was keeping those guidelines in mind. All my efforts to keep the guidelines destroyed my faith completely—completely! I was battling; having inner conflicts...I always looked unhappy. Try to do the right things and this is what I get for it.

Based on her words, Aurora had come to the point where her faith had died.

However, toward the end of the interview, when she was asked about the meaning she ascribed to her experience, she responded:

I had reached a point where I lost faith in God, but as a youngster, I would talk to God, and I still do now. Even though I had been blaming Him for the moment, afterwards I go back and see that might have been for the best. Even now with my two beautiful children...I am a more prayerful person, and maturity has given me strength that I needed.

Aurora's faith which was strongly evident in her life since childhood, by her own words, was seen to have been sorely tested against her abuses, and had died. She explained how she had gained strength as she matured, and fortunately, at the time of her interview, she made it clear that her faith was present and active again, having been reestablished sometime after she left her abusive husband for good.

Structural description. Aurora experienced her abuse against the background of the following contextualizing elements: (a) faith, (b) immaturity, (c) family presence and views, and (d) shame and secrecy.

Faith. In telling her story, Aurora made it clear that her faith, based on her religious beliefs, provided the background for her life before, and during her abuse. She mentioned she had chosen her husband based on guidelines associated with her faith:

I attended my religion in very strict form, in a very strict household, where my mother instilled biblical principles, not to have sex outside of marriage from a biblical and moral standpoint. She encouraged me to talk to somebody in the church. Going to meetings, I came upon him. He looked like a good candidate as he participated in the church and religious activities and looked like he fit the bill.

She admitted she disregarded the warnings she had received from her family, and the warning of her husband's abusive behavior before marriage, and proceeded with the marriage, because she felt it was in keeping with her faith. She acknowledged that she soon realized, however, that something was wrong:

Now married, going through all the engagement with the pushing and shoving, knowing something is not right, and didn't have the strength to deal with it. I don't even know if it's just strength, because in my view, it was all about God, religion, and in my view, God says you must make it work. That was my interpretation.

Aurora stated she experienced continued abuse, and she would repeatedly leave her husband, and then return to him based on the urgings of the religious leaders. She spoke about how she did so until her faith was destroyed:

My spirituality died! My faith was so broken down. You know you love God and you want to serve God, but now you no longer believe in it, because there are so many persons living a lie and all of those things have weakened you spiritually. My spirituality broke down. I tried following the teachings, and it is a part of you. And you don't believe anything better exists outside there...I was keeping those guidelines in mind. All my efforts to keep the guidelines destroyed my faith completely—completely! I was battling; having inner conflicts...I always looked unhappy. Try to do the right things and this is what I get for it.

Aurora's words clearly illustrated how her faith contextualized all aspects of her abusive experiences until the abuses destroyed her faith. She described how this led to an acceptance of her fate and very negative responses to her continued abuses:

Even though there is acceptance, a part of you wanted escape, and when he was not around, a part of you wish him dead. You feel this is the only way I can get out of this bondage of religion. Remember now, I can't divorce, and I want God, and I picture a nice life with my children going to church. I said, "God forgive me but I wish he would die! I wish he would die and come out of my life!" But I know this is not right. Why am I thinking like that? Oh God, this is that is the only way I can move on and be free and not be walking around with guilt, and be free.

Aurora continued to explain the downward spiral of her mental state as her abuse continued and she found herself pregnant with her second child:

I was shocked to find myself pregnant. Mama said mi a fool fi go have another child again and look what mi going through. Mi all tell myself that something wrong with me. All suicidal thought come to me you know...and I look at a bottle of pills because I could see no way out. I wanted to end my life. I was just unhappy, just unhappy; I was just unhappy and I can't be unhappy anymore, you know? Just unhappy [clapping her hands agitatedly with her eyes filling with tears]. I-I wish I could be sick and just be in hospital just to get away—mi no know. You pray to be sick in hospital for somebody to take care of you and you don't have to deal with life. I don't know, honestly, honestly [very emotional with her eyes brimming with tears, she paused]. I just wanted to die; I just couldn't do it anymore [crying and paused for a few seconds]. But I'm here; I don't know how.

Despite the downward spiral as her faith was destroyed by her abusive experiences, Aurora's words attested to the fact that it had somehow been restored after she finally left her husband for the last time. Her faith had, in fact, contextualized her abusive experiences from their beginning to their very end. She said:

I had reached a point where I lost faith in God, but as a youngster, I would talk to God, and I still do now. Even though I had been blaming Him for the moment, afterwards I go back and see that might have been for the best. Even now with my two beautiful children...I am a more prayerful person, and maturity has given me strength that I needed.

Immaturity. It was evident from Aurora's account that her youth and immaturity impacted how she experienced her abuse. According to Aurora, her decision to proceed with her choice of husband was colored by her lack of understanding of certain matters of life, and also by her desire to experience life within the ambit of her faith guidelines:

I couldn't understand the social aspect of relationships that this could impact things later on. This just did not dawn on me at the tender age of 19 to 20. Coupled with the fact that at that age, you feel that you want to be exposed to certain experiences, but you want to do it the right way. So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about it and weighing and I did face challenges."

Aurora described how her immaturity led to her response of returning to her mother's home after her first abusive experience shortly after she was married:

It was very early in the marriage, within or less than six months, when I got the slap of my life. It was like, "Behave yourself! What's wrong with you woman?" I was like, "Seriously?" It was openhanded, not fist, not to floor me, but I got a slap...that night, I walked out of that house at 11 o'clock at night, and returned to my mother's house, so you see, I wasn't very mature at 20 to 21. I went back to safety.

In addition, she described her ignorance and fear of the world beyond her faith, which accompanied her immaturity: "I just don't know what to expect and I wasn't exposed to the world, so I'm afraid to step out in the world." Aurora reported that

eventually, she had matured through the abuse, and it was her maturity that helped to strengthen her: “I am a more prayerful person, and maturity has given strength that I needed.”

Family presence and views. Aurora’s story reflected the presence and impact of her family and their views throughout her entire abusive journey. First, they warned that she and the man she had chosen were not a good fit: “They sat me down...and said they believed we were of two different educational levels. This was conflicting to me.” She added she ignored their words: “So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about it.” Aurora related how she went back to the safety of her family after her first abuse, “I got a slap...that night; I walked out of that house at 11 o’clock at night, and returned to my mother’s house. I went back to safety.” She explained how she told her mother, and her mother told her brother, who went and warned her husband against hitting her again: “I told my mother everything, making the situation worse, and she told my older brother, and he went there and warned him and told him not to put his hand on me.” Aurora’s account reflected the presence of her family and their support up to a point. It also reflected their disappointment and negative views of her, based on her decision to constantly return to her abusive relationship:

Mama cussing me, and she just tired of me and me tired of me; me tired of disappointing people; and mi brother now, not dealing with me anymore, and him say mi a fool, wid no ambition; something must be wrong with me fi have man a batter me so. Dem just tink me a problem child.

She explained how her mother panicked when she started wishing her husband would die: “I wished he would die. Mama panicked because she felt if he didn’t die naturally, I would kill him.” She explained that through it all, her mother never

abandoned her. It was at her mother's home that she made her last stand, and never returned to her husband:

We were older and he is still beating me. I didn't want to be 60 and still running away from him. My family, especially my brother said it's up to me. I need to get my act together....Only my mother, because she is named mother, fought for me. She did not abandon me. This made me feel guilty. He made a scene at my mother's home when I left, and I was so afraid, so afraid.

Aurora's account illustrated the constant presence of her family and their views throughout her entire ordeal. Her account also revealed that her family, in particular, her mother, supported her during her final stand against her abusive husband and gave her refuge in her time of need.

Shame and secrecy. Aurora's story reflected the shame and secrecy that contextualized her abusive relationship, and led her to remain in it for almost 20 years. From the early stages after marriage, she said, "It was too embarrassing to go back..." She explained that couldn't allow her church folk to know she was being beaten:

And if you turn to the church, which is where you think you belong, you don't want to tell anybody because it is too private to talk about it, that you're being beaten by your husband; that you're so unhappy.

She continued as she mentioned the regret and shame she felt regarding her decision to proceed with the relationship, and the repeated abuse she encountered as she went back and forth, in and out of it:

I start going back and thinking I should have married a guy I knew at school. I would have been much happier. There's regret, so much regret, but you keep going back because every time there is an argument, I go back, and you get, "You see, just what we tell you all the time." And you just feel shamed.

Aurora sadly described the shame she felt within herself after she became pregnant again, and how negatively she thought of herself, just as her family did: "I was shocked to find myself pregnant. Mama said mi a fool fi go have another child again,

and look what mi going through. Mi all tell myself that something wrong with me.”

Aurora explained how the secrecy and shame continued to be perpetuated:

You never give your friends the full truth because they are going to say how could you have taken all of that, seriously, are you for real? You look like an idiot because nobody in their right mind would stay after certain things, you know?

She added how she was afraid to disclose details of the abuse in counseling sessions for fear of reprisal afterward: “I would be afraid to talk in counseling sessions and I would be afraid to go home because I talked too much and I’m going to get beaten up.”

In summary, Aurora’s story revealed that she experienced her abuse against a background that included her faith, immaturity, family presence and views, and shame coupled with secrecy. These factors appeared to have consistently influenced her thoughts, feelings, and motivations, as she lived through almost two decades of abuse.

Conceptual mapping task. Aurora moved reflectively into the conceptual mapping task (CMT) as she viewed the notes and spoke, as it were, to herself. As she shifted the notes around, her comments were “Sorry, but I was the one who caused it all.” She clustered together all notes that addressed her disregard of her family’s warnings, and encompassed the early stages of abuse. She marked them through with black markers and called them “dark days.” She clustered all the notes that referred to her mother and said, still very much to herself, “Mama loved me.” She placed smiley faces in yellow on them. She sounded quite sad as she continued to reflect and arrange her map. She placed a note that referred to the fact that she was fired after her boss witnessed the fight between her and her husband on the road, with the remaining notes that addressed her life. She explained, “My boss let me go because they had lost respect for me.” She had said earlier regarding what had happened after that fight that her boss witnessed:

He said he was going to beg Jehovah God to help him to be a better Christian, and I was young, you know...I almost collapsed when I found out I was pregnant after that, and I lost my job. I believe my boss fired me because of that, after I went on maternity leave. I believe my boss lost respect for me because I went back to him after the beating.

Aurora proceeded with her CMT and isolated a few notes: She marked with a large black “X” on the note that referred to her being raped on the road and placed it by itself; she added the following words to a note that referred to her statement that she felt she has wasted 19 years of life, “But I’m still hopeful, and I do believe in God!!” She also placed a smiley face on the note that referred to the date she left “after...unhappy years,” and added in bright purple, “The happiest day of my life!” Aurora’s conceptual map ended with clusters and individual notes indicating the arrangement depicted in Figure 2.

As Aurora surveyed her map, she was asked what struck her as she looked at it. She said, “I’m glad I did this. I see it all before me.” She was then asked to state what struck her as she reflected on the map. She said:

I left...years now, and the reality is this was my reality then, and I still cannot understand, and still blame myself why didn’t I leave earlier. Why was I destroying me? I started to blame religion. What was I doing for me? Why did I think I had to stay? When you see people in it now, you have an appreciation of what it’s like. You have to be able to have the strength to know when something is not good for you, and move on, and do not self-destruct!

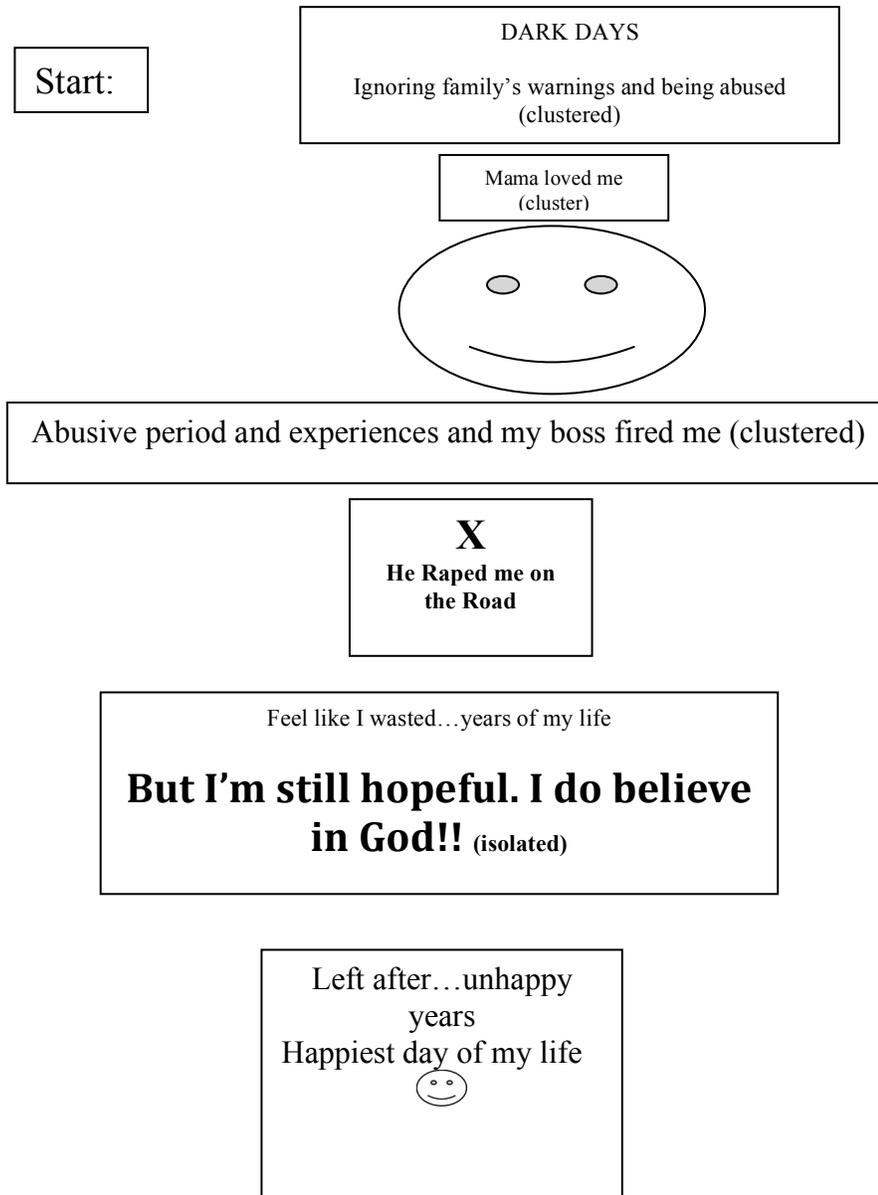


Figure 2: Aurora's conceptual map

She was then asked to identify the most important thing for her to understand, and she said in a loud strong voice, speaking directly into the microphone:

The most important is you as an individual, who you are, what it is you want, then assess your environment and how that is going to help you grow, spiritually, financially, emotionally or physically. In life you have to have a very strong sense of character...if I was strong I would have left. People say you're strong to have gone through this, but the strength lies in leaving, being able to step away,

walk away from the things that are hurting me to the core and making me so unhappy, that is going against who I am, what I want.

Finally, Aurora was asked to state what meaning she has been able to take from her experience, and she responded in a sober tone:

I had reached the point where I lost faith in God, but as a youngster I would talk to God, and I still do it now. Even though I had been blaming him for the moment, afterwards I go back and see that might have been for the best. Even with my two beautiful children that I now have. I am a more prayerful person, and maturity has given strength that I needed.

She ended the interview by stating with a smile on her face:

I did enjoy this because I feel very passionate about this part of my life. I understand what others go through and only pray they have the strength to say, whatever it takes, I have to step out. For me, there is no way, whether 60, 70, 80, a man is ever going to abuse me again, physically, emotionally, or otherwise, and I stay.

Having said that, she breathed in, held her breath for a few seconds, and then breathed out loudly. She then hugged the researcher, signifying she was done.

Callie's Profile

Callie works in the field of marketing in the country's capital, Kingston. She is qualified beyond high school level, and has some technical skills training. Callie is a soft-spoken person, who is very good at her job, because she knows just how to please her customers.

Callie approached the interview in a gentle and assured manner. She responded succinctly to questions that were asked. Sometimes she had to be prompted in order to bring out more details and completely answer the questions. At times, she seemed to be a bit shy, embarrassed, or both, to be talking about her story.

Textural description. Callie's transcript revealed she experienced physical abuse without warning, after over a decade of living together with her partner. She was

asked how she had met her partner, and she said they had a mutual friend who brought them together. She mentioned things were good between them, and within a year, she and her son moved in with him:

The early stages were good, and we would go out a lot... Within the same year of meeting him, my son and I moved in with him to a home of our own. We had only regular cussing that couples go through. I had a daughter with him during that time and everything was ok.

Callie's first abusive experience came without warning after she and her partner had been together for over a decade. He started fussing with her, and then began hitting her:

In the...year before I left, he started fussing with me about my calling a male on the phone. I was a bit shocked when he said that. I told him it was my sister, and he started hitting me and damaged my hand. He had to take me to see the doctor, and he said how he was sorry and it would not happen again. This is the first time this has ever happened to me, and we always talk about this together when we hear these things on the radio. I was really shocked.

She went on to describe the next incident:

After that I was at work and was to go to PTA meeting with my daughter, and he was to pick me up along with my daughter who was with me. When he came to the office, I was talking on the phone to a client, job-related, and I was changing my daughter to go to the meeting, so I told him I was coming. When we were ready and walking out, he kicked me from behind, saying I am inside there talking to man and he's out there waiting for me. Then he hit me in my face, and you ever hear people say they see blinkie, well I saw blinkie that day! I saw stars when he hit me in the face...It was a hard hit, and he quarreled with me all the way and drive like a madman, and I'm glad he left me at school, because it would probably be bad if we went home. I was shaking.

Callie mentioned that he would usually apologize afterwards, and then subsequent assaults would be repeated, "out of the blue":

It would be the same old story, where he apologized and things went back to normal, then started all over again. Out of the blue, I would just get a hit. Coming home from work, because I work late at nights, he would just hit me. It's about five times I remember him hitting me; five occasions he hit me and it's always about this phone thing.

Callie stated that after a while, her son migrated, and she and their daughter lived with him. She described another beating incident that was unexpected:

I went home and needed something on the road at the store to finish dinner, and he willingly went, but when he came back, the man just started beating me, I remember it was a Saturday when I came home early from work. I have the food in my hand and we're going to eat and him just—one lick! Him tek up the fan and hit me-why?

Callie described the final incident, with her usually soft voice increasing in volume as she spoke:

He was beating me in the house, and the thing that he was using hit my daughter, and I ran out of the house, and he said I should come back in and I said I'm not going back inside. And then that was when I decided I would leave, because this man is going to kill me. So I ran out and went around to my neighbor, bare-footed and all, and I took my daughter you know...

Callie sat for a while without speaking, clearly reflecting and remembering, and then she pointed to a scar on her face and said:

You see this scar on my face; he took my same phone and chopped me in my face [laughed wryly]. If I had stayed with him, he would have killed me; he told me he would. When in a rage, he told me he would kill me. One Sunday morning I was making breakfast, and he accused me of talking to man on the phone. Now if I was doing that, wouldn't I have the phone with me all the time? The phone was in the bedroom and he just came to me in the kitchen and gave me one lick with the phone in my face and cut me.

She continued hurriedly without pausing, "Another time I was putting my daughter to bed and he hit me right there and then; I don't know why; for no reason at all, and cussing me out." She explained that she stayed in the relationship because of her daughter; "The reason I stayed was because of my daughter, which was the wrong thing to do." She continued to explain:

I was supporting us. I don't know how she would feel not being with her father. I was thinking of her, but in the long run, she would have preferred for me to get

out of it, although she was young, she was glad, because her father wasn't abusing me anymore; she was glad.

She said that in a discussion with her daughter in present tense, she said to her, "Mommy, I don't know what you were doing with him. I was so glad you left."

Callie stated that these experiences of abuse continued to characterized her life, until her son took her out of it:

My son took me out of it, and my brother was there, and the police came and I had to move with my things and went to stay with my brother, and that was how I got out of this relationship. [Paused with her eyes tearing up. Researcher told her to take her time] I'm seeing everything. It's not a nice experience you know, especially when you don't deserve it. No one deserves to be abused and the worst part of it is knowing you haven't done anything.

Structural description. Callie's physically abusive experiences occurred against a background of (a) unfounded accusations and verbal abuse; (b) shock, fear, and shame; (c) mother's physical abuse; and (d) faith. These elements impacted how she processed her experiences and her resulting reactions to them.

Unfounded accusations and verbal abuse. Callie reported that her physical abusive experiences were always accompanied by accusations about talking with a man on the phone. She was also verbally abused. She mentioned in the first incident, "He started fussing with me about my calling a male on the phone. I was a bit shocked when he said that. I told him it was my sister, and he started hitting me." She explained that these accusations and abuses continued to shock her, and she could not make sense of what was happening. In another incident, she described how he assaulted her and accused her of talking on the phone with a man and keeping him waiting: "He kicked me from behind, saying I am inside there talking to man and he's out here waiting for me." At one point, she described how he met her on the verandah as she arrived from work,

and had her empty her bag, as he looked for a phone he accused her of having: “One evening, after I came home from work, he wanted me to throw out everything that was in my handbag. He said I had another phone...hiding.” She explained that when the police were called after he abused her, he was crying and accusing her of having another man:

He was telling them all kinds of things about me—how mi have man and all of that. And they had called the police, and he was there crying, and telling all kinda sad story bout how is me doing all that I’m doing, but the police said, “but you don’t have any evidence that she is doing all of this, so why are you abusing her?” I said I’m not staying.

Callie mentioned that her partner also accused her of showing off on him:

He would say I’m showing off on him, but I’m showing off on him in what way? He had access to all my finances because when he had it, he would give me whatever I needed. He was good to us; he was a good person, you know. When he didn’t have it to give me, I shared what I had. I didn’t want him to feel bad. I didn’t belittle him in any way, because I know men had their ego.

Callie described how he would verbally abuse her in front of their six year-old daughter, who witnessed the abuses:

She was still at basic school. She was about six. She saw everything that happened, even when she crying, it didn’t matter to him. And he would tell her bad things about me all the time, and cuss me dog rotten, that who am I, “this dunce gal—dunce coolie gal.” He was verbally abusive during the physical abuse.

Callie said she was unable to make sense his behavior, because they were always together. She explained:

You’re always together, we go everywhere together. Our friends would comment that we’re always together and he and his wife should live like we do. So I ask him, ‘Where would I get the time to be cheating on you? You pick me up from work, take me to work, we go grocery together. Where would I get the time?’

She admitted she did not know the reason for his treatment of her, and she would leave the matter alone: “Still not knowing why, can’t figure it out, because I’ve never asked him, and will not.”

Shock, fear, and shame. When Callie's partner began abusing and accusing her, she mentioned that she was shocked:

He started fussing with me about my calling a male on the phone. I was a bit shocked when he said that...I was really shocked.

She explained that she was shocked especially because they had discussed her background of home domestic violence, early in their relationship:

And then at the beginning of the relationship I said my mom was abused, and I don't want to be abused, and he was strongly against women being abused too, so it came as a shock! You know anything can happen, but to hit me, it was really like, where is this coming from? It was a shock coming from him.

In addition to the shock she experienced, Callie experienced fear in the midst of her abuse. She explained how she felt:

I remember coming home from work; I was real scared, and I didn't want to go home. It's like when something is going to happen, I can feel it. I didn't do anything but I knew something was going to happen.

She added:

On the way to work he told me how he was going to kill me, and actually took me to the police station and told me to tell them he said he was going to kill me; and he left me there to tell them—yes, he left me there.

Callie explained that she would cry during the abuse, but not fight back: "I would cry, no fighting back you know. I cried a lot. My friends would say 'take something and hit him back.' She said she was afraid most of the times: "I felt anger and afraid; everything in one; but afraid most of all."

Callie admitted she was ashamed to tell her family members what was happening to her. She explained, "It continued for a while, and I didn't say anything to any of my family members, because, I don't know, I was ashamed..." She added reflectively:

And you see when you don't share the things with your family too, and let them know what's happening with you, and he knows that I'm not telling them,

anything [she paused for a few seconds]. Like my son said, “Mommy, you’re acting like everything is ok and know that it’s not.

It appeared the point was being made that shame led to secrecy, and secrecy fostered more abuse. She explained that her son was the one who rescued her from her situation, after he found out that she had hidden the abuse from him. She described how he angrily confronted her partner:

Then he got so angry and went to the kitchen, got a knife to confront him, and by this time his daughter and my niece were at the house, and he went for a cutlass when my son went for the knife, and I was there trying to part them, and we locked up the children in the closet because they were seeing all of this. Oh, and when these things would be taking place all the time, my daughter would be seeing all of it. I tried to part them, and got cut on my finger in the process. I had to get a neighbor and he came. By this time, my son had called his father, and he had come, and neighbors and everyone gather outside—very disgraceful, I was so ashamed, but that was when I left. [paused, eyes tearing up].

Callie admitted she still felt ashamed when she encounters people who knew what took place in her life years ago: “When I see my neighbors and these people who knew what happened, I still feel ashamed you know, even though I know they know. I believe as a family, they must still talk about it, you know?” Sadly, it seems the shame still lingers on for Callie.

Mother’s physical abuse. Callie experienced her physical abuse within the context of her mother’s own abuse at the hands of Callie’s father, which occurred within the home through out Callie’s childhood, and was currently taking place in her mother’s relationship with Callie’s father. She mentioned she had sought to safeguard against this happening to her by discussing it with her partner early in their relationship: “At the beginning of the relationship, I said, ‘My mom was abused, and I don’t want to be abused,’ And he said he was strongly against women being abused, so it came as a

shock.” In addition to being shocked at the abuse, Callie explained that she wondered where she went wrong. She described her state when she broke down in tears at work:

I remember coming to work and breaking down [paused]. And they were shocked when they heard what was happening to me and consider, “You of all person!” You wouldn’t expect that to happen to you. And is something you never wanted to happen to you because you grew up seeing it happen around you; abuse in the home, to your mother and you never wanted it for yourself, you know? Eventually it happens to you, and you question yourself asking where did I go wrong? What did I do? [paused, shaking her head]

Callie explained what the scene was like when her family found out:

When my family don’t know, everything is covered up, and when they finally found out, everybody came over that night. My mom hugged me, and we were all crying, and she told me she loved me. And you know, she was going through the same thing with my father, so she knew what I was going through. And my son was so angry with me that I didn’t tell him because we had a good relationship.

Callie found herself brought face-to-face with a fate of physical abuse similar to her mother’s, and she didn’t know how that reality became her own.

Faith. Callie identified herself as being a spiritual person during her demographic screening process. When she was asked to state what role her faith played in her abuse, her words reflected its importance:

I prayed a lot about it, because you know, why is this happening to me and I’m not guilty? I talk to Him a lot about it. When I’m to go home, I pray and ask Him to not let anything happen. Don’t know what I’m going home to. I prayed a lot.

Her comments indicated her acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty in what had happened to her at the hands of her partner, and her acknowledgment that God has a plan for her in the midst of her abuse:

And I think what would happen to me if I had married this man? What would have become of me, you know? The Lord knows what He was doing all along. And you wonder being with a man so long, and not one time he ever proposed to you, you know? I strongly believe what happens to us is for a purpose. God has a purpose for us and knows what He has in store for us.

Callie's abusive experiences were contextualized within unfounded accusations and verbal abuse; shock, fear, and shame; her mother's physical abuse; and faith. These elements formed a constant background to her abuse, and impacted how she lived though and, indeed, survived, the battering she encountered at the hands of her partner.

Conceptual mapping task. Callie approached the CMT with caution and explained that she was not a very creative person. As she viewed the notes, she commented on the content of select ones. While looking at one note, she reflected quietly, "When he hit me when I was putting my daughter to bed, afterwards he was all lovey-dovey, rubbing me on my ear where he hit me, you know [laughed sadly]." Referencing another instance, she said, "When he had hit me in my face and I left, when I came back home, the house was spick and span, and well-stocked. He had never done anything like that before. I guess it's the apology."

As she continued, she commented, "Horror," as she looked at the note that mentioned when he kicked her from behind. She wrote "HORROR" on it in black, and set it aside. She also clustered the notes related to when he went to the store, and started to beat her when he returned. She marked the word, "HORROR" in black on them, and clustered them to one side with the first one on which she wrote the word horror. She continued working on her map and said:

Like I was in a dream when he kicked me from behind. Never thought this could every happen to me. My only smiley face was when I had freedom when I left. In the beginning it was really good. After the abuse started there was nothing to be happy about. Making love, I was just numb. I didn't want him to touch me—I wasn't feeling anything. It was like I was getting to hate this person. Why I stayed, was it love? Was it really, why I stayed? It's like you hate this person now—hate him. Just go through the motions. Don't want him to touch me.

When Callie was finished viewing and arranging the notes, she was asked to tell what stood out for her and she responded:

Why did I stay? It's not like I was depending on him for anything, you know? But you know, my daughter...But from the first incident I shouldn't have gone back. You see, being out of it now you can see all these things, but when you're in it, it's different.

She was then asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand from her experience: "Keep asking the question 'why' you know. Once you in relationship and abuse start, do not stay for anything at all. All of this did not have to happen. Maybe the first one, but no more [sighs]." Callie was asked the final question about what meaning she placed on her experiences and she responded:

Still not knowing why, can't figure it out, because I've never asked him, and will not. I guess with all that happened, I'm a bit stronger and I won't let this happen again, I won't go through all of this again. It has made me stronger. I would advise people too that once a man hit you, don't stay because he's not going to stop. Get out, he will apologize but he won't change. Look out for yourself. Don't stay for anything. I am very much against this and I advise people to get out of it.

Callie then thanked the therapist in a very soft tone and said, "I'm glad I did this!"

Figure 3 illustrates Callie's conceptual map. It simply clusters her relationship into three main piles. The largest box at the top represents over ten years of good things. The second box is much smaller, but has in it a number of things that she considers to be her horrible experiences. This box is labeled, "HORROR." This word is marked specifically on certain notes. She linked the entire cluster with black marker. Finally, a smiley face signifies her exodus, created by her son.

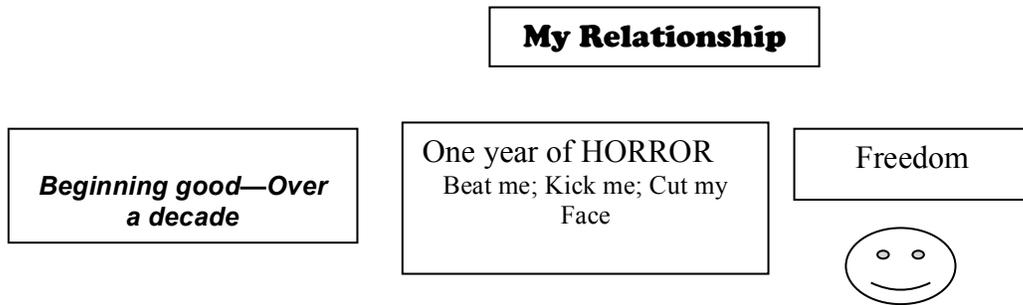


Figure 3. Callie's conceptual map

Mary's Profile

Mary was interviewed in the early afternoon, after which she left immediately for work. She works in the customer care department of her company, which is listed as the top provider for health care items in Jamaica. She has a university degree to her credit, and has three children who are all teenagers.

Mary has a gentle, friendly manner, and readily agreed to participate in the study. She proceeded through the entire process, including the conceptual mapping task with interest, stating that she had never done anything like this before.

Textural description. An examination of Mary's transcript and conceptual map revealed two main highlights (a) hasty/rushed commitment and (2) frequent separations/reconnections in the relationship.

Hasty/rushed commitment. Mary was first asked to describe how she and her partner met, and she explained that they met in a public place and exchanged numbers there:

I met him in...and when I saw him, he saw me first and he started talking...He said he knew me, because he worked in the area where I worked... We sat at the same table... We exchanged numbers, and he called me first, so he was interested.

She described how the relationship proceeded rapidly and with great intensity. She also stated that there were things he knew about her, and important things he kept from her during this time, until he moved into her home after seven months had passed:

We talked for two months straight. Then he said he could tell me exactly where I lived and he was downstairs while talking on the phone. He did not tell me he was a policeman then, because I had told him I do not like police. Then and there, I wanted to let him go. Anyway the relationship developed until after seven months, he was staying at my house.

Mary's story continued to reveal that things were moving quickly and, at the same time, problems were emerging:

Before one year, I found out I was pregnant, but then we were having problems because he would work every day; he did not have any day off, and he said I should have an abortion, and I said "No!"

She explained how the situation worsened after she had the baby, as conflict arose about the baby's paternity. She said, added to that, was the problem of her being at work all the time:

Then after the pregnancy, it was like everything went wrong. I was a workaholic so I was always at work. The relationship started drifting because he said my baby was not his because I was seeing somebody else, but he knew for a fact that the child was his.

Mary added how she was, in fact, trying to get pregnant, because this was her mother's desire. "I never knew I was pregnant, but I was trying to get pregnant because my mother wanted me to have a child. I believe she felt that she was going to die somewhere along the line." Mary also mentioned that her partner, who was staying with her, actually moved in to live with her after the baby was born, despite the fact that he doubted the baby's paternity: "He moved in despite the fact that he said the child was not his." She explained that problems related to trust emerged thereafter, and then after her son was

born, she discovered he was involved with somebody else. She mentioned how badly this affected her:

Then after that, everything went haywire. When he said he was at work he was not there. I didn't take it that he was lying because I was always at work too. It was not until my son was born I found out that he was having another relationship. That actually sent me over the edge, and I broke down then—the baby was about six months.

At this point, Mary shook her head and stated, “The relationship started out too soon before I got pregnant, and I developed this love for this person, and it was too much.”

[She paused and sighed. The researcher encouraged her to take her time.]

Mary's responses revealed how she moved into this relationship rapidly, and encountered painful issues that ought to have been resolved before moving forward. Her account revealed she ignored the fact that he wanted her to abort her baby, and doubted its paternity. Unfortunately, according to her report, it was not only his occupation that she was unaware of as she rushed into this relationship, but also his involvement in another relationship, which hurt her badly.

Frequent separations/reconciliations in the relationship. Mary explained she experienced ongoing separations and reconciliations with her partner throughout their relationship. He would often leave and return, and she admitted she facilitated that in some instances, as she would wash for him, and he would eat at her house. She explained this situation from the point when he left after she discovered his infidelity:

He left, and I had to take the baby to my mother in the country. Then I went back to work and my mother offered to take the baby. He actually moved out. He kept coming back and he had a key and I didn't take it back because he wouldn't give me back. When I come home he was there; he would eat at my house; I still had to wash for him.

Mary indicated they got back together, but the relationship was unstable. She admitted she went back to him because she desired stability, and did not want to go to another man with her baby:

We eventually got back together, on and off, on and off, because I really didn't want to go back out to somebody else with a young baby, trying to sort out my life, so we decided to move in together. We rented somewhere. I had to pay for everything even though he was supposed to do his part.

She reported in the midst of everything, she became pregnant again, and decided she would buy a home, rather than continue renting. She said during this time, he proved himself to be a good father, but did not provide consistent financial support:

Then I realized I was pregnant, when the first child was three years old, and this time I decided I wasn't going to stay. I got a house, I said to him to let us buy the house together. He said he wasn't going to do it. Anyway I bought the house, and we lived there all three of us. My son was still with my mother and my mother took sick, and I had to take the children. He was a good father even though he didn't give monetary support consistently.

Mary was asked to describe when the physical abuse started, and she provided the following information regarding the first incident:

I was eight months pregnant with the first child, and he wouldn't help to do anything, and I got upset and was quarreling real bad, and he got up and shot me a box, and mi tek something an lick him, and him grab me, and mi grab him up back, and him push mi down on the settee and dressed and disappeared. It was a shock; I cried for days.

Without prompting, Mary went on to describe the next incident:

I was at home one day and my friend's brother brought something she had given him to give me. It was not like we were friends, but we knew each other. He called and said he was outside and I was to come and take the thing his sister sent. He did not want to let me out of the house. He was asking where this guy come from? I went out and the guy was asking me how I was doing. He came out of the house and made a scene, asking who him, weh him come from? He actually went back into the house, and when I went inside him grap mi up, you know, and was very physical. My daughter was sleeping and my son was outside playing. He hit me, actually. He hit me open hand and I hit him back. He hit me in my face, and when the child got up, he grabbed me up and I grabbed a knife and he

ran, and I sailed the knife after him. I had to go to the police to get my key from him.

Based on Mary's word, it appeared that after each incident, there was separation, as he left and did not return for while. Mary continued to describe the third incident, again without prompting:

The third time, my son was on the bed sleeping, and he came to the door and wanted to come in. I told him I had on my underwear. He was asking, "Who deh here? Who deh here?" and I said, "Nobody." This was during an on and off period. I asked what he wanted. He said he never knew our son was here, why I never tell him; and it happened so fast, I didn't even know when it happened—him shot me one lick somewhere in mi ears, and I don't know where the blood came from. And when I looked at my son, I saw the blood splattered on him, and I didn't know what to do, and we started to wrestle now, and I took up the lamp and chopped him in his forehead. That was the worst time. This was the last straw. That was where everything went to the bottom. We went to the highest police. He accused me of having my son with somebody else. He never showed up in court. I wondered why, why me. I tried to stick it out for the two children.

Based on Mary's account, the abuse continued within the instability of frequent separations and reconciliations for several years. Mary described this as "on and off" periods. During this time, she said she would move to other homes with her children without his knowledge, and hope that he would not find them. Unfortunately, her report indicated that this did not work:

After I sailed the knife after him and he left, he didn't take his clothes, and he was still seeing this girl. I left my daughter with my mom and told her I'm going to move out of my own house, because he won't stop stalking me, so I left. I locked up my own house and left, and he couldn't find me for about four months straight, so he came to my workplace and said he wanted to look for his children because he don't know where they are. I couldn't talk to nobody, couldn't go to the movies, I couldn't go anywhere. If I go somewhere, when I looked out I would see him.

She continued to explain what things were like for her in a lamenting tone:

He wouldn't stop coming by my house, my neighbors said he would come by and stand outside. It was like he was stalking me. When I went to pick up the kids at daycare, he was always there. He couldn't pick them up, but he was there when I

went to pick them up. The taxi driver that I asked to carry me wouldn't carry me. I couldn't get anybody to carry me because they were afraid of him. He is always there parked up, or he would stop them [he was a policeman] if they carried me.

Mary's story reflected that she had moved hastily into her abusive relationship without taking the time to build the relationship and address certain critical issues that emerged. Her story also indicated she experienced "on and off" periods, during which she and her partner were together or separated. The abuse continued during these "on and off" periods for almost ten years. She explained how she "got rid of him":

He said he was going abroad, and asked me to marry him. I said, 'No, not at all! With this man I couldn't have friends, they couldn't come to my house because him don't want them there [she sighed]. He would be gone for a while then come back. It was like a continuous nightmare. When he said he was leaving, I asked him how soon. I got rid of him when our son was just starting grade one—six years old. About eight or nine years now, and that was how I got rid of him.

At the end of her interview, she reflectively said: "I met him in my early 20's and it ended in my 30's—a decade."

Structural description. Mary's transcript revealed she had experienced physical abuse within the context of (a) her mother's desires, (b) desire for stability for herself and her children, (c) love, and (d) fear.

Her mother's desires. Mary explained that early in the relationship, she became pregnant because she was trying to do so. This information emerged at the point in her interview when she described how she and her partner met. She revealed that she became pregnant within a year of having met him. She indicated her reason was that her mother wanted to see her have children before she died, "I never knew I was pregnant, but I was trying to get pregnant because my mother wanted me to have a child." Her response indicated that her mother's desire impacted her decisions to have a child and stay in a

relationship that was very new and shaky. Mary was asked why she remained with her abusive partner, and her response again pointed to her mother's influence:

One reason was my mother had a lot to do with it. What she wanted was for us to live good and give it a try. In her first relationship, she had two children and had to abandon them because of abuse. With her second two children, me and my brother, she decided she would stay with my father in spite of the abuse for our sake. She would say, "Never have three and four children for different, different men." So I tried to make it work, because I saw my mother stay so that we could know we have a mother and a father and we were kind of stable.

Mary's response spoke volumes about the contextualizing factors of her mother's own experiences, example, and wishes for Mary. These factors impacted the manner in which she bore her abuse over the years.

Stability for herself and her children. Mary also indicated she remained in the abusive context because of a desire for stability for herself and her children. This was her mother's desire for them, as stated above, and it was also a desire she owned for herself. She indicated after she and her partner had separated initially, they reconciled because she wanted stability:

We eventually got back together, on and off, on and off, because I really didn't want to go back out to somebody else with a young baby, trying to sort out my life, so we decided to move in together. We rented somewhere.

This desire impacted her life and colored her decisions and motivations, as she proceeded through her abuses with her children. She wanted better for them and for herself.

Love. In the early part of her interview when Mary described the rapid formation of her relationship, she said she had developed love for her partner: "The relationship started out too soon before I got pregnant, and I developed this love for this person, and it was too much." She also added that love was a factor in her motivation to stay in the

relationship, coupled with the fact that she did not want another man to enter her child's life:

I don't know why I loved this guy, I don't know why, and I didn't want anybody else to come into my child's life...I loved him and wanted a family—one father for my kids.

Fear. Mary's account reflected the presence of fear existing within this relationship. She stated that persons were afraid to help her because they were afraid of her partner, "The taxi driver that I asked to carry me wouldn't carry me. I couldn't get anybody to carry me because they were afraid of him." She also expressed how fearful she was, as he stalked her continuously, and she moved from place to place:

I moved out again and he didn't know where I move to, and nobody would tell him. And he trailed me, and one day the taxi guys who move back and forth in my neighborhood told me there was car continuously parked under some trees across from where I lived with "a man in there who looked exactly like you son." You can imagine how frightened I was. They didn't know him, and him no talk to nobody, but him park up every day and the car glass tinted, and when him come out to pee-pee, them see him face.

It is, therefore, evident from Mary's story that she experienced her abuse within a context of her mother's desires for her, her own desires for stability for her and her children, love, and fear. These factors determined her feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and motivations during her abusive period.

Conceptual mapping task. Mary approached this task in a somber fashion, and spoke her thoughts aloud as she viewed each note. She made the following comments as she went along: "I should have left when I got pregnant and he said I should abort the child." "We shouldn't move in together—Big mistake." "I have nothing to laugh about with this relationship because there was always misery, misery the whole time. After

having him around, I thought things would work out.” She looked at the note that referred to her partner finally leaving to go abroad and she said:

It hurt to lose him, but I’m free, free now that he’s gone. In a relationship you get accustomed to the mess that’s going on and off. I think that was happening to me, to the point where, when I started with other persons I did it out of pure companionship.

When Mary was done viewing and arranging her notes, she was asked to state what struck her as she looked at the map she had created, and she responded, “I wonder why I stayed so long.” The researcher waited for any elaboration of her response and she just nodded, signifying that her answer was complete. She was then asked what she saw as the most important thing to know and understand about her experience and this was her response:

I been trying to do some self-searching. I keep making one mistake—the mistake of not know the person fully. Moving too fast in relationships. I don’t trust anyone. I use this relationship to judge everyone and every relationship. Find some excuse not to go on—and don’t trust. I don’t have any love in me for anyone. I have tried to move on but cannot believe what they say. As relationship moves quickly I end it. It has affected even my children, even my son. It’s hard to get past it; he’s just the splitting image of his father. This relationship impacts me in all other relationships even today.

Mary was then asked what meaning her abusive experiences had in her life. She responded emphatically, with a contemptuous tone:

Stupid! I think I was stupid then, I should have not have had any children. I should have just aborted the children [laughing wryly]. Children see this. They feel I am not affectionate to them. It bothers me. My son says I’m a very nice mother but always want to be by myself. Before this, I was jovial, someone you could talk to.

At this point, Mary had responded to all questions in her interview. Her conceptual map had all the notes related to the early stages of her relationship clustered together and circled with brown. This cluster was marked “No Early Stage, Abort!” She

identified the notes that referred to her mother’s wishes together in a cluster, and she placed the notes that referred to her wishes in a cluster of their own. She joined both clusters with a two-way arrow, signifying the constant flow and solidarity. She found one note that referred to her partner being a good father, and placed it by itself. She labeled it “love” with question marks, signifying she did not know why she loved him. Finally, on the note that referred to him leaving, she drew a smiley face. The remaining notes were left by themselves, circled in black, with a call-out note saying, “Bad Decision!” Figure 4 illustrates Mary’s conceptual map.

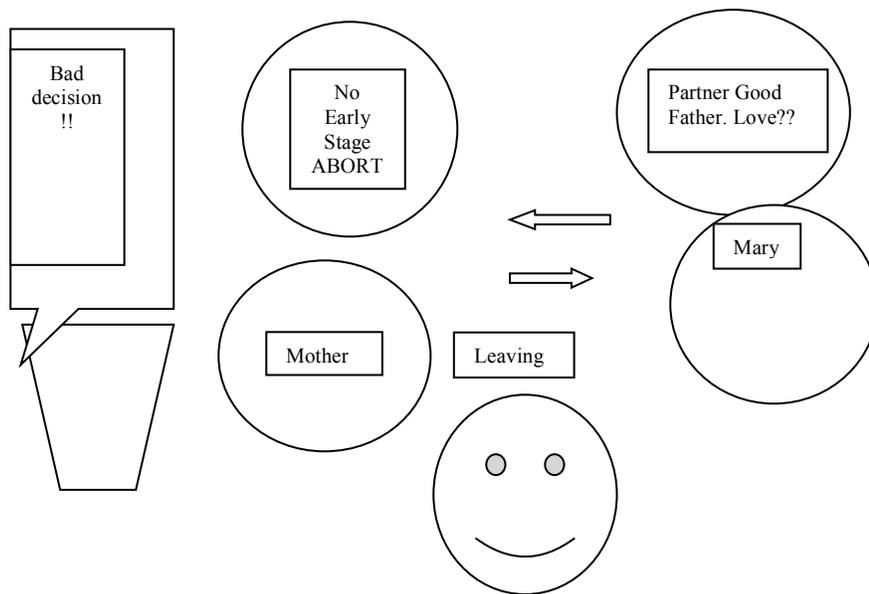


Figure 4. Mary’s conceptual map

Tanya’s Profile

Tanya requested an early morning interview. She explained that she was at her best in the mornings. Tanya is a police woman, whose tall, “six feet-plus” form filled the

room immediately. She presented a pleasant demeanor and is currently pursuing a university degree in forensic science.

Tanya had expressed her eagerness to participate in the study, based on its potential to help address the problem of domestic violence. She approached the conceptual mapping task with curiosity, stating that this was a new activity for her.

Textural description. An analysis of Tanya's transcript and conceptual map revealed the following predominant features: (a) ignored warnings/red flags before marriage; (b) unbridled, raw abuse.

Ignored warnings/red flags before marriage. Tanya's interview began as she responded to the question about how she had met her husband. She explained they were colleagues who worked in the same office, and would share common concerns pertaining to their current romantic relationships with their partners. They became best friends and moved forward with a romantic relationship of their own after their relationships ended. She said things were going well, but all was not what they appeared to be, as she realized her partner was trying to impress her:

We became best friends and took things to another level when both our relationships ended, and he was a very nice person. I liked how he looked after his two daughters at the time—well he was trying to impress me at the time, but I realized he wasn't there for them and doing anything for them. He would go on the road and lock them in the house till one, two o'clock, and when I found out, I spoke to him about it, and he did better, but that's where the relationship started.

This effort to impress could be seen as a red flag that was overlooked. Tanya went on to describe how the relationship progressed quickly:

The relationship was new and very good. We talk on the phone 55 times per day even though we worked in the same office. Eight or nine months after we started the relationship, we decided to move in together. Shortly after we moved in together, in three months we got married.

At this point, she was asked to talk about how and when the relationship became abusive, and she said, “Funny enough, I shouldn’t have married that man!” She continued: “One of his daughters lived with us, and the other migrated. Before we got married, the physical abuse started. I shouldn’t have married him, but love is blind and cannot see.” She proceeded to explain what she meant:

Verbal abuse was a prelude. told him the landlord didn’t want persons of other sex to visit and he told me if I don’t let him come in then we can’t live together. He grabbed my hand and physically restrained me and said, “You not going to let me in?” That was the first time.

She explained that she failed to take note of this warning, because she was not processing effectively due to the residual effects of her recent breakup:

I wasn’t paying it any mind, because the prior relationship that I was in...I really loved that person and I don’t think I was really over that person when I started talking to this person. I was vulnerable and not seeing things, you know? Even when he restrained me so harshly, I still blew it off, and went to live with him.

Tanya’s story clearly exposed the fact that her judgment was clouded, and with their relationship moving rapidly, she ended up failing to take note of a major red flag.

This had very bad consequences, even before marriage:

When the physical abuse started, before we got married, we moved in January, and getting ready to go to work, he drove, and I didn’t drive, and the argument was about his daughter who lived with us who was very nasty, and I spoke with her about cleaning up, and he did not take kindly to it; and after he dropped her at school, he came back home and I did not take kindly to his strong language, very, very, verbally abusive—he’s like that even now—and I responded likewise, and before I know what happened, I was on my back on the bed with this man squeezing the life out of my neck. I blacked out for, I don’t think it was long, and the only thing I could do is reach for a nice crystal lamp next to me, and hit him in his face, and he eased up, and even then, he was still on me thumping me, punching me [she doubled her fists to demonstrate], and the only way I could stop him, believe me, I had to draw my gun. And when I draw my gun that was in my waist that was when he eased off and stopped hitting me. My neck was so, so swollen, and lucky for me, scarves were in style, and it didn’t look out of the way to were scarf. It was black and blue, badly swollen, and I hid that well, and we drove together to work afterwards, and nobody knew what happened.

Tanya reported this event in its entirety without pausing, and she was gesturing through its entirety. Afterwards she was breathing heavily, and so she paused. The researcher eagerly (and gladly) told her to take her time and catch her breath. This event represented a major warning—a huge red flag—that Tanya ignored to her detriment.

Tanya's story revealed how she continued to receive warnings about her partner's abusive capabilities but ignored them. She explained that she told her mother about the incident, and she also warned her against continuing in the relationship:

I told my mother, and when she learnt we were going to get married, she said, "What? Is man you love so? Why you going to marry him and him put him hand on you? You grow up and see your father doing the same thing to me. Why would you let him do the same thing to you?"

Tanya continued to speak in a reflective tone about the red flags she ignored:

The red flags were always there—because before we went into the relationship, I heard he was beating his baby mother, and when we got in the relationship and I asked him about it; he said they were telling lies on him because they don't want us to get together. An inspector had come to me and told me "Don't get involved with him because he is an abuser; he beats women, but I still did not listen. After that first time, it was mostly verbal for a number of years, but his daughter would warn me and say don't get involved with her father because he beats women.

Tanya's story revealed that she moved too quickly into this relationship, and disregarded the many warnings she received. She moved, therefore, into a viciously abusive reality, as she married her partner.

Unbridled, raw abuse. Based on the details of Tanya's transcript, she experienced what might be described as raw and unbridled violence during her marriage. She described the following incident in response to a request for her to speak about what the abusive experiences were like. She indicated this incident was related to a phone he had given to her, and demanded back because of its contents:

He was texting a woman telling her he loved her and all sorts of things...I called him and asked him about messages and he reached home about half hour after and demanded the phone. I said you gave me the phone so it's my phone now and I'm not giving you back the phone, and déjà vu, I was on my back with his hand around my neck, just like the time before, it was déjà vu all over again, squeezing my neck and when he moved his hand I shouted for my neighbor, and the baby come into the room, and he's sensible, you know, and he started hitting his father saying, "Don't hit mi mommy! Don't hit mi mommy!" and his father continued punching the daylights out of me in my face, in my body, and I can't manage him, and eventually my neighbor heard and came over and by time she reached I got away and ran from him in the living room, and he came after me and demand the phone, and I said I'm not giving him the phone, and all I know is I get one thump, right here [indicating her ear], and blood squirt out of my ears. The force of the thump in my ears caused blood to come out. I don't remember what I did, but my neighbor was beating down the door. Finally, he opened it and she came in and saw the state that I was in, and he told her it was my fault. The next morning I had to go to the doctor. I walk with that doctor report to this day. I had blunt force trauma to my right ear, and even now sometimes, my ear affects me. My mouth was burst my finger was bruised, my thighs.

Based on Tanya's story, there was no stopping him when he was enraged. The account revealed that the presence of his child hitting him and crying out did not deter him. Her words reflected that there was no constraining his violence. Tanya said she reported the incident to three senior officers at work. Her wounds were clearly visible, and the medical report was presented to them, but he denied everything:

So I reported at work to three senior officers, and he denied it. The woman asked about the swellings how it all happened, and he said he didn't know anything about them. And it is to be noted that only those three officers knew about the abuse. Nobody else did, because I hid it, but I did tell my parents. He denied even when I produced the medical report to the seniors.

Tanya's story revealed that the battering ceased after this incident. She explained "Then it stopped after that, and I started sleeping with a butcher knife under my bed, which he didn't know about, because I said I wouldn't draw my firearm again. We slept in the same bed but he didn't know." She went on to explain that she became pregnant

after that, and was quite distressed. She explained how she had to deal with verbal abuse, and what might be described as psychological abuse and even neglect:

Then stupid me, we had another child again—well, it was an accident. We didn't really plan it. When I found out I was pregnant I cried, because I didn't want any more children from that man. That was how I started to resent him now. I resented even having sex with him. Every time he's having sex with me it's like he's raping me. But for a couple years he did not put his hands on me because I told him that next time he did, I was going to kill him. He would verbally abuse me now, which I thought was worse. I didn't have any self-esteem. He did not help with the baby, and he comes in when he likes. I learned to drive and he would take the car away and I would have to take the bus or taxi with the baby. If we have anything argument, he took away the car, and say "me and mi pickney fi tek di bus." Every time I remember I used to cry, but I passed that stage.

At this stage, Tanya took a deep breath, and began to relate the following incident:

That morning on my son's 9th birthday, he would tell me bad words and disgraceful things in front of my children, who were nine years old and a few month short of two years old. I thought to myself he cannot continue to talk to me like this in front of my children, and I went up to him and pointed in his face and told him that he cannot continue to talk to me like that in front of my children, and the next thing I know is that I got a thump that sent me from the kitchen into the living room. I said "Lord, Jesus, this cannot be happening!" I sent the children out and I started calling out for my neighbor...and luckily she ran over as usual, and by the time she reached door that was me flying through the door with a thump as she opened the door. This was like a TV show! And I put my hand at my waist to reach for my gun and I hear somebody say, "Mommy!" but it not my big son who said it because he would have been in the garden outside, but the person said it beside me and I heard the person say, "Mommy, no!" and I was going to pull it, and he was going to pull his own also, and I put it back and went outside in the garden. I'm just going to work; it's my son's birthday. My neighbor said, "Mr. S., Mr. S., stop!" and he came outside and thump me again in the wall, and the wall had rough finish, so I was scraped up where I made contact with the wall. So I ran into the garden with lots of space and he was behind me, and my good friend across the road, called to him, and he cursed at her to don't bother to come into this. And he came upon me and give me one thump again, and I almost fell over my child and kill him. My neighbor had to pull him out of the way. My neighbor said, "Mr. S. you going to kill Mrs. S.?" I had my own car at the time and jumped into my car, and my son called to me and said, "Mommy phone." My son called the police on his father and it wasn't the first time, and he didn't know that his son did that. I told the police it was ok because I was leaving the residence.

Tanya stopped speaking for a while at this point, and there was silence in the room. She nodded when asked by the researcher if she was all right. After a while, she said, “This was the worst beating. The same day I went to work, and nobody knew.” Tanya’s report of this incident reflected, once again, the unbridled, raw nature of the abuse that she encountered during her relationship, and the fact that whether in public or private, her husband respected no boundaries in the midst of his violent behavior toward her.

Structural description. Tanya’s analyzed transcript revealed she experienced physically abusive treatment from her husband against a background of the following elements: (a) courage based on presumption and overconfidence, (b) pretense and secrecy borne out of shame, (c) verbal abuse and neglect, and (d) faith.

Courage based on presumption and overconfidence. Tanya’s transcript revealed her presumption that she had the means to sufficiently defend herself against her husband’s violence against her. She, therefore, ignored the warnings she received from her mother and others against proceeding with the relationship:

I said to myself, “I am a police officer, and so is he. If anything, I will use my gun to defend myself.” So probably in my mind I am bad, you know, even though he is slimmer than me, he is physically stronger than me.

She also related how she locked him out one night—an act that can be viewed as presumptuous and overconfident. She acknowledged it was a “big mistake:”

Another time was when I was pregnant and he loves to go to the bar, and I am in an advanced stage of pregnancy, and he would come in every night with his liquor breath beside me, and I keep saying, “Do not do that!” And I locked him out one night—big mistake! The man kicked down the door and came at me, and I had to call his daughter to help me.

Tanya's transcript also revealed her courage, overconfidence, and presumption, all combined, when she described how she repeatedly refused to return a phone to her husband on his demand. Her account described how he beat her in front of the baby until she bled:

He reached home about half hour after and demanded the phone. I said "You gave me the phone so it's my phone now and I'm not giving you back the phone. And déjà vu, I was on my back with his hand around my neck, just like the time before, it was déjà vu all over again squeezing my neck just like the time before, it was déjà vu all over again... And his [her baby] father continued punching the daylight out of me in my face, in my body, and I can't manage him...and he came after me and demand the phone, and I said I'm not giving him the phone, and all I know is I get one thump, right here [indicating her ears] and blood squirt out of my ears. The force of the thump in my ears caused blood to come out.

These elements of courage, overconfidence, and presumption were also reflected in Tanya's account, as she described her response to his verbal abuse of her in the presence of her children:

I thought to myself, "He cannot continue to talk to me like this in front of my children" and I went up to him and pointed in his face and told him that he cannot continue to talk to me like that in front of my children, and the next thing I know is that I got a thump that sent me from the kitchen into the living room.

Without a doubt, Tanya's courage in the face of severe physical abuse could not be denied, as she stated that often she had to take a stand and defend herself and the children in her household. She added that sometimes she had to act "bad like a mad woman" to defend herself:

After I had baby, I had to stand up strong and defend myself, because he would come at me, and I would say "You not going to lick me in here!" And plus, I had my baby and his daughter was there....When I know he's coming at me, I would have to jump up and act bad like a mad woman and rail up to defend myself.

Tanya also described how she resorted to sleeping with a butcher knife to defend herself. This illustrated the courage, and at the same time, overconfidence, of this woman that

impacted how she faced the abuse daily, and led her to feel she could successfully defend herself against her enraged husband: “I started sleeping with a butcher knife under my bed, which he didn’t know about, because I said I wouldn’t draw my firearm again. We slept in the same bed, but he didn’t know.” Without a doubt, Tanya’s courage, intermingled with presumption and overconfidence, contextualized her experience of abuse, and impacted the manner in which she bore it from day to day.

Pretense and secrecy borne out of shame. An analysis of Tanya’s transcript revealed how she bore her abuse in secrecy, hiding the incidents from the coworkers that she and her husband shared. She indicated that after she had reported a particularly vicious assault to three of their senior officers, nobody else was made aware of it: “So I reported it at work to three senior officers and he denied it...And it is to be noted that only those three officers knew about the abuse. Nobody else did, because I hid it.” Tanya’s next words illustrated why it was important for her to pretend that all was well. She mentioned how their coworkers viewed them as a model couple. Secrecy and pretense helped to preserve that perception: “Everyone said they wanted to be like us. We worked together until...They felt we were a model couple, always working together.” She explained that she stayed in her marriage because she was ashamed, and considered what people would say. She also explained how she lacked confidence that she could manage on her own with her child:

After we were married I stayed because I was ashamed. I didn’t want anybody to say “You just married and whatever” and I didn’t believe I could make it on my own with my child at the time; worse I couldn’t drive, and I lived so far, and it would cost me a lot to take taxi all the time, so that is why I stay, a sense of security—false security—that he would be there to secure me some way or the other, foolishly I thought. I should have left.

Verbal abuse and neglect. Tanya's account illustrated that she bore her physically abusive experiences against a constant backdrop of verbal abuse and neglect. She mentioned this when she recounted his verbal abuse followed by a battering, after she had reprimanded his daughter:

After he dropped her at school, he came back home and I did not take kindly to his strong language—very, very, verbally abusive—he's like that even now. And I responded likewise, and before I know what happened, I was on my back, on the bed with this man squeezing the life out of my neck.

As Tanya recounted her experiences, she mentioned there was a time when physical abuse abated, but verbal abuse was rife, and she explained that it affected her self-esteem. She also mentioned how neglectful and unsupportive he was:

But for a couple years, he did not put his hands on me because I told him that next time he did, I was going to kill him. He would verbally abuse me now, which I thought was worse. I didn't have any self-esteem. He did not help with the baby, and he comes in when he likes. I learned to drive and he would take the car away and I would have to take the bus or taxi with the baby. If we have any argument, he took away the car, and say "me and mi pickney fi tek di bus." Every time I remember I used to cry, but I passed that stage. It was raining and he was on leave, and I walked in the rain with the baby when he took away the car key. I still had to come home and cook at 7 p.m. and wash baby bottle and things.

She also described the lack of support even immediately after she had her baby:

I did everything; he didn't help with anything, he was just there. From I came out of hospital I had to start working. I said, "Oh Lord, my body is breaking down." I had to be doing everything. On Sundays, my father would come and help me with washing and cleaning. I thought I wouldn't have made it on my own.

Tanya also mentioned how she had pointed her finger in his face and confronted him about verbally abusing her in front of the children. She reported his violent physical reaction:

He would tell me bad words and disgraceful things in front of my children...I thought to myself, "He cannot continue to talk to me like this in front of my children" and I went up to him and pointed in his face and told him that he cannot continue to talk to me like that in front of my children.

Faith. Tanya did not mention her faith during her interview until she was asked about the role it played in her abusive experiences. She was emphatic in her response:

I don't like to talk about this because I was a Christian, saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost; I had a lot of Spirit in me, go to church every Sunday, and because of that man, mek mi haffi start sin. He made me sin, I still prayed; I still believed, and I would pray and asked God, "How long you going to allow me to stay in this?" But God was showing me the way but I wasn't seeing it, I was blinded by something, I don't know, I was spiritually strong but I was not strong mentally. God was showing me the way; I could have done it on my own but I wasn't seeing it.

She explained how her faith kept her throughout the abuse:

I was failing; my faith was strong but is like I can't deal with it. My head felt like it was going to burst, was constricted. I tell you, anybody going through this and don't look to God cannot go through it, I tell you. My friends say I must go back into the church. It's God who carry me through.

She also added how she had to call out to Jesus when experiencing panic attacks:

A lot of times I would have panic attacks. I am driving and just feel I have no brakes and I would call a friend and they would talk to me. I would be sleeping and my heart would be like its jumping out of my chest. I wouldn't wish this experience on my worst enemy. So many times I have to cry to Puppia Jesus on my knees.

She also mentioned how God gave her strength to put down her firearm when she was on the verge of committing murder-suicide, when the impact of the abuse took its toll on her psyche:

I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first then second, and then obviously me haffi dead; I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal... I sit before the desktop, and some prayer thing popped up and I was talking to somebody on Facebook and telling them how he described my privates and in my mind I would never be with a man again because he should know—what he said about me was true—because he was the one I had been with, and I just draw for my firearm and called out to God and said, "Father, give me strength!" and He did, and I put away the firearm. This was after the last beating.

Tanya's report illustrated that her faith had kept her through her abusive experiences, and is still a strong force in her life to date:

My faith is still as strong as ever; although I'm not a Christian anymore, and I don't go to church, I still have my worship every single day, either in the bathroom or at night. I have my worship and try to involve the children and I try to invoke that in the children to put God first in everything.

These elements—courage based on presumption and overconfidence; pretense and secrecy borne out of shame; verbal abuse and neglect; and faith—provided a constant backdrop against which Tanya experienced her abuse over the years, and impacted her thoughts and motivations as she remained in the abuse for the time that she did.

Conceptual mapping task. Tanya viewed the notes, and as the CMT was explained to her, she stated that she had no symbols to use except crying faces. As she arranged the notes in a clustered together, she made some comments, mostly to herself:

All of my symbols are crying faces, stupid, no positives except when I got pregnant with the second child even though I did not plan it. I love my baby. I had my first son two weeks before my birthday. I started late and I was very happy. I did not know I could get pregnant. I could have an additional love in my life. He was so wicked that he went away abroad during hurricane Ivan, when I was pregnant and left me.

She proceeded to extract all the notes that made reference to her children in any way, and labeled them with a happy face. All the other notes were clustered and labeled with a crying face with the words, "stupid" and "no positives here." She also drew an arrow pointing to the cluster with the crying face and labeled "Feelings of Low self-esteem, fear, anger, shame." She then said, "Low self-esteem, fear, anger, shame; I felt somehow co-workers knew, but they didn't. I just felt they did but they didn't until we divorced. They were shocked." Finally, she wrote "God" at the top of it all. Figure 5 illustrates Tanya's conceptual map.

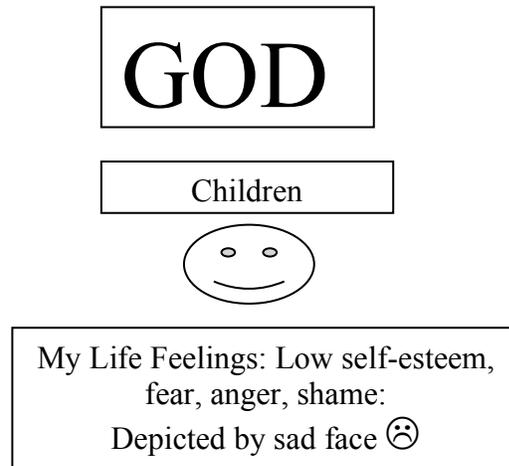


Figure 5 Tanya’s conceptual map

As she viewed the finished map, Tanya was asked what struck her as she looked at the map, and she responded, “I was stupid with no self-esteem or belief in myself.” She was then asked what was most important for her to note as she looked at the map, and she responded: “I must never let anyone decide how I feel about myself. I must not let anyone rule my day. No man must ever have that power over me again, not even my children who are boys.” She was finally asked what meaning these abusive experiences have for her, and she responded: “I need to stop thinking all men are the same. When I date and reach certain stage, I break it off. I have not had sex since this incident.”

Gina’s Profile

Gina was interviewed at a designated interview facility. Having arrived ahead of time for her interview she explained she didn’t want to be late. She is a civil servant, and had a polite and soft-spoken manner. She has a university degree, and expressed curiosity about the interview ahead.

She approached the conceptual mapping task in a reserved manner, and appeared emotionally affected as she reflected on the map at the end of the interview for several minutes. She was reminded twice at the end of the interview, of the available counseling sessions, free of charge that were at her disposal. She sat with the researcher for a while in silence after the interview and collected herself. She then thanked the researcher sincerely for the opportunity to participate in the study and departed.

Textural description. An analysis of Gina's transcript and conceptual map revealed the following key features: (a) hasty commitment, and (b) painful cost of ignored red flags.

Hasty commitment. Gina was asked to speak about how she and her husband met, and she proceeded to explain that they worked together and found that they related to each other well. She was very frank, as she explained that they did not date much, and became involved before getting to know each other well:

There wasn't much dating or courting. He was a colleague and another colleague introduced us. We were working at the same place and we would sit and talk for a long time, just share; somebody who you can relate to. So from there it started and developed into a relationship. I wouldn't say there was much dating. It was like we jumped into the relationship from the deep end. We didn't take time out to learn about each other, and then eventually got together. Sexual intercourse was introduced early and I got pregnant early.

Painful cost of ignored red flags. Gina continued to describe her relationship as it progressed at its fast pace, and highlighted concerns that she saw as warnings along the way. She explained how his mother became involved in the matter, and this seemed to have resulted in her going ahead with the marriage: "I had issues, not him; because he wanted to get married and I didn't...His mother got involved in it, so I got married. We

got married within a year.” Gina stated specifically that her partner did not appear to her to be ready for marriage and fatherhood, and this was a red flag for her:

There were red flags in that he was not ready for marriage, he was not responsible, wanted to be on the road all the time, just taken up with being a youth. I didn’t see him taking up the responsibility of being a father and husband at this time.

Gina continued to recall the details of an incident when he slapped her. This occurred before they were married, and represents an ignored red flag that cost her a great deal of pain in her life:

And then something happened and he had slapped me, and we had a big issue about it. I can’t remember what we were arguing about. He apologized and his mother got involved again. And then another time I can’t recall what happened, but it had to do with food and he came and threw the pot outside with the food in it, and his mother witnessed it. He slapped me before we were married. Slapped me in face! [She placed her hand on her cheek as she spoke].

She then added:

After he threw the food out, he grabbed me up, draped me up, and slapped me around, and after that his mother left. Again he said he wouldn’t do it again, and I decided I would go back home because I had left him.

Gina did not heed these serious red flag events. She overlooked them and proceeded into a marriage with more of the same red flag issues, but they became more severe and commonplace.

Gina was asked to describe her abusive experiences, and she started by speaking about an incident that occurred after they were married, when her husband wanted to drive a car she had rented, but he did not have a license to do so, and she refused to let him drive:

I rented a car to drive to the country and he wanted to drive and I said, “No!” because he couldn’t drive and we started to argue. I told him before to go and get his license and he said no, so I rent my car and I’m going to drive, and he said I

was trying to show him up, and we argued and he draped me up and flashed me around.

She continued as she described another physically abusive incident:

He came home one night and squeeze my throat and wring my hand because I am not paying any attention to him when I shut him out, when he comes in and talking. And him box mi down and push me into the closet and wring up my hand. And left some black marks all over my body, and all I did was cry because you see how it is, I will not fight back when you are so angry, because I know I cannot manage you. Anytime he is into this state I just don't fight him.

Gina went on to relate an incident when she received a promotion at work, and her husband did not come home. Instead, when he eventually came home, she said he was covered with hickeys and physically abused her:

I was promoted before him, and when I was promoted, he didn't come home the night, and when he finally came home, he had hickey all over him. He came to fight me, claiming that he heard I was involved with the official in charge of the division, that's why I was promoted. I said, "Excuse me? After I went and did my exam?" And him slap, slap me up. And I said I'm going to report it to the officer in charge, but I never did. I think they would lock him up and I never did.

Gina described a final incident that occurred after she had just had her baby daughter. She stated that her husband introduced her to a daughter he had from another relationship. This daughter was two years younger than their own son. This appeared to have been Gina's breaking point. She said she decided she would divorce him, as she did not wish to have his child in her life as a constant reminder of his treatment to her:

After the baby was born, he brought home a 16 year-old girl after 10 p.m. when I'm in my bed, and she turned out to be his daughter. She was born two years after we were married. Our son was born 1 year after we were married. So I have my grounds for divorce now. I don't want any reminder of what he put me through and I filed for divorce.

She stated that when she filed for divorce and he realized she was serious, he became violent:

Now he realized I was serious, and he came in one night and beat me up and took his gun, and said he was going to kill himself, and hang himself, and all kinds of atrocities. And I told him anything he wanted to do he should do it. I realized that he will never change. He punched me, squeeze my neck, hit me in the ears, pinch me. The children never saw, but he told them what he was going to do.

Gina, therefore, lived through a hastily formed relationship, and ignored the clearly visible red flags that presented themselves early in the relationship. She proceeded into a marriage that was characterized by abuse—a great cost to pay for ignoring the red flags that were clearly evident.

Structural description. Gina’s analyzed transcript revealed that she experienced physical abuse at the hands of her husband within the context of a number of elements and situations. The main ones include the following: (a) her husband’s unsavory character traits and behaviors, (b) pretense and secrecy, and (c) faith.

Her husband’s unsavory character traits and behaviors. As noted earlier, Gina indicated she had noticed her husband’s irresponsible ways, even before marriage: “I did not see him taking up the responsibility of being a father and husband at this time.” She explained how after marriage, things did not change. Rather than go to church, he would stay in his pajamas all day, and the youngest child would want to stay with him:

I go to several churches to suit him and he didn’t come. He said he was a Christian, but he won’t go to church. The younger child will want to stay home with his father and not go to church. He would stay in his pajamas from morning till evening and the little one stayed with him.

Gina also explained that her husband was irresponsible regarding finances and planning. She said, “He’s not responsible when it comes to finance. He was too laid back, and didn’t plan anything, like a bird he was laid back.” She added that financial problems and embarrassment plagued them because of his irresponsibility. She would go

abroad and send money home to him from her earnings, but her children were not cared for:

I still felt he was a financial burden to me. Whatever money I give him to pay bills, he uses the money and they give us notice before eviction and take my furniture, and all sorts of embarrassment because him tek mi money and don't pay the bills and provide for the household when I am away. Sometimes my sister say they are there crying because they don't see him for days, and there is no money to provide for the children and pay the bills, and the children are hungry, and they don't tell me anything. I had to take on everything. I drew three month's rent from my insurance and gave to him to pay up outstanding debt and he paid only two months, so we still in arrears. I became like a recluse because I feel people will see me and know that I owe. I don't have any friend. We lived elsewhere and had to pay the rent. I worked abroad again, and sent money to him, and same thing happened.

According to Gina, not only did she have to bear her abuse within the context of her husband's irresponsibility, but also his infidelity and lack of morals and integrity:

He is always involved in relationship out there so that was a common thing, like a recurring decimal, so each time I would ask him to go, but it was good for him to go out there and say he's married and have a family, even though it was so crooked, so pitchy patchy, dysfunctional at best.

Gina continued, and reported even family members and friends were not out of bounds of his sexual advances:

He is focused on doing his thing his way and it doesn't matter who gets hurt. I went away to the States and the boys stayed elsewhere, and I asked my sister to stay at the house with her little girl, and my sister told me after I left that he forced himself on her....Even my daughter's friend from high school stayed with my daughter and he had sexual relations with her. I don't know if it was forced. It never crossed my mind that he would have done that because he has so much women out a street.

In the midst of all these unsavory factors, Gina said she had to deal with her husband's jealousy, immaturity, and insecurity. She provided an example:

I always would ask him to teach me to drive and he wouldn't, so I went to driving school and learned to drive, so his ego would be beating him because I was driving, and he still had not learned to drive....He said I was trying to show him up, and we argued and he draped me up and flashed me around.

She went on to say, “Even my graduation...he didn’t want to come, because it was like glorying me.” She added the following account regarding what appeared to be his jealousy and immaturity:

When I was promoted, he didn’t come home the night, and when he finally came home, he had hickey all over him. He came to fight me, claiming that he heard I was involved with the official in charge of the division that’s why I was promoted...and him slap, slap me up.”

Gina’s also highlighted her husband’s manipulative ways, which impacted how she dealt with his abusive treatment:

The children are very attached to him and he spoils children, so he knows how to use that and play on the relationship, so after everything calm down, he would be playing with them and let them know I am not talking to him.

She added the following explanation, referring to his manipulative behavior in the aftermath of his abusive behavior toward her:

Then you can be vex for so long and no more and you are there feeling like you can’t manage on your own and you say you have three children so you just say you’re going to try all over again. He knows and he will say it to his friends that because of my children I will not go anywhere. And I said to him I want my children to grow with their father, so he used that to his advantage and he would remind me that I said that.

Gina summed up his unsavory traits, as she described his efforts to manipulate and sway her when he realized she was serious about divorcing him:

Now he realized I was serious, and he came in one night and beat me up and took his gun, and said he was going to kill himself, and hang himself, and all kinds of atrocities. And I told him anything he wanted to do he should do it. I realized that he will never change. He punched me, squeeze my neck, hit me in the ears, pinch me. The children never saw, but he told them what he was going to do.

Pretense and secrecy. Gina bore her abuse within a context of pretense and secrecy, even as she explained how her studies focused on the same negative conditions that were in own life. She had to fight back tears, and said this to herself:

Imagine going to school and having to fight back tears, learning about the same thing that is happening to you and you can't tell anybody. There is really nobody to tell, so I just kept it in and decided when I leave school I would leave.

Gina added that in spite of how bad things were, she did not tell her family about what was taking place: "Things were just jaded. I never went to a real counselor. I spoke to friends and I hid things from my family." She confessed she, in fact, also sought to protect her husband, by not divulging the situation to her family and their coworkers:

And I did not tell my family, because I knew they would not talk to him and they would cuss him and, you know? I think I did protect him. I think I did because I didn't tell anybody, not even at work.

Gina smiled wryly, and explained how the people in the community would know certain things based on her husband's activities, but she would just keep smiling and pretend all is well:

Some people in the community would know more than you know, and would see his activities out there and ask me questions but I would just smile and put on a face. I learn to put on a face for years, and people would think that I had one of the happiest marriages, because he is known to boast about his family, and his wife, and his boys, and he'll talk. He knows just how to put it on but he does not act right with us.

She was honest as she confessed that pride motivated her to pretend all was well, because she feared what people would say, and how they would look down on her:

I was thinking if I told people they would say, "Look at you who always go on like you're nice." Pride was a part of it. I didn't want people to know that I was living this kind of life, and have them look down on me, you understand?

Faith. Gina made it clear during her interview that during her abusive relationship she lived according to the Christian faith. She stated she was not "living the life now" but her faith was an integral part of her life at that time, "I started going to school, and I started going to church, so my week was full with one day off. I am a Christian, saved, but not living the life right now." She added that she tried to encourage her husband to

attend church with her and the children, since he professed to be a Christian too, but he was not willing to attend. Unfortunately, the youngest child wanted to follow his example:

I go to several churches to suit him and he didn't come. He said he was a Christian, but he won't go to church. The younger child will want to stay home with his father and not go to church. He would stay in his pajamas from morning till evening, and the little one stayed with him.

When Gina was asked her reasons for remaining in the abusive relationship her response was immediate and emphatic:

Because of my children and church! I believed I should stay because I am married and it's a covenant. And I have a friend who is a Christian, and she said I can't complain about him every day because God will kill him. So I have this fear and don't want anything to happen to him. I just want him move and leave me. So when I find out that him get involved, I know I withdraw myself and that push him further out. I would say to God, "Why would you want me to be unhappy? I'm just unhappy here." And you know, every day I am looking around hoping to see a message saying I must leave now; and I am waiting around for an answer that never came. Yes, so it's my children, my marriage vows, and my faith that made me stay.

Gina's report revealed the importance of her faith, and how it contextualized her abusive situation. When Gina was asked directly about the impact of her faith or the role it played, she reiterated, "It was one of the main things that kept me there!" She explained she was waiting for deliverance to materialize for her:

It was like I want a deliverance but I am not making any steps toward. It's like I'm sitting down waiting for it to materialize out of air like magic. I am thinking I should stay because it is the right thing to do, so I am there and battled with that decision for a long time. I would talk with peer group at church.

At this point, Gina spoke rapidly and with urgency about her faith dynamics going through the abuse:

Coming through the experience, it's not that my faith looked different, but I made decisions because I believed that I was being held hostage by my faith. If I had gone to seek counsel and clarity, it would have been different. I didn't think

making that bold step and stepping away was the right thing to do, going to church and listening to what was preached. Looking back now, I realized I should have done it a long time ago. It is not so much stepping away that was the problem, but it's how I stepped away that was the problem. But then it was after I stepped away and made certain decisions, I realized that I did it the wrong way.

In response to a request for her to explain how she stepped out, she responded:

I moved away and I was not practicing the faith that I knew. I moved away from the realms of my faith, and I felt if I was still vibrant there, I would not have the courage to step away. So I had to step back somewhat and step out of my faith to get the courage. I actually started a relationship. It wasn't really right, then, but I told myself in order for me to get there mentally, I had to see myself with somebody else...It was like just him alone, and I felt like I could not be that way with anybody else. I couldn't see beyond him. I was wrong to do it that way. What I should have done was to make a clean break and decide this is where I want to go. He is saying now that I left because I was involved with somebody, you understand, which that was not it. I needed that strength. I had to hold on to something to help to propel me there.

Gina's explanation illustrated a picture of a commitment to her faith that kept her bearing the abuse, and was eventually seen as bondage that had to be escaped, for her to escape the horrors of her life. She regretted disregarding her faith, and acknowledged after the fact, there was a right way of leaving her situation.

Conceptual mapping task. Gina viewed her notes and commented as she proceeded. She said, "I stayed more out of a sense of responsibility. It wasn't love." She selected the notes related to her faith and clustered and labeled them, Love, Bondage, Regret. These labels alluded to the fact that she loved her faith, but felt it kept her in bondage. Finally, she regretted her actions that disregarded the beliefs and practices of her faith. She also drew a tree with her green marker, and labeled it "Changing room." She wrote the word, "WHY" at the top of her chart and stood for several minutes reflecting on her map. Her eyes were filled with tears as she told this story:

As I look I remember this tree that was at the bus stop, and every morning, I would walk from home to the bus stop in tears, and by the time I reached the tree

I would compose myself. In the evenings when I am coming home, I would be ok, and when I get to that tree, all the burdens would come back on me. The journey from home to the tree was like a ritual to compose and appear normal. There is just so much, so, so much, so I had to find ways of coping. I felt like I lost myself.

At this point, she just sat with tears in her eyes, looking at the map, and shaking her head. She was then asked what stood out to her or struck her as she looked at the map. She responded, "I am wondering why. I had so many opportunities. I think I would have done so much better for my children if I had left. They would have been away from him." She was then asked to state the most important thing for her to understand from her experiences. She responded, "I was held captive by my fear. Afraid of being on my own, afraid of how people would see me, afraid that I would not be able to manage. Fear, fear, I was held captive by my fear."

Gina was asked whether there were any meanings ascribed to her abusive experiences, and she replied:

Looking at this is like I'm having an outer-body experience. Looking at this and what I would say to somebody is...I had no confidence in myself. [There was silence as she just looked at the map and shook her head for two to three minutes]. I wonder sometimes if my judgment is off. If I make decisions around the wrong thing currently. I wonder if my decisions are sound now and do I process the right things to make decision. Sometimes I am in such a conflict because in my heart I weigh things so much. Back then I believed I was doing what I thought to be correct. I didn't know what I was doing. I was trying to do the right thing.

Gina continued to sit and look at the conceptual map, as she shook her head. She was told to indicate when she was done processing. She still continued to sit and look shaking her head. Again, she was gently told to indicate when she was done processing. Gina then reached into the pile of notes, and picked out the one that mentioned twenty years, which was the length of time she was with her husband in the abuse. She labeled it "Stupid" in red. Gina continued to stare at the map, now rocking backing and forth, and

after a few minutes, the researcher asked if she was all right. She responded with a groan, while still rocking herself and staring at the map:

I was too weak and forgive too easily, then everything start all over.
Some things it's not about forgiveness, but you have to act before going forward.
I was too trusting. For counseling, he said nothing is wrong with him. After I had my daughter and we were both older, I realized I was living in a dream world. A lot of my life wasted. When I look at that card [stating 20 years] I am shocked.

Several minutes more elapsed as Gina sat rocking in her chair, then she said, "I still wonder why. I wonder how it will impact my life to trust somebody, to submit without that fear that this is going to happen again. It is at the back of my mind all the time." She sat rocking for a few more minutes, with one of her arms folded around her, and her chin resting in the palm of the other hand. The researcher then asked if she was done, and she nodded, gathered her things, and stood to her feet, signifying she was, in fact, done. Gina's conceptual map is illustrated in

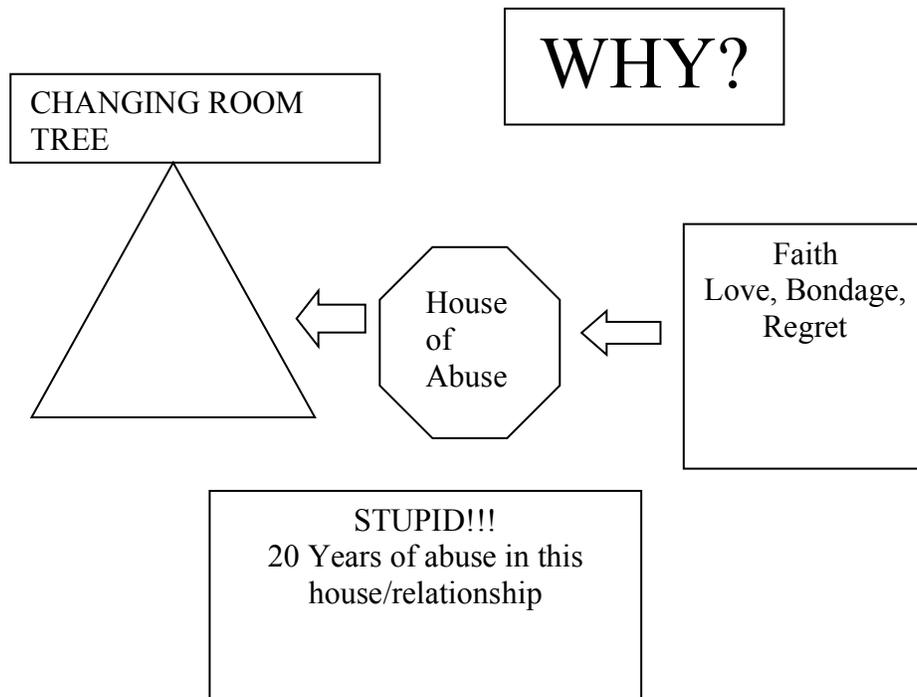


Figure 6. Gina's conceptual map

Della's Profile

Della's interview was done in the afternoon at one of the designated interview sites, after repeated efforts to identify a convenient time to meet. Della has a technical degree and is a vocational trainer. She left her job to serve at her husband's side when they agreed to get married. She presented in a quiet, self-assured manner and spoke softly throughout the interview. Sometimes, she had to be prompted to speak up into the microphone.

Della said she considered it a privilege to participate in the study, and approached the conceptual mapping task hesitantly, stating the activity was new to her. She gave the assurance, however, that she would do her best.

Textural description. An analysis of Della's transcript and conceptual map revealed that she suffered physical abuse from her husband, which served to extinguish her significance as a wife. By extension, the abuse sought to extinguish any accountability of her husband to her, as his wife.

Della proceeded smoothly into the interview by responding to the question regarding how she and her husband met in a succinct manner, and then waited for the next question:

We met at a crusade, which was more like a convention. All the churches from the denomination grouped together, and had an evangelistic outreach. He was part of the planning team, and he pastored one of the churches in the denomination.

Della mentioned that they courted for a few months, and then went to the Church Elders about plans to get married. She said he was a very good-looking man who seemed passionate about God's business. She expressed excitement about serving the Lord alongside him:

We courted for a while, and everything was fine. He was leading a church in the capital and told me he would like me join him in ministry as his wife. I suggested that we should talk to the Elders because we were from different churches but same denomination. We didn't date for very long, and we did a few premarital counseling sessions, but we didn't finish them, because he had to focus on his work with his church. He was a good-looking man, and he seemed to love the Lord. I felt excited to go into ministry with him.

When asked about the early part of their relationship, Della said it was fine for the most part, except her husband seemed to hold to his single life and said it was important to him. She stated how she was surprised and hurt about his declaration:

We went along ok for the most part, but I found it strange that he would still be going out regularly with his men friends, and leave me at home alone a lot of the times. Now remember, I was at a location that was new to me, and I didn't have many friends. When I asked him one night how come he was going out and leaving me again, he barked at me and said, "Mi love mi single life you know! My life with my friends is very important to me, and mi not giving it up!"

Della stated that this continued until the second year into the marriage, when her husband came in late and she confronted him about it. He physically abused her and she had a miscarriage as a result. She indicated this was when the physical abuse started:

In the second year of the marriage, he was getting on real bad and coming in late at night and early morning, and when he came in one time, I asked him what is going on and where is he coming from. Him just gimme one shove and pushed me into the wall, and I bang up and fall down. Then I just see a pool of blood just gather at my feet. I lost the baby, my first baby, just two months old. We went to counseling and him seemed like him sorry, and things cooled down a bit.

Della continued to describe how he would be harsh with her whenever she questioned him, or expressed disagreement with him. A few months after the miscarriage she stated that he became verbally abusive, and they sought counseling again, on her insistence:

After a while, it was like I can't have an opinion or ask him any question about anything. If I open my mouth and say, "Kem" him tell mi bad word. I just couldn't understand what was happening and he was a holy, holy pastor man at church. This was going on too long for me, and it sick mi stomach! I tell him I

want to see the counselor or elder because something is wrong and I can't live like this. He said I must go by myself, but then the elder called him and said he must come in. And can you believe that him lie and tell elder how me cause everything and how mi miserable and don't want him to be a man? Yes, I was always wrong. Elder seemed like he believed him, and that hurt me real bad.

Della said she felt she didn't matter and she had no rights in the marriage. She added that it all got worse when she saw her husband hugging another man closely, and she asked him about it:

I felt cheated out of a real marriage. This was not what I signed up for. I felt like a nonentity with no rights and no voice. But it all began to get worse when I saw him hugging a man tight, tight, and he didn't know I could see them. It never looked right to me, and I waited until he returned to where I was, and I ask him about it, and before the words done come out of my mouth, he punched me in the face and pushed me down. And he said to me, pushing my face with his fingers, "You, no fi ask mi nutten!" I was in shock!

Della explained how she finally came to the full realization that her husband was having sexual relationships with men, and from then on stopped supporting her and their children. In addition, any comment or questions about the men in his life would bring physical abuse:

After some other strange incidents, I realized that my marriage was a cover-up for his sexual relationships with men. Any question or mention about his men friends brought abuse. I had to start supporting myself financially and otherwise; he did not support me. It was like he was making me know that I don't matter in this, and I can't stop him.

Della made it clear that she began to defend herself when he assaulted her, and her three sons who were born in this situation began to fight and defend her. She added that when she spoke to his family, they were not surprised:

I got home and saw a young man in the marriage bed with him, and I he felt he should lick me because I bawl out against what he was doing, and I defended myself. I draw for machete, board, hammer, and anything else I can find to retaliate anytime he comes to put his hand on me. And then my sons, the two big ones born and see him abusing me verbally and physically, and they start to defend me now. And I have a little toddler, who comes into the fight anytime his

father raise his voice at me or lift up his hand to hit me. When I told his family what was going on, to my shock and surprise, they said that they knew he was like that before, but they believed he would change when he got married. I was outraged and broken-hearted at the same time.

Della expressed dismay at the fact that he could preach the word in one moment, and abuse her in the next: “He just finished preaching and he punched me in the face. I couldn’t believe it, and I felt like nothing, but I start to fight back.”

Della described how her husband would also physically and verbally abuse their older son:

He started to abuse our older son for no reason and would curse him and tell him all sorts of things that he won’t amount to anything and all that. One time, he told him to strip naked in front of his school friends, and he began to beat him brutally for no reason. I had to step in between him and mi son, and push him off him, and start mek up noise.

Based on Della’s report, physical abuse at the hands of her husband conveyed to her that she was insignificant to him as a wife; and he was, therefore, not accountable to her as a husband.

Structural description. Della’s analyzed transcript revealed that she suffered physical abuse at her husband’s hands within a context of the following key elements or situations: (a) husband’s homosexual behaviors, (b) faith, (c) children, and (d) image preservation versus self-preservation.

Husband’s homosexual behavior. An analysis of Della’s transcript indicated that her abuse was borne out against the backdrop of her husband’s sexual behaviors with men. In fact, it was shown that any mention or question from her about this situation brought abuse:

But it all began to get worse when I saw him hugging a man tight, tight, and he didn’t know I could see them. It never looked right to me, and I waited until he

returned to where I was, and I ask him about it, and before the words done come out of my mouth, he punched me in the face and pushed me down.

Another illustration of this situation was noted in her account of his abuse toward her, when she saw him in bed with a young man, and made an alarm about it:

I got home and saw a young man in the marriage bed with him, and I he felt he should lick me because I bawl out it and made a big stink about what he was doing, and I defended myself.

Della explained that her children were exposed to their father's behavior with men, "He had open relationships with men in front of the children when I was abroad." Her husband's sexual behaviors with men must have affected the children, and would certainly have affected her in her abusive marriage.

Faith. Della's transcript revealed that faith was a major contextualizing agent, which affected how she bore her abuse. Della mentioned that after the abuse started her husband stopped supporting her and the children, and God made provision for them, "Any question or mention of his men friends brought abuse...I had to support myself financially; he did not support me. In the whole thing, I proved God more. God provided money and food through the kindness of others."

Della's story illustrated that she struggled with her faith during her abusive marriage, "I questioned God, after all, my husband, or ex-husband is a marriage officer and pastor." She was being honest as she explained how difficult it was for her to maintain her faith, but she turned to the scriptures for refuge during the abuse:

Don't get me wrong; it was not easy keeping the faith during these abusive years. I thought of revenge, but eventually, just gave it up to the Lord...The abuse sent me to the scriptures. I had to set an example for my children in dealing with this.

Della's faith beliefs and values influenced her initial decision to stay in the abuse and protect her husband's ministry and image. She also stated that she sought to show her

children how to depend on God in trials, “I stayed, initially, because I did not want to jeopardize his ministry and image. I had to be strong for the children. I had to show them how to exercise faith in God and teach them to trust God.”

Della stated that she “considered the abusive period as a season that will pass,” and she emphasized how she depended on God, “During that time, I held on to God. I survived by maintaining hope in God that better would come. I was never discouraged.” She spoke of how she did her best to maintain her faith practices, in the midst of her abusive life, “I tried to maintain prayer, church attendance, fasting. I try not to miss any of these things.” Della’s words clearly illustrated that her faith carried her through her abuse. Although she had questions about how this could be taking place, she read the scriptures and “sought wise counsel from people of God” and thus encouraged herself. Della described how her faith was sustained, and caused her to endure, with greater strength at the end of it all.

Children. Della’s story revealed how important her children were to her. Therefore in the midst of her abuse, she considered what was best for them, “At first, I stayed in the marriage because of my children. I am their mother, and I wanted to make sure they had both parents and were in a stable home.” She considered it necessary to be a good example for them, “I had to be strong for the children. I had to show them how to exercise faith in God and teach them to trust God.” Della mentioned how her husband had relationships with men openly in front of the children, “He had open relationships with men in front of the children when I was abroad.” Without a doubt, this must have hurt Della deeply, and increased her concern for her children. She described how her husband beat her son naked, and she had to jump in and put an end to the abuse, “He told

him to strip naked in front of his school friends, and he began to beat him brutally for no reason.”

Della explained that “The children were my only comfort,” and that they would defend her against harm from their father, as she tried to negotiate her abusive marriage and keep her children safe:

And then my sons, the two big ones born and see him abusing me verbally and physically, and they start to defend me now. And I have a little toddler, who comes into the fight anytime his father raise his voice at me, or lift up his hand to hit me.

Della’s context of abuse was impacted by her children at various levels, and so affected her motivations and decisions in her difficult situation.

Image preservation versus self-preservation. Della’s account illustrated that her survival depended on a change of focus or perspective. She had stated that initially, she stayed in the marriage because of the children. She also mentioned that along with staying to preserve her husband’s ministry and image, she was also concerned with people’s opinions, “I stayed because I was afraid of what people would say.” Della’s account indicated that throughout the course of her abusive journey, which began to affect her children, Della had to reevaluate her situation and revise her perspective. Della described the range of her emotions throughout the abuse, “During the abuse, I felt shock and disbelief at first; the fear, I felt betrayed, used, and abused. Then I became angry and I felt alone. I felt very alone.” She added, “My children were my only comfort. I felt shame and embarrassment. I felt like a nobody.” The following words illustrated Della’s revised perspective, “I decided to step out for me. I put the children aside. I thought about myself, my value. I deserve better.” Her words illustrated her positive self-reevaluation, and her actions reflected this new outlook, “I started to talk to the neighbors

toward the end, telling them to listen if they heard me cry out at any time. I told them to come and help me.” She continued to express her revised thoughts and views related to self-preservation:

I developed a love and value for myself because of the abuse. I had to value my life and run, leaving behind the things I had. I decided not to give him a chance to draw blood. I thought it best to leave than lose my life. I thought, I can lose my life in this abuse and I must put myself first.

Della’s account, therefore, revealed how she experienced her abuse against the background of changing perspectives and views that impacted her feelings, decisions, and motivations within the abusive context.

Conceptual mapping task. Della viewed her notes and arranged them in three piles that signified three time eras in her marriage: (a) her early expectations and excitement about getting married, (b) her shock and disappointment, and (c) her change of perspective and decision to leave. She placed “God” at all stages to signify God’s presence and purpose through it all.

As she viewed her map Della was asked what jumped out at her, and she said, “My marriage was a cover-up! He didn’t want a wife.” This comment was in reference to her husband. She was then asked to state what she saw as the most important thing to know or understand about her experience. She responded:

God never leaves His children. He loves us and we must also love ourselves. He gave us His best, and we must seek the best for ourselves, and don’t let pride allow us to settle for scraps. That man wanted to use me as a cover-up, and I put up with it for a while for my children and ministry. Pride was also in it too, but I said I would have no more of it. God wants better for me.

Della was asked the final question regarding what meaning her abusive experiences had for her, and she responded:

God is merciful, and He lets the wheat and tares grow together. How could somebody live a life of iniquity and still put up a front that he is serving God, a minister, and treat God's pickney the way he treated me? God is merciful, but God will judge, and God made me a stronger and wiser person, so I give Him thanks at the end.

With these comments, the interview was brought to an end, and Della expressed her thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the welfare of other women. Figure 7 represents Della's conceptual map.

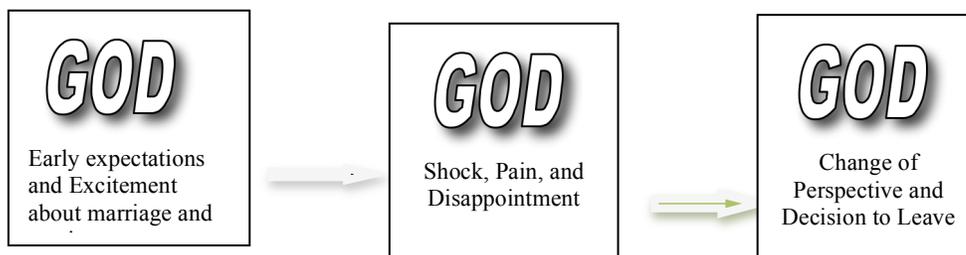


Figure 7. Della's conceptual map

Mellie's Profile

Mellie's interview was carried out at a designated site during the evening after work hours. Mellie works in the corporate world, and her forte lies in business and finance related areas. She was friendly and open as she arrived on time for the interview.

Mellie attended to her conceptual mapping task in a focused but sad fashion. It appeared that she was emotionally affected by retelling her story, but ended on a positive note thanking God for carrying her through.

Textural description. On analysis, Mellie's transcript and conceptual map revealed that she experienced physical abuse at the hands of her partner, based on his internal thoughts and not reality.

In response to the question regarding how she and her partner met, Mellie said they had lived in the neighborhood and traveled to school on the same bus each day. They were both teenagers and attended different high schools. She explained that he was very handsome, and as a sheltered girl who never had a boyfriend before, she was flattered when he expressed interest in being friends with her. She also expressed how impressed she was with his resourcefulness in the midst of severe family issues:

We went to different high schools at the same time, and he lived down the road with his family from my family home. We met through my brothers as well, and started taking the bus together...Very handsome specimen...exercised, good looking, over 6ft. on swim team, everything any girl would want. Sheltered, I was floored, parents didn't let us go out, weren't exposed. Him say him check fi me and I liked him. His mother left him and his sibling because his father beat her badly. His mother migrated; his father had moved out and was living with another woman down the road from them. He had responsibility to take care of his seven siblings after his mother left. I don't know if he finished school and passed his exams, but he had to leave and go to work to support his siblings. What I liked about him is he didn't waste time. He improvised...to support them. From very early, he was leaning toward the Rastafarian faith.

Mellie mentioned that he had embraced the Rastafarian belief, and she did the same despite her parent's protests. She explained how the relationship grew, and her school performance fell as she lost focus on her schoolwork. Then she became sexually involved with him, and found that she was pregnant:

He was fully in Twelve Tribes of Israel Rastafarian cult, and like a silly girl I went into it with him in spite of my parents protest. Then the whole sex thing came up. I thought this man was just my guy, and he used to come to the gate and talk, steal a kiss, go for walks. When I was to take my exams, I would focus on him a lot and not on my schoolwork, I wasted a lot of time, and I didn't do well in school. Then one night, I finally gave in to him and had sex, and that was the night I got pregnant. He had dreadlocks by then, and was working downtown. He would also raise animals in his backyard to subsidize cost for living.

Mellie explained that after she had her son, she would go back and forth between her home and his, and she discovered he was being unfaithful. She added that during this time he decided to purchase a house in the neighborhood. She indicated they did so together, and she was hopeful about getting married to him, in spite of the Rastafarian belief in having multiple partners:

I had a nice boy, lovely boy, and by this time I had accepted the Rastafarian faith—the cult, and even after having my son, during this time when I had the young baby, I found out he was cheating on me. During that time I went to live with him. I was back and forth really, and he was very ambitious and he decided to buy a house, and I was working at a bank, and we decided to buy house together in the neighborhood. He was a weed-head—smoked weed a lot, and also sold weed to back up income, and we owned this house when we were young—early 20's. So we bought a house while very young people, I pictured myself being married to him, somewhere in the future, hopefully on my part, because Rasta don't believe they have to be married and have one woman, I wanted a good family future for my son.

Mellie was then asked to describe how and when the relationship became abusive.

She started by describing the events that she felt led up to his abusive behavior toward her:

I came in from work and he was reading—he was well read. The night I came home, it was usually dusty, so I was sweeping and all of a sudden, he jumped up and accused me of sweeping dirt in his eyes, and that was when everything changed. And that was when he changed. He was smoking as well and I don't know if the ganja was spiked, and he went to doctor and the eye couldn't get better, and he began to accuse me and hallucinate and complain that they putting dead body behind him at work, you know, he had changed. What is this on me God?

She continued as she described the beginning of the abusive incidents:

Gradually I remember I had to move out because he started to beat me up. He would wrap up...electric wire and beat me, beat me, because his focus is on my having a man, accusing me that I had a man with him, a total figment of his imagination. And he would come in...and attack me with anything he could grab, and beat me in front of mi son, and beat mi on my fingers with the electric wire, and bruise them up. And it was like a nightmare, like a nightmare, and beat me. And I had to move out and go back to my mother's house, which I didn't want to do, and I left with my son, he just wouldn't leave me alone, it's like we were apart but not apart.

Based on Mellie's account, her partner appeared to have begun abusing her after a strange incident that left him changed in his personality and perception of reality. She continued to explain that she would go back to him sometimes based on his assurances that he would not hurt her again, but it would end up that he would beat her:

I would go over there sometimes because he said he wouldn't do it again, and we would have intercourse, and he would beat me, beat me, and then have sex with me. Sometimes he was lucid and ok and sometimes, wild-eyed and terrible, until I told him we had to go our separate ways. For days I didn't see him, and then he would turn up again, it was like he was fixated on us, and he wanted to see his son. And I would go back to the house with him, because the house wasn't sold yet, and I don't know why.

Mellie paused at this point, shaking her head as she looked into her lap. She then continued:

My son was about six at the time and I wasn't even thinking about his mental state at the time, I know he was frightened when he saw his father beating me up, and sometimes he would draw me into the room and send my son outside and beat me up and then have sex with me and then he would cook. And he would come in and look at me and call me names and abuse me verbally as I lie down there. I said to myself, "No, this have to stop!" but my saying that didn't mean it wouldn't happen again.

Mellie went on to describe the abuse that she endured in a shaky voice:

He had a wire brush; he use it to beat me on my leg, spontaneous attack, out of the blue, like something telling him I'm doing something: "You won't stop doing it? And that was when I really started praying to God to take me out of this. Before him come home, I used to pray, "Tek mi out of this! Help me! Help me!" and I genuinely believed God was going to help me. I know something would trigger and he would start to beat me, and I would cry out and scream, but nobody came to help me, nobody came to help me, nobody.

Mellie looked intently and with shock at the researcher as she said, "nobody came to help me, nobody came to help me, nobody." As she stated, she expected someone to come to her aid, and her expression indicated it was unbelievable to her that nobody did.

According to Mellie, she was being beaten for no real reason, except for what was in her partner's mind, based on what appeared to her to be the promptings of something inside him. Mellie went on to describe the horror of her final abusive experience:

His mother had filed for him to go to the US and before he left, after I had left, He would come to where I worked at the bank sometimes, and I would go outside and calm him down because I didn't want anybody to know that something was wrong. And he told me that he would make a stink if I didn't go with him, and so I took the bus with him docile and he took me back to the house. By now the neighbors knew everything, they would hear me screaming all the time. That day when he really beat me in my face with the belt buckle. That was the last time he really beat me like that. They had cut off the light in the house and there was lamplight. And he accused me of having somebody with him...and he took off his belt and he beat me, and beat me in my face, a long scar right across my face, cheekbone to the side of my mouth. I was naked and he beat me on my naked body, and then raped me, and when he went into the bathroom, I said, "Lord, if I don't escape now I not going to escape again." I drag on my clothes on the wrong side, didn't put on any panty wasn't even zipped up and took my handbag and shoes in my hand, and dash through the door and decided this was it. The neighbors had heard me screaming and they got word to my parents' home and told my mother and brother who was there. And I went through the gate, and I was running and running, trying to escape. He realized I had escaped and that was where my mother and my brother and him buck up. I don't know if God send

them, because I don't know what would happen if they didn't come. They fought him off and took me home.

While she was giving the account of this terrible experience, she was looking straight ahead of her, as though she were right back at that place and time, experiencing the abuse in the moment. She stopped speaking at this point, and fixed her eyes on those of the researcher. She proceeded to speak with her eyes filled with tears:

Tek off you clothes, mi ago beat you. And him start tek off him belt, that's what him always do, and him beat mi, him beat him, beat mi pon mi naked skin, and mi scream "Help me! Uno help me, help mi! Somebody help me! I bawl, and not only my face weal up, but my whole body, my legs swell up, and not only my face had the cut across it, but also cut across my chest across my breast cut, and him beat mi naked, beat mi naked, beat mi naked, and a bawl, a bawl out to people and nobody wouldn't come.

Mellie paused, holding her head. She groaning, shaking her head and said, "My legs and chest were bruised, black and blue. The other times I was wealed [welted] up, but this time was the worst." She then fixed her gaze upon the researcher once again, and continued to speak:

He realized I had escaped and he chased me and just as he catch up with me and grabbed me in my neck back, that was where him buck up [came face-to-face with] my mother and brother. Mi mother protected mi, and mi mother fight him off with mi brother, and said, Whe you no lef har? [Why don't you leave her alone?] Mi mother fight him off, after mi cause her so much heartache. I don't remember where my father was—maybe he wasn't home from work yet.

Mellie sat back, sighed, and closed her eyes for a few seconds after this account. She had described her abuses, the reasons for which seemed to her to have emerged from her partners mind. She appeared to be exhausted after having spoken about, and recollected the abuse.

Structural description. Mellie's analyzed transcript revealed a number of elements or conditions against which she experienced her abuse. The following represent

the main elements of this context: (a) partner's questionable mental state, (b) fear and shame, and (c) faith, hope, and love.

Partner's questionable mental state. As she told her story, Mellie made it clear that her partner smoked marijuana heavily. She called him a “weed-head,” which is the Jamaican term used for persons who smoked marijuana heavily and appear to be addicted to it: “He was a weed-head—smoked weed a lot, and also sold weed to back up income.” She mentioned that he was smoking on the night of the incident when he said she had swept something in his eyes. She said she didn't know whether something was added to the weed, but his behavior and thought patterns changed. She said he would falsely accuse her and hallucinate thereafter:

I was sweeping and all of a sudden, he jumped up and accused me of sweeping dirt in his eyes, and that was when everything changed. And that was when he changed. He was smoking as well and I don't know if the ganja was spiked, and he went to doctor and the eye couldn't get better, and he began to accuse me and hallucinate and complain that they putting dead body behind him at work, you know, he had changed.

She described his strange behavior in the midst of abusing her: “He would draw me into the room and send my son outside, and beat me up, and then have sex with me, and then he would cook.” She added that he enjoyed beating her, and then he would have sex with her. Afterwards, he would force her to lie down with him:

He took joy out of beating me up; he was aroused, and when he was finished beating me, he would have sex with me—beating and then sex, beating and then sex, and then he would force me to lay down with him and sleep like nothing happened. You know, that part of my life I sorta block out.

To this description, Mellie added that after beating her, he would have sex with her in a loving manner:

Mi get raped against mi will, you know. It was mi baby father, but him force himself pon mi after him beat mi up. And him no have sex wid mi rough u know,

him beat and then have sex with mi lovingly, looking in mi eyes. Mi no want to have no sex in that condition. It just coming back to me now.

His questionable mental state was also reflected in his behavior when he would go to see her at her mother's house, after she left: "He was fixated on me. He would spit at me and curse and make ugly scene at the gate—dirty, dirty, life. He looked down at me because he was imagining I was doing these things."

Fear and shame. In addition to bearing her abuse within the context of her partner's questionable mental state, Mellie's story indicated she had to deal with constant fear of embarrassment: "After I had left the house, he would come to where I worked sometimes, and I would go outside and calm him down, because I didn't want anybody to know that something was wrong." She explained how he stalked her, and that she was always scared and afraid of embarrassment:

At work after I left I was at mama, he was stalking me, he could tell me who I was talking to, and sometimes I look outside, and I see him standing out there. I didn't want anybody to know I was with somebody who beat me or who was a madman. He would come to my work place and talk like he was all right, but I could see in his eyes that he wasn't all right. When the day passed and I didn't see him come, I was glad. I was always scared. When I went on the bus from work and went back to the house with him, I did it because I didn't want any embarrassment.

Mellie explained that she was ashamed to go back home, because she had gone back and forth so many times, and her partner had come to her mother's home and behaved badly on occasions:

I was ashamed to go back to my mother, because I left and went back so many times. And when I was around my mother he would come and make a scene and cause my parents a lot of pain.

Mellie also described the shame of having to face the world with her scarred face, and how she lied, after being on sick leave for two weeks, after her last abusive experience:

I had to be on two weeks sick leave, and go back to work with this big scar on my face. I told them I was in an accident and the glass cut me in my face. I think my boss suspected I was in an abusive relationship, and I had to face people with that cut in my face. Some believe me and some didn't, but I had to face people with that scar in my face till it heal.

Faith, hope, and love. Mellie's analyzed transcript revealed the dynamics among these three elements that formed a constant background, and affected how she experienced her abuse.

As Mellie spoke about the early stages of her relationship with her partner, she stated how she embraced the Rastafarian beliefs that he held, and became a member of the cult: "He was fully in Twelve Tribes of Israel Rastafarian cult, and like a silly girl, I went into it with him, in spite of my parents' protests." It appeared that she sought to please her partner by embracing the beliefs he had embraced. Her words indicated that in the midst of her abuse, she reached for her belief in God, and cried out to Him for help, but there was no response:

He had a wire brush he used it to beat me on my leg, like a spontaneous attack, out of the blue....And that was when I really started praying to God to take me out of this. Before him come home, I used to pray, tek mi out of dis! Help me! Help me! And I genuinely believed God was going to help me...God neva help me at all (*Paused with her eyes glistening and staring at the researcher*).

She made it clear, however, that during her period of abuse, she never became bitter when God did not answer her cries for help. She explained how the experience showed her that Rastafarian way was not the way to go:

God didn't send anybody, but it didn't make me bitter toward God, I still had an open mind...I don't know...it just opened my eyes that Rasta was not the right way, so yes, I was disappointed, but it didn't turn me off from God at the time. Disappointed but not turned off from God—not hating God.

When Mellie was specifically asked to state what role her faith played in her abusive experiences, she responded:

I wouldn't say it was the Rastafari part that helped me, it was reading the Word you know, that helped me. Drawing closer to God, seeking His face in trouble, you know? It sorta gave me strength to face the pain, to bear it, and in that way also, it opened another door to who God - who God was, because I don't know if I didn't have that experience I would be eating up the word like that, hoping to get some help and rescue from it. So it wasn't from the standpoint of Rasta, but reading the Word gave me strength. All things work together....All of this was making me into somebody stronger, helping me to seek God's face, helping me to see the importance of God in my life.

As she reflected on the final abusive incident, she considered whether God sent her mother and brother to her rescue, when she ran out of the house in an effort to escape her abuser: "He realized I had escaped, and that was where my mother and my brother and him buck up. I don't know if God send them, because I don't know what would happen if they didn't come." She added, "I think at that time God sent the neighbors to tell my family. God intervened." She finally expressed how much her faith in God grew and strengthened her, so that she was able to survive her abuse:

This experience helped me to be strong, grow in knowledge of God and His word. It made mi stronger in life. I didn't have my sister to talk to at the time, so I had to go through these experiences on my own. It hurt when I think of the possibilities of what could have been. When I think about how he was—he never hurt anybody, but God allowed things to happen this way, and with all of this, I take away spiritual growth.

In the midst of Mellie's growth in faith, hope and love coexisted. Her story illustrated that she loved this man and wanted to have a life with him and their son. She

expressed her constant hope for change. This was her response when she was asked to state why she stayed in the abuse:

I was hoping he would change, my son not being separated from his father, loving him, hoping to just have one man and not start another relationship, hoping to have a life with him. Being a young girl, he is my child's father. I never had sex with anyone else; wanting to keep that relationship for as long as you can, you know.

She added the following, which illustrated the intermingling of her faith in God with hope for change in her partner's behavior:

I was hoping God would rectify the situation one day and he would come home and be all right. He would send somebody to deliver me—all kind of foolish thought. I realize a no so God work! God work in His time and his way; Him no just send a deliverer just so.

It was clear that, in spite of the abuse, Mellie's faith, hope, and love, allowed her to weather the agony of the abuse, and impacted her behaviors and motivations during the time she endured it.

Conceptual mapping task. As Mellie viewed her notes, she spoke reflectively about the person her partner used to be:

In all of this, I always remember the kind of man he was, he was always kind, ambitious, responsible, and he took care of all his siblings even after they fired him. And he wasn't ashamed to do what he had to do—sell weed and travel abroad to Caribbean to buy and sell. All these things I admired, and he loved his son very, very much, and I hoped to have a family with him one day. And sexually he was excellent. He was a very clean individual, took care of his body, washed his hair and clothes; always smelling clean, always smelling nice and fresh—the things I put a lot of stock in; never had sex without having a bath. He took cleanliness as a very important part of his life.

She continued to reflect aloud as she viewed the notes:

I remember he used to tell me his father would beat his mother over the years, and he would see the beatings and she ran away and leave the young children. For a woman to have seven children for a man and run away and leave them because of the beating—the youngest girl was four—she must have been under tremendous pressure to leave. He was the oldest one, and the father lived down the road with another woman, so he had to take care of his young siblings, because his father did not take care of them.

Again, as she viewed her notes, she stated how she lost focus at school and tried to please her partner by embracing his faith:

I lost my focus at school, so I didn't do as well as I could because I lost my focus. I went along with him in Rasta meeting to please him as his woman. What was I thinking? What was I thinking? Lord have mercy!"

She added the following comment about hope in the midst of abuse:

I can see why women stay with abusive men. There is always a hope that things would change, would regularize, and would be righted. I was hoping for a family but it never worked. When I think back I don't know why I stayed in it, I guess because of his promises and he was lucid, then he is wide-eyed."

Mellie appeared to be exhausted and emotionally drained when she was done arranging the notes. She extracted a few notes and wrote on them. She wrote, "I love you mom" on the notes that related to her mother and brother rescuing her. She had a smiley face on notes related to her son. The notes with the abuse were all marked with a black "X". This was the biggest pile of notes. Figure 8 illustrates Mellie's conceptual map.

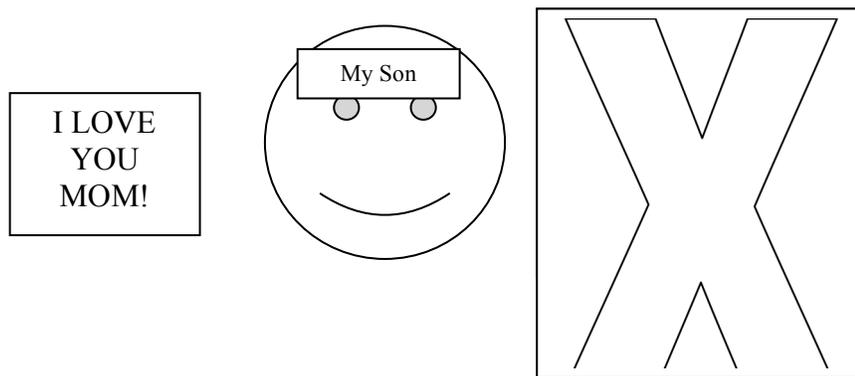


Figure 8, Mellie's conceptual map

As Mellie viewed her map, she was asked to state what struck her as she looked at it, and she stated:

When I think back I can empathize with other women. It's a personal thing. You might say, "She so stupid," but although her actions may appear stupid, there is always hope that the man would change, and that he would come back and look normal; there is hope. Hoping just as how he became like that, same way he would change back.

She was asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand emerging from her experiences. She promptly responded:

What I know or what I've learned is things don't happen how you want it—how you hope it will happen. The reality is that your life just crumble, and you have to move on; you have to make a decision. And I had to make a decision in my life to sever all ties and become an enemy; not to encourage him, for him to understand it was finished, in order to get my life back. I had to stop taking and taking and had to attack, I had to fight back.

Mellie was asked what meaning her abusive experiences had for her, and she said with a strong tone:

Without this part of my life I wouldn't have had my son, and it has been a challenge with my son, but I wouldn't have reversed it and not had my son. I learned to put away shame and pride. Experience helped me to be strong, grow in

knowledge of God and His word. It made me stronger in life...I had to go through these experiences on my own. It hurt when I think of the possibilities of what could have been. When I think about how he was—he never hurt anybody, but God allowed things to happen this way, and with all of this, I take away spiritual growth.

Nellie's Profile

Nellie's interview took place on the very next day after she successfully completed the screening process. She expressed her desire to assist in this field for the sake of women, and was present at a designated interview site a few minutes ahead of time. She seemed to be calm and ready for the process ahead. Nellie is self-employed, and a very successful pioneer in her field of business. She has managed to attain her level of success from basic beginnings of a high school diploma. She is currently one of the highest authorities in her field.

As the CMT was explained to Nellie, she pleasantly stated that the exercise was new to her, and she asked the researcher to be patient with her. She added that although it was new, she was very open to learning new things.

Textural description. Nellie's analyzed transcript revealed the following main highlights of her abusive experiences: (a) emerged from one-sided and bizarre beginnings—warnings, and (b) routine/scheduled in occurrence.

One-sided and bizarre beginnings—warnings. Nellie was asked to state how she and her husband met. She stated that her girl friend, who was a mutual friend, introduced them, and she was instantly enamored with his looks: "He was handsome...I couldn't take my eyes off him. I asked who he was." Nellie explained that they agreed to meet a few days later, but conversation was one-sided: "I did all the talking, and the only thing he told me is his name." Things became further one-sided, and perhaps bizarre, in this new relationship, as Nellie suggested that they move in together: "I suggested we find

somewhere to live together, and he agreed.” She continued to describe how things proceeded in what might appear to be a bizarre fashion: “Honestly, he never wanted sex. I was the one who instigated sex, but I didn’t know anything about sex. He told me he liked me not loved me. I loved how he looked.” Her report illustrated the strangeness of this new relationship, and her partner’s harsh behavior toward her, early in the relationship, was noted in the following statement:

He never had much to say, and I would be the one always talking, and he said, “Shut up!” and I shut up, and would only speak when absolutely necessary. So we would just sit and listen to the radio and not talk.

She added there was a time when she was playing around with him and his response was very frightening, a sure warning of bad things to come:

I remember before we lived together, I was playing around and he shouted, “Stop it!” and I still continued, and he took out a knife and threw a switchblade knife at my foot and I jumped out of the way.

Nellie described how the relationship proceeded, as she became pregnant at 21. She explained that she had mixed feelings, but strangely enough, there was no response from her partner:

I was pregnant age 21...Doctor confirmed it. I was happy and I was sad. In those days you were looked at as scum. It was shameful to be pregnant out of wedlock. I was ashamed, and I was really feeling bad. When I told him, he never said a word—not “I’m happy or sad.” He just said, “Oh!” I worried because I hear how baby pain hot!

Nellie’s account illustrated that the relationship proceeded in what could be characterized as a bizarre fashion. After her announcement to him that she was pregnant, her partner told her to write to her mother, informing her that she is getting married. There was no proposal, and there was no communication between them about wedding planning:

His cousin said we have to get married, and I was glad. They spoke to him, and he came to me—four months pregnant by now. He came into the room and put his head in my lap, which was unusual. I thought, “Wait, what’s going on here?” He said you can write home and tell your mother that you’re going to get married. He didn’t ask me anything. So I said, “Oh? So when we going to get married?” He said, “I don’t know, but take your passport and birth certificate to the church around the corner.” They decided the date and time for wedding. They told me where to go and get cake made. It took about 6 weeks.

She added:

I had to go and buy my dress. I was very naive because on the day of the wedding I asked him if he had my ring, and he asked me if I didn’t buy a ring. He said he thought I was to buy the ring. I told him he was the one who should buy the ring. He gave me two pounds and odd and told me to go buy ring. The store man opened his eyes when I told him all I had. So he gave me a ring. I didn’t know I should get a ring for him, so he had no ring. I was the one who carried the ring to the church. There was no invitation. I never know to invite people. The person to pick me up didn’t come till one hour later, and said he was trying to fill up the church, because there were no invitations.

Nellie continued her strange story, expressing her realization that she had made a horrible mistake:

This is when I realized, “You have made a mistake!” No flowers in the church. I was now 21 years old. When pastor said, “Where is your ring?” I said, “I don’t have any sah!” [laughing] Oh God! When we were signing, I started to say, “Pastor, I’m sorry I didn’t...” My husband shouted, “Shut up!” right there and then, and I just shut up because I was frightened. And that is when I realized, “Oh my God, what have I done?”

Nellie added that her friend had warned her not to marry him, but she did not take heed:

My friend said she not taking any pictures with me, because she told me not to marry him, because him going to treat me like how his father treated his mother, but I didn’t listen, because I love him, and I was going to fix it. I was going to treat him so nice, and him must love me!

Adding to the bizarre nature of this one-sided relationship, Nellie stated loudly,

“Honeymoon night, the man turn him back to me, not even a little hug up.” Nellie also spoke about problems that emerged shortly after the wedding, related to his alleged

involvement with a 14 year-old cousin in the household. This added to the strange nature of this new relationship, which seemed to be on a bad path:

They said he was too close to a 14-year-old cousin, and I saw him go in the bathroom with her. That time I had my big belly. But I didn't say anything because it was my husband. One day he just came in and jumped in the bed and told me if anybody asked, to tell them he was in the bed long time. The little girl's father came in and raised hell because he had caught them doing something, I don't know what. It was the 6th week after wedding.

Based on her report, Nellie's relationship began in this strange fashion, which could be noted in her taking the lead in a number of key areas. Her partner's behavior toward her, including shouting at her, throwing a knife at her feet, not being interested in sex or major interactions with her, and his apparent involvement with his 14 year-old female cousin attested to this relationship's strange beginnings, which proceeded into full-blown abusive experience. Nellie had received many warnings that went unheeded.

Routine/scheduled. Nellie reported sadly that the relationship became physically abusive in the wake of her husband's involvement with his young cousin. She described how the events unfolded when she commented on her husband's behavior, as the family turned on him:

They started to curse him and turned on me, and I started to say to the relatives that I saw him going into the bathroom with the girl, and told him I didn't like it, and he didn't say anything. When I went home all the man did is double his fist and give one thump in mi mouth—blood come! "I am you husband, don't talk bout me to anybody!" And he pushed me up against the wall and left.

Nellie explained how she was physically abused routinely each weekend. She expressed the abuse as something she could "look forward to" and it was done in the presence of the children:

Every weekend I could look forward to a box in the face, or push up against the wall, and the children saw this all the time. Sometimes they would cry, "Mommy daddy stop." I didn't want to tell anybody because it was too shameful.

Whenever he hit me, I hit him back. When I say fight, I mean fight, fight!
Double him fist and punch mi, and watching mi face to make sure it hurt.

Nellie stated that her husband would stay out all night, and she described how she would be abused if she questioned him about this. In this routine of abuse, she described his habitual treatment of her:

He started not to come home, and you couldn't ask him anything or else he would push me up against the wall and tell me not to ask him anything so I became afraid of him. He had a habit of grabbing me and pushing me up against the wall for no apparent reason. He always would slap me in the face and push me up against the wall, then leave and come back and don't talk to me. There was argument frequently, once a week and he was a malice keeper.

In her routine of abuse, Nellie explained how she would know what to expect because of her husband's stance. She described a particularly brutal assault with a large, filled aerosol can of spray:

As I opened the door, I know when a fight, or a chuck against the wall was coming, I knew it, because for some unknown reason, he would have his shirt open, and so when I walked in he was upstairs waiting for me: "Weh you a come from? I bright and bold said, "Weh mi a come from? Street!" He picked up a huge, big aerosol can and gave me one lick in ma face and I saw sun, moon, stars, death, and that thing hurt me so bad, and when I went down on the ground, he said, "U bitch u! And I was in such excruciating pain, there was nothing I could do, and he just turned and went into the bed.

She continued her story, stony-faced, explaining how she attempted to routinely proceed through her day, in the wake of what was now routine physical abuse. She further explained that this was not possible, because her jaw was broken:

I was there crying and the children came, Mommy, mommy what happened, I was saying to them that their father hit me, but when I was trying to say that, my mouth couldn't open, and I got up in the morning and made breakfast for him same way, and went to work. When I went to work, I couldn't answer the phone, I couldn't talk, and one of the women came to me and said, "What happened to your face?" and I said, "I fell down." And my boss came over and said, "No, no, no, your face look lean. Go to the doctor." I went to my same family doctor, and he asked me what happen to my face and I told him I fell down, and he said, "On what?" I said, "A lightpost." and he said, "You think I'm a damned fool. That

man should be locked up!” and he ran me out, and I went to the public hospital, and I was afraid they would lock him up, and they asked what happen, and I said I fell down. And they didn’t believe me. They said, “Your jawbone is dislocated, and you will need surgery to fix it.”

Nellie sat back in her chair at this point, and took a deep breath. She then sat upright in her chair, and proceeded to relate what turned out to be her husband’s final attempt to hurt her. She explained that she had dressed nicely and gone out with a girlfriend the night before, and nothing happened when she returned home that night. She expressed great fear come morning, and described the events that unfolded in an excited high-pitched tone:

Next morning I was so afraid, and he got up and said, “You naa git up and get mi breakfast?” And I jumped up and made breakfast and put it on a tray, and put it on the bed. That night, “A whe u did go? A whe u did go? A man u ago wid. Mi notice from the other day u a fix up uself.” I don’t remember honestly what I said to him, and he grabbed me in my chest, and I don’t know where the three children came from, and at the time P, he was fourteen, C, she was thirteen, and the last one, he was twelve. The three children grab him you see, and I don’t know how P, the quieter of the three, had grabbed one hand and put it behind his back, with his knee in his neck, and had him on the floor, and C was there kicking, Their father took up the vacuum cleaner and he was going to lick mi down, and the vacuum fly over there, and I just stayed one side watching, and P was kneeling in his back and C, she was in front of me kicking, kicking, and Ch giving some punch, and P had his knees in his face down on the ground. He said, “Let me go! Let me go!” and P said, “No, I not letting you go!” and he turned and looked at me and said, “U see what u mek them do to me? And I never said a word. I was actually glad the children were doing that, and P said, “Daddy let mi tell you something, I’m telling u this; I’m going to let you go, but I’m tired of what you been doing to mommy, and if you ever put your hand on mommy again, I’m going to kill you!” C said, “Yes!” and Ch said, “Yes!” He stood up and said, “U see dat? U see dat? U see what you mek dem do?” And that was the last time he put his hand on me, and that was the day I believe the children were finished with him.

According to Nellie, this signified the end of her physically abusive experiences, though the marriage continued in its broken state. She expressed her feelings in the wake of it all: “They were respectful but had nothing else to do with him. By this time

everything had broken down, and we didn't have anything to do with each other. I was sad but had a sense of freedom.”

Structural description. Nellie's analyzed transcript revealed the context within which she experience physical abuse over the years. The following elements characterized her experiences: (a) children, (b) pride and shame, (c) views on marriage, and (d) desperation and hopelessness.

Children. Nellie explained she became pregnant with her first child when she was 21 years old: “I was pregnant age twenty-one...Doctor confirmed it! I was happy and I was sad.” She revealed the other two children arrived in quick succession, and she was overwhelmed:

My baby was three to four months and found I was pregnant again. I felt doomed. We had to find somewhere else to go because, the one room was too small. Always so internally stressed out wondering, “How did I get into this? How am I going to get out?” So I had the second child....The new baby was about 4 months old and I was pregnant again, and we had to move to live in an attic.

Her story indicated that her children were a part of her life since the very early stages of her relationship. In the routine of abuse, she described how the children were constant witnesses: “Every weekend I could look forward to a box in the face or push up against the wall, and the children saw this all the time. Sometimes they would cry, “Mommy, daddy, stop!”

Nellie described how her children became a source of love, comfort, and even protection for her:

I was always honestly seeking love and never got it, and I got a certain amount of comfort from my children. My children became my friends. They protected me a lot of times because when he starts, they would just come into the room and sit down and he would stop.

Nellie explained that she made her children her life, because there was no love in her marriage:

I made my children my life. We do everything together. I just made my children my life... When him want sex, which wasn't very often, he would just turn me over, and I would just turn over and didn't say anything, because I didn't want any problems.... There was no love.

She went on to explain that when she took pills in an effort to commit suicide, it was her daughter's voice that brought her to her senses, and enabled her to call the ambulance for her own rescue:

I decided to kill myself, and took all the tablets I could find, and the Valium, and stood in front of him and said, "This is what you want. I will be out of your life." And I took the tablets, and he just look at me and went to bed and turned off the light. Then I hear my daughter's voice, "Mommy, Mommy" and I came to my senses and thought, "What have I done?" and I went downstairs and called the ambulance for myself [she laughed heartily]. I told them I've taken an overdose, and they took me to the hospital and pumped my stomach.

As Nellie's life continued to unfold with repeated abuses from her husband, her children's constant presence impacted how she bore her abuse. According to her story, their actions served to put an end to their father's physical abuse of her just as he sought to begin a fresh assault on her:

He grabbed me in my chest, and I don't know where the three children came from... The three children grab him you see, and I don't know how P, the quieter of the three, had grabbed one hand and put it behind his back, with his knee in his neck, and had him on the floor, and C was there kicking... and P said, "Daddy let mi tell you something, I'm telling u this; I'm going to let you go, but I'm tired of what you been doing to mommy, and if you ever put your hand on mommy again, I'm going to kill you! C said, "Yes!" and Ch said, "Yes!"... And that was the last time he put his hand on me.

When asked why she stayed in the relationship, Nellie stated first that it was because of her children. She explained:

I wanted to leave but I did not because I told myself that I did not want my children to grow up and not know their father, and say I was the reason why they

did not know their father, so I was prepared to go through anything to protect my children.

She added, “I didn’t like the idea of having children for different fathers, that’s why I stayed.” Nellie continued to explain as she said, “I just had to stay because of my children, my children need me, they need both of us.” Without a doubt, Nellie’s children were a close part of her life throughout her abusive experiences, and their presence impacted her thoughts, feelings, and decision to remain in the abusive context for the time she did.

Pride and shame. These elements plagued Nellie throughout her abusive experiences. She explained how ashamed she was when her husband assaulted her after she spoke out about his behavior with his young cousin:

When I went home, all the man did is double his fist and give one thump in mi mouth—blood come...and he pushed me up against the wall and left. I was so embarrassed I was so ashamed. I didn’t know what to do.

She explained how shame caused her to keep secret what her husband was doing to her. She said, “I didn’t want to tell anybody because it was too shameful.” According to Nellie, concerns about public opinion, if people learned she was being abused, led her to stay in the abusive situation. It was a matter of pride. Remaining married was a very important factor, “People was a big part of my decision to stay. What would people say? And the shame, the shame! Everyone would know the marriage was over...Being Mrs. N. was a big thing for me.”

Views on marriage. In addition to Nellie’s pride and her esteem for the status of being married, her words indicated her view of marriage also impacted her abusive experiences:

The only thing that kept me when you think about faith or spirituality is not that I had a relationship with Christ. It was through what I was taught by my mother, “Once you’re married you stay deh!” and I was afraid of adultery, those two things, and wanting my children to grow up knowing their father, and my pride—and a matter of fact the status of being married since I had children. And I thought to be married was the greatest thing in the world. Yes, keeping marriage vows was a big thing.

Desperation and hopelessness. Nellie’s account revealed how she responded to her abuse by dangerously mixing alcohol and valium after the doctor prescribed valium to help her deal with her stress. The doctor had warned her that she might meet her demise at her husband’s hands if she did not leave:

I was so, so, so depressed, I couldn’t focus on anything. I went to the doctor because I had no one to turn to, and he said he knew when I came with the bruises it was my husband, and I should get out of it or else he would kill me. He gave me some Valium to take one before going to bed, and when I took the Valium I felt nice. And I would take one in morning and one at night. And I would drink it with whisky, and gin. I used to drink a lot of whisky and gin, so I took the Valium with the drinks. At that time I was afraid of him. Then I noticed my lips felt big and went to doctor and he said take half, but I still take the same amount.

Nellie added that she would also smoke, and “try to let the smoke go up in my head, and I was still taking the Valium.” Nellie described how she decided to commit suicide in desperation and fear, after she had taken out a court order for her husband to leave the house:

And when he read the summons, he called me and said, “Mi naa come out! “You betta come out!” I was so scared I couldn’t sleep whole night. The thought came to me to take the Valium and kill myself. A few days later he started at me again and I decided to kill myself, and took all the tablets I could find and the Valium, and stood in front of him and said, “This is what you want! I will be out of your life!” And took the tablets, and he just look at me and went to bed, and turned off the light.

As stated earlier, her daughter’s voice calling for her brought her to the realization of what she had done, and she called for an ambulance to help her.

Conceptual mapping task. Nellie viewed her notes then placed them in two piles labeled “God bless my children” and “Naïve.” The pile regarding children had at the center, the notes referring to when the children rescued her from their father. The remaining notes represented her abusive marriage, and were assigned under the other label. Above both piles, she wrote, “Thank God.” She then placed arrows linking “God” to the two piles, illustrating God’s presence in everything. Figure 9 illustrates her conceptual map.

As Nellie viewed the notes, she asked the researcher the following question: “After hearing all of this, you think I was stupid?” The researcher responded in the negative, and she proceeded to say, “I really believe what the Bible says that the older women should teach the younger. First I’ve ever spoken to this level about these things.”

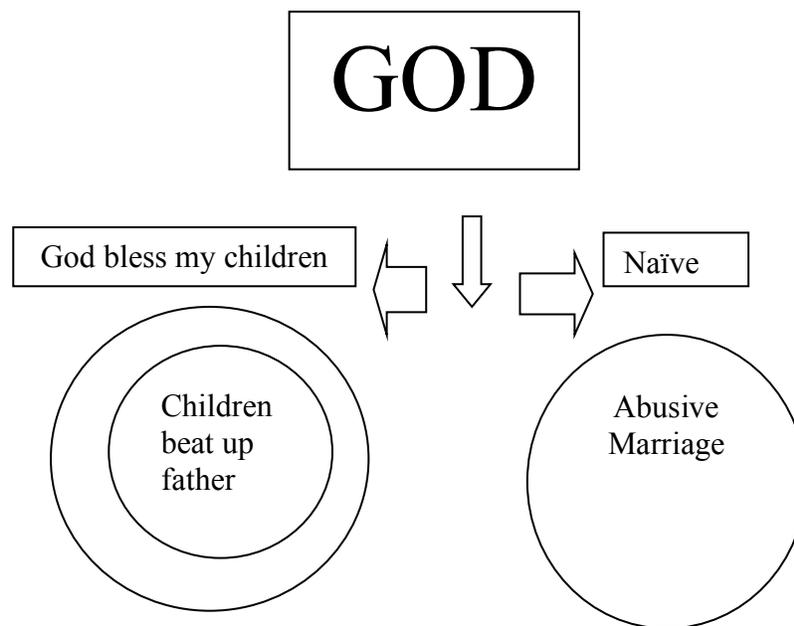


Figure 9. Nellie’s conceptual map

Nellie was then asked to state what struck her as she looked at her completed map, and she responded:

Looking at all this, I'm so glad. I feel like, "Thank God I got out of it!" How did I get out of it? God was there even though I didn't know Him....Thank God for His love. He is really good to me.

Nellie was asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand about her experiences, and she stated:

I understand—I can look back and see that God was there all along and I didn't know. I can lift my hand higher and praise God. But I didn't do so bad after all! Look at me now! Praise God! I have lived to see him say he wants me back, and I am happy to say I've moved on.

Finally, Nellie was asked to state the meaning the experiences had for her, and she responded with a sigh:

I was not wise, so I needed someone to talk to. I bottled up everything. I needed somebody older, somebody wiser, who could counsel, and growing up as sheltered as I did, I didn't know life. I learned that you can't just see a man and make your own picture. You don't make the man into what you want. You need to learn about the background. I looked at external, and external is a lie. Take time to get to know the person. Also learned when you fall down you must get up. Must learn from your mistake, everyone makes mistakes, but you must learn from them or something is wrong. I also allowed pride to hurt my children. They are insular now because of everything. I grow them up like that because I was raised like that, but thank God they are happy in their marriages. I understand—I can look back and see that God was there all along and I didn't know. I can lift my hand higher and praise God. But I didn't do so bad after all! Look at me now! Praise God!

Helen's Profile

Helen's interview was carried out at a designated site first thing in the morning. She graciously volunteered to participate in the study and expressed her hope that the study would make a positive impact in Jamaica and internationally. Helen is a well-spoken teacher, who has a graduate teaching degree.

She approached the conceptual mapping task with an open and willing attitude. At the end, she expressed how happy she was to have gone through the process, and stated she had learned a great deal from it.

Textural description. Helen's analyzed transcript and conceptual map revealed the following main highlights of her abusive experience: (a) commitment made in spite of red flags and inadequate guidance, and (b) extinguishing of her personhood and self-esteem.

Commitment made in spite of red flags and inadequate guidance. Helen commenced the interview by stating how she and her husband met. She explained that they met within a church setting, where he approached her and introduced himself. She added that afterwards, he would present himself unannounced at her office and invite himself to her home where she lived with her roommate, "We met on Saturday, and within a few days, there he was bounding up the stairs to my office. He stayed and chatted until I was ready to leave...He invited himself and came home with me." She explained he began to visit her at home frequently and would overstay his time, despite the fact that she would ask him to leave earlier. She indicated that this also inconvenienced her roommate:

He would come to my home and stay until late, although I would request that he leave earlier. My roommate at the time was also put out by this, and when I communicated this to him, he felt that she was jealous that she was no longer having the time with me that she was accustomed to. I was troubled by what seemed like an issue with boundaries where he was concerned.

Helen's concern was clearly stated, as her words revealed that this person showed no regard for other persons' time or space, from the very beginning of the relationship. She added she also had concerns regarding anger issues on his part before they were married.

This was another warning sign for her, and she explained how she insisted on counseling based on these anger issues, when he brought up the matter of marriage, “Before we were married, I saw anger issues and some possessiveness. Since he was introducing the topic of marriage, I pushed for us to do pre-marital counseling.” Helen explained that, regrettably, they were not able to complete their sessions. Thus she did not receive adequate guidance, having completed only half the number of sessions before getting married, “When we got half-way, it was close to the wedding date...the counselor advised us that we could go ahead and he would pick up the counseling after. This is advice I have regretted to this day.”

Helen said she proceeded in the relationship because she “felt he had a teachable spirit during courting.” She revealed that they were scheduled to be married within a year of having met, but she decided to call off the wedding two months before. She took her concerns to her church Elders, and waited for their recommendations. She was disappointed by the outcome:

I was calling off the wedding for three reasons: (1) he was not fully employed; (2) I thought he was emotionally immature by the way he handled things, picking fights for what seemed like insignificant and sometimes unexplainable things; (3) he had a kind of disrespect for my privacy etc. I went to my Elders and informed them of my decision and they asked to meet with him first. They did, and I waited for their recommendations. I was surprised when I was called into the meeting after...and they closed the meeting by saying that they were leaving it up to us to decide. I was disappointed because my church policy was that they would make recommendations in conflict situations like that.

Helen’s account indicated she felt she had not received any guidance when she should have, as there were serious warning signals and cause for concern with her relationship.

She expressed that afterwards, she felt blackmailed by her partner into getting married:

After they left, what after the fact I would call emotional/spiritual blackmail took place and I gave in to this. He said he would go to the Church on the date set for

marriage because he refused to disobey God. He would go, even if he had to go alone. For some reason that created a “fear” in me. A fear I later determined as fear of God’s judgement if I were truly in disobedience! In hindsight, I deeply regret this, as I wondered after if I really thought that God would strike me with lightning or something if I had followed through and postponed or cancelled the wedding.

Helen finally spoke about a frightening show of anger from her partner a few days before the wedding, which played out before her mother. Despite this incident, she said she dismissed it after they met with a counselor—a decision she said she regretted:

I saw a side of him that frightened me—such anger in his eyes that made me wonder if he could or would get physical with me. The anger that he displayed, and how he carried on was right in front of my mother...which also concerned me regarding self-control. I called the counselor after he left my house, and he reassured me that he was brought up on the rough side and just needed some “sand-papering” that he thought that I could provide. I dismissed my “gut-concerns” and allowed myself to be “comforted” by these words. This was another regret.

Extinguishing of her personhood and self-esteem. Helen stated that during her honeymoon, her husband’s behavior toward her, when she asked for his patience during a difficult time of intimacy, caused her to feel “vulnerable as a new bride:”

Sex was painful...and I could not go through with it, and asked him to be patient with me...At this request, he got up, put on his clothes and left me alone in the room. He returned about one and a half hours after. He told me that a prostitute tried to pick him up and he was tempted but...I felt very vulnerable as a new bride... new to sex and not finding the type of consideration and gentleness that I thought appropriate. I spent much of the night, lying down and praying.

It would be understandable that her husband’s words and behavior would be uncomfortable and even hurtful to her, inferring from his words that a prostitute was a tempting prospect, because his new bride was not satisfying his needs. This was likely to make her feel less of a person, thereby negatively impacting her self-esteem. In another incident that Helen related, she described her husband’s inconsideration and physically abusive treatment toward her during her honeymoon:

I told him I was going to lie down. He stayed in the living area. I fell asleep. He came to the room, turned on the radio loudly, listening to cricket. It woke me. I told him that it was too loud and that if he needed to listen to it, I would lie down in the living area since I could not sleep with the cricket commentary so loud. He ignored me so I went in the living room. After a while, he came in the living room and commanded me to “Go to yu bed!” I could still hear the radio and reminded him that I could not fall asleep with the radio so loud. He began to curse me, which surprised me, especially in the manner he was doing it. I reminded him that I was his wife and not a stranger. He continued cursing coming up in my face and then in his anger, he lifted me roughly, carried me to the bedroom and flung me on the bed. I was in shock! I could not believe what just happened, and that he just physically threw me down! I jumped off the bed and was on my knees, praying...crying...trying to maintain my cool! He just went to lie down like nothing happened with the radio still playing. I think I forced myself to fall asleep just to see morning and get a clearer perspective on what happened. By morning, he approached me for sex. I did not resist.

Based on Helen’s report, her husband showed no consideration and respect for her as a person and his new bride, as he had the radio turned up, spoke to her in a sharp manner, and physically handled her very roughly. These behaviors displayed total disregard for her and, to add insult to injury, he approached her for sex in the morning. She said she did not resist, but it would be reasonable to consider just how crushed and disrespected she must have felt.

Helen’s description of how her husband locked her in the house and left her there, because he wasn’t told where she was going, was particularly telling. It reflected his arrogance, and his domineering and controlling character. His actions were demeaning toward his wife, a minister of God, and indeed, would be for any human being. She said:

The final separation came when he was threatening to murder me one Saturday morning. Pastor took him away all day. He came back saying this was the “old him” speaking. Next morning, I was dressing to go somewhere to pray—I hadn’t decided where. He insisted he needed to know where. When I couldn’t give him details, he decided to lock me in the grilled house. He left for nearly one hour with my keys too. I called the police. He came back before they did and started taunting me. I began to feel something building within me. I knew if he touched me, I would retaliate. One or both of us would be severely wounded. I prayed and begged God not to let him touch me. He didn’t, but kept on taunting. He

placed the keys on table; I grabbed mine, ran to outer grill, and escaped with my house slippers on, and only my toothbrush in hand.

Helen's husband's behavior described in her account reflected his disregard for her feelings, and his lack of esteem for her as his wife. Helen related another incident in which her husband seemed as though he wanted to extinguish her personhood, and also her actual physical person/existence. She reported that he used a cushion to smother her as she screamed while he was attacking her. She held her throat and opened her eyes wide, as she described the incident:

He came over me, putting his hand in my throat and slamming me against the wall. I started screaming...He began to shout at me: "Shut up and stop yu noise!" I was still screaming while he held me against the wall. He then flung me on the day bed, put the cushion over my face, and began pressing it into my face. I started fighting to push him off. He eventually got off me, and I sat up in shock! I felt like I was going out of my mind with shock. This could not be happening to me...and not with someone who was intimate with me...a husband!

Helen's story illustrated the nature of her abusive experiences, which were very demeaning, disrespectful, and seemed to have damaged her sense of self as a woman. Her words spoken toward the end of the interview, in response to the question of what struck her as she looked at her map, illustrated the damage that was done, "I thank God for restoration of confidence in my womanhood that his verbal taunts had damaged—the woman in me whose standard I had lowered. The esteem and respect I had all along was restored.

Structural description. Helen's analyzed transcripts revealed that her physical abuse occurred within the context of her: (a) faith as a Christian woman and leader, and (b) hope that was inferred by her behaviors during the abuse.

Faith as a Christian woman and leader. Helen's story revealed that she entered her abusive marriage after seeking and not receiving guidance from her church Elders, when serious warnings signs emerged before getting married:

I was calling off the wedding...I went to my Elders and informed them of my decision and they asked to meet with him first...I was surprised when...they closed the meeting by saying that they were leaving it up to us to decide.

As a leader in her church, she believed in and respected the guidance of those in authority. Her reports illustrated that she submitted herself and her concerns to her church Elders, but unfortunately, was disappointed with their lack of guidance. Sadly, because she feared disobeying God and experiencing his judgment, she gave in to blackmail by her partner, and got married in the wake of major concerns about her partner's behaviour. She said:

After they left what, after the fact, I would call emotional/spiritual blackmail, took place and I gave in to this. He said he would go to the church on that date, the date set for marriage, because he refused to disobey God. He would go even if he had to go alone. For some reason, that created a fear in me.

It is likely that her partner was aware of how much her faith and God meant to her. He, therefore, seemed to have manipulated her into doubting herself and fearing she would be doing the wrong thing if she did not go through with the wedding. Helen's faith contextualized her situation and, in an effort to obey God, she made a bad decision that led her into a physically abusive marriage. The following comments in her previous account indicated that in retrospect, she realized her apparent misperception of God led her in the wrong direction:

For some reason, that created a "fear" in me. A fear I later determined as fear of God's judgement if I were truly in disobedience! This was another deep regret as I wondered after, if I really thought that God would strike me with lightning or something if I had followed through and postponed or cancelled the wedding.

Helen's faith was always around her during her abusive experiences, and impacted her actions during the abuse. This is clearly illustrated when she was on her honeymoon, and was flung on the bed in anger by her husband:

He began to curse me, which surprised me; especially in the manner he was doing it. I reminded him that I was his wife and not a stranger. He continued cursing, coming up in my face, and then in his anger, he lifted me roughly, carried me to the bedroom, and flung me on the bed. I was in shock! I could not believe what just happened, and that he just physically threw me down! I jumped off the bed and was on my knees, praying...crying...trying to maintain my cool!

Helen's description of how she jumped off the bed, kneeled, and prayed, as she cried and tried to remain calm, in response to the unexpectedly harsh treatment, illustrated how her faith seemed to guide her behaviours and responses during her abuse.

Helen's story also revealed that she experienced what might be viewed as a crisis of faith and perception of God, when she said she had to "blot God out of my mind" in order to remain sane in the wake of being abused. Her husband had been smothering her with a cushion after squeezing her throat and throwing her onto the bed. She said:

He eventually got off me and I sat up in shock! I felt like I was going out of my mind with shock...I felt like I had to blot God out of my mind for a while because I could not understand how He was standing by and watching this happen to me. It seemed that this was the only way to keep my sanity.

As an obedient Christian woman in ministry, Helen's report illustrated her crisis of faith when she could not make sense of her abuse occurring while God was "standing by and watching" it occur.

Hope that was inferred by her behaviors during the abuse. Helen sought counseling from the early stages of her relationship when she saw problems emerging in her relationship. She appeared to take it seriously and insisted on pre-marital counseling with her partner. This reflected her hope and confidence that counseling would address

the negative issues that were present and prepare them both for marriage. She said, “Before we were married, I saw anger issues and some possessiveness. Since he was introducing the topic of marriage, I pushed for us to do pre-marital counseling.” After each time she was abused, she would seek counseling rather than just leaving. This demonstrated she did not just give up on her marriage and her partner, but hoped these counseling interventions would change things. She related how she had found a counselor after her husband had tried to smother her, and she had left him. She explained how she returned after counseling, but was not comfortable:

During my time away—three weeks of drama, with him coming to my friend’s house and threatening to fight her; him telling anyone who called the house that I had left him, and not telling them what he had done, etc.—I found a counselor who could meet with us. After a few sessions and he promising to handle things differently. I went back, feeling like I had to walk on eggshells with him.

Midway through her interview, Helen said with exasperation, “We had eight official counselors in that short time of marriage. I lost count of the unofficial counselors.” Based on her story, her actions inferred that hope truly “sprang eternal” for Helen throughout her abuse, until it ceased to do so, and she made good her escape from her situation.

Conceptual mapping task. Helen viewed her notes, made adjustments, and asked for notes to be inserted to accurately convey her story. She spoke quietly to herself as she completed the process. As she arranged her conceptual map, she first picked out notes related to her premarital counseling being unfinished and circled them in black; then she picked out those related to the Elders not giving her guidance, and did the same with them. Thirdly, notes related to her honeymoon traumas were clustered next in line, going downward, and finally, the different abuses she suffered were at the bottom of the

chart. She then placed the notes related to her escape, which signified her final break/separation, off to one side with a smiley face. She said aside from the smiley face, the four clusters sadly formed the “foundation” of her marriage. She said, “I felt the leadership, the church, had let me down when I needed guidance. This is what they do. They provide guidance in these matters.” Her conceptual map is illustrated in Figure 10.

Helen was asked to take time to reflect on her finished map. She was then asked to state what struck her as she viewed the map. She said:

I’ve always said I would not wish it on my worst enemy. I also pray if he should remarry, his wife would not have to go through this. I am grateful to God for deliverance. He intervened and delivered me. I thank God for restoration of confidence in my womanhood that his verbal taunts damaged—the woman in me whose standards I had lowered—esteem and respect I had all along was restored.

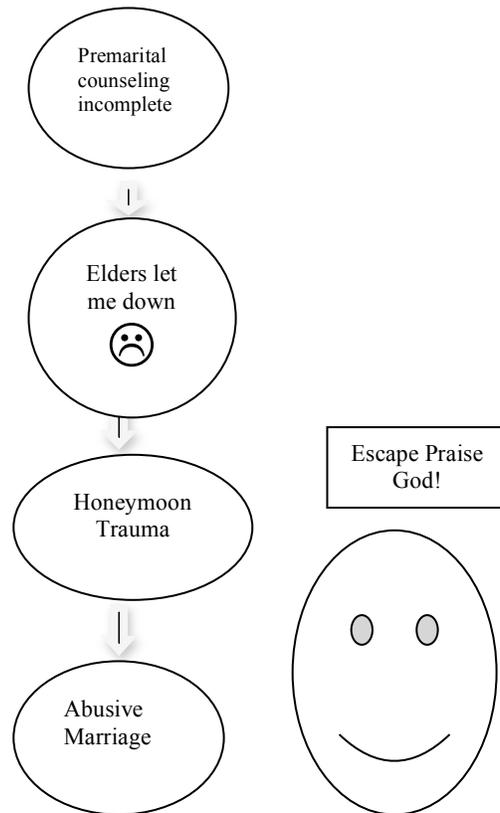


Figure 10. Helen’s conceptual map

She was then asked to state what she saw as the most important thing to know or understand about her experience, and she responded:

Don't settle! You know better. Learn to know God more as a loving God, not one who is quick to strike us down judgment. I should allow the principle of healthy relationships to guide me rather than fear of God. Being a single woman in ministry, I had to deal with jealous wives, and felt I needed the covering of a husband. I wonder if I settled for this thinking my standards were too high. Thank God now that my current marriage restored my confidence that my higher expectations were possible.

Helen was then asked what meaning her abusive experiences had in your life. She responded firmly:

These experiences bring home the reality that none of us is exempt from certain experiences, regardless of education or religion, or status in church, or level of maturity in the faith. Also, trials come to all of us, but God knows what we can manage because he is with us.

At this point, the interview came to an end, and she expressed how much she had learnt from the process.

Cecille's Profile

Cecille's interview was carried out at a designated location first thing in the morning. Cecille was punctual and eager to participate in the study, and expressed her gratitude for being invited to make a contribution. Cecille is a pleasant, well-spoken woman, who has a Bachelor's degree, and works in a manufacturing organization.

Cecille found the conceptual mapping task to be a very interesting activity, and she applied herself creatively, as she completed it. At the end of the process, she expressed hope that efforts invested in this research will bear fruit in the future.

Textural description. There were two primary highlights that emerged from Cecille's transcript and conceptual map that provided a textural description for her

abusive experiences: (a) establishment of control, and (b) no boundaries/restraints of timing or location.

Establishment of control. Cecille's interview commenced with her responding to the question of how she and her husband met. She explained that they both lived in the same neighborhood, and became friends while they attended the same church there. Her story revealed how their friendship grew, and they dated seriously for a while, then the relationship ended. She stated that they reconnected after a few years, and both were in different parts of the world for a time. She explained that she was the only one employed at the time. She added how they became engaged and then made plans for marriage, "We started back the relationship, and were in different parts of the world. I was working but he wasn't." Cecille continued her story, commenting that:

The relationship was good. We would spend a lot of time talking. I was the one working, and I would spend a lot of money on phone calls, and he would send me little precious things. Leading up to the engagement we would spend a lot of time together, and we were still going to the same church.

Cecille paused for a few seconds at this point, then said:

Looking back I felt that it was the lady's part to fuss about her wedding, and the things I wanted, I was denied of them. Very close to the wedding day, he backed off, and afterward I learned someone told him to allow me; it was my day and not worth quarrelling over. It was me spending the money, and I should be allowed to have what I wanted. We spent a lot of time, but communication was poor.

Added to these comments, Cecille made the following comments about her husband's strong control of the wedding planning, as she viewed her notes later in the interview.

She stated:

Planning of wedding, he controlled so strongly, even though all my savings I was putting into wedding. I was being robbed of all the details I wanted. I was disappointed that someone else had to speak to him to back off on controlling the wedding planning, for him to do so, rather than listening to me.

Based on Cecille's report, there was a strong desire for control on her husband's part, even before they were married, and this seemed to have continued into the marriage.

Cecille continued her story, revealing that after their wedding, she was awarded a scholarship abroad, for which she had applied before marriage, and expressed to her husband her desire to accept the scholarship. She explained that after discussing the matter, they agreed she should go, but resentment seemed to surface on her husband's part while she was away, and communication broke down. She explained the situation in the following manner:

During the early stages, I got a scholarship I had applied for before marriage. The studies were abroad, and I expressed to my husband my need to take up the scholarship. We discussed it, and we agreed that I should go. We were married, and a few months later, I was gone abroad to take up the scholarship. I went and the relationship started breaking down due to poor communication. In our conversation I could sense resentment about my not being around. I did not have enough money to communicate as often and things broke down badly.

She continued:

I came home and...dropped into ministry. He was a pastor and dedicated to ministry, at church a lot, spent a lot of time in office or on the compound doing something. We didn't spend a lot of time together building legacy and relationship. He was busy building other people, and I pretty much went along. I like quiet time, cuddles, focus on me; I didn't get much of that...at church we don't sit together...We didn't get much of being together.

As she viewed her notes, Cecille added the following comments regarding what things were like when she returned from abroad:

Returning home after studies, there was curiosity about ministry. I was lonely, as there was not much time together; no affection, neglect, and I would cry a lot and say we need to talk. I would be blamed, and I would take the blame and say I will try to do better, apologize, and I would be told I need to go for counseling, and I would promise to seek help.

Cecille's report illustrated a very unstable start to their marriage, in which her husband blamed her for what was going wrong. According to her, she acquiesced to his judgment, accepted the blame, and promised to seek assistance to address her problems. When Cecille was asked to describe when and how the marriage became abusive, her response spoke to the presence of psychological and verbal abuse over the years. She said:

I think not only of physical abuse and psychological abuse. I know this interview focuses on physical. I've noticed over the years that there was psychological and verbal abuse. The physical abuse came out in...this anger that I saw—I don't know. My husband was trying to enter our daughters' room and repeatedly, I kept closing it behind him and he kept coming back, so I kept my body there to bar him, and he was kicking on the door, and I don't know what he did but he slammed me against the wall behind the door and...made it clear that I must not try to stop him from going anywhere he wished in his house, because he goes anywhere he wants to go. That's where it really started.

The details of Cecille's report indicated this first physically abusive incident occurred after more than a decade of marriage. In this encounter, her husband established the fact that he was in control, and there would be no disputing that by anyone, by actions, or in any other manner. Cecille continued to describe the next physically abusive incident:

The next one was we were talking, and I said I wanted the lights to be on so that I could see facial expression as we discussed what we were talking about. He started slapping first then punching on my hand to stop me from turning on the light. I noticed my hand started swelling and turning blue, and I spoke to him about it. He was quite insensitive about it and told me to get away from him, and what I wanted him to do—did I want to go to the police or something like that? So that was the second abuse. He was unrepentant and not remorseful. In the course of the next week, I would make sure I wore long sleeves to work, he was hardly home and we hardly spoke, and one day he asked me how was my hand, and I told him it was here swollen and black and that he did a very good job damaging it. I can't remember if he said he was sorry, I can't remember.

Once again, this description of physical abuse by Cecille illustrated her husband's determination to have full control of the situation, at any cost. She was made painfully aware of this once more.

No boundaries/restraints of timing or location. An analysis of Cecille's transcript revealed her husband abused her with no restraint or consideration of boundaries related to timing or location, as he sought to gain and maintain control over her. She explained:

I see these little things popping up and in my estimation, my husband became out of control, and he would not say, "Let me not go after her at this time because the children are around or people are around. Let me not go after her; let me hold on to myself." But I saw him coming at me at times, and I saw it was serious, and I became fearful.

Cecille's words spoke volumes about her husband's disregard for where he was or who might be around, when he was in an abusive state. Her description of the following incident illustrated his abusive behavior when his recuperating mother was in the house:

His mother was at the house, and there was some argument between he and I, and she had come out of hospital at the time. I had her clothes in my hand, and he was trying to get the clothes away from me, and pushed me against the wall. I could see the look in his eyes—the anger like when he physically abused me, and I just did not want that to happen again, so I just gave up the clothes. I just let him have his way so it would not turn out to be another abusive situation.

Cecille's account indicated that there were times when she "gave in" to her husband to avoid being abused by him. She described the following incident, which illustrated once again, her husband's disregard for boundaries—location. This occurred outside their home when the car was parked in public view:

There were other times when it could have been quite serious, and I pretty much gave in to him, so it didn't become physical, and other times I pretty much ran and locked myself in the car, and he started punching the car, punching the car window, and tried to break off door handle, and stood in front of car, so I couldn't move.

She added, “I got to the breaking point when he came at me in the car, but I was waiting for the right time.” As she viewed her notes later in the interview process, she said in a reflectively manner, “I became decisive that I wanted to leave; I did not see that there was any limit. I did not see any limit on what he would do to me.” Cecille’s reports illustrated her abuses were meant by her husband to gain and maintain control over her. Her reports also illustrated that he abused her regardless of who was around, and where they were at the time, no boundaries or limits restrained him.

Structural description. An analysis of the data revealed Cecille’s physical abuse by her husband occurred within the context of her (a) faith, (b) fear, (c) temporary denial, and (d) commitment to protect her husband and children.

Faith. Cecille’s faith contextualized her abusive experiences, and indeed, her relationship even before marriage. She explained she had promised her husband before marriage that she would never do anything to jeopardize his ministry. Her words indicated that she felt her husband, a minister who was carrying out the work of Lord, should be protected. She, therefore, did not expose his behavior to anyone. She said:

A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband’s image. I just felt I had to protect...I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry, and I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn’t think I should say it to anyone.

Cecille expressed her spiritual struggle with what was taking place in her life, and responded with the following words when she was asked what role her faith played in her abusive experiences, “There were times when I felt that it was unfair for me to be living my life for God for so many years, and to be in a situation like that.” She added how she

would still seek God's help to rescue her, believing God wanted her to be able to serve Him freely. She explained:

Often though, I would turn to God and ask him for deliverance from what I was going through, and I would look forward to when he would deliver me. And during that time, I would hear messages whether preaching or from a friend, that would say, "When you come to God, don't come to God thinking God promised that everything would be all right for you with no problems." But I also knew it was not the will of God for me to be in this setting where I couldn't serve Him as I wanted.

Cecille explained how her faith in God was severely tested in the midst of her abuse. She described how she would have to make the adjustment to attend church directly after being abused by her husband where she would listen to her husband preach. She added that she had to find a way to sustain her faith and connect with God for herself:

This situation keeps me from reaching out to God, hindered my praise, I am in the home with this man, and even after an abusive situation, I would go to church and sit and listen to him preach, and that was really shaking my Christian life. We were taught at Bible College to look beyond the man, but somehow I was having a hard time doing this, so the message was not reaching me, and I really had to seek the Lord for myself.

As she viewed her notes, Cecille also described how paranoid, alone, and unsafe she felt within the context of her church, and the company of her fellow church brethren. Her faith and the people of her faith provided her with no comfort or assurance. Her account illustrated how she felt forced to keep her husband's abusive treatment secret as a result. She said:

What do you tell people? I think, "How do I tell people something like that?" I had to keep this secret. There is a sense of aloneness. People would ask how are you doing? I would wonder if it was a loaded question, and they saw something wrong and that was why they asked. I became paranoid. I wondered if they could see that something was wrong, even though there were no scars. I did not feel safe. The church environment was not safe! In the church culture where I'm from, you did not talk about those things as a pastor's wife. When church persons saw the interactions between us and saw that something was wrong, and asked if I was ok, I did not feel safe to speak.

Cecille's story indicated how she was able to gain strength as she maintained her relationship with God, who she believed delivered her from her abusive marriage. She described her struggles and deliverance in the following way:

He was my husband, he was my pastor, and it became very difficult for me to get from him the message I should be getting from my pastor. My relationship with God—I didn't lose that—but there were times when I was not as close to God as I should have been, because the person who should be the priest leading me in that way was the same person who was causing my faith to be affected. So I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself, and I would be crying out to God for deliverance, and I would always think about the children of Israel and they were in Egypt, and they were going through some hard times, and I saw myself in that situation. So when that opportunity came, I saw it as my opportunity to step out and cross that sea, and I saw it as the Lord delivering me from the situation I was in.

Cecille's account revealed the extent and manner in which her faith impacted her abuse, and how in turn, it was impacted in the process. Her story illustrated that her faith grew faint, than triumphed, as God gave her strength, and delivered her.

Fear. Cecille expressed how fearful she had become as she experienced her husband's unrestrained abuse toward her. Her story illustrated her realization that nothing or no one would cause him to hesitate or decide not to hurt her. As a result, she became fearful:

I see these little things popping up and in my estimation, my husband became out of control, and he would not say, "Let me not go after her at this time because the children are around or people are around. Let me not go after her; let me hold on to myself." But I saw him coming at me at times, and I saw it was serious, and I became fearful.

She added how she would let him have his way when she saw the "look in his eyes" similar to when he had previously abused her. She indicated his mother was present at the time:

He was trying to get the clothes away from me and pushed me against the wall. I could see the look in his eyes—the anger like when he physically abused me, and I just did not want that to happen again, so I just gave up the clothes.

Later in the interview, as she viewed her notes, she commented, “There was fear, looking at his face. Some names for my emotions—there was fear, anxiety, shame were definitely present.” As Cecille viewed her notes, she said reflectively to herself, “He became more out-of-control, and my fears grew, because I didn’t know what was going to happen.” Cecille’s fear contextualized her abusive experiences, and resulted in her passivity as she sought to preserve herself from continued harm.

Temporary denial. When Cecille was asked what influenced her to remain in the abuse, she explained that she did not identify her situation to be abusive at first. She admitted that even in the face of physical evidence, where she needed medical attention, she still minimized what had taken place after the first incident of being slammed behind the door. She said she was “not willing to face up” to what was happening to her. She said:

At first, even though I know it was not supposed to happen, I was not seeing the situation to be abusive at first, but after speaking to my husband and other persons about what happened, he would say, “That’s just her account of what happened.” I was saying, “It’s not so bad.” Even though I was in pain and I had to go to the doctor for treatment, parts of me wanted to put it aside and cover it, and move on. Also, because I didn’t talk much about it, having information based on my training, I was not willing to face up to it that this was happening to me. I wasn’t willing to label it as abuse. It had impact on the relationship and it wasn’t properly labeled, and didn’t seem like something so bad.

Her words revealed that with subsequent abusive incidents her temporary denial passed, and she realized she had great cause to be afraid. She said, “I saw him coming at me and I saw it was serious, and I became fearful.”

Commitment to protect her husband and children. In her response regarding why she stayed in the abuse, Cecille mentioned she sought to protect her own image, but more importantly, her husband's image. She added that before they were married, she had made him a promise:

A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband's image. I just felt I had to protect him...I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry, and I believed saying that [he was abusing me] to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn't think I should say it to anyone.

Cecille continued by explaining she also sought to protect her children in the midst of her abuse, as she believed full knowledge of their father's behavior would harm them. She said, "I just thought it would destroy the children and his ministry, and I just thought I could ride it out, but I couldn't live up to that." Cecille continued to explain her rationale for not exposing her husband's behavior and leaving the situation by saying:

I did not make a decision to leave, for one, our status, a pastor; what do you say when people ask you why you are leaving? You don't tell someone you are leaving because your husband is abusive to you.

Cecille's abuse was contextualized by all these elements—faith, fear, temporary denial, and her commitment to protect her husband and children. They impacted how she bore her abuse and determined how she behaved, how she felt, and her decision to stay and finally leave her abusive marriage.

Conceptual mapping task. As Cecille viewed her notes, she made comments more to herself than to the researcher. The comments added useful details to her story.

After viewing one note, she said:

Consistently, after each abuse, even with evidence of the abuse, it was my perspective, and the abuse was always played down, as the situation was not so bad. I was a big part of the problem, and I need to focus on what I did. The abuse was always minimized. I must see what I did in the whole mix. In all situations

when I spoke, the counselor or mediator had to be brought back to what I did. I brought it on myself.

She looked at a few other notes and commented:

I battled with self-esteem issues—I could make some changes to me, what I couldn't be like, how I looked, what I could or could not do. Two months before the physical abuse, in a heated discussion in front of the children, I was called a dunce. It really messed me up and has impact on the children up to today. It was really a low blow, and if done not in front of children it would be different. It rocked my self-esteem, how they look at me in how they saw me with helping with schoolwork. Sent me back to what I didn't accomplish at school. There was anger at self and parents. There was a sense of neglect and embarrassment. Sometimes different ones of these feelings would be more pronounced than at other times. I felt disrespected.

Cecille continued, as she looked squarely at the researcher:

What do you tell people? I think, "How do I tell people something like that?" I had to keep this secret. There is a sense of aloneness. People would ask, "how are you doing?" I would wonder if it was a loaded question, and they saw something wrong and that was why they asked. I became paranoid. I wondered if they could see that something was wrong, even though there were no scars. I did not feel safe. The church environment was not safe. In the church culture where I'm from, you did not talk about those things as a pastor's wife. When church persons saw the interactions between us and saw that something was wrong, and asked if I was ok, I did not feel safe to speak.

As she viewed a few more notes, she paused, looked at the researcher, and said:

I made up my mind after car incident. I was even stronger and became more determined that I must get out of this. I became more disconnected and was always looking for the escape path. I seize the opportunity to escape with the sewage problem in the house. I asked the Lord, "Why is this happening to me Lord?" Nearer the time, I asked Lord, "Should I go? Are you going to help me if I go?" Different kinds of questions, but I was determined to leave.

Cecille clustered her notes that referred to the abusive incidents, marking them with bright orange-colored arrows and lines. Notes referring to her emotions were also clustered, with self-esteem being central, all within the cluster of notes referring to abuse. She wrote on the notes that referred to not feeling safe to speak at church, "Could not!" These notes were also placed in the abuse cluster. Notes referring to her relationship with

God were clustered, and had a sad face and an arrow pointing to a happy face with the words, “Strength and Deliverance.” The sad notes referring to her relationship with God were also within the abuse cluster, and the happy face cluster was placed outside the abuse cluster. Figure 11 illustrates her conceptual map.

Cecille was then asked to reflect on her map when she was done, and to state what struck her as she looked at it. She responded with these words:

Looking back, some of the times, you know, I kind of feel, “Did I really go through all of that?” Some of them it wasn’t easy pulling them back and dealing with them [sighs and takes a deep breath]. They are really heavy, really heavy, but I can’t help feeling in some way, victorious. As I look, I can’t help seeing some strength in me that I have never seen before, and just thinking that I am much more stronger than I really think I am. I didn’t credit myself with the strength. I became stronger but also had strength I credit myself with.

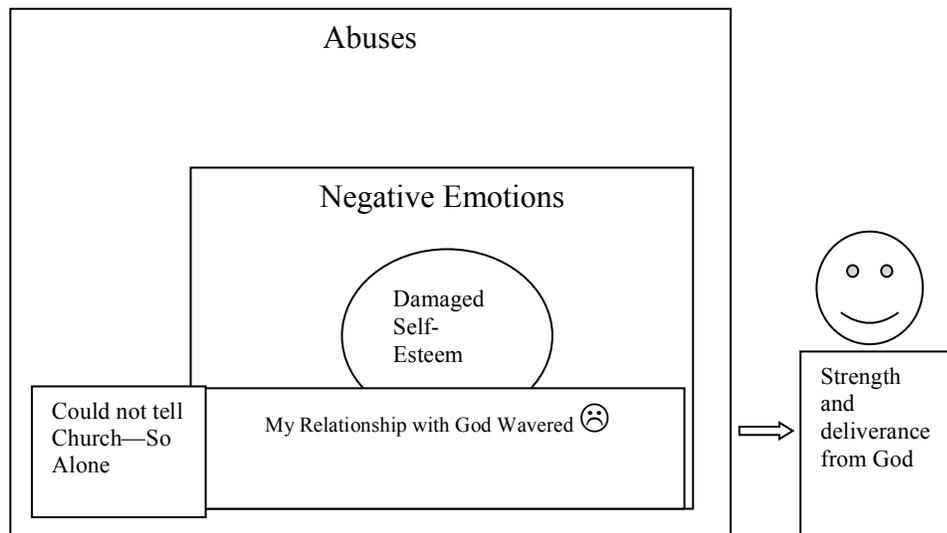


Figure 11. Cecille’s conceptual map

Cecille's response indicated she was struck by her strength throughout her ordeal. She was then asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand from her experiences, and she replied:

I can't help but looking back at my strengths, because I honestly did not know that I could have done it—did not know—and as I look back at some of the fears and the loneliness and feeling neglect, and the self-esteem, it's almost like it's a different person, I am a different person today in that I could go through this and raise myself out, and not only that, but also protect two other persons, the children, and lift them out of this too. There are persons who despise me for what I have done, I can only say they don't know my story, and they can only make judgment from what they have seen and what they have heard otherwise, but I still love, I still show love and respect, and deal with persons as the needs arise. However, for some part, I just have to let persons continue to believe what they want to believe. I can live with their misguided opinions. Earlier on it was very difficult for me, because of my personality. It mattered to me what people think of me. It used to bother me a lot, but you know, it's like the Lord has dealt with that and even my forgiveness of them, and they can only go by what they hear, and it has only made me stronger.

Cecille responded with the following words when she was asked to state what meaning she ascribed to her experiences:

I really see this as some kind of therapy for me. I have been to counseling sessions where different parts of this would come up, but this is the first time I am interfacing in this way with what has happened to me, and right now, I'm feeling it's therapeutic for me in just putting it together, and anything that can help you identify your strengths is a good thing, and that is how I am feeling it has done for me. It brings me back, lets me see what was happening to me, and the fact that I was able to take myself through a process with the help of God, to experience deliverance in a way that I never experienced it before—overcome, yes! Gone through and you are living, not just surviving.

Cecille's interview ended with these words, after which she thanked the researcher, and extended best wishes and positive feedback with the study.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were collected according to the format described in Chapter II, which involved analyzed transcripts of audiotaped interviews and conceptual

maps. The following four main themes were extracted from the data: (a) faith, (b) hope, (c) poor judgment, and (d) secrecy. These themes are discussed in this chapter, as they emerged from the transcripts of the participants, along with the invariant constituents subsumed within them.

Theme 1: Faith

As this theme is considered, it is to be acknowledged that a number of things may come to mind in terms of the meaning ascribed to the word “faith.” For the purpose of this study, faith encompasses the following: belief and adherence to a system of beliefs and values, which are Christian or non-Christian; belief and trust in God; and loyalty to God and adherence to His instructions as laid out in the Bible and doctrines of the church (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>).

Faith was portrayed on a continuum in the stories of all participants. On this continuum, faith existed as a dynamic element that evolved during the abusive experiences of these women. It was seen to ebb and flow, growing, and even being diminished throughout the abuse. Faith was noted to exist and evolve in the following fashion: (a) as a consistent element that contextualized their lives and abusive experiences, (b) as an element that existed in the background, (c) as an element that emerged and evolved during the abuse, and (d) as an element that was born years after the abusive experiences.

A consistent element that contextualized participant lives and abusive experiences. Seven of the participants, Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Della, Gina, Helen, and Cecille all had faith as a consistent part of their lives before they met their partners. For

them, faith contextualized their abuse in varied and similar ways, and in turn, their abusive experiences also impacted their faith.

Selena's story indicated that she was new in the faith, and met her husband in church. She stated that it was the manner in which he delivered the scripture message that attracted her to him. She had a strong desire to be affiliated with him, and have what she perceived as a model Christian family like his. She believed this would promote her Christian growth. Her words illustrate this:

He is a minister and...I took an interest in how he delivered the message. I saw confidence and power and great knowledge coming forth, and I am attracted to men like that who are confident and know what they are about...we met and had a lot of similarities as it pertained to our Christian walk. I was pretty new in the faith and, for a minister, I thought it would be great to be with someone who could help me in my faith. That attracted me a lot. He preached at several places and I followed him. I realized I was hungry for the word, and so I followed him because the word followed him. I met his family eventually, and his father was the main pastor of his church. I delighted in that this was a Christian home and a Christian family that preached God's word...I pushed it because I thought it would be nice to marry a minister and have my family grow up into a spiritual home like that.

Selena's words indicated that her faith was important to her, and that it contributed to her pushing to get married to her husband despite the negative signs of conflict and verbal and emotional abuse that emerged early during courting. When the physical abuse started, she stated that she accepted her father-in-law's words about marriage and what the Bible said about problems in marriage. She said she also stayed because of her own values about marriage and her desire to please God. She explained it thus:

I would talk to his father...about our issues, and he would encourage me to just work it out. Marriages are never perfect and this is just my cross to bear...he just said the Bible says it was my cross, that's one; and secondly, I had made a commitment before God and man to stay in there, so I got married and I had to

stay in there. Before God, I mean, leaving, I think God would be really upset with me...

Selena's faith in God also fueled hope as she experienced the abuse. The abuse, in turn, caused her to draw close to God, who gave her strength. In drawing close to God, she indicated that her faith grew, and she believed that God had a plan in her situation:

Yes, there was hope. I knew based on God's word that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change...I drew close to God in that time, because almost always we were in conflict in one way or the other. We had good times but it was really short...Always something that would trigger his anger and he would malice me for days. During those lonely times, it was just me and God. I fasted sometimes, prayed a lot, stayed in my room just talking to God about the situation, so my faith grew. I didn't understand anything but my faith grew, and I found strength leaning on God, and I believe that's what carried me through the whole tenure of my marriage. I found strength from God and I believed God had a plan in all of this.

Selena also added how much the support of her family and counsel of godly persons helped her through her trials. She said, "Then I had my family and accountability persons strengthen me, and a counselor—Godly people who helped me a lot." This platform of tangible, godly support helped her through her ordeal.

Selena's faith, therefore, was seen to be increasing on the continuum and evolving as she drew closer to God. Interacting with the everyday church world, however, seemed to test her faith, as she appeared to believe she had to pretend and lie in order to preserve the façade that all was well. She explained that sometimes she wearied of it all, and stayed home:

Church was difficult. I had to put up a front to show people we were doing ok...Sometimes I wouldn't come to church because it was very difficult. Sometimes I didn't have the strength to play the game, so I would stay home sometimes. It was difficult because we would come to church and act like we were doing well then when we go back in the car, it would be back to normal—don't talk to each other.

She added how important it was to protect her husband: “Protecting him meant not letting anyone know what was taking place. She stated, “Also protecting him was important; he was a minister, and protecting him was paramount. I was just hoping that things would just get better as we go along, you know?”

Selena’s story illustrated how she grew as an individual and a Christian during her abusive experiences. In reference to her final departure and her decision not to return to her husband, she stated, “Eventually, I realized how sick God was of that, living a lie. Even though he wanted me to come back, he wasn’t getting counseling, so I wasn’t going to come back to live a lie again.” She reported that she was currently able to see things more clearly, and when she was asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand from her experience, as she reflected on her map, she responded:

It all comes down to knowing myself and knowing what I’m about and how God sees me, because clearly, I didn’t value myself enough because I allowed my husband to step all over me, and I think my self-esteem was really low, even before I came into the marriage. It just showed up itself even more so as he did what he did with me, you know? So knowing how God sees me, that should be important, and when I know that, then I would set boundaries, because I didn’t have any boundaries at all because I thought it was his right to do whatever he wanted to do with me. I didn’t have any rights. I didn’t know how God saw me, much, because I took all my counsel from my husband, because I believed he was a man of God, he should know, and I didn’t really have to know God for myself. He was the mediator, really, so God had to mash that down for me to have that personal relationship with him so I don’t repeat this cycle over again, and then I realized how much God sees me, how he sees me, how much he values me, and that’s what I should expect from people. That’s the big thing for me.

In summary, the positive growth and evolution of Selena’s faith during her abusive experience was clearly noted from her analyzed transcript. The manner that her faith contextualized her experiences was also clearly evident. Her story illustrated the extent and manner in which her faith affected her thoughts, feelings, and motivations, and impacted her decision to remain with her abusive husband for the time that she did. It

was also clearly illustrated how this said faith gave her the strength and justification to leave.

An analysis of Aurora's transcript also revealed that faith was a consistent element that contextualized her life and abusive experiences. She mentioned that she met her now, ex-husband, in the church when she was a young girl. Aurora spoke about the strictness of her religion, which governed the household in which she was raised, and the fact that she was always encouraged to seek relationships with individuals in the church:

My ex-husband and I met pretty much, in the Jamaican term, in the church. I was a young girl living with my mother at the time. I attended my religion in very strict fashion, and was brought up in a very strict household where my mother instilled in me biblical principles, not to have sex outside of marriage from a biblical and moral standpoint. She encouraged me to talk to somebody in the church. Going to meetings, I came upon him. He looked like a very good candidate as he participated in the church and religious activities and looked like he fit the bill.

Aurora's faith beliefs and teachings clearly guided her life, and her choice of spouse appeared to her to be in keeping with the guidelines of her faith. Aurora reported that she was about 19 years old at the time, and was confused that her mother and siblings did not approve of her choice of mate. They disapproved for a number of reasons, including disparity in age, and what appeared to be educational and other social issues. She stated the following:

I thought this was the best thing for me....As I rationalized things, I thought things would work as long as it was "in the Lord." However, I was getting another perspective that threw me out. My older brother was saying this man was 11 years older than I am at the time, and obviously more exposed than I.... They sat me down in the living room, and my brother, who was very intelligent, they believed we were of two different educational levels...this was conflicting to me, because this was of the Bible; this was the Lord; this was religion, so I couldn't understand the social aspect of relationships, that this could impact things later on.

Aurora indicated that although her family was important to her, she ignored her family's views about having a relationship with this man, and she went ahead with the relationship. She stated, "So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about and weighing, and I did face challenges." Aurora continued to describe how she proceeded in the midst of the challenges, always referring to religion and the guarantee that it must bring to the relationship. She explained it as follows:

Some persons, even at 19, would have developed more, but for me, I had not accelerated and matured. I thought, 'This is religion! It must work; what are you talking about?' I couldn't understand...he was pushing and shoving (*gesturing by pushing and shoving the researcher*), like, "I'm older than you and what's wrong with you?"

These were her words, as she sought to explain what was happening to her and what she was thinking, as her husband began to physically abuse her. She continued as she sought to explain what her religion and family meant to her:

So he didn't have any allegiance to pleasing my family...and he didn't know what I was feeling, wanting the blessings of a family. He grew up doing his own thing till him find religion. I grew up in it from four years old with mommy and daddy, until daddy died when I was 15, and left mommy struggling and we all going on.

Aurora offered comments on her view of the religious leaders in the midst of her abuse. She sought to illustrate that at that time, it was purely religion that was applied to the situation from the Elders' standpoint, 'Although we had Elders who tried to assist you, because it is biblical doesn't mean you don't need some other training...from it's biblical, they don't look at balancing it from a professional standpoint.' This brought across the importance and supremacy of religion versus professional counseling or other outside intervention to assist in her situation. She also explained how religious leaders reinforced her faith beliefs to remain in her abusive context. She explained that, "The

religious body would always encourage you to go back. ‘You’re his wife; you need to work out your problem.’ She added:

Going through all the engagement with the pushing and shoving, knowing something is not right, and didn’t have the strength to deal with it. I don’t even know if it is just strength, because in my view, it was all about God, religion, and in my view, God says you must make it work, that was my interpretation.

Aurora appeared to be blinded and bound by her religious beliefs, and, as a result, endured abuse even before she was married to her husband. She also explained how she would go back to her husband each time after his abusive treatments, for moral reasons tied to her religious beliefs:

Sometimes you go back just for sexual fulfillment at that time because you don’t want to go astray....The Bible says you can’t go out! There is no divorce! You’re trying to live a moral life, so I went back. As a matter of fact, when I got pregnant, I wasn’t living with my husband. I would thief out and go to him and have sex without mama knowing.

Aurora mentioned how after beating her badly, her husband would come to her mother’s house where she had gone, and plead with her to come back, stating that he would beg Jehovah God to help him, “He said he was going to beg Jehovah God to help him to be a better Christian, and I was young, you know...” She said she would become hopeful and relent, from the moment religion was brought into the situation.

As Aurora was reflecting on her map, she was asked about the role her faith played in her abusive experiences, and she responded with the following words:

My spirituality had died! [She paused for a few seconds looking at her map] To me, you feel like they will take sides because they can’t keep it professional. Mama gossip with her friends, so them at church know mi getting beating and the marriage not working. When I call the Elders, he starts disrespecting them. He stops going to meetings...My faith was so broken down. You know you love God and you want to serve God, but now you no longer believe in it because there are so many persons living a lie, and all of those things have weakened you spiritually. In front of them, him literally fist after me when I’m talking, and that time they realize this is a hopeless case.

Aurora's story revealed how the same faith that led her to defy her family and enter into this relationship, was systematically destroyed throughout her abusive marriage. She expressed her desire to please God because she loved Him, but was not able to see a reality where good fruit was borne out of her devotion to God. In fact, her faith was destroyed, while its guidelines still governed her life. It were these guidelines, she said, that destroyed her faith:

My spirituality broke down. I tried to follow the teachings, and it is a part of you, and you don't believe anything better exists outside there. Anything outside is just not good, just corrupt. You can't marry if it's not adultery; you can't look at anyone else in the church. You just have to live a life of celibacy. I was keeping those guidelines in mind. All my efforts to keep the guidelines destroyed my faith completely, completely!

She became emotional at this point, as she lamented what she considered the destruction of her faith by religious guidelines. She went on to explain her desperate feelings in the midst of the abuse that she felt she could not escape:

Even though there is acceptance, a part of you wanted to escape, and when he was not around, a part of you wished him dead. You feel this is the only way I can get out of this bondage of religion. Remember now, I can't divorce, and I want God, and I picture a nice life with my children going to church. I said, "God forgive me, but I wish he would die; I wish he would die and come out of my life." But I know it's not right; why am I thinking like that? Oh my God, that is the only way I could move on and be free and not be walking around with guilt—and be free.

The "bondage" of her religion led Aurora to thoughts that were dark in their desperation. She even reported thoughts of suicide, "All suicidal thoughts come to me you know."

Through it all, however, Aurora was able to gain what she needed to leave her abusive husband once and for all, and she asked reflectively:

Does he know what he has done to me during the younger part of my life? And I tell him I still believe in God. God is blessings me now, and I take consolation in that [paused, reached for tissues, and dried the tears].

When asked what meaning she ascribed to, or took from her experiences, she responded:

I had reached the point where I had lost faith in God, but as a youngster I would talk to God, and still do now. Even though I had been blaming him for the moment, afterwards I go back and see that might have been for the best. Even with my two beautiful children that I now have, I am a more prayerful person, and maturity has given me strength.

The theme of faith can be clearly seen throughout Aurora's experience of physical abuse. It existed as a predominant part of her life during her formative years, and it has impacted her thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions throughout her abusive experiences. Her faith has also been significantly affected by the abuse, which she sustained over the years, and has ebbed, flowed, and even died, only to be resurrected from the ashes in the aftermath of her experiences, leaving her a stronger and more prayerful person.

The theme of faith became evident in Tanya's story when she was specifically asked about the impact of her faith on her physically abusive experiences, and her countenance changed as she responded agitatedly and emphatically:

I don't like to talk about this because I was a Christian, saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost. I had a lot of Spirit in me, go to church every Sunday, and because of that man, mek mi .start sin. He made me sin, I still prayed. I still believed, and I would pray and asked God how long you going to allow me to stay in this, but God was showing me the way but I wasn't seeing it, I was blinded by something, I don't know, I was spiritually strong but I was not strong mentally. God was showing me the way I could have done it on my own but I wasn't seeing it.

Tanya's response indicated that she had considered herself a very strong Christian who departed from a righteous Christian lifestyle when she became involved with her husband. Her response also indicates that she had not totally abandoned her faith, and had still sought the help of her God in the midst of her abuse. She admitted, however,

that at the time, she was unable to see that He was showing her a way out of her situation. According to her, her compromised mental state affected her spiritual connection with God, and so she remained in the abuse. Tanya explained how God kept her after the abuse, when she would have panic attacks:

A lot of times I would have panic attacks. I am driving home and just feel I have no brakes...I would be sleeping and my heart would be like it's jumping out of my chest...so many times I have to cry to Pappa Jesus on my knees.

She explained passionately how God came to her rescue when she contemplated committing murder-suicide. She explained:

I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal...I draw my firearm and called out to God and said, "Father give me strength!" And He did, and I put away the firearm. This was after the last beating.

In an effort to convey her mental, physical, and spiritual condition in that situation, and the fact that God rescued her, Tanya explained:

I was failing; my faith was strong but is like I can't deal with it. My head felt like it was going to burst, was constricted. I tell you, anybody going through this and don't look to God cannot go through it, I tell you. My friends say I must go back into the church. It's God who carry me through.

Tanya added that her faith has emerged strongly in the aftermath of her abusive relationship, and she worships God and teaches her children to do the same, in their daily lives:

My faith is still as strong as ever, though I'm not a Christian anymore and I don't go to church, I still have my worship every single day, either in the bathroom or at night I have my worship and try to involve the children, and I try to invoke that in the children to put God first in everything.

Tanya's story revealed the presence of faith that remained in the midst of her abuse—faith that she admitted had kept her through some of the worst periods of abuse and its aftermath, and is currently a very important part of her life.

The theme of faith was clearly noted in Della's story, as her transcript revealed it was a constant part her life. It impacted how she experienced the abuse at the hands of her husband, and made her stronger in her belief in God in the midst of trials. Della met her husband, a pastor, at a church crusade where he was the speaker. Della made mention of her faith as she spoke of her husband's abusive actions toward her older son:

He started to abuse my older son physically for no reason. He told him to strip naked in front of his friends and beat him. I questioned God; after all, my husband, or ex-husband is a marriage officer and pastor. He pastors a church. Our sons got saved there and he baptized them. I didn't understand.

She went on to describe his abusive actions toward her, and how she rationalized staying with him:

Right after he just finished preaching he punched me in the face...I stayed because I did not want to jeopardize his ministry and image. I had to be strong for the children. I had to show them how to exercise faith in God and teach them to trust God.

Della's words indicated that it was important for her to preserve the ministry and image of her husband, and be a Godly example for her children. She made it clear he was a minister of God, and she chose to believe that her abuse would soon pass, "I considered the abusive period as a season that will pass. During that time, I held on to God. I survived by maintaining hope in God that better would come. I was never discouraged." She spoke of how she tenaciously sought to maintain her faith practices, despite being abused, "I tried to maintain prayer, church attendance, fasting. I try not to miss any of these things." She was honest as she added:

Don't get me wrong; it was not easy keeping the faith during these abusive years. I thought of revenge, but eventually just gave it up to the Lord. The abuse sent me to the scriptures. I had to set an example for my children in dealing with this.

Della's story illustrated that she bore her abuse with her faith wrapped around her and governing her every move and thought. Throughout the abuse she said, "I sought wise counsel from people of God, and I encouraged myself." She added, "Now I talk about this as my testimony to other women, to help them." Finally, Della concluded her story by saying, "He did all those things to me, but out of evil, came forth good." The last part of this statement is based on Joseph's words from the Bible to his brothers, who had thrown him in a pit, then sold him into slavery. These words aptly illustrated that with the help of her faith in God, Della was able to survive her abusive ordeals without compromising her religious belief, and emerging stronger than before.

In Gina's case, her analyzed transcript indicated that during her marriage to her abusive husband, she faithfully attended church, although at the time of the interview, she stated that "she was not living the life." These were her words, "I started going to church...I am a Christian, saved, but not living the life right now." Her faith was obviously an important part of her life, and she made it clear that she tried to encourage her husband to attend church with her and their children. She mentioned, "I go to several churches to suit him, and he didn't come. He said he is a Christian, but he won't go to church. The younger child will want to stay home with his father and not go to church."

Gina's faith guided her decision to remain in the abuse. She said the following:

I stayed because of my children and church. I believed I should stay because I am married and it's a covenant, and I have a friend who is a Christian, and she said I can't complain about him every day because God will kill him. So I have this fear and don't want anything to happen to him.

Clearly, Gina's values and beliefs regarding marriage and family, along with her Christian faith, dictated how she experienced the abuse and provided reason for her to remain for the time that she did. She obviously took the matter of God's actions and

judgment seriously, and actually became fearful of God's actions against her husband based on her friend's comments. Gina made the following statement when asked about the impact of her faith on her experiences of abuse, "It was one of the main things that kept me there." Gina admitted that in the midst of it all, she just wanted him to leave, and considered why God would have her be unhappy. She explained herself as follows:

I would say to God, "Why would you want me to be unhappy? I'm just unhappy here." And you know, every day I am looking around for a message saying I must leave now, and I am waiting around for an answer that never came.

Ultimately, Gina mentioned that throughout the course of the abuse, she felt she was held hostage by her faith. She, therefore, felt she had to step outside the boundaries and rules of her faith in order to escape her situation. She said she recognized in retrospect, that she should have left long ago, but was sorry about the manner in which she left:

It's not that my faith looked different, but I made decisions because I believed that I was being held hostage by my faith. If I had gone to seek counsel and clarity it would have been different. I don't think making that bold step and stepping away was the right thing to do....Looking back now, I realized I should have done it long time ago. But then it was after I stepped away and made certain decisions, I realized that I did it the wrong way.

Gina pressed on and continued to explain what she meant, and how she had to break out of her faith to escape her battering:

I moved away and was not practicing the faith that I knew. I moved away from the realms of my faith and I felt if I was vibrant there, I would not have the courage to step away. So I had to step back, somewhat, and step out of my faith to get the courage.

She was then asked how she stepped out from the realms of her faith, and she said:

I actually started a relationship. It wasn't really right then, but I told myself in order for me to get there mentally, I had to see myself with somebody else. It's like we were together for almost 20 years...It was like just him alone and I felt like I could not be that way with anybody else—couldn't see beyond him. (*after a*

brief pause) I was wrong to do it that way. What I should have done was to make a clean break and decide this is where I want to go. He is saying now that I left because I was involved with somebody, you understand, which that was not it. I needed that strength; I had to hold on to something to help to propel me there. The relationship wasn't like something I wanted to get into, because it didn't last very long, but it was like a means to an end, you understand?

Gina looked at me intently as she came to the end of her explanation. Her features reflected the regret she expressed about getting involved with another man and committing adultery to escape her abuse. Her features also reflected a need for the researcher to understand how and why she acted outside her faith to gain traction or propulsion to leave her abusive context.

In summary, the theme of faith was noted throughout Gina's story, being seen in its vibrancy at certain points in time, in its constricting state, keeping Gina in bondage, and being seen as something of a prison warden that had to be circumvented and set aside, for the purpose of escape. Gina regretted disregarding her faith, but admitted she should have left her abusive marriage a long time before she actually did.

Helen indicated that she met her husband within a church context, and several of their subsequent meetings soon after they met were in faith-based contexts. She stated, "I told him I was leaving to prepare for a prayer meeting....He inquired if anyone who wanted to, could attend. I said it was open, although it was a church prayer meeting. He invited himself..." Her faith was evident in her referral to her early concerns about her husband's behavior during courting, to her Elders. She obviously trusted the religious system and valued the input of her leaders. She was, however disappointed with their treatment of the situation. She explained as follows:

I was calling off the wedding...I went to my Elders and informed them of my decision and they asked to meet with him first. They did, and I waited for their recommendations. I was surprised when...they closed the meeting by saying that

they were leaving it up to us to decide. I was disappointed because my church policy was that they would make recommendations in conflict situations like that.

Helen was a leader in her church, and believed in the system and policies pertaining to her church's governance. She felt she was not allowed to benefit from the Elders' guidance, which she really needed at the time. She explained that she was brought to the point where she feared God's judgement if she did not marry her husband. She stated:

After they left, what after the fact I would call emotional/spiritual blackmail took place and I gave in to this. He said he would go to the Church on that date, the date set for marriage, because he refused to disobey God. He would go even if he had to go alone. For some reason that created a "fear" in me. A fear I later determined as fear of God's judgement if I were truly in disobedience! This was another deep regret as I wondered after, if I really thought that God would strike me with lightning or something if I had followed through and postponed/cancelled the wedding.

It was clear that Helen was a devout Christian woman, who wanted to obey God. As a result, she went ahead despite her strong misgivings and married a man who had already been displaying negative behaviours toward her. She did this because of fear of God's judgment if she disobeyed. She expressed regret at this action, and considered how she could have thought of God the way she did. Nevertheless, for her, it was all about trying to do the right thing according to God's instructions, but she made poor decisions despite trying to adhere to her faith.

The theme of faith could also be noted in her description of her abusive experiences. In one of her descriptions she said:

He came over me, putting his hand in my throat and slamming me against the wall. I started screaming....He began to shout at me: "Shut up and stop your noise!" He then flung me on the...bed, put the cushion over my face, and began pressing it into my face. I started fighting to push him off. He eventually got off me and I sat up in shock! I felt like I was going out of my mind with shock...I felt like I had to blot God out of my mind for a while because I could not understand how He was standing by and watching this happen to me. It seemed that this was the only way to keep my sanity.

In the midst of her terrible abusive experience, Helen was unable to conceive that her God, whom she loves, and who loves her, could see what was happening to her and not help her. What appeared to be a major disconnect in her mind, made her feel like she would go insane, and so he had to “blot God out of her mind for a while” in order to manage that dissonance between beliefs about God and what was happening to her in real life. Helen also related an instance when she felt God was asking her to return to her husband after an abusive incident, and she did. She stated that the counselor had spoken with her husband and told her if she wanted to try with him again, she could. She said:

I did not want to, in the flesh. I did not trust him, but one morning...I felt that God was asking me if I would do it for the sake of my vows. With tears running down my face...I said yes to the Lord.

She felt this was a healthy response to God, as she explained that this was like “the ultimate test and I responded based on a healthy fear of God.” Helen made it clear that she stayed in her abusive context for the time she did because of her faith and her vows, coupled with the knowledge that separation and divorce would negatively affect her ministry:

I stayed because I was a Christian and believed in keeping my vows. I was in ministry and knew that a separation and divorce would negatively affect it. Some of it might have been that no Christian really gets married to be divorced. It was a hard pill to swallow—the possibility that I could end up being a divorcee—that big “D.”

For Helen, her Christian faith informed how she viewed marriage and the vows she had taken. It also mattered to her that being separated or divorced would not fit well with her profile as a minister of God. Her response throughout her abuse was undoubtedly contextualized by her faith. Ultimately, her faith prevailed, and she

expressed thankfulness to God for His deliverance and restoration, and had prayers of good wishes for any wife that her husband might have in the future:

My new marriage restored my confidence that my higher expectations were possible. I also pray if he remarried, his wife would not have to go through this sort of experience. I am grateful to God for deliverance. He intervened and delivered me. I thank God for restoration of confidence in my womanhood.

Cecille's analyzed transcripts revealed the theme of faith in a similar fashion to Helen. She reported that she met her husband in the context of church, and faith issues related to ministry, encompassed their lives. She reported that because of ministry, there was very little time spent together during the early stages of their marriage. She explained it thus:

He was dedicated to ministry, at church a lot, spent a lot of time in office or on the compound doing something or other. We didn't spend a lot of time together building legacy and relationship. He was busy building other people's lives, and I pretty much went along.

The theme of faith was evident in Cecille's world of abuse, as protection of ministry and image was very important for those who were ministers of God. Her words illustrated this:

A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband's image. I just felt I had to protect, umm, I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry and I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn't think I should say it to anyone.

When Cecille was asked about the role her faith played during her abuse, she also stated the following:

There were times when I felt that it was unfair for me to be living my life for God for so many years and to be in a situation like that. Often though, I would turn to God and ask him for deliverance from what I was going through and I would look forward to when he would deliver me, and during that time, I would hear messages whether preaching or from a friend, that would say when you come to

God don't come to God thinking God promised that everything would be all right for you with no problems, but I also knew it was not the will of God for me to be in this setting where I couldn't serve Him as I wanted.

She admitted that she struggled with the fact that she was serving God and living for him, and this abusive life has become her fate. Her faith wavered throughout these experiences, and her connection with God was weakened:

This situation keeps me from reaching out to God, hindered my praise, I am in the home with this man, and even after an abusive situation, I would go to church and sit and listen to him preach and that was really shaking my Christian life. We were taught at Bible College to looking beyond the man, but somehow I was having a hard time doing this, so the message was not reaching me and I really had to seek the Lord for myself.

Through her abuse, Cecille, like other participants such as Selena, had to come to a point where she "had to seek God for herself." She received her deliverance when her wavering faith was strengthened as she connected directly with God, and took the opportunity for deliverance that she believed God had provided. Her words clearly illustrated this:

He was my husband, he was my pastor, and it became very difficult for me to get from him the messaged I should be getting from my pastor. My relationship with God, I didn't lose that, but there were times when I was not as close to God as I should have been because the person who should be the priest leading me in that way was the same person who was causing my faith to be affected. So I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself, and I would be crying out to God for deliverance, and I would always think about the children of Israel and they were in Egypt, and they were going through some hard times, and I saw myself in that situation, so when that opportunity came, I saw it as my opportunity to step out and cross that sea, and I saw it as the Lord delivering me from the situation I was in.

Cecille's story reveals that her faith was tested and evolved during the abuse, but in the end, it became stronger, and the God of her faith led her to deliverance.

An element that existed in participant backgrounds. After analyzing the transcripts of Callie and Mary, it was noted that this theme existed for them in the

background of their abuses. They were not married to their abusive partners, and did not profess to be individuals who lived their lives aligned with a specific system of faith beliefs. However, when Callie was asked about the role of her faith in the abuse, her words reflected a fundamental belief in God, to whom she prayed for help during her abuse. She said the following:

I prayed a lot about it, because, you know, why is this happening to me and I'm not guilty? I talk to Him a lot about it. When I'm to go home, I pray and ask Him to not let anything happen. I don't know what I'm going home to. I prayed a lot.

She indicated her belief in the sovereignty of God as she reflected:

And I think what would happen to me if I had married this man, what would have become of me, you know? The Lord knows what He was doing all long, and you wonder being with a man so long and not one time he ever proposed to you, you know? I strongly believe what happens to us is for a purpose. God has a purpose for us and knows what He has in store for us.

Through faith, albeit faith that might not have been most evident in her everyday life, Callie was able to come to terms with her abuse in its aftermath, and can now walk away with a sense of being protected from a worse fate by God.

Mary admitted she wasn't a Christian, but had been brought up in the church, and so faith resided "at the back of her mind." She made it clear, however, that faith did not play a part in her abusive experiences:

I wasn't a Christian, but I grew up in the church. I didn't send my kids to church, even though mom took them to church. I didn't make time for church; I just focused on work. There were times when I might pray, but it wasn't anything significant. Faith didn't really play a part. It was at the back of my mind since I grew up in church.

An element that emerged and evolved during the abuse. This theme was noted in Mellie's story as it first emerged when she spoke about the Rastafarian cult, which she embraced during her relationship with her partner. She was not married to him, but fully

embraced the beliefs he owned, “He was fully in the Twelve Tribes of Israel cult, and like a silly girl, I went into it with him in spite of my parents’ protests. I stole away to meetings with him, and sometimes I would carry the baby.”

Mellie stated that she would pray to God for help during the abusive experiences, but no help materialized:

He had a wire brush he used it to beat me on my leg, like a spontaneous attack, out of the blue....And that was when I really started praying to God to take me out of this. Before him come home, I used to pray, tek mi out of dis! Help me! Help me! And I genuinely believed God was going to help me. I know something would trigger and he would start to beat me and I would cry out and scream, but nobody came to help me, nobody came to help me, nobody—God neva help me at all [paused with her eyes glistening and staring at the researcher].

Mellie added the following, which spoke volumes about the evolution of her faith in God through her trials, as she moved out of the realms of the Rastafarian beliefs and into the realms of faith in the Judeo-Christian God:

At the time, crying out to God, I realized a no so it go. He wasn’t going to just send some angel. I took the word at face value; I was very naïve: “Cry out to God for help and the help would come and he will send somebody to help.” I was looking for it to happen and it never did. I was disappointed; when I was crying out for help, the neighbors didn’t come, nobody knocked on the gate...God didn’t send anybody, but it didn’t make me bitter toward God, I still had an open mind...I don’t know...it just opened my eyes that Rasta was not the right way, so yes, I was disappointed, but it didn’t turn me off from God at the time. Disappointed but not turned off from God—not hating God.

Mellie further explained the role of faith in her abuse, and the growth of her spiritual faith with the following words:

I wouldn’t say it was the Rastafari part that helped me; it was reading the Word you know, that helped me. Drawing closer to God, seeking His face in trouble, you know? It sorta gave me strength to face the pain, to bear it, and in that way also, it opened another door to who God - who God was, because I don’t know if I didn’t have that experience I would be eating up the word like that, hoping to get some help and rescue from it. So it wasn’t from the standpoint of Rasta, but reading the Word gave me strength. All things work together. All of this was

making me into somebody stronger, helping me to seek God's face, helping me to see the importance of God in my life.

As she described the final abusive incident, she said:

He realized I had escaped and that was where my mother and my brother and him buck up. I don't know if God send them [paused], don't know if God send them, because I don't know what would happen if they didn't come.

Finally, Mellie's faith/belief system was seen to emerge and evolve into a stronger, and to her, more genuine faith in God, because her abuse drove her toward constant consumption of the word:

This experience helped me to be strong, grow in knowledge of God and His word. It made mi stronger in life. I didn't have my sister to talk to at the time, so I had to go through these experiences on my own. It hurt when I think of the possibilities of what could have been. When I think about how he was—he never hurt anybody, but God allowed things to happen this way, and with all of this, I take away spiritual growth.

An element that was born years after the abusive experiences. In Nellie's case, her faith evolved and gained tangible substance years after she had been divorced from her abusive husband. She indicated, however, that she did hold on to beliefs about marriage that her mother taught her, while she was in her marriage. She stated:

The only thing that kept me when you think about faith or spirituality is not that I had a relationship with Christ. It was through what I was taught by my mother, "Once you're married yu stay deh!" and I was afraid of adultery.... Yes, keeping marriage vows was a big thing.

She also made it clear that she did not know God and so depended on substances to help her bear the abuse. She stated the following:

I had nobody to turn to. I never knew God, so I turned to the drinking, and I would go to the store and buy anything and just drink, and then I would smoke and try to let the smoke go up in my head, and I was still taking the one and two Valium.

Finally, Nellie said at the end of the interview, “I can look back and see that God was there all along and I didn’t know. I can lift my hands higher and praise God. But I didn’t do so bad after all! Look at me now! Praise God!” Nellie was able to see God in spite of all the abuse she had suffered, and today, she gives Him the glory!

This theme of faith has been inescapable within the lives of all participants. In spite of the fact that it might have been manifested overtly or was obscured during their lives and experiences, it was always there. At the end of their interviews, all the women, except Mary, acknowledged their faith, and the God of their faith, as their keeper and deliverer from their terrible ordeal.

Theme 2: Hope

This theme was identified in various forms and stages throughout the stories of all participants. Their stories indicated hope was expressed overtly in some cases, and in other cases, it could be inferred from their words or reported behaviors. The data also revealed that in some cases, there was hope for change in their partners’ behaviors, in others, hope for deliverance from their abusive situation, and in some cases, there was hope for change in both regards at different times throughout their abusive journeys. In addition, the data also revealed that hope evolved, changing in level/quantity throughout the course of these women’s abusive experiences.

The stories of all participants also revealed that what emerged at some point during, and up to the end of their abusive relationships was a lack of hope—or hopelessness—regarding positive change in their partners’ behaviors. The data revealed the invariant constituents related to the theme of hope that emerged were (a) hope expressed - hopeless; and (b) hope inferred - to hopeless.

Expressed overtly. The data revealed six participants, Selena, Aurora, Della, Nellie, Mellie, and Cecille all expressed hope as they recounted the details of their experiences. Specifically, they all initially expressed hope for change in their partners' behaviors, before indicating by words or actions, their eventual loss of hope that this change would take place. Gina, on the other hand, was noted to have expressed hope for deliverance from the treatment of her abusive husband.

Selena clearly expressed her hope that "things would change" between herself and her husband, so she protected him in the meantime, "Also, protecting him was important; he was a minister, and protecting him paramount. I was just hoping that things would just get better as we go along, you know." Selena also expressed her hope with the following words, "Yes there was hope. I knew based on God's word that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change." Her words indicated her expressed hope was for change in the relationship, which would be expected to emerge from a change in her husband's behavior.

Selena's described her efforts to gain help via counseling because she wanted to try to work things out. This effort also indicated her hope that change could be brought about in her husband's behavior, and by extension, their relationship. She said:

I left two times before because he asked me to leave, but I went back, because the Holy Spirit said I should. I wanted to try. I insisted that we get counseling. He started counseling with me and stopped and I continued to insist that we get counseling.

Selena's account also revealed her loss of hope that there would be change if her husband did not proceed with counseling to address his abusive behaviors. She stated she would, therefore, not return to him, "The third time he asked me to leave and hit me in the face, I decided I wasn't gonna to go back. The only way I'd go back is if we do counseling but separately, but he wasn't open to that."

Selena's description of the last encounter with her husband when he hit her in the face and told her to leave, clearly illustrated that she had lost hope that the situation would improve. She, in fact, mentioned in the following statement that things were going to become worse, so she decided it was time for her to leave:

He walked up to me, and he was very angry, and hit me in the face and said, "You worth nothing! You're worth nothing! Why are you here? You're worth nothing! You should just leave!" And that was my freedom to leave and I knew it was time to go because it would get worst.

In Aurora's case, her words revealed her hope and confidence that her abusive relationship would change, based on her interpretation of God's word. She explained, "It was all about God, religion, and in my view, God says you must make it work; that was my interpretation." She added that she and her husband had proceeded on rocky foundations, but she expressed hoped for stability, "Our foundation was a little rocky then, but we went on hoping things would settle down." Aurora reported that her faith broke down over time, as her life unfolded in undesirable ways, and this seemed to have affected her sense of hope. She explained:

My faith was so broken down. You know you love God and you want to serve God, but now you no longer believe in it because there are so many persons living a lie and all of those things have weakened you spiritually.

She described her husband's abusive behavior in the presence of the Elders that also made her feel the situation was hopeless, and would have compounded her sense of hopelessness where change in his behavior is concerned. She said, "In front of them [the Elders], him literally fist after me when I'm talking, and that time they realize this is a hopeless case." As she reflected on her notes during the latter part of her interview, Aurora said, "I was bearing and hoping that things would be better. We were older and he is still beating me. I didn't want to be 60 and still running from him." Aurora's words

illustrated that she had hoped for change over the years regarding her husband's abusive behavior, but it was not forthcoming. The following account illustrated her sense of hopelessness after she found herself pregnant again, and her mother and other family members expressed great disappointment and anger toward her. She stated that she contemplated suicide, but did not carry it out, "And I look at a bottle of pills because I could see no way out, I wanted to end my life. I was just unhappy, just unhappy, I was just unhappy, and can't be unhappy anymore, you know, just unhappy" [clapping her hands agitatedly and her eyes filled with tears].

By her own account, Aurora was brought to a point of hopelessness, evidenced by her expressed desire to end her life.

Della stated she "was never discouraged," because of her situation. She added that she survived her abusive situation by "maintaining hope in God that better would come." She also said she "considered the abusive period as a season that will pass," illustrating her hope for change in her husband's abusive behavior toward her. The following words from Della reflected her loss of hope that her husband's behaviors would change, "I thought that I can lose my life in this abuse. I thought it best to leave than to lose my life. I decided not to give him a chance to draw blood."

In Nellie's case, she expressed hope that she could "fix" whatever was wrong with her husband, in spite of being warned by her friend not to marry him. Her friend refused to take pictures with her after her wedding because she did not heed her warning.

Helen explained her rationale by saying:

My friend said she not taking any picture with me because she told me not to marry him, because him going to treat me like how his father treated his mother, but I didn't listen, because I love him, and I was going to fix it! I was going to treat him so nice. And him must love me.

Nellie described her suicide attempt, which occurred in the midst of a fearful situation after she had the police serve her husband with an order to leave the family home:

I was so scared I couldn't sleep whole night. Thought came to me to take the Valium and kill myself. A few days later he started at me again and I decided to kill myself, and took all the tablets I could find and the Valium, and stood in front of him and said, "This is what you want? I will be out of your life." And took the tablets, and he just look at me and went to bed and turned off the light.

Nellie had moved from vibrant hope, at the beginning of her marriage, to despair and hopelessness that drove her take an overdose of pills.

In Mellie's case, hope for her partner's change in behavior was clearly expressed when she was asked her reasons for remaining in the abusive relationship. She responded, "I was hoping he would change; my son not being separated from his father; loving him; hoping to just have one man and not start another relationship; hoping to have a life with him." Mellie added these words, which confirmed her hope for change in her partner, "I always wanted the relationship to work. He was the prince of my life; the man of my dreams. I hoped things would change magically." When Mellie was asked to reflect on her map and state what struck her most, her sadly expressed response spoke volumes about her hope for her partner's change in behavior. She said:

When I think back, I can empathize with other women. It's a personal thing. You might say, "She so stupid!" but although her actions may appear stupid, there is always hope that the man would change, and that he would come back and look normal. There is hope—hoping just as how he became like that, same way he would change back.

Mellie's response when she was asked to state the most important thing for her to know or understand, coming out of her experiences, she responded:

What I know or what I've learned is things don't happen how you want it, how you hope it will happen. The reality is that your life just crumble, and you have to move on, you have to make a decision. And I had to make a decision in my life to

sever all ties and become an enemy; not to encourage him, for him to understand it was finished, in order to get my life back. I had to stop taking and taking, and had to attack, I had to fight back.

Her words clearly illustrated her loss in hope for change in her partner's behavior, and a decision to escape or remove herself from her abusive situation.

When Cecille was asked why she remained in the abusive situation with her husband, she responded, "I stayed because I just thought it would never happen again." Clearly, her response indicated hope for her husband's behavior change, which was not forthcoming. She made this unfortunate fact clear, as she continued, "But as time went by, and I experienced other abuses, and I see these little things popping up, in my estimation, my husband became out of control." She then explained in the following statement, that she began to pray for deliverance out of her situation:

I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself, and I would be crying out to God for deliverance, and I would always think about the children of Israel, and they were in Egypt, and they were going through some hard times, and I saw myself in that situation, so when that opportunity came, I saw it as my opportunity to step out and cross that sea, and I saw it as the Lord delivering me from the situation I was in.

Cecille's combined statements illustrated a journey that began with hope that her husband would change, but ended with loss of this hope. She, therefore, began to pray and hope for deliverance, which she received.

Gina expressed hope for deliverance, because she had given up hope that her husband would change, and she wanted him to leave:

I just want him to move and leave me...I would say to God "Why would you want me to be unhappy? I'm just unhappy here." And you know, every day I am looking around hoping to see a message saying I must leave now and I am waiting around for an answer that never came.

She was asked about the role her faith played during her abuse, and she responded with the following explanation:

I made decisions because I believed that I was being held hostage by my faith...I actually started a relationship. It wasn't really right, then, but I told myself in order for me to get there mentally, I had to see myself with somebody else...I needed that strength. I had to hold on to something to help to propel me there.

It could be inferred from Gina's explanation, that she had lost hope that God would deliver her or change her husband's behavior. She, therefore, decided to start a relationship with someone else in order to gain strength to exit the situation, and deliver herself from the abuse. As she stated, she realized this was the wrong way to secure her deliverance.

Inferred. The data revealed that hope was inferred from the words and behaviors of four participants—Callie, Tanya, Mary, and Helen. Throughout their abusive experiences, both hope for change in their partner's behavior, and hope for deliverance from their experiences could be inferred from their stories.

The theme of hope was inferred from Callie's response, when she was asked to state what part her faith played during her abuse, and she said:

I prayed a lot about it, you know, why is this happening to me and I'm not guilty? I talk to Him a lot about it. When I'm to go home, I pray and ask him to not let anything happen. I don't know what I'm going home to. I prayed a lot.

Since one normally prays and expects, or hopes for, an answer, hope could be inferred based on her report of consistently praying about her situation. Callie's description of how her son took her out of the abuse, illustrated her joy in being delivered out of a situation where the abuse would have continued, since her partner's behavior had not changed:

When I left there, when my son took me out of it, it was disgraceful that night, but eventually it was the best thing ever that happened to me; the best thing ever, getting out of it, I thank him—it was the best thing ever!

The theme of hope for deliverance from her situation was inferred from Tanya's story, as she responded to the question regarding the role her faith played in her abusive experiences. Her response reflected her hope as she prayed for God to show her the way out:

I still prayed. I still believed, and I would pray and ask, "God how long you going to allow me to stay in this?" but God was showing me the way, but I wasn't seeing it, I was blinded by something... God was showing me the way.

Tanya continued to hope for deliverance, until she appeared to have arrived at a place of hopelessness after being beaten very badly. She described her situation, as she contemplated murder-suicide:

I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first, then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal... I just draw for my firearm and called out to God and said, "Father, give me strength!" and He did, and I put away the firearm. This was after the last beating.

Tanya's words reflected hopelessness, and she sought [thankfully, unsuccessfully] what she believed, was the only way out of her abusive life—death.

As Mary told her story, hope could be inferred from her words, as she said, "I tried to stick it out for the children." It could be understood that for one to try to "stick it out" in the situation, one would have to be hoping that there would be some change before the breaking point comes. Mary's words indicated her initial hope for change in her partner's abusive treatment. It was evident, however, that she lost hope, and sought to get away from him after things continued without change. She reported how she kept changing her residence in order to escape him, but he would always find her. She explained that:

I told my mother I'm going to move because he won't stop stalking me, so I left, locked up my own house, and left, and he couldn't find me for about four months straight, so he came to my workplace and said he wanted to look for his children.

She also added she had to move again, as she sought to free herself from her partner, whose behavior she felt would not change, "I moved out again, and he didn't know where I move to—nobody would tell him." It was clear that for Mary, hope for change was gone, and she, therefore, sought deliverance.

The theme of hope was inferred from Helen's report of ongoing counseling, which she obviously expected would bring about change in her husband's abusive behavior. She stated, "We had eight counselors in that short time of marriage....I lost count of the unofficial counselors." She indicated she was the one who insisted on counseling from the very beginning. She said, "Since he was introducing the topic of marriage, I pushed for us to do premarital counseling." Since she pursued this path throughout the relationship, it would, therefore, be fair to assume she was hoping for change based on counseling interventions. Unfortunately, this change did not emerge. Helen lost hope and sought to escape her abusive husband after he locked her in the house and left her there. When she finally escaped, she never returned to him:

The final separation came when he was threatening to murder me. Pastor took him away all day. He came back saying this was the "old man" speaking. Next morning, I was dressing to go somewhere to pray, but I hadn't decided where. He insisted he needed to know where, but I couldn't give him details. He decided to lock me in the grilled house. He left for nearly an hour with my keys too. I called the police. He came back before them and started taunting me...I knew if he touched me I would retaliate. I prayed and begged God not to let him touch me....He placed the keys on the table, and I grabbed mine, ran to the outer grill, and escaped with my house-slippers on, and only my toothbrush in hand.

Helen's entire story reflected inferred hope for her husband's behavior change, which did not come. Instead, she had to escape this hopelessly abusive relationship by running away.

This theme of hope has been noted in various forms and at differing levels throughout the abusive experiences of all participants. It has impacted their lives in various ways, and has been seen to have come to naught in terms of expectation of change in their partners' abusive behaviors. As a result, all participants had to seek escape, or were delivered from their situation, and are now all divorced or separated from their partners.

Theme 3: Poor Judgment

All participants were first asked to relate how they met their partners and what their relationships were like before they were married or committed to each other. They were then asked to describe when the relationship became physically abusive. It was within the context of responses to these questions that this theme of poor judgment was identified. The analyzed data revealed the theme's strong emergence from the data of eight participants: Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Gina, Mary, Nellie, Helen, and Mellie. The data revealed that these women exercised poor judgment in their decisions to proceed with their relationships.

An analysis of the data revealed poor judgment emerged from the following individual elements or conditions, or a combination of them. They have been identified as the invariant constituents related to this theme: (a) ignored or overlooked warnings or red flags, (b) hasty approach to relationship, and (c) youth and immaturity.

Ignored or overlooked warnings or red flags. Selena’s story illustrated her poor judgment as she chose to ignore the red flags that were evident early in the relationship and marry her husband. One such red flag was the high level of conflict that was constantly present early in the relationship. She plainly mentioned this as she stated:

I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored. We argued a lot, and he malice me a lot, so I would be the one to have to be calling him to make up back. There would be a lot of shouting. ...I ignored all of that and said this was all part of the relationship.

She also added, “The abuse started when we were dating—emotional and verbal abuse. He would say things to put me down and make me feel less of a person.”

Aurora also displayed poor judgment as she ignored the warnings of her family members. She explained in the following way:

My brother was saying this man was 11 years older than I am at the time, and obviously more exposed than I—never had any children. They sat me down in the living room, in that living room talk, and my brother, who was very intelligent—they believed we were of two different educational levels.

She continued to display poor judgment, as she ignored the physically abusive treatment that was evident before getting married. She said, “He was pushing and shoving, and like, ‘I’m older than you, and what’s wrong with you?’ sort of thing.” Her statements indicated there were warnings that she ignored, and made the decision to marry her husband—a very poor decision. She added, “So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about it and weighing, and I did face challenges.”

In Tanya’s case, she had numerous red flags and verbal warnings. The most dramatic flag was actually being viciously assaulted by her partner before they were married. She reported that she had strongly reprimanded his daughter who was living

with them, and he took exception to that. She explained that he returned home after dropping his daughter off at school, and the abuse began:

Before I know what happened, I was on my back on the bed with this man squeezing the life out of my neck. I blacked out for, I don't think it was long, and the only thing I could do is reach for a nice crystal lamp and hit him in his face and he eased up, and even then, he was still on me thumping me, punching me, and the only way I could stop him, believe me, I had to draw my gun, and when I draw my gun that was in my waist, that was when he eased off and stopped hitting me.

One would imagine that an actual experience of such horrific proportions would speak louder than any other type of warning. But for Tanya, she ignored this, and they were married, exhibiting very poor judgment on her part.

Gina's poor judgment in deciding to get married was made after she ignored her partner's irresponsible behavior before marriage. She stated:

There were red flags in that he was not ready for marriage; he was not responsible. He wanted to be on the road all the time, just taken up with being a youth. I didn't see him taking up the responsibility of being a father and husband at this time.

To add to that red flag, Gina revealed that her husband had slapped her twice before marriage. She said, "Something happened and he had slapped me, and we had a big issue about it. I can't remember what we were arguing about." She added, "He slapped me before we were married—slapped me in my face. After he threw the food out, he grabbed me up, draped me up, and slapped me around." Gina reported how she ignored these warnings, and proceeded to enter a marriage where her husband's slaps became hard blows to her body. Her poor judgment in ignoring these warnings cost her much pain for many years.

Mary's poor decision to proceed in a committed relationship with her partner, took place in the wake of red flag incidents and warnings that she chose to ignore. In one

such incident when she became pregnant early in the relationship her partner wanted her to abort the baby. She said, “Before one year, I found out I was pregnant, but then we were having problems, because he would work every day. He did not have any day off, and he said I should have an abortion, and I said no.”

She added that other problems came to the fore after she had the baby. She said, “The relationship started drifting because he said my baby was not his...but he knew for a fact that the child was his.” Mary’s story also revealed other serious issues that affected her psychologically:

Six months into the relationship he moved in, despite the fact that he said the child was not his. Then after that, everything went haywire. When he said he was at work he was not there. I didn’t take it that he was lying because I was always at work too. It was not until my son was born I found out that he was having another relationship. That actually sent me over the edge, and I broke down then—the baby was about six months.

In spite of these and other warnings, Mary’s report indicated her poor judgment led her to continue with a relationship that never stabilized and became physically abusive.

There were numerous red flags and warnings noted in Nellie’s story from the very beginning. Her story indicated that in addition to the fact that their communications were mainly one-way, with her doing the talking, or with her partner yelling at her to shut up, the most dramatic warning incident was when he flung a knife at her feet when she was playing around with him shortly after they met. Her words vividly described the situation:

He never had much to say, and I would be the one always talking and he said, “Shut up!” and I shut up, and would only speak when absolutely necessary. So we would just sit and listen to the radio and not talk. One time before we lived together, I was playing around and he shouted, “Stop it!” and I continued, and he took out a knife, and threw a switchblade knife at my foot and I jumped out of the way.

In addition, Nellie stated that her friend had warned her not to marry her partner, but she ignored the warning, because she felt she could change him. She referred to this incident, which took place on her wedding day:

My friend said she not taking any picture with me, because she told me not to marry him, because him going to treat me like how his father treated his mother. But I didn't listen, because I love him, and I was going to fix it. I was going to treat him so nice. And him must love me!

Nellie's poor judgment prevailed. She ignored all warnings and entered a marriage that was extremely abusive for many years.

Helen's story indicated she had received several warnings and red flags from the very beginning of her relationship with her husband. She said, "He invited himself and came home with me....He then started dropping by my home at other times." She expressed her concern that her partner's behavior was a warning that he had problems respecting the boundaries of others. She added:

Not long after we started dating, he would come to my home and stay until late, although I would request that he leave earlier. My roommate at the time was also put out by this, and when I communicated this to him, he felt that she was jealous that she was no longer having the time with me that she was accustomed to. I was troubled by what seemed like an issue with boundaries where he was concerned. Before we were married, I saw anger issues and some possessiveness.

Helen reported that she took note of these warning signs, but chose to ignore them.

Unfortunately, her poor judgment led her into a very abusive marriage.

Mellie entered a committed relationship with her partner after noting he smoked marijuana a great deal, and also sold it. She said, "He was a weed-head—smoked weed a lot—and also sold weed to back up income." She also stated after she had his baby, she found out that he was cheating on her. She said:

I had a nice boy, lovely boy, and by this time I had accepted the Rastafarian faith—the cult, and even after having my son, during this time when I had the young baby, I found out he was cheating on me.

Despite these negative indicators, Mellie continued in a committed relationship, showing poor judgment, and ending up being abused by her partner.

Hasty approach to relationship. The data revealed that Selena, Tanya, Gina, Mary, Nellie, Helen, and Mellie all proceeded with undue haste in their relationships, bypassing due process of healthy relationship building. This would have allowed them time to get to know one another, and address emerging concerns appropriately.

Selena admitted frankly:

I was pushing it because I thought it would be nice to marry a minister and have my family grow up into a spiritual home like that. I kinda pushed things....So I really pressured him into the marriage thing, and he yielded and decided to get married within one year. I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored.

Selena's words indicated her haste in getting married, and her stated motivation was to be married to a minister and be blessed with a family like his. Unfortunately, things turned out to be painfully different from what she had hoped.

Tanya described the fast movement of her relationship, explaining how they were best friends while in other relationships, then decided to take "things to another level when both our relationships ended, and he was a very nice person." It appeared that Tanya did not allow herself time to recover from the previous relationship, and this seemed to have affected her judgment. She stated this plainly, as she described her first encounter with her partner's abusive inclinations. She explained:

I told him the landlord didn't want person of other sex to visit, and he told me if I don't let him come in, then we can't live together. He grabbed my hand and physically restrained me and said, "You not going to let me in?" That was the first time. I wasn't paying it any mind, because the prior relationship that I was

in, I was with that person from...and I really loved that person, and I don't think I was really over that person when I started talking to this person. I was vulnerable and not seeing things, you know? Even when he restrained me so harshly, I still blew it off, and went to live with him.

Tanya's hasty approach to her relationship resulted in their getting married almost within a year. She explained, "Eight or nine months after we started the relationship, we decided to move in together. Shortly after we moved in together, in three months we got married."

Gina stated in her account that she and her partner jumped into the relationship "from the deep end," without taking time to learn about each other. This was a poor decision on her part—one for which she paid dearly and painfully:

There wasn't much dating or courting. He was a colleague and another colleague introduced us. We were working at the same place and we would sit and talk for a long time, just share, somebody who you can relate to. So from there it started and developed into a relationship. I wouldn't say there was much dating. It was like we jumped into the relationship from the deep end. We didn't take time out to learn about each other, and then eventually got together. Sexual intercourse introduced early and I got pregnant early.

Mary and Nellie also moved very fast in their relationships, and made poor, hasty decisions too early that led to serious abuse for the duration of the relationships. Mary briefly described the rapid pace of her relationship as she said, "The relationship developed until after seven months, he was staying at my house. Before one year, I found out I was pregnant." Nellie's story revealed that after what seemed like one date, during which she did all the talking, she suggested moving in together, and her partner agreed to do so. She explained the situation by saying:

He asked to walk me home and never said a word. He asked if he could call me but I said I don't have a phone. He then said "Can I come and look for you on Friday?" and I said, "Yes!" I couldn't wait till Friday. I did all the talking and the only thing he told me was his name. I suggested we find somewhere to live together and he agreed.

Both women showed poor judgment by hastily committing to relationships within too short a time, resulting in an abusive reality.

Helen's transcript revealed that although she pushed for pre-marital counseling to continue after the first counselor discontinued abruptly, she was hasty in proceeding with the marriage before completing the sessions, and expressed her regret in the following account:

Since he was introducing the topic of marriage I pushed for us to do pre-marital counseling. We started and it stopped abruptly—no explanations to this day. This left things kind of “up in the air” as I believed very strongly in it...When that counsellor stopped, I pushed again for us to find another. We did and started. When we got half-way, it was close to the wedding date we had set for November. The counsellor advised us that we could go ahead and he would pick up the counselling after—advice I have regretted to this day.

Mellie's hasty decision to become involved with her partner occurred during her high school years, during which she became sexually involved with him and had his son. She explained how he:

Would come to see me late at nights when my parents were asleep, and would go in my father's car, and one night, I gave in and got pregnant. The one night that I finally gave in to him was the night I got pregnant.

Unfortunately, Mellie explained how she discovered he was being unfaithful to her, yet proceeded to purchase a house with him without allowing time to sort out the problems that already existed. She explained:

I had a nice boy, lovely boy, and by this time I had accepted the Rastafarian faith—the cult, and even after having my son, during this time when I had the young baby, I found out he was cheating on me. During that time I went to live with him. I was back and forth really, and he was very ambitious and he decided to buy a house, and I was working at a bank, and we decided to buy the house together in the neighborhood.

These women exercised poor judgment, as they were hasty, and did not take the time to get to know their partners, and sort through their problems, before entering a fully committed relationship. This led to their painful and abusive situations.

Youth and immaturity. This theme of poor judgment was noted to have emerged from the context of youth and immaturity, according to the analyzed transcripts of Aurora, Nellie, and Mellie.

Aurora explained that she was still a teen-ager when she met her husband. She explained, “I was nineteen to twenty and going to college...I thought this was the best thing for me. As I rationalized things, I thought things would work as long as it was ‘in the Lord.’” She continued to explain her situation in the following way describing her family’s warnings that she spurned in her immaturity:

My brother was saying this man was eleven years older than I am at the time, and obviously more exposed than I....They sat me down in the living room...they believed we were of two different educational levels. This was conflicting to me, because this was of the Bible; this was the Lord; this was religion, so I couldn’t understand the social aspect of relationships that this could impact things later on. This just did not dawn on me at the tender age of nineteen or twenty.

Aurora mentioned her own immaturity as she said, “Some persons, even at nineteen, would have developed more, but for me I had not accelerated and matured.” Her youth and immaturity, coupled with her confidence in her faith, caused her to make a very bad decision to proceed in the relationship.

Nellie’s story reflected the influence of youth on her judgment. The story of how she and her partner met reflected the perspective of an infatuated and naïve school girl—which she was. She said:

I saw this handsome guy sitting in the corner—handsome because he was fair skinned, long eyelash and pretty hair. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. I asked who he was. Afterwards, I heard he was asking about me too. He asked to walk

her home, and never said a word. He asked if he could call me but I said I don't have a phone. He then said "Can I come and look for you on Friday?" and I said, "Yes." I couldn't wait till Friday.

Nellie's final statement clearly illustrated her immaturity and lack of experience—qualities that led her into a poor decision to have a relationship with this person. Nellie stated her age when she became pregnant, "I was pregnant at age twenty one." This would have meant that she would have been a bit younger when she met her partner.

Unfortunately for these women, poor judgment prevailed, as they proceeded into their relationships with their partners despite warnings and red flags, and they failed to take the time to get to know their partners in a healthy fashion. Hasty actions and decisions prevailed, and in some cases, youth and immaturity was a significant element in their very poor decisions that led to physically abusive relationships.

Theme 4. Secrecy

This theme emerged from the analyzed transcript of all participants, except Mary. It was found to emerge alongside one or more of the following: shame, pride, and protection. Regardless of the alignment, secrecy was identified as either a means of addressing these elements, or could be viewed as facilitating them in some way.

In Selena's case, secrecy was the means by which she sought to protect her husband; secrecy, therefore, facilitated protection of her husband. She explained that, "Protecting him was important; he was a minister, and protecting him was paramount. I was just hoping that things would just get better as we go along, you know?" Her words explained her reasoning that she would keep her husband's abusive behavior secret until hopefully, change came. She also added, "He was punching me. I hid it because I believed in protecting him, because he was in ministry, and I didn't want anyone to look

down on him in any way.” Selena’s rationale for protecting her husband was, once again, emphasized with these words, which further explained the basis of her desire to protect him. It could reasonably be inferred from her words that people would “look down on him” because it would be a shameful matter for a minister of God to be exposed as being physically abusive to his wife. Selena explained that with her husband’s encouragement, she kept the abuse secret, and did so very well. She said, “He was a very private person, and he encouraged me to be private about what was happening, so I played the game well.” She added how difficult things became for her to pretend that all was well at church, and “act like we were doing well, then when we go back in the car, it would be back to normal.” As Selena reflected on her map, she explained what struck her was:

How much my marriage was just a pretense and a lie to cover up wrong, because I thought that was what God expected. He would say to honor the marriage by keeping it confidential and whatever went on, I shouldn’t talk about it. But based on scripture, that wasn’t true. We need accountability, and if we are in trouble we must seek help, so I was covering up a lie, and I was also protecting myself too—what people had to say was important and I didn’t want the name over my head to be a loser, that I really lost out and my marriage didn’t survive. This is what I always wanted, a family, and I still do, and I would hold on to anything to maintain that, no matter what.

Selena’s frank admission that came toward the end of her interview revealed she lied, pretended, and kept her abuse secret, not only to protect her husband, but also herself.

There was the element of pride that she sought to preserve in a personal way, not wanting to be viewed as a “loser” whose marriage was destroyed. Unfortunately, as she realized, not disclosing the truth and pretending that things are better than they really were, could not change reality. Selena’s words reflected how well she came to terms with that truth.

Aurora’s story revealed how she was secretive with her friends about her abusive marriage, because she felt they would consider her to be an “idiot” to have tolerated such

abuse. Based on the following words, her secrecy, therefore, helped to preserve her pride. She explained:

You never give your friends the full truth, because they are going to say how you could have taken all of that—“seriously, are you for real?” You look like an idiot because nobody in their right mind would stay after certain things, you know?

She also explained her inclination to be secretive within her church context, and her words suggested a duality of pride and shame based on people knowing she was being beaten. She said, “And if you turn to the church, which is where you think you belong, you don’t want to tell anybody what is too private to talk about.” Aurora’s shame may be inferred from the following words spoken by her, as she explained how her mother broke secrecy. She said, “Mama gossip with her friends, so them at church know mi getting beating, and that mi marriage not working.” Aurora’s words also illustrated her perceived need for secrecy for self-preservation sake. She explained, “I would be afraid to talk in a counseling session, and I would be afraid to go home, because I talked too much and I’m going to get beaten up.” These words from Aurora indicated how secrecy played its role in preserving pride, avoiding shame, and preserving her safety.

Callie’s story revealed she kept her abuse from her family because she was ashamed. She said, “I didn’t say anything to any of my family members because—I don’t know—I was ashamed.” She explained how ashamed she was when her son discovered she was being abused all along, and confronted her partner with a knife with the neighbors viewing the fracas. She stated, “I tried to part them and got cut on my finger in the process...the neighbors and everyone was gathered outside—very disgraceful. I was so ashamed, but that was when I left.”

The theme of secrecy was noted strongly in Tanya's account. It indicated how she hid her abuse from her coworkers, as she and her husband worked in the same office. She explained how she covered up the bruises she had just received, before driving with her husband to work, as though nothing happened:

My neck was so, so swollen and lucky for me, scarves were in style, and it didn't look out of the way to wear a scarf. It was black and blue, badly swollen, and I hid that well, and we drove together to work afterwards, and nobody knew what happened....As I say we worked at the same place in the same office; nobody knew. I was happy as a lark.

Tanya's words further illustrated her commitment to secrecy as she explained that although she made a report to three superior officers after a bad beating, no one else was aware that she had been beaten. She said, "So I reported at work to three senior officers and he denied it....And it is to be noted that only those three officers knew about the abuse. Nobody else did, because I hid it. Secrecy was well-maintained by Tanya and her partner, as it was noted how they did such a good job keeping their abusive relationship a secret that their coworkers viewed them as a "model couple" that they would like to emulate, "Everyone said they wanted to be like us. We worked together...and they felt we were a model couple, always working together." Tanya expressed the range of feelings that emerged from her abusive treatment, and shame was one of them, "Embarrassment, low-self-esteem even now it affects me; fear; anger; shame." She explained how she felt her coworkers, who were ignorant of the situation, knew about the abuse. She said, "I felt somehow my co-workers knew but they didn't. I just felt they did, but they didn't until we divorced. They were shocked."

In Della's case, when she was asked her reasons for remaining in the abuse, she reported, "At first I stayed for the children...I stayed because I did not want to jeopardize

his ministry and image. I stayed because I was afraid of what people would say.” Based on her response, she sought to protect the welfare of her children, her husband, and his ministry. It would be safe to assume, therefore, that she could only do so by keeping her husband’s abusive treatment secret. Later, toward the end of the interview, she described how she felt as a result of the abuse, but had a good attitude at the end, “I felt shame and embarrassment. I felt like nobody, but out of evil, came forth good.”

An examination of Gina’s transcript revealed how she did her best to pretend all was well with her marriage as she kept secret her husband’s abusive treatment. Her words revealed her husband also did his fair share of pretending. She said:

Some people in the community would know more than you know, and would see his activities out there and ask me questions, but I would just smile and put on a face. I learn to put on a face for years, and people would think that I had one of the happiest marriages, because he is known to boast about his family, and his wife, and his boys, and he’ll talk.

Gina admitted her pride was also to be considered, as she hid the abuse to protect her image. She explained:

I was thinking if I told people they would say, “Look at you who always go on like you’re nice.” Pride was a part of it! I didn’t want people to know that I was living this kind of life and have them look down on me, you understand?

She explained that she felt she should keep silent about her abuse, just as others did about theirs, and she also admitted she sought to protect her husband. She said:

And the other part of it was that I was thinking there were persons going through the same thing and they were not saying anything, so I say I’m not saying anything. And I did not tell my family, because I knew they would not talk to him and they would cuss him and, you know? I think I did protect him; I think I did, because I didn’t tell anybody not even at work.

Based on her words, therefore, Gina employed secrecy to protect her husband, and to protect herself, because of pride/shame.

Nellie explained that her abusive experiences were too shameful, so she kept them secret. She said, “I didn’t want to tell anybody because it was too shameful.” Nellie explained how she considered the shame she would experience should her situation be revealed regarding her abusive marriage. This was noted when she was being urged by her doctor, who treated her regularly after she was abused, to get a permit for legal separation. She said, “The doctor said to go to the lawyer and get a permit for legal separation, and I went and did that...and the shame, everyone would know the marriage never last.” For Nellie, secrecy would have facilitated preservation of her pride, and masking of her shame.

Helen mentioned how she spoke with “some relevant persons about the incidents of abuse, especially those I thought could help me, him, or us together. I hid it from my family members because of embarrassment.” Beyond that, she had disclosed the matter to “eight official counselors in that short time of marriage.” Helen’s report revealed her selectivity regarding the persons to whom she disclosed her abusive situation.

Mellie’s account revealed how she sought to keep her abusive treatment a secret from the persons at her place of employment. She mentioned how she lied about being in a car accident after her face was badly cut during a beating. She explained that:

I had to be on two weeks sick leave and go back to work with this big scar on my face. I told them I was in an accident and the glass cut me in my face. I think my boss suspected I was in an abusive relationship, and I had to face people with that cut in my face. Some believe me and some didn’t, but I had to face people with that scar in my face till it healed.

It would be fair to assume that for Mellie, there was a great deal of shame associated with this scar, and a definite need that the abusive treatment that caused it, be kept secret.

Cecille's story revealed how she sought to protect herself, her children, and her husband, as she stayed in the abuse and kept secret her husband's abusive behavior. She explained her rationale in this fashion:

I did not make a decision to leave, for one, our status, a pastor. What do you say when people ask you why you are leaving? You don't tell someone you are leaving because your husband is abusive to you. You don't tell your children that you are leaving because their father is physically abusing you. A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband's image. I just felt I had to protect, umm, I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry and I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn't think I should say it to anyone. I just thought it would destroy the children and his ministry, and I just thought I could ride it out and make it through each one.

Of note, is the fact that Cecille mentioned protection of her own image, suggesting her pride was also at stake. Her additional comments emphasized her perceived importance of keeping the abuse secret and protecting her family. She asked, "What do you tell people? How do I tell people something like that? She added emphatically, "I had to keep this secret! There is a sense of aloneness." She proceeded to explain that in the church context, she had to maintain secrecy, because such matters regarding abuse are not discussed. She explained this as she stated:

People would ask, "How are you doing?" I would wonder if it was a loaded question, and they saw something wrong and that was why they asked. I became paranoid. I wondered if they could see that something was wrong, even though there were no scars. I did not feel safe. The church environment was not safe. In the church culture where I'm from, you did not talk about those things as a pastor's wife. When church persons saw the interactions between us and saw that something was wrong, and asked if I was ok, I did not feel safe to speak.

Cecille felt forced to maintain secrecy, bounded by her own promise to her husband, her pride, and her desire to protect her children from the pain and shame of people knowing about their father's abusive behavior.

The findings of this study revealed the theme of secrecy to be interwoven in the abusive lives of all participants, except Mary. Secrecy was found to be interwoven with the elements of shame, pride, and protection, as they emerged from the women's experiences of abuse. This theme was noted to persist until the participants escaped or were delivered from their abuse by way of separation or divorce, at which time that which was secret, in most of their cases, became public knowledge.

Summary

Faith, hope, poor judgment, and secrecy are the four major themes that emerged from the stories of the 11 participants in this study. These themes emerged from the stories of lives that were different, yet had major similarities. These similarities were characterized by these themes, which formed definitive backgrounds to the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of physical abuse. The theme of faith was strongly evident throughout, and impacted how the participants behaved and reasoned in the midst of their abuse. It was also noted to be present when their abuse came to an end. Hope was noted to be a constant part of the participants' lives, and was seen to have evolved, as they hoped for change in their partners' abusive behaviors, then lost such hope, and sought to escape their abuse. Poor judgment was noted to be a predominant theme throughout this study, and was found to be the element that opened the door to the abusive experiences of eight of these women. The theme of secrecy was powerfully noted in all stories, except Mary's. The abusive experiences of the participants were found to be perpetuated within a covering of secrecy, even as the abuse and resulting shame served to demand continued secrecy for the sake of protection of reputation/image, and preservation of pride, which were all intertwined. These themes, therefore, have

been seen to characterize the world of these Jamaican abused women in undeniable ways, and their combined impact has been indubitably life changing and powerful.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The analyzed data garnered from this study revealed four major themes, which were described in Chapter III. The themes are (a) faith, (b) hope, (c) poor judgment, and (d) secrecy. The themes of faith and hope emerged in various forms and degrees from the stories of all eleven participants; the theme of poor judgment was strongly evident for all participants, except Callie and Della; and Mary's story was the only one in which the theme of secrecy was not evident.

To begin this chapter, there is a brief review of the research questions and the qualitative approach selected to answer them. The chapter presents the following information: (a) the four themes as a unified whole, based on their textural and structural dimensions; a conceptual map is also presented to represent this thematic synthesis; (b) comparison of the themes with relevant literature; (c) limitations of the study; (d) implications of the study; and (e) suggestions for further research. The chapter then closes with summary and concluding comments.

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica. In this exploration, an understanding of the women's abusive worlds and the influences that led them to tolerate the abuse for the time they did, was also sought. A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen as best suited to attain the goals of this study. This approach investigated the lived

experiences of the women, and identified the core essence of their experiences of the phenomenon of physical abuse, based on their own words and descriptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). This process was carried out as the researcher bracketed or set aside personal views and knowledge of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). With this qualitative approach, commonalities in the participants' experiences were extracted, and a universal essence of their combined experiences was created (Moustakas, 1994) from textural and structural unification of the themes that emerged from their subjective accounts of their experiences.

Having presented detailed individual analyses of the participants' encounters with the phenomenon in Chapter III, this chapter presents a synthesized representation of the themes. The textural descriptions that are presented serve to illustrate the nature of the experiences, while the structural descriptions illustrate the context within which the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The research questions were:

1. What is the essence of the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained with their abusive spouses for some time before deciding to leave?
2. What influences and conditions affected the women's decision to remain in their abusive contexts for the period of time that they did?
3. How do the findings of this study compare with extant literature on this topic?

The first two questions are answered by combining both textural and structural descriptions related to the participants' experiences of physical abuse.

Results

Based on the responses of the participants of this study, the essence of lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica is characterized by a combination of faith that evolved throughout the abusive period, hope for change in behavior, or for deliverance from the abusive context, poor judgment in committing to partners despite prior warnings, and secrecy that was aligned with shame, pride, and a desire to protect the abuser. As was previously noted, the themes of faith and hope were evident in all participants' stories, while the theme of poor judgment did not emerge from the stories of Callie and Della. In addition, the theme of secrecy was not evident in Mary's story.

Themes

Faith. This element existed in different forms and stages, and evolved during the abusive experiences of all participants. For Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Della, Gina, Helen, and Cecille, it was a consistent element that contextualized their lives and abusive experiences.

Selena, as a new Christian, chose her partner because she felt he had a good command of the scriptures, and could help to advance her spiritual growth. She explained, "I was pretty new in the faith and, for a minister, I thought it would be great to be with someone who could help me in my faith." Her faith also influenced her to remain in the abuse, as she explained, "I had made a commitment before God and man to stay in there, so I got married and I had to stay in there. Before God, I mean, leaving, I think God would be really upset with me." It was also because of her faith, that she found her way out of the relationship, "I found strength leaning on God, and I believe that's what

carried me through the whole tenure of my marriage.” In Aurora’s case, she chose her partner according to the instructions of her strict religious beliefs, within which she was brought up since early childhood. She, therefore, expected that all must be well. She said, “I thought this was the best thing for me....As I rationalized things, I thought things would work as long as it was ‘in the Lord.’” Aurora described how she proceeded with the relationship despite verbal warnings and red flag incidents as she said, “So I think in my mind I should continue, so I defy all odds of thinking about and weighing, and I did face challenges.” Her faith beliefs seemed to have kept her going back after each beating. She explained, “The Bible says you can’t go out! There is no divorce! You’re trying to live a moral life, so I went back.” Aurora’s faith evolved negatively, as she described how it was destroyed, and her spirituality was broken down:

My spirituality broke down. I tried to follow the teachings, and it is a part of you, and you don’t believe anything better exists outside there...I was keeping those guidelines in mind. All my efforts to keep the guidelines destroyed my faith completely, completely!

In Tanya’s case her passionate description of what her faith was like before entering her relationship with her partner, spoke volumes. She said:

I don’t like to talk about this because I was a Christian, saved, baptized, filled with the Holy Ghost. I had a lot of Spirit in me; go to church every Sunday, and because of that man, mek mi haffi start sin. He made me sin. I still prayed. I still believed.

Her faith seemed to have evolved and weakened throughout the abuse, as she explained how she was unable to see what God was showing her, “I would pray and asked God, ‘How long you going to allow me to stay in this?’ But God was showing me the way, but I wasn’t seeing it. I was blinded by something, I don’t know. As her faith ebbed and

flowed, she described how the God of her faith finally delivered her, at a time when she was about to commit murder-suicide:

I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal...I draw my firearm and called out to God and said, "Father give me strength!" And He did, and I put away the firearm.

Della's story illustrated how her faith remained constant throughout the abuse. She said, "I was never discouraged." She also mentioned her intentionality in maintaining her faith practices despite the abuse. She said, "I tried to maintain prayer, church attendance, fasting. I try not to miss any of these things." Della's honest comment about the difficulty of her situation was of significance and maintained the authenticity of her story.

She said:

Don't get me wrong; it was not easy keeping the faith during these abusive years. I thought of revenge, but eventually just gave it up to the Lord. The abuse sent me to the scriptures. I had to set an example for my children in dealing with this.

Gina's account illustrated how much her faith impacted her response to her abusive experiences. She explained, "I stayed because of my children and church. I believed I should stay because I am married, and it's a covenant." Unfortunately, her words revealed that later in the relationship, she felt she had to step out of the confines of her faith, in order to escape her abusive situation. She said, "I made decisions because I believed that I was being held hostage by my faith." She added, "I actually started a relationship. It wasn't really right then, but I told myself in order for me to get there mentally, I had to see myself with somebody else." Helen was a church leader, whose misplaced fear of God led her to commit to marriage despite serious red flag warnings. She explained in the following way:

After they left, what, after the fact I would call emotional/spiritual blackmail took place and I gave in to this. He said he would go to the Church on that date, the date set for marriage, because he refused to disobey God. He would go even if he had to go alone. For some reason that created a “fear” in me. A fear I later determined as fear of God’s judgement if I were truly in disobedience! This was another deep regret as I wondered after, if I really thought that God would strike me with lightning or something if I had followed through and postponed/cancelled the wedding.

What could be called a crisis of her faith could also be noted from Helen’s account, as she described how she had to “blot God out of her mind” in order to maintain her sanity in the wake of a viciously abusive episode:

He came over me, putting his hand in my throat and slamming me against the wall. I started screaming....He began to shout at me: “Shut up and stop your noise!” He then flung me on the...bed, put the cushion over my face, and began pressing it into my face. I started fighting to push him off. He eventually got off me and I sat up in shock! I felt like I was going out of my mind with shock...I felt like I had to blot God out of my mind for a while because I could not understand how He was standing by and watching this happen to me. It seemed that this was the only way to keep my sanity.

This theme was evident in Cecille’s abusive world as she explained how she struggled with the reality of being abused. She said:

There were times when I felt that it was unfair for me to be living my life for God for so many years and to be in a situation like that. Often though, I would turn to God and ask him for deliverance from what I was going through.

She explained that the abuse was “shaking” her faith. Her words illustrated this as she said:

This situation keeps me from reaching out to God, hindered my praise, I am in the home with this man, and even after an abusive situation, I would go to church and sit and listen to him preach and that was really shaking my Christian life.

Ultimately, she was able to testify to her deliverance at the hands of the God of her faith:

So I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself, and I would be crying out to God for deliverance, and I would always think about the children of Israel and they were in Egypt, and they were going through some hard times, and I saw myself in that situation, so when that opportunity came, I saw it as my

opportunity to step out and cross that sea, and I saw it as the Lord delivering me from the situation I was in.

In Callie and Mary's case, they did not identify in a distinct way with any faith group or practices. Faith could be viewed as existing in the background of their abusive lives, and they professed that they prayed because of the abuse. Callie said, "I prayed a lot about it, because, you know, why is this happening to me and I'm not guilty? I talk to Him a lot about it." Mary said:

I wasn't a Christian, but I grew up in the church. I didn't send my kids to church, even though mom took them to church. I didn't make time for church; I just focused on work. There were times when I might pray, but it wasn't anything significant. Faith didn't really play a part. It was at the back of my mind since I grew up in church.

Mellie's story clearly illustrated the evolution of her faith in God through her trials, as she moved out of the realms of the Rastafarian beliefs, and into the realms of faith in the Judeo-Christian God:

At the time, crying out to God, I realized a no so it go. He wasn't going to just send some angel. I took the word at face value; I was very naïve: "Cry out to God for help and the help would come and he will send somebody to help." I was looking for it to happen and it never did. I was disappointed...God didn't send anybody, but it didn't make me bitter toward God, I still had an open mind...I don't know...it just opened my eyes that Rasta was not the right way, so yes, I was disappointed, but it didn't turn me off.

She added:

I wouldn't say it was the Rastafari part that helped me, it was reading the Word you know, that helped me. Drawing closer to God, seeking His face in trouble, you know? It sorta gave me strength to face the pain, to bear it, and in that way also, it opened another door to who God - who God was, because I don't know if I didn't have that experience I would be eating up the word like that, hoping to get some help and rescue from it...but reading the Word gave me strength. All things work together, All of this was making me into somebody stronger, helping me to seek God's face, helping me to see the importance of God in my life.

In Nellie's case, she was very clear as she explained that the only beliefs that were active in her abusive situation were those her mother taught her about remaining in her marriage. She was careful to explain that:

The only thing that kept me when you think about faith or spirituality is not that I had a relationship with Christ. It was through what I was taught by my mother, "Once you're married yu stay deh [there]!" and I was afraid of adultery.... Yes keeping marriage vows was a big thing.

Nellie's retrospective words, uttered at the end of the interview, attested to a faith that was born after her abuse, but a faith, nevertheless, that allowed her to see that God was present in the abuse, even when she did not know him. She exclaimed, "I can look back and see that God was there all along and I didn't know. I can lift my hands higher and praise God. But I didn't do so bad after all! Look at me now! Praise God!"

Hope. This element was noted in the stories of all participants. It was found to be expressed either overtly or was inferred from their words or behaviors. Of significance, is the fact that hope existed for change in their partners' behaviors, for deliverance from their abusive situations, or both, at varying times in the relationship. The data also revealed that all participants moved from a state of expressed or inferred hope, to hopelessness, at which point they either left or were delivered from their abusive contexts.

Selena, Aurora, Della, Nellie, Mellie, and Cecille all expressed hope for change in their partners' abusive behaviors. Selena's words were clear as she said, "Yes, there was hope. I knew based on God's word that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change." Her words here reflected her loss of hope that her husband's behavior would change, and indicated her decision to leave her abusive marriage for good. She said, "The third time he asked me

to leave and hit me in the face, I decided I wasn't gonna to go back." Aurora, who had expressed her continued hope by saying, "I was bearing and hoping that things would be better" expressed her loss of hope in the following words:

And I look at a bottle of pills because I could see no way out, I wanted to end my life. I was just unhappy, just unhappy, I was just unhappy, and can't be unhappy anymore, you know, just unhappy.

Della kept positive, "maintaining hope in God that better would come." She also said she "considered the abusive period as a season that will pass." Her sense of hopelessness that her husband's behavior would change could be noted in her words, "I thought that I can lose my life in this abuse. I thought it best to leave than to lose my life. I decided not to give him a chance to draw blood." Gina's transcript revealed her expressed hope for deliverance from her situation. She hoped her husband would leave her and her children. She said:

I just want him to move and leave me...I would say to God "Why would you want me to be unhappy? I'm just unhappy here." And you know, every day I am looking around hoping to see a message saying I must leave now and I am waiting around for an answer that never came.

Hope was inferred from the words and behaviors of Callie, Tanya, Mary, and Helen. These women were noted to have prayed or pursued counseling, which are actions that infer hope for change. They prayed for change in their partners' behaviors and for deliverance. Helen was hopeful that counseling would change her husband's behavior, and so she avidly pursued this path from the beginning of her relationship. Her words reflected this as she stated, "We had eight counselors in that short time of marriage...I lost count of the unofficial counselors." In the end, her hopelessness was evident as she related how she escaped her abusive husband, after being locked in the

house for a while, “He placed the keys on the table, and I grabbed mine, ran to the outer grill, and escaped with my house-slippers on, and only my toothbrush in hand.”

Poor Judgment. This is a theme that emerged strongly for eight participants: Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Gina, Mary, Nellie, Helen, and Mellie. These women exhibited poor judgment within one or more of the following contexts: (a) ignored or overlooked warnings or red flags, (b) hasty approach to relationship, and (c) youth and immaturity.

Selena ignored warnings and red flags. Her own words attested to this as she said, “I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored.” She also admitted pushing for a hasty marriage, and her husband yielded to the pressure she brought to bear. She confessed:

I was pushing it because I thought it would be nice to marry a minister and have my family grow up into a spiritual home like that. I kinda pushed things...So I really pressured him into the marriage thing, and he yielded and decided to get married within one year.

Gina’s own words described how she and her partner “jumped into the relationship from the deep end” before taking time to “learn about each other”:

I wouldn’t say there was much dating. It was like we jumped into the relationship from the deep end. We didn’t take time out to learn about each other, and then eventually got together. Sexual intercourse introduced early and I got pregnant early.

Aurora and Mellie became involved with their partners when they were still teen-agers, and immaturity and inexperience resulted in poor judgment on their part.

Secrecy. All participants, except Mary, related stories, which reflected the presence of secrecy in the midst of their abusive lives. For these women, secrecy was aligned with shame, pride, and pretense, facilitating and/or resulting from them.

Selena's words indicated she maintained secrecy about her husband's abusive treatment because it facilitated his protection. She explained that, "He was punching me. I hid it because I believed in protecting him, because he was in ministry, and I didn't want anyone to look down on him in any way." It was clear from her words, that there was also the element of pride that she sought to preserve in a personal way, since she did not want to be viewed as a "loser" whose marriage was destroyed. Her secrecy facilitated this preservation of her pride. In Tanya and Gina's case, both worked at the same office with their husbands, and both kept secret their abusive lives from their coworkers. Tanya's account of her actions after a particularly violent encounter with her husband emphasized how committed she was to keeping her abuse secret:

My neck was so, so swollen and, lucky for me, scarves were in style, and it didn't look out of the way to wear a scarf. It was black and blue, badly swollen, and I hid that well, and we drove together to work afterwards, and nobody knew what happened....As I say we worked at the same place in the same office; nobody knew; I was happy as a lark.

Gina admitted her pride was involved, as she hid the abuse in order to protect her own image, because she felt people would look down on her:

I was thinking if I told people they would say, "Look at you who always go on like you're nice." Pride was a part of it! I didn't want people to know that I was living this kind of life and have them look down on me, you understand?

She also admitted she sought to protect her husband by keeping silent. She said, "And I did not tell my family, because I knew they would not talk to him and they would cuss him and, you know? I think I did protect him; I think I did, because I didn't tell anybody not even at work."

Mellie worked at a bank and kept her abusive relationship from her boss and coworkers there. She mentioned how she lied about being in a car accident, after she received a bad cut in her face during a vicious beating from her partner. She explained that:

I had to be on two weeks sick leave and go back to work with this big scar on my face. I told them I was in an accident and the glass cut me in my face. I think my boss suspected I was in an abusive relationship, and I had to face people with that cut in my face. Some believe me and some didn't, but I had to face people with that scar in my face till it healed.

It can be safely assumed that there was much shame associated with the visible scar on her face. It would, therefore, be important to her, that nobody knew how she received it. Her secrecy, therefore, ensured this was the case. Maintaining secrecy was also very important to Cecille, as her words illustrated how it facilitated protection for her, her children, and her abusive husband. She explained:

I did not make a decision to leave, for one, our status, a pastor. What do you say when people ask you why you are leaving? You don't tell someone you are leaving because your husband is abusive to you. You don't tell your children that you are leaving because their father is physically abusing you. A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband's image. I just felt I had to protect, umm, I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry, and I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn't think I should not say it to anyone. I just thought it would destroy the children and his ministry, and I just thought I could ride it out and make it through each one.

Reported Lived Experiences: Composite Conceptual Map

It is evident that, although participants' individual responses differed, the themes of faith, hope, poor judgment, and secrecy clearly emerged in varied ways from the stories of the majority of them. A computer-generated unified representation of these themes is illustrated in Figure 12. This model is titled "The Abusive World of the Jamaican Woman." It illustrates the Jamaican woman's world of abuse that is accessed by poor judgment, as shown by the arrow pointing from poor judgment toward the

circles. Within the darkness of her abusive world, there resides faith and hope, with both touching in the darkness of the abuse. Their partial positioning in the darkness of abuse indicates that both elements are impacted by her abuse, and they also have an impact on her abusive experiences. They both also protrude outside the abusive circle, indicating their path of escape for the women, beyond the reach of abuse. The black triangle of secrecy and its attendant elements support the woman's dark world of abuse. This is noted by the circle of the abusive world resting on top of the triangle of secrecy. The two-way arrows from secrecy to abuse illustrate their symbiotic relationship, as they both perpetuate each other.

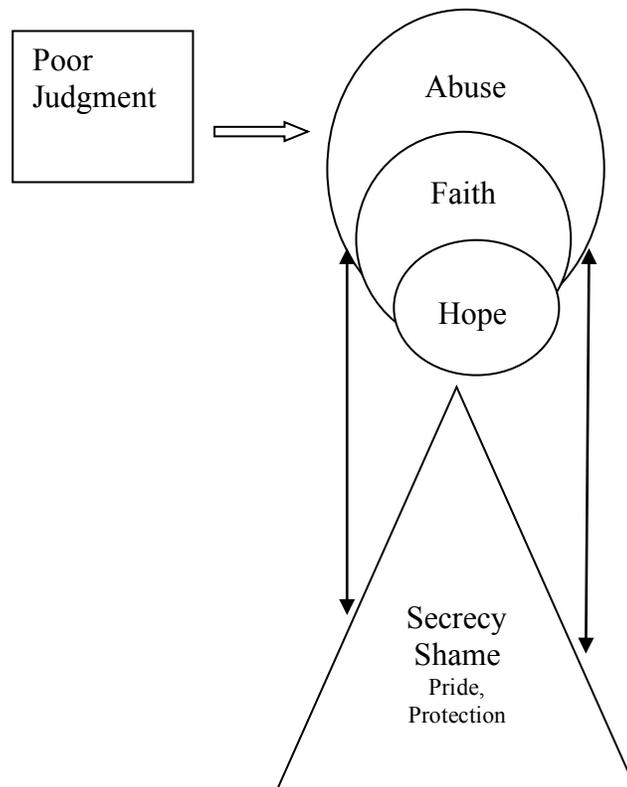


Figure 12. The Abusive World of the Jamaican Woman

Based on the findings of this study, the essence of the lived experiences of Jamaican female intimate partners can be expressed in the following way:

A reality occupied by faith and hope in various forms, which is sometimes hastily accessed via poor decision-making, and is characterized by brutal and inhumane treatment, meant to demoralize and extinguish the personhood of the abused, as it seeks to gain and maintain control over her, while fostering shame and fractured pride within her, as well as protection of her abuser, via a firm cloak of secrecy, which also sustains it.

Results Compared to Extant Literature

This research represents the only qualitative one of this specific type that has ever been conducted in Jamaica. Its aim was to investigate the phenomenon of physical abuse from the woman's perspective. Given the noted paucity of studies on physical abuse carried out in Jamaica in general, this specific type of study is meant to address this dearth in the literature. It is anticipated that the outcome of this study will facilitate a more informed and culture-specific therapeutic and social response to the needs of this population, which will emerge from a more enlightened understanding of the women's world of abuse. It is also hoped that useful dialogue in response to the abusers, and the factors or conditions that foster and maintain their abusive behaviors, will also result.

With these goals in mind, the themes are examined in this section, alongside the related literature. In addition, the following comparisons are carried out against the backdrop of the participants' perspectives meanings, feelings, and motivations gleaned from this study: (a) an examination of the matter of learned helplessness in the midst of the Cycle of Violence (Walker, 1977), (b) an examination of the revised image of the abused woman who chose to remain in her abusive context, postulated by Dunn (2005), and (c) women's reasons for staying in the abuse.

Themes

Faith. This theme emerged from the data of all participants. It was noted to be present in various forms and at varying levels, as it evolved with the impact of the abuse, and also impacted how the women experienced their abusive situations. Cares and Cusick (2012) carried out research with abused Jewish women in the United States, and results indicated how their abusive husbands would exploit their faith in order to gain and maintain control over them. Helen's situation provided an excellent example of this coercive tactic, which was employed by her husband in order to get her to proceed with the marriage, after she failed to gain guidance from the Elders of her church. She explained,

After they [the Elders] left, what, after the fact, I would call emotional/spiritual blackmail took place and I gave in to this. He [her husband] said he would go to the Church on the date set for marriage because he refused to disobey God. He would go, even if he had to go alone. For some reason that created a "fear" in me. A fear I later determined as fear of God's judgement if I were truly in disobedience! In hindsight, I deeply regret this, as I wondered after if I really thought that God would strike me with lightning or something if I had followed through and postponed or cancelled the wedding.

It was evident that knowing her zeal and desire to obey God at all times, her husband seemed to have manipulated her faith. It appeared that he placed sufficiently strong fear in her mind that she would be disobeying God if she did not proceed with the wedding. Based on her report, however, he made it clear that he did not plan to disobey God, but planned to obediently present himself for marriage. In Selena's case, her statement demonstrated that she eventually recognized how she was being manipulated through her faith and misuse of the scriptures. She said:

What he did a lot too was use the scriptures a lot to make me feel guilty. There was a lot of manipulation with using scripture, and that was why I had to learn the

scriptures for myself. I had to take time to do so, because something wasn't right with what he was saying.

In a seminal study, Burnett (1996) highlighted abused women's behavior of repeatedly returning to their abusive partners, thereby suffering further abuse. She identified this behaviour as an element of Battered Women's Syndrome. She indicated that this behavior was noted in women with strong religious beliefs that lead them to think it is their duty before God, and indeed to their husbands, to remain in their abusive marriages, and demonstrate their religious faith. This was noted in Selena's and Aurora's case, as they left and returned to their husbands on more than one occasion, before leaving for good. Selena expressed her views about her marriage vows and her relationship with God when she said, "I had made a commitment before God and man to stay in there, so I got married to stay in there. Before God, I mean, leaving, I think God would be really upset with me." For her part, Aurora said:

So I keep going back to my husband; I would sneak out and go, and eventually I would go back to him...the Bible says there is no divorce. You're trying to live a moral life, so I went back...I would thief out and go to him and have sex without mama knowing...I feel I cannot say no to him.

According to Burnett, the abused women strongly believed that being a dutiful wife and remaining in an abusive marriage was an integral part of the Christian "belief about the nature and purpose of marriage" (p. 146). Burnett added that the teachings these women received, directly or indirectly, might have suggested that physical and emotional abuse are "hardships of married life that must be endured" (p.146). Of significance, is the fact that Selena's father-in-law, who was her pastor, seemed to have conveyed similar sentiments about marriage to her. Selena explained that:

I would talk with his father, the main pastor of our church, about our issues and he would encourage me to just work it out. Marriages are never perfect and this is

just my cross to bear, so he would talk to my husband about it, maybe one time, and that was it, but he just said the Bible says it was my cross.

It is to be noted that in her study carried out with 40 battered black women in the United States, Potter (2007) highlighted the successes and disappointments these women encountered with spirituality and religion, in an effort to escape their abuse. The findings of this Jamaican study clearly reflect her findings. These participants expressed similar dynamics, as they turned to their faith/religion for help in the abuse, and finally for deliverance out of it. Cecille, for example, expressed her disappointment, as she stated how at times, she “felt that it was unfair for me to be living my life for God for so many years and to be in a situation like that.” She also described her journey as she sought God for herself, and took the deliverance she believed He prepared for her:

So I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself, and I would be crying out to God for deliverance, and I would always think about the children of Israel and they were in Egypt, and they were going through some hard times, and I saw myself in that situation. So when that opportunity came, I saw it as my opportunity to step out and cross that sea, and I saw it as the Lord delivering me from the situation I was in.

Hope. This theme emerged from the stories of all participants, and was either overtly expressed or was inferred from their words and behaviors. Their hope was noted to have evolved within the context of their abuse, being strong at some points, and at others, much weaker. At times there was hope for change in their partners’ behavior, or for deliverance. Eventually, they all arrived at a place of hopelessness, and sought escape or deliverance from their abusive partners. In an early study carried out with abused women by Lee-Hargrove (1996), it was noted that of all the reasons given for the women’s decisions to stay in the abusive situations, two reasons were given more frequently: (a) children, and (b) hope that their partner’s behavior would change for the

better. In her qualitative phenomenological study with five abused women, Duley (2012) noted the theme, “hoping things would change,” emerged from the stories of all participants. All 11 participants in this study were noted to have expressed hope, or they exhibited behaviors or made statements from which hope could be inferred. Mellie’s words retrospectively described her hope, and expressed an understanding of the decisions made by other abused women to remain with their partners. She said:

When I think back, I can empathize with other women. It’s a personal thing. You might say, “She so stupid!” but although her actions may appear stupid, there is always hope that the man would change, and that he would come back and look normal. There is hope—hoping just as how he became like that, same way he would change back.

Helen was noted to be on her knees praying in the wake of her abusive treatment, or was constantly seeking counseling. She explained, “We had eight counselors in that short time of marriage...I lost count of the unofficial counselors.” These actions could be inferred as acts of hope, as she sought change in her situation through praying and counseling interventions. Mary’s hope for change in her relationship was inferred from her words, as she explained how she “tried to stick it out for the children.” Of course, in “sticking it out,” there would have to be some hope for eventual change.

Despite their expressed or inferred hope, all participants arrived at a place of hopelessness, which seemed to pave the way for their exit from their abusive situations. In their study of cognitive-affective predictors of abused women’s readiness to end their abusive relationships, Shurman and Rodriquez (2006) indicated that hopelessness was an affective predictor. Mellie described her cognitions, as she arrived at this sense of hopelessness that her partner would change, and sought to terminate her relationship once and for all:

The reality is that your life just crumble, and you have to move on, you have to make a decision. And I had to make a decision in my life to sever all ties and become an enemy; not to encourage him, for him to understand it was finished, in order to get my life back. I had to stop taking and taking, and had to attack, I had to fight back.

In the case of Tanya, Aurora, and Nellie, their sense of hopeless led them to contemplate ending their lives. Aurora said, “And I look at a bottle of pills because I could see no way out, I wanted to end my life.” Tanya considered killing her children, and then herself, as she said, “I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first, then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal.” After Della had initially said she was “maintaining hope in God that better would come” because she “considered the abusive period as a season that will pass,” the continued abuse drove her to hopelessness about change in the relationship, and she decided it was safer for her to leave. This was illustrated as she said, “I thought that I can lose my life in this abuse. I thought it best to leave than to lose my life. I decided not to give him a chance to draw blood.”

Poor Judgment. The stories of eight participants—Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Gina, Mary, Nellie, Helen, Mellie, and Cecille—strongly reflected this theme. The following elements were subsumed within it: (a) ignored or overlooked warnings or red flags, (b) hasty approach to relationship, and (c) youth and immaturity. Of note, is the fact that at least two of these three elements were evident in the stories of all eight participants. Short et al., (2000) carried out studies related to abuse survivors’ identification of protective factors and early warning signs for intimate partner violence (IPV). Their findings pointed to the fact that once violence began in the women’s relationships, regardless of how early, it would usually escalate over time. Lang’s (2012) study to

investigate the knowledge gap related to the earliest warning signs of IPV, highlighted the fact that these signs were rationalized and set aside in various ways when they presented themselves. They noted that for the women, focusing on the positive aspects of being in the relationship helped in the rationalization process. Selena's words declared this as she said:

I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored. We argued a lot, and he malice me a lot, so I would be the one to have to be calling him to make up back. There would be a lot of shouting...I ignored all of that, and said this was all part of the relationship.

She later added, "I knew based on God's word that we would have trials, and I accepted this trial was just mine, so I had to trust God and just hope for change." Her words reflected rationalization that the warnings that emerged were nothing more than expected challenges in her relationship, based on her understanding of God's word. Tanya and Gina received severe warnings, as they were physically abused very early in their relationships, before they were married. Tanya described her horrifying experience with the following words:

Before I know what happened, I was on my back on the bed with this man squeezing the life out of my neck. I blacked out for, I don't think it was long, and the only thing I could do is reach for a nice crystal lamp and hit him in his face and he eased up, and even then, he was still on me thumping me, punching me, and the only way I could stop him, believe me, I had to draw my gun, and when I draw my gun that was in my waist, that was when he eased off and stopped hitting me.

Tanya stated that her mother warned her about marrying her partner after such violence.

She explained how she set the incident aside:

I said to myself, "I am a police officer, and so is he. If anything, I will use my gun to defend myself." So probably in my mind I am bad, you know, even though he is slimmer than me, he is physically stronger than me.

In Gina's case, she described her husband's behavior before marriage, explaining that she did not see him as a man who was ready to settle down responsibly. She explained that:

There were red flags in that he was not ready for marriage, he was not responsible. He wanted to be on the road all the time, just taken up with being a youth. I didn't see him taking up the responsibility of being a father and husband at this time.

In addition, Gina revealed how her husband had slapped her twice before marriage. She said, "Something happened and he had slapped me, and we had a big issue about it. I can't remember what we were arguing about." She then added:

And then another time I can't recall what happened but it had to do with food, and he came and threw the pot outside with the food in it...He slapped me before we were married—Slapped me in face. After he threw the food out, he grabbed me up, draped me up, and slapped me around.

Lang (2012) mentioned the importance of (1) being emotionally aware and (2) having the ability to trust one's gut feelings, in being able to act on warnings or red flags that emerge. Based on Helen's words, she noted warnings: "I was troubled by what seemed like an issue with boundaries where he was concerned. Before we were married, I saw anger issues and some possessiveness." Unfortunately, perhaps due to a lack in one or both areas as noted by Lang (2012), or for other reasons including rationalization, Helen disregarded the warnings that she acknowledged and, therefore, went into a marriage that revealed the full nature of the situation she was being warned about.

The findings of this study revealed an element of hastiness, in addition to the participants' disregard of warnings, which resulted in poor judgment to marry or commit to their abusive partners. Selena admitted that:

I kinda pushed things....So I really pressured him into the marriage thing, and he yielded and decided to get married within one year. I realized in our relationship there were some red flags that I ignored.

Gina also admitted that the relationship proceeded very rapidly, without allowing time for her partner and her to become properly acquainted. She said:

I wouldn't say there was much dating. It was like we jumped into the relationship from the deep end. We didn't take time out to learn about each other, and then eventually got together. Sexual intercourse introduced early and I got pregnant early.

In their hasty involvement with their partners, these women failed to observe basic rules of building healthy relationships, one of which is taking time to get to know each other and get to know each other. Bradley and Gottman (2012) highlighted this element of taking time and building friendships as an important element in their "Creating Healthy Relationship Program" designed to address IPV in low-income families. This element was noticeably missing, as these women ignored warnings, proceeded with their relationships, and paid the price for doing so. In Aurora and Mellie's case, they both became involved while they were in their teens. Unfortunately for them, in their immaturity and youth, they also ignored warnings and red flags, hastily proceeded with a formal commitment to their partners, and ended in abusive relationships due to very poor judgment. Aurora mentioned she was unable to understand the challenges because she was immature. Her words indicated her confusion with the social concerns expressed by her family, because in her view, all should be well since she had chosen her partner according to her faith practices. She said:

This was the Lord; this was religion, so I couldn't understand the social aspect of relationships that this could impact things later on. This just did not dawn on me at the tender age of nineteen or twenty. Coupled with the fact that at that age, you feel that you want to be exposed to certain experiences but you want to do it in the right way.

Aurora added, “Some persons, even at nineteen, would have developed more, but for me I had not accelerated and matured.” Her youth and immaturity, coupled with her confidence in her faith, led to her poor decision. In Mellie’s case, she became pregnant while she was still in high school, and continued into a relationship fraught with abuse. She explained, “I was in upper sixth form at school. My studies suffered. I did my exams with my big tummy in my uniform.” She added:

I had a nice boy, lovely boy...and after having my son, during this time, when I had the young baby, I found out he was cheating on me. During that time, I went to live with him...and we decided to buy a house together.

The inexperience was evident in the accounts of both women, and they paid the price for their poor judgment that resulted from it.

Secrecy. With the exception of Mary, all participants’ stories reflected this theme. Secrecy was noticeably associated with one or more of the following: shame, pride, and protection. Secrecy was noted to somehow mitigate these elements, and/or facilitate them. In addition, as illustrated by the unified thematic representation titled, “The Abusive World of the Jamaican Woman,” the woman’s abuse and secrecy were noted to feed off each other in a destructive symbiotic relationship. According to Anderson et al. (2010), numerous abused women across the world keep their abuse secret. The authors carried out research with battered women in Pakistan to identify barriers to their disclosure, and research results indicated the women were (1) afraid of damaging their reputation, (2) bringing dishonor/shame to their families, (3) afraid of exacerbating the abusive situation, and (4) afraid of separation or divorce, and subsequently losing custody of their children as a result. The study also revealed the women were skeptical about whether social leaders, including religious leaders, would

support reporting the abuse. Results gleaned from research carried out in Australia by Spangaro, Zwi, Poulos, and Man (2010) also indicated that the women in their study did not disclose for fear of their partners finding out, thereby exacerbating the problem of abuse.

The Jamaican women who were interviewed in this research expressed a desire to protect their partner's image/reputation, and secrecy facilitated this. Selena's words reflected this desire and her rationale, "He was punching me. I hid it because I believed in protecting him, because he was in ministry, and I didn't want anyone to look down on him in any way." It would be reasonable to accept that her concern about how people would view her husband was based on the shamefulness of his treatment of his wife, especially as a minister of God. She explained how her husband encouraged her to keep the secret, and she complied, "He was a very private person, and he encouraged me to be private about what was happening, so I played the game well." Selena's words reflected how well she pretended and lied about her situation. Aurora's story revealed how she sought to preserve her own image and pride, as she believed she would be viewed as an idiot if her friends knew about her abuse. She explained:

You never give your friends the full truth, because they are going to say how you could have taken all of that—"seriously, are you for real?" You look like an idiot because nobody in their right mind would stay after certain things, you know?

Her words also indicated her perceived need for secrecy for the sake of self preservation. She explained how she "would be afraid to talk in a counseling session, and I would be afraid to go home, because I talked too much and I'm going to get beaten up." Overall, it was noted for Aurora and several other women, that secrecy played its role in preserving pride, avoiding shame, and preserving her safety. Callie explained

that she did not tell her family about the abuse simply because she was ashamed, “I didn’t say anything to any of my family members because—I don’t know—I was ashamed.” Nellie and Helen reported that they were also ashamed, so for them, secrecy would have helped to mitigate their shame. Helen said, she told “some relevant persons about the incidents of abuse, especially those I thought could help me, him, or us together. I hid it from my family members because of embarrassment.” For her part, Nellie said, “I didn’t want to tell anybody because it was too shameful.” Mellie sought to protect her image and quite likely her job. Her words illustrated this, “I had to be on two weeks sick leave and go back to work with this big scar on my face. I told them I was in an accident and the glass cut me in my face.” Cecille’s words indicated how she used secrecy to protect herself by preserving her pride, and to protect her children, and her abusive husband. She explained:

I did not make a decision to leave, for one, our status, a pastor. What do you say when people ask you why you are leaving? You don’t tell someone you are leaving because your husband is abusive to you. You don’t tell your children that you are leaving because their father is physically abusing you. A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband’s image. I just felt I had to protect, umm, I said to my husband before we got married that I would never do anything to destroy his ministry and I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn’t think I should say it to anyone. I just thought it would destroy the children and his ministry, and I just thought I could ride it out and make it through each one.

Tanya and Gina were noted to have kept secret their abuse because of shame and a desire to protect their husbands. The theme of secrecy has indeed been noted throughout the stories of these women, and was found to support their abusive worlds as their partners were protected by it. Of note, is the fact that because of secrecy, their abuser was free to continue his treatment of them, without accountability or consequences.

The four major themes, faith, hope, poor judgment, and secrecy, that emerged in this study, have been shown to compare well with the existing literature in most cases. The themes, faith and hope were found to be strongly evident within the stories of abuse of all participants, while poor judgment was very evident within the stories of all participants, except Della's and Callie's. The theme of secrecy in conjunction with shame, pride, and protection, was undeniably clear in all participants' stories, except Mary's.

Participant Acquired Meanings and Understanding

This study yielded responses from the participants related to the meanings and understandings that emerged for them from their experiences of abuse. These meanings and understanding were found to be in two categories, pertaining to (a) value and confidence in themselves, and (b) God's presence in their lives, knowing Him, and understanding the scriptures for themselves, apart from previous teachings. First, there was understanding gained about themselves, in that they realized they did not value themselves. Selena's words attested to this, as she said, "I didn't value myself enough because I allowed my husband to step all over me, and I think my self-esteem was really low, even before I came into the marriage." Mary's words reflected what she thought of herself and her behavior, as she said with contempt, "Stupid! I was stupid to have stayed!" Understanding was also gained about a lack of self-confidence and fear of public opinion, and Georgia's words spoke volumes, in this regard, "I was held captive by my fear of being on my own and of what people would say; afraid I would not be able to manage...I had no confidence in myself." Cecille's words indicated how she was able to see her strengths. She explained as she looked at her map, "Looking back, I kind of

feel, like did I really go through all of that? I can't help seeing some strength in me that I have never seen before...I didn't credit myself with the strength."

With respect to God's presence, Nellie's words acknowledged God's presence even when she did not know Him. She said, "Looking at this [her map], I'm so glad. I feel like, 'thank God I got out of it!' How did I get out of it? God was there even though I didn't know Him." Tanya's words indicated her understanding and acknowledgment that it was God who took care of her. She said, "I tell you, anybody going through this and don't look to God cannot go through it...It's God who carry me through." Selena and Cecille recognized they had to forge a connection with God for themselves, rather than through their husbands. Selena clearly explained:

Because I took all my counsel from my husband, because he was a man of God...I didn't really have to know God for myself. He was my mediator, so God had to mash that down for me to have that personal relationship with Him, and not repeat this cycle over again.

Cecille's explanation echoed similar sentiments, as she said:

There were times when I was not as close to God as I should have been, because the person who should be the priest leading me in that way was the same person who was causing my faith to be affected. So I had to get to a place where I was seeking God for myself.

In summary, these meanings and understandings were significant to the outcome of the study, as they provided some clarity into the women's perspectives related to their abuse, and the dynamics involved as they suffered in their ordeal, until the time it actually came to an end.

Influences on Participants Decisions to Remain

The second research question for this study asked what influenced the women to stay in the abusive relationship. The findings of this study revealed the women's

decisions to remain within their abusive contexts for the time they did, included the following influences: spiritual/faith beliefs and values pertaining to marriage and Christianity; concern for their children's well-being in the aftermath of full disclosure of the abuse and ensuing separation; hope for change; protection of their image and their partner's; shame/pride; love; weakness of will; lack of a sense of self-sufficiency (although these women were not economically dependent on their partners); valued partner's presence in children's lives, regardless of abusive behavior; not wanting to have to start over with another man and have children for other fathers; desire not to disappoint family or embarrass family; and initial denial and rationalization of abuse. These stated reasons encompass the range expressed by the participants, with all of them expressing more than one. These reasons have been supported by the literature (Anderson et al., 2010; Burnett, 1996; Duley, 2012; Dunn, 2005; Gengler & Lee, 2001; Grauwiler (2008); Lee-Hargrove, 1996; Spangaro, Zwi, Poulos, & Man, 2010; Yoshihama, 2002; Yount, 2005).

In considering Dunn's (2005) postulated revised image of the abused woman as a heroic, sacrificial survivor, rather than a helpless, passive victim, it is to be noted that there was evidence of this heroic image in the stories of the Jamaican women in this study. Cecille's thoughts were cogent as she finally assessed her situation and acknowledged that change was not going to happen, so she had to plan her escape. She expressed how she waited for the right moment, and "seized the opportunity to escape" when the time was right:

I made up my mind after the car incident. I was even stronger and became more determined that I must get out of this. I became more disconnected, and was always looking for the escape path. I seized the opportunity to escape with the...landlord problem in the house.

Cecille's words regarding how she planned and strategized for her escape, therefore, provided support for Dunn's (2005) view. Tanya, on the other hand, had plans to protect herself at all costs. She said:

I started sleeping with a butcher knife under my bed, which he didn't know about, because I said I wouldn't draw my firearm again. We slept in the same bed, but he didn't know.

Cecille's and Tanya's behaviors are in keeping with Dunn's (2005) description, as she described the women, "in their strength, sanity, and relative nobility (p. 22), transcending "gendered stereotypes" (p. 22), as they strategized and planned for their preservation in the abuse, and "eventual liberation" (p. 22). Dunn (2005) noted that characterizations or images of the "passive victim" or "active survivor" (p. 24), are reductionist and limited, in that they fail to capture the complex dynamics associated with the experiences of abused women, and their associated meanings and inner motivations within their abusive worlds. Della and Mary also reported that they would fight back, thereby supporting the image of an active survivor. Della's description was definitive as she said, "I start to fight back each time. I used machete, board, hammer, and other weapons to retaliate, and the children started to defend me." Mary said, "He hit me in the face, and...grabbed me up, and I grabbed a knife and he ran, and I sailed the knife after him." The data revealed that some of the participants like Cecille, found it wiser to not fight back at times, and were apparently strategically passive and silent, for the sake of self-preservation. Mellie reported she went along calmly with her abuser when he came to her workplace repeatedly, because she couldn't afford for her employer and coworkers to see the bad side of her partner. Based on her words, Mellie's actions reflected she was not being a

passive, helpless victim, but had a strategy based on preserving herself and her job, which was very important to her. She said:

He would come to where I worked at the bank sometimes, and I would go outside and calm him down, because I didn't want anybody to know that something was wrong. And he told me he would make a stink if I didn't go with him, so I took the bus with him, docile, and he took me back to the house.

In considering Dunn's (2005) views of the abused woman, and Walker's (1977) view of the abused woman within the context of the Cycle of Abuse and the matter of "learned helplessness," it should be noted that the former view and the findings from this Jamaican study compare much better than the latter—Walker's view. Notwithstanding, Walker's (1977) model is noted to have its merits and validity, but cannot be used indiscriminately to characterize each abusive situation or context—and most certainly, not this Jamaican one in particular.

A Journal Reflection by Researcher

I have been carried into a very dark place with this interview. No, I don't know what it is like to be beaten naked and then raped. When she looked in my eyes and asked me the question, with her eyes filled with tears, I didn't know what to say. I saw—felt her horror. It was palpable in the room, and when she paused, and I said, "Are you ok?" I felt I was somehow talking to myself. I was glad she paused and collected herself. I very much needed to do the same, and the things I would have said as a counselor, I could not say as a researcher. These spoken words would have helped me to deflect the horror, but would have been seen as an "intervention" for the client. This is not therapy, this is real life, real world experience of being beaten and humiliated. This is a dark place for me, but I can appreciate even more, what it was like for these women. I respect them very much, these, my Jamaican sisters.

Indeed, what this qualitative phenomenological study has done, is to remove the general blanket, and opened doors into the women's individual worlds of abuse. It has provided insight into the minds of 11 Jamaican women who remained in their abusive contexts for various periods of time, for various reasons, and escaped or were delivered to tell their stories about it all.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study sought to explore the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica. Specifically, the aim was to gain an understanding of the essence of their abusive experiences, and the conditions and influences that led them to tolerate the abuse for the time they did. There was an expressed optimistic effort to gain as diverse a sample as possible, in terms of age, educational and socio-economic status (SES), religious or faith status, parental status, and employment status. This would serve to provide a broad perspective across these demographic parameters, which would enrich and strengthen the findings of the study. Purposive sampling was implemented in order to gain participants who could provide rich data about their experiences.

This study was limited in that the level of desired diversity in the population was not present. First, the participants were all in the 40 to 50 age range, with the inclusion criteria for the study being 20 to 60 years old. A greater spread across the inclusion age range would have better facilitated garnering of perspectives across the developmental lifespan. Second, nine participants identified themselves as Christians in varying states of activity in their faith, while the other two expressed belief in God, and a background founded on Christian beliefs, although they did not profess to be members of the faith. Having participants with differing belief systems, other than the Christian one, as well as participants who might be atheistic or agnostic in their beliefs, would have provided insight in the abusive world from these faith (or non-faith) perspectives. Diversity was further precluded due to the fact that ten participants had children, and all participants were employed and self-sufficient. Third, in terms of educational status, only one

participant did not complete high school, and the majority had attained, or was in the process of attaining, first or second degrees. Finally, this sample was not diverse in terms of SES, as all participants identified with middle to lower-middle class SES.

Implications of the Study

Faith-Based Teachings and Belief

The findings of this study have illuminated the powerful influence of faith and religious belief systems in the participants' abusive situations. To a great extent, these beliefs impacted their decisions to remain after the abuse started, and in some cases, faith provided strength and a direction to escape. These findings indicate a need to revise religious teachings that state directly, or imply, that battering is to be borne in marriage, as it is the woman's duty to remain in order to honor the marriage vows, and demonstrate her faith. It must be taught that by its very nature, battering is against the biblical principles of marriage, and should not be tolerated. In addition, religious doctrines that tend to tolerate husband's abuse of their wives must be addressed. Programs to bring about change in these areas must be put in place at the level of the local church, but would be more impactful if implemented from the highest levels of faith-based communities as well. An important aspect of these programs would entail church leaders being shown the importance of equipping themselves in matters pertaining to family violence. They must address the matter of accountability for the abuser and safety for the woman and children. In addition to that, it is important to provide a safe place for the abused woman to come for help. In other words, the conversation of domestic violence and spousal abuse must take place at the level of church and other faith-based institutions. In a preventative sense, it would prove very useful and convenient to

introduce this dialogue as a part of premarital counseling that clergy and counselors should equip themselves with to manage with competence.

Counselor Competence

With respect to the counseling field, the findings of this study point to the importance of counselors equipping themselves to address the issue of faith within the context of abuse. Counselors must seek to implement a counseling perspective that frees the abused woman from a sense of obligation to her abusive partner (Burnett, 1996). Counseling interventions must help the woman to understand that her abusive marriage is not in keeping with what the Bible teaches (Burnett, 1996). Counselors must, therefore, be able to guide the abused woman from her false beliefs and assumptions about herself and her abusive situation, which have kept her in the abuse, and must lead her toward healing and a new perspective of her God, herself, her life, and others (Senter & Caldwell, 2002).

These findings have highlighted how much damage is done to the psyche of the abused woman. The counselor must, therefore, have personal competence to objectively deal with the harsh realities—physical and otherwise—of the abuse, and lead the woman toward healing and restoration.

Educating General Population

Another important consideration that has been brought to the fore by this study is the need for open seminars about abuse in secular contexts for the general population starting at the community level, and moving to the national level in Jamaica. Teachings/training on healthy relationship building and conflict resolution skills, geared at youth and adults, are also important to organize and conduct. Self-awareness, emotional awareness, self-

empowerment, building of self-esteem, and attending to warning signals in relationship development should be important components of such training sessions. These teachings can be carried out via seminars and workshops at church, school, and community levels, by appropriately trained persons, including counselors and clergy. This would constitute preventative action.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was carried out in response to the sparse literature on this topic, related to this specific type of study in this part of the world. A worthwhile direction to take going forward would involve replicating the study in other Caribbean countries, which would add to the perspectives and understanding of the phenomenon within the region. This would pave the way for appropriate responses in therapy, and would also provide useful information for clergy, medical personnel, families, organizations, and others, who interface with this population in varied ways.

This study was skewed in areas related to participant demographics. Therefore, useful directions for the future would also include conducting studies with women that fit the following demographic criteria that were lacking in this study: high and low levels of education; high and low SES; non-parents; unemployed; non-Christian or no religious/faith identification; age range between 20 and 40 years; and same-sex orientation. This would provide a more inclusive view of this phenomenon across more varied victim characteristics, thereby providing greater insight about the women's experiences. This could prove useful in tailoring interventions for both abuser and abused, and would ultimately benefit families, including children within the relationship. It should be noted that these findings are meant to benefit the counseling world, other

women, abusers, family members, and other individuals and entities that have a stake in addressing the matter of domestic violence in general, and physical abuse specifically.

Qualitative phenomenological studies aimed at exploring the other abuses, including verbal, psychological, and sexual would also be of value, as they are noted to be consistently present in physically abusive relationship. Such studies would guide interventions, focusing not only on the woman's physical health, but also her psychological well being, with cannot be ignored.

Finally, it would be useful for counseling professionals to gain an appreciation of the phenomenological experience of conducting such a study as this one. In addition, this experience could be compared with the phenomenological experience of counseling this population. The roles, therefore, would be that of counselor, and that of researcher. The focus would be on seeking to understand what is required of the counselor/researcher while operating in these two roles, with the same population, regarding the same phenomenon. Ultimately, this type of study would increase awareness, particularly for counselors and supervisors, regarding what such activities demand, and would have implications for training activities for counselors who deal with this population in either role.

Conclusions

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study sought to acquire an understanding of the lived world of physically abused Jamaican women by their intimate male partners, and their reasons for remaining with them. Eleven Jamaican women participated in the study, and four main themes emerged: faith, hope, poor judgment, and secrecy. These themes served to address the goals of the study, and provided the

following description of the combined essence of the women's lived experiences of abuse:

A reality, occupied by faith and hope in various forms, which is sometimes hastily accessed via poor decision-making, and is characterized by brutal and inhumane treatment, meant to demoralize and extinguish the personhood of the abused, as it seeks to gain and maintain control over her, while fostering shame and fractured pride within her, as well as protection of her abuser, via a firm cloak of secrecy, which also sustains it.

These women left their abusive partners, and were valiant and willing enough to tell their stories, with the expressed hope that their efforts will help other women. It is greatly anticipated that their efforts will serve to provide valuable information that informs tailoring of more appropriate responses to the phenomenon of physical abuse in all settings in Jamaica, including the counseling field, faith institutions, and social settings. Indeed, hope exists that insight gained about their lived experiences of abuse will greatly serve Jamaica and the world beyond, as efforts are made to appropriately utilize these findings, and advance future studies to fill the gaps that still remains.

Finally, in light of the findings in this study related to the theme of faith, serious note should be taken of the fact that the scriptures are powerful, whether they are applied appropriately or wrongly. Based on the related experiences of most of these women, a particular understanding and application of the scriptures resulted in their sustained physical abuse, and some believed could even have ended in their demise. Therefore, a concentrated thrust must be made to address faith practices, based on healthy teaching and application of the scriptures, specifically as it relates to intimate partner relationships.

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Appendix A

Invitation Letter



This is an invitation to my fellow-Jamaican women...

- ✚ **Who wish to make a valuable contribution to research about physical abuse in Jamaica**
- ✚ **By telling their own stories of physical abuse by their male partners**
- ✚ **In a safe environment**

Who is conducting the research?

The research is being conducted by Vivette Henry, who has been the church counselor at Havenhill Baptist Church in Kingston, Jamaica, since 2001, and also cares for patients at her private practice at Edgewater Medical Center in the city of Portmore. She has a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology, and this research will partly fulfill requirements to complete her doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Regent University in the United States.

Vivette has been caring for physically abused women for many years, and is passionate about providing a safe forum for them to speak out about their abuse. She hopes that this study will allow the voices of abused women to be heard nationally and internationally, and this will increase awareness and foster greater efforts to deal with abused of women.

What is the research about?

- ✚ Vivette wants to **Listen** to the experiences of physically abused Jamaican.
- ✚ She wants to **Provide an Opportunity** for her fellow-Jamaican women to tell their stories of abuse in a safe setting.
- ✚ She seeks to **Help Abused Women to Speak Out**, and help others understand what it is like to be physically abused.

Confidentiality

All information from this research will be completely confidential, including all identities of those who participate.

What is the benefit to the counseling profession and others?

- ✚ The counseling profession, caregivers, and others will gain a direct sense of what it is like to be abused,
- ✚ And what might be helpful in minimizing or preventing this awful occurrence.

How does this benefit you if you participants?

This is an opportunity for you to be empowered, and to help to empower and assist others by making your voice and perspective about physical abuse heard.

What do you have to do if interested?

- ✚ Respond to this invitation by contacting Mrs. Henry at the telephone number or email listed at the end of this invitation.
- ✚ Be prepared to answer a few questions by telephone lasting about 20-30 minutes.
- ✚ Be willing to tell your story in a face-to-face interview lasting about one and a half hours with Mrs. Henry. This will be scheduled at your convenience.

Basic qualifications

- ✚ You must have been in an intimate physically abusive relationship with your male partner/husband for at least 2 years.
- ✚ You must NOT be living with your abusive male partner or husband at the time of the interview.

Vivette Henry, Email: vivehen@gmail.com; Telephone: 876-9096051; 876-2954297

Appendix B

Pre-screening Demographic Instrument

Lived Experience of Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

Researcher will read questions over telephone to prospective participants and researcher's words are in bold.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. I am going to ask you some questions or have you complete some statements about yourself that will help me to decide whether you qualify to participate in the study. This is in your best interest. Please do your best to respond as accurately as possible. I will let you know whether you fulfill the requirements to participate in the study within 2 hours after our time on the phone has ended. The first section deals with statements about your abuse status and other demographic information, such as educational, religious, parental, and employment statuses. Afterwards, I will ask you questions that will help me to decide if your telling your story will affect you seriously in a negative way. Are you ready?

1. Abuse status

- **Are you living with your partner/husband at this time?.....Yes.....No.....**
- **The relationship between my partner/husband and I began on ...month....year**
- **The first time I was physically abused was.....**
- **The last time I was abused was**
- **I have left my physically abusive partner/husband since.....**
- **I have left and returned to my partner/husband before...(Yes) (No)**

For women who respond in the affirmative to the above statement, the following is presented.

- **I have left and returned to my partner/husbandtimes before leaving this last time.**

2. Age: What is your age?

3. Employment status

Please tell me which of the following applies to you currently?

- Employed by an individual or company
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- A homemaker
- A student
- Other _____

4. Education completed

What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?

- Never attended school or only attended kindergarten
- Primary/Elementary School
- Did not complete high school
- High school graduate
- Some college or technical school
- College graduate
- Graduate School/Advance Degree

5) Family size

- **How many children do you have?.....**
- **How many of them lived in your household while you were with your partner/husband?.....**
- **What are their ages and corresponding gender**

6) What, if any, is your religious preference?

- **Evangelical**
- **Protestant**
- **Catholic**
- **Mormon**
- **Jewish**
- **Other...Please explain**
 - No Preference / No religious affiliation
 - I am a spiritual person
 - Prefer not to say

7) How active do you consider yourself in the practice of your religious preference?

- Very active
- Somewhat active
- Not very active
- Not active
- Does not apply / Prefer not to say

8) *Socio-economic status*

Which category best identifies you and your family?

- Poor
- Lower class
- Lower to middle class
- Middle class
- Upper class

This brings us to the end of this section. Thank you for your patience and effort in this matter. We will now move on to some questions that will help me to determine whether you are mentally able to tell me your story. I realize that telling your story might make you feel uncomfortable. These questions will help me to know whether you can manage this process. Shall we go on?

Appendix C

Pre-screening Mental Status Instrument, Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) for the Study of the Lived Experience of Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

 V 0477	Beck Depression Inventory CRTN: _____ CRF number: _____	Baseline Page 14 patient inits: _____
		Date: _____

Name: _____ Marital Status: _____ Age: _____ Sex: _____
 Occupation: _____ Education: _____

Instructions: This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. Please read each group of statements carefully, and then pick out the **one statement** in each group that best describes the way you have been feeling during the **past two weeks, including today**. Circle the number beside the statement you have picked. If several statements in the group seem to apply equally well, circle the highest number for that group. Be sure that you do not choose more than one statement for any group, including Item 16 (Changes in Sleeping Pattern) or Item 18 (Changes in Appetite).

<p>1. Sadness</p> <p>0 I do not feel sad. 1 I feel sad much of the time. 2 I am sad all the time. 3 I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.</p> <p>2. Pessimism</p> <p>0 I am not discouraged about my future. 1 I feel more discouraged about my future than I used to be. 2 I do not expect things to work out for me. 3 I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.</p> <p>3. Past Failure</p> <p>0 I do not feel like a failure. 1 I have failed more than I should have. 2 As I look back, I see a lot of failures. 3 I feel I am a total failure as a person.</p> <p>4. Loss of Pleasure</p> <p>0 I get as much pleasure as I ever did from the things I enjoy. 1 I don't enjoy things as much as I used to. 2 I get very little pleasure from the things I used to enjoy. 3 I can't get any pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.</p> <p>5. Guilty Feelings</p> <p>0 I don't feel particularly guilty. 1 I feel guilty over many things I have done or should have done. 2 I feel quite guilty most of the time. 3 I feel guilty all of the time.</p>	<p>6. Punishment Feelings</p> <p>0 I don't feel I am being punished. 1 I feel I may be punished. 2 I expect to be punished. 3 I feel I am being punished.</p> <p>7. Self-Dislike</p> <p>0 I feel the same about myself as ever. 1 I have lost confidence in myself. 2 I am disappointed in myself. 3 I dislike myself.</p> <p>8. Self-Criticalness</p> <p>0 I don't criticize or blame myself more than usual. 1 I am more critical of myself than I used to be. 2 I criticize myself for all of my faults. 3 I blame myself for everything bad that happens.</p> <p>9. Suicidal Thoughts or Wishes</p> <p>0 I don't have any thoughts of killing myself. 1 I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out. 2 I would like to kill myself. 3 I would kill myself if I had the chance.</p> <p>10. Crying</p> <p>0 I don't cry anymore than I used to. 1 I cry more than I used to. 2 I cry over every little thing. 3 I feel like crying, but I can't.</p>
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Subtotal Page 1

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11. Agitation

- 0 I am no more restless or wound up than usual.
- 1 I feel more restless or wound up than usual.
- 2 I am so restless or agitated that it's hard to stay still.
- 3 I am so restless or agitated that I have to keep moving or doing something.

12. Loss of Interest

- 0 I have not lost interest in other people or activities.
- 1 I am less interested in other people or things than before.
- 2 I have lost most of my interest in other people or things.
- 3 It's hard to get interested in anything.

13. Indecisiveness

- 0 I make decisions about as well as ever.
- 1 I find it more difficult to make decisions than usual.
- 2 I have much greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.
- 3 I have trouble making any decisions.

14. Worthlessness

- 0 I do not feel I am worthless.
- 1 I don't consider myself as worthwhile and useful as I used to.
- 2 I feel more worthless as compared to other people.
- 3 I feel utterly worthless.

15. Loss of Energy

- 0 I have as much energy as ever.
- 1 I have less energy than I used to have.
- 2 I don't have enough energy to do very much.
- 3 I don't have enough energy to do anything.

16. Changes in Sleeping Pattern

- 0 I have not experienced any change in my sleeping pattern.
- 1a I sleep somewhat more than usual.
- 1b I sleep somewhat less than usual.
- 2a I sleep a lot more than usual.
- 2b I sleep a lot less than usual.
- 3a I sleep most of the day.
- 3b I wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep.

17. Irritability

- 0 I am no more irritable than usual.
- 1 I am more irritable than usual.
- 2 I am much more irritable than usual.
- 3 I am irritable all the time.

18. Changes in Appetite

- 0 I have not experienced any change in my appetite.
- 1a My appetite is somewhat less than usual.
- 1b My appetite is somewhat greater than usual.
- 2a My appetite is much less than before.
- 2b My appetite is much greater than usual.
- 3a I have no appetite at all.
- 3b I crave food all the time.

19. Concentration Difficulty

- 0 I can concentrate as well as ever.
- 1 I can't concentrate as well as usual.
- 2 It's hard to keep my mind on anything for very long.
- 3 I find I can't concentrate on anything.

20. Tiredness or Fatigue

- 0 I am no more tired or fatigued than usual.
- 1 I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual.
- 2 I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do.
- 3 I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do.

21. Loss of Interest in Sex

- 0 I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex.
- 1 I am less interested in sex than I used to be.
- 2 I am much less interested in sex now.
- 3 I have lost interest in sex completely.

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Subtotal Page 2

Subtotal Page 1

Total Score

1112 ABCDE

Appendix D

Pre-screening Mental Status Instrument, Trauma Symptom Checklist-40
(TSC-40) for the Study of the Lived Experience of Physically Abused Wives
in Jamaica

Trauma Symptom Checklist - 40 (TSC-40)

TSC-40

How often have you experienced each of the following in the last two months?

0 = Never 3 = Often

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. Headaches | 0 1 2 3 |
| 2. Insomnia (trouble getting to sleep) | 0 1 2 3 |
| 3. Weight loss (without dieting) | 0 1 2 3 |
| 4. Stomach problems | 0 1 2 3 |
| 5. Sexual problems | 0 1 2 3 |
| 6. Feeling isolated from others | 0 1 2 3 |
| 7. "Flashbacks" (sudden, vivid, distracting memories) | 0 1 2 3 |
| 8. Restless sleep | 0 1 2 3 |
| 9. Low sex drive | 0 1 2 3 |
| 10. Anxiety attacks | 0 1 2 3 |
| 11. Sexual overactivity | 0 1 2 3 |
| 12. Loneliness | 0 1 2 3 |
| 13. Nightmares | 0 1 2 3 |
| 14. "Spacing out" (going away in your mind) | 0 1 2 3 |
| 15. Sadness | 0 1 2 3 |
| 16. Dizziness | 0 1 2 3 |
| 17. Not feeling satisfied with your sex life | 0 1 2 3 |
| 18. Trouble controlling your temper | 0 1 2 3 |
| 19. Waking up early in the morning and can't get back to | 0 1 2 3 |

sleep	
20. Uncontrollable crying	0 1 2 3
21. Fear of men	0 1 2 3
22. Not feeling rested in the morning	0 1 2 3
23. Having sex that you didn't enjoy	0 1 2 3
24. Trouble getting along with others	0 1 2 3
25. Memory problems	0 1 2 3
26. Desire to physically hurt yourself	0 1 2 3
27. Fear of women	0 1 2 3
28. Waking up in the middle of the night	0 1 2 3
29. Bad thoughts or feelings during sex	0 1 2 3
30. Passing out	0 1 2 3
31. Feeling that things are "unreal"	0 1 2 3
32. Unnecessary or over-frequent washing	0 1 2 3
33. Feelings of inferiority	0 1 2 3
34. Feeling tense all the time	0 1 2 3
35. Being confused about your sexual feelings	0 1 2 3
36. Desire to physically hurt others	0 1 2 3
37. Feelings of guilt	0 1 2 3
38. Feelings that you are not always in your body	0 1 2 3
39. Having trouble breathing	0 1 2 3
40. Sexual feelings when you shouldn't have them	0 1 2 3

Appendix E

Interview Instrument

Lived Experience of Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

Note: This is the interview script. Bold font is to be read by the interviewer. Regular font is instructional or optional.

Introductory Comments:

**I wish to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.
Please take your time and complete the informed consent.**

Give the participant the Informed Consent, time to read, and sign. Once both copies of the Informed consent have been signed, ask for permission to turn on and test the recorder.

Do the testing of the recorder and start the interview.

Phase I: Rapport Building

At times my words and tone may seem a bit strange, compared to regular conversation, but I need to read my statement for purposes of consistency in the research process with each participant.

As stated in the informed consent, a conceptual mapping task (CMT) will be incorporated in this interview, and this will allow you to be involved in ensuring that your story is accurately understood and recorded. Do you have any questions at this point?

Please remember that you are free to stop and even withdraw from this interview at anytime, and your identity will remain completely anonymous. As stated earlier, the interview will last approximately ninety minutes, and will be recorded. Please let me know if you are comfortable and whether you have any questions or concerns at this time before we begin.”

After ensuring the participant is comfortable and ready

I shall now start recording, test my equipment, and begin by asking you the first question.

Phase II: Recall of Phenomenon

The first two questions are meant to settle the participant further, then questions about the abuse will follow. During this phase, the researcher will record key ideas from the participant's story on Post-it® notes with one idea per note.

At this time I am going to ask you questions about your relationship with your partner and the abuse that you experienced. I want you to take your time and try to recall as I ask you the questions. If there is any discomfort at all or need to take a pause, please let me know.

As you are telling your story, I will be making notes on these Post-it® Notes. This is so you can check my notes and later create a conceptual map or visual picture of your story. OK?

- 1. Please tell me the story of how you and your partner/husband met, starting at the early stages before you were married or decided to live together.**

Probing questions if necessary to relax the participant and gather data

- a. What was your relationship like during the early stages before you were married and soon after you were married?
- b. What was your relationship like during the early stages before you decided to commit to each other and in the early stages after you started together?

It is hoped that after this first section of the story telling, the participant will have settled into the interview, and the following questions will directly address the participant's abusive experiences.

Thank you for telling me about that phase of your story with your partner. Now I would like to ask you a question that may be more difficult. I consider it a privilege that you would share this information with me.

- 1. Please speak about how and when the relationship became abusive. Take your time and speak about what your abusive experiences were like, what influenced you to stay, and perhaps what role faith/spirituality had in the course of the experience.**

Probing questions if necessary to coach the participant and gather the desired data

- a. What influenced you to stay during the abuse?
- b. How does your faith/spirituality impact your experiences of abuse?

The researcher will allow the participant to view the notes, check for accuracy, and make whatever adjustment or corrections she feels are necessary.

Now I want to ask you to review the notes I have taken. As you review them, please turn them over and maintain the pile. (*Demonstrate for participant*).

Please look at these notes and tell me about corrections, adjustments, or additions to the notes that will satisfy you about the accuracy and fullness of what was recorded. I will be happy to make corrections as directed and even create new notes.

Phase III: Organizing the Experience/Creating the Map

The participant will be given a lap-board with a 24"x22" sheet of newsprint. The participant will be encouraged to organize the notes into a visual map of concepts or a conceptual map and given minimal guidance as requested.

What I would like you to do now is create a conceptual map of your story. There are three steps to this process. OK?

- 1. Would you please arrange the notes in such a way as to represent the process that you have described in your story? You may move them around as many times as you need – they are sticky notes. You may pile them up or cluster them together. Make it your story map however it works for you.**
- 2. Please label the concept clusters in any way that would help to bring out the meaning of your story."**
- 3. Please use arrows, circles, and shapes if you wish, to link concepts that are related into groups or clusters, and show direction."**

Phase IV: Interview Wrap-up

The participant will then be encouraged to reflectively examine the map and will be asked the following questions:

Now that you have created this conceptual map of your experience, take some time to reflect on it.

Give them some time and wait for them to let you know they have finished with just looking at the map.

- 1. What strikes you as you look closely at your map?**

2. What do you see as the most important thing to know or understand about your experience?

Probing question to gather desired information

What meanings do these abusive experiences have in your life?

Please take one last look at your map. Is there anything else that you feel must be said about your entire experience?

With the CMT task at an end, the interview ends with the following comments:

We have come to the end of the interview, and I wish to thank and congratulate you on your courage and strength in being able to complete this interview. Please remember that the information you have given will remain confidential, and will be disposed of appropriately at the end of the study. In addition, let me remind you that if you feel you are in need of counseling because of this interview experience, you have at your disposal up to three (3) counseling sessions free of cost. These sessions will be carried out by competent mental health professionals. I shall be available for any questions you might have, and I thank you once more for allowing me the privilege of hearing your story.

Appendix F

Informed Consent Form for Research Titled:

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

RESEARCHER:

Vivette M. Henry, B.A., M.A., Doctoral Student in Counselor Education and Supervision at Regent University, School of Counseling and Psychology, United States of America (USA).

Address and Contact Information: Havenhill Baptist Church, 28 Mannings Hill Road, Kingston 8. Telephone #: 876-9096051; Email: vivehen@mail.regent.edu.

INTRODUCTION:

I wish to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. This informed consent form outlines the purposes of this research, provides details about it, and outlines information about your involvement and rights as a participant. Your consent to participate will be recorded below at the end of this form.

I shall collect information for this research in a single face-to-face interview with you, which will be audiotaped. This interview will last approximately ninety minutes, and will involve a conceptual mapping task (CMT), which will allow you to be involved in ensuring accurate recording of story. Your permission to have the interview audiotaped will also be recorded below, and the interview will take place at an agreed time at a women's shelter, church, or other premises deemed to be safe, private, and mutually convenient. Similar interviews will be conducted with a minimum of nine other women, with more being selected to participate until the information begins to repeat itself across participants.

RESEARCH TITLE: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY:

1. To fulfill dissertation research requirements to complete my doctoral studies in Counselor Education and Supervision at Regent University, United States of America. My dissertation Chair is: Dr. Linda Leitch-Alford, School of Counseling and Psychology, Regent University. She can be reached by phone at 757-3524499, and by email at lalford@mail.regent.edu.
2. To gain insight into the experiences of Jamaican women who have been physically abused by their male partners, and have chosen to remain for a time within the abusive situation.
3. To gain understanding of conditions that have led physically abused Jamaican women to remain in the abuse for the time they did, and compare this information with existing literature.

4. To give physically abused women in Jamaica a “voice” that can be heard nationally and internationally, thereby providing for the counseling profession perspectives that might lead to solutions to the problem of physical abuse of female intimate partners by their male counterparts.
5. Empowering abused women in Jamaica and beyond, by allowing them to participate in helping themselves and other women in similar situations.

RISKS, BENEFITS, AND INCENTIVE

RISKS: It is possible that during the interview, answering personal questions and recalling your experiences of abuse might result in some emotional discomfort or distress. This researcher will pay close attention during the interview, and will readily pause at your request or at any sign that you are being negatively affected by the process. Please feel free to discontinue the interview at any time, to ask questions for clarification, or choose not to answer any question if you wish. Trained mental health professionals will be available in the event that you need attention during or after the interview.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this research is being empowered as you make a valuable contribution to addressing the problem of physical abuse of women in Jamaica and beyond. You and the other participants, with your combined stories, will provide in-depth understanding of the dynamics of being abused and living with it everyday. It is hoped that as a result, more effective solutions might be formulated, involving the women, their offending partners, and their children.

INCENTIVES AND PAYMENTS: There are no financial payments attached to participating in this research. It must, therefore, be clearly understood that your participation must be completely voluntary.

As incentive to participate in this research, you will be provided with three (3) one-hour counseling sessions with a trained mental health professional after the interview, free of cost, if you feel that you are in need of them. This gesture is meant to not only to encourage your participation, but also to demonstrate care for your well-being, as you assist with this very important work.

NEW INFORMATION

If any new information is revealed during the course of this study that would possibly affect your decision to participate, you will receive it from this researcher.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information and material gathered from you in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researcher will not identify you by name or in any way that would reveal your identity. All notes and audiotapes of your interview will be destroyed after the research is finished.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

You may withdraw from this research at any time after agreeing to participate.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

There will be no compensation—money, free medical care, or any other compensation—from this researcher or from Regent University for any illness or injury resulting from participating in this research. Appropriate referrals will be made if there is further need for counseling beyond the three free counseling sessions to address any emotional distress after the interview. These referred sessions will be at your own expense. In the event that you suffer injury or become ill as a result of participating in this research project, you may contact me at 876-9096051 or email, vivehen@mail.regent.edu. You may also contact Dr. L. Underwood, current HSRC chair at leeunde@regent.edu through Regent University, who will be glad to review the matter with you. However, we will not be able to compensate you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

I have read, understand, and agree to the terms outlined in this document. My signature below testifies to the fact that I have said “Yes” in complete agreement.

I have read the preceding consent form, or it has been read to me, and I fully understand the contents of this document and voluntarily consent to participate. All of my questions concerning the research have been answered. I hereby agree to participate in this research study. If I have any questions in the future about this study, the interviewer or committee members will be available to answer them. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant Name.....

Participant’s Signature.....

Date.....

In addition to my consent to participate in this research, I am giving my specific permission for the interview to be audiotaped. My signature below testifies to the fact that I have said “Yes” in complete agreement to audiotaping my interview.

Participant Name.....

Participant’s Signature.....

Date.....

RESEARCHER’S STATEMENT

I certify that I have fully explained details about this study, including purpose of this research, benefits, risks, confidentiality and emergence of any new information. I have described the rights and protection afforded to the participant, and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my legal obligations, and promise compliance. I have answered all questions asked by the participant, and am prepared to answer any others at any time during this research. I have personally witnessed the participant’s signing of this document.

Researcher’s Name.....

Researcher’s Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix G

Journal Ready Manuscript

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of
Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

By

Authors: Vivette Henry, Dr. Leitch-Alford, Dr. Underwood, and Dr. Stupart

Regent University

Abstract

There is a dearth of literature focusing on domestic violence within the Jamaican culture. This study addresses the paucity of literature related to physical abuse of females in intimate heterosexual relationships in Jamaica. This qualitative, transcendental, phenomenological study was designed to gain insight into the abusive worlds of these women based on their stories told in their own voices. Identification of their reasons for remaining in their abusive contexts was also explored. Eleven women, no longer in their abusive relationships, participated. Results revealed four major themes: (a) faith, (b) hope, (c) poor judgment, and (d) secrecy. A strong call to address faith teachings and application of scriptures related explicitly to abuse within intimate partner relationships emerged from the results.

Key words: physical abuse, female, Jamaica, phenomenology.

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of
Physically Abused Female Intimate Partners in Jamaica

Intimate partner abuse in general can be widely defined because of the variety of forms that abuse can take; for example, physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological (Johnson & Sigler, 2000). Undoubtedly, males and females have been victimized in heterosexual and homosexual relationships, but the focus of this study was on the physical abuse or battering of females by their intimate common-law or legally-bound partners, in heterosexual relationships in Jamaica.

For the purposes of this study, the term “physical abuse” was used. Physical abuse is characterized by a range of behaviors meant to cause physical harm, and includes pulling of hair, hitting, squeezing, slapping, pushing, kicking, and the use of objects to cause harm or kill (<http://www.paradigmcounselingps.com/-abuse/physical.php>). Although physical abuse may involve aversive sexual contact (<http://www.paradigmcounselingps.com/-abuse/physical.php>), this was only considered within the context of the physical abuse, which was the main focus of the study.

Jamaica is an English-speaking island situated in the central Caribbean, 145 km (90 mi) south of Cuba and 161 km (100 mi) west of Haiti. As of 2012, its population was estimated to be over 2.8 million, with over half a million of its inhabitants living in its capital and largest city, Kingston (<http://www.infoplease.com/country/jamaica.html>). Jamaica has a predominantly black population, with protestant denominations being the main religious groups (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jm.html>). This developing country, like many other countries, is troubled by incidents of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Arscott-Mills, 2001; Cattaneo, Bell,

Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, Fox, & Brown 2008). The female victims of these violent incidents were the focus of this study.

The occurrence of physical abuse within heterosexual marriages or intimate relationships has become quite commonplace on a global level, and most studies completed on this topic have been done within Western contexts (Yount, 2005). Admittedly, the Caribbean context of physical abuse, including general attitudes and social structures to address it, is likely to have similarities and differences compared to Western or North American ones. Although there are facilities and support structures in both contexts to assist physically abused women, a 2003 report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Sub-regional Headquarters for the Caribbean, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (ECLAC & UNIFEM) revealed that some women in the Caribbean have remained in abusive situations until death or serious injury was suffered.

Statement of the Problem

It has been noted that the majority of studies carried out on domestic violence in general, and physical abuse specifically, have been done in the United States of America (USA), and several other selected areas of the globe (Krahe, Bieneck, & Moller, 2005; Yount, 2005). In a thorough review of the literature, only a few studies were found that were carried out in Jamaica, and these included studies done by Arscott-Mills, 2001; Krahe, Bieneck, and Moller, 2005; and Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, and Fox, and Brown, 2008. In addition, most studies on this topic have sought to prove hypotheses using quantitative methodologies (Barnett, 2000; 2001; Gage, 2005; Hindin & Adair, 2002; Johnson & Sigler, 2000; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Yount, 2005). They

have been aimed at identifying reasons for physical abuse and for abused women remaining in the abusive contexts. There is a comparative paucity of studies on physical abuse carried out in Jamaica in general, and specifically, there have been no qualitative studies that have sought to explore physical abuse from the women's perspectives. This study sought to address this lack.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained in physically abusive contexts created by their spouses. The study specifically explored the main influences or circumstances that affected their decision to remain in their abusive situations. In addition, this study illuminated how well the elements of the "Cycle of violence," postulated by clinical psychologist, Lenore Walker (1977), fitted the abusive contexts of the Jamaican participants. Most importantly, as expected, the findings of this study provided insight into the meanings, motivations, and perspectives associated with the physically abusive experiences of Jamaican women. By extension, greater understanding of the phenomenon of physical abuse, and effective implementation of appropriate, culturally tailored interventions that might encourage physically abused women to seek help, was also forthcoming. Overall, this study served to enhance the body of literature on physical abuse for the benefit of all.

Review of the Literature

Studies carried out primarily in Western contexts, but also in several other areas across the globe, appear to suggest various reasons for women's tolerance of physical abuse, including the fear of harm to their children, loss of custody of their children,

financial dependence on their partner, insufficient education, and religious beliefs about marriage (Gengler & Lee, 2001; Yoshihama, 2002; & Yount, 2005). According to Yoshihama, and Akhter (2011) current attitudes in society that might judge the woman negatively, or side with the husband in instances of battering might also affect her decision to remain in the abusive situation. In Bangladesh, for instance, the Bengali proverb, “A drum, a vessel, a donkey, and a woman are all worthy of being beaten.” Akhter speaks volumes about the general societal attitude toward wife/partner beating.

Caribbean Context

Studies carried out by Le Franc, Samms-Vaughan, Hambleton, and Fox (2008) within the Caribbean countries of Barbados, Jamaica, and twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago, revealed the prevalence of very high levels of interpersonal violence in general, and intimate partner violence in particular. According to Le Franc et al., these results suggested a high tolerance for such violence among victims, and the possibility of a deeply entrenched “culture of violence and adversarial intimate relationships” (p. 409).

A study on intimate partner violence carried out in Haiti by Gage (2005) pointed to the complexity of the phenomenon of the battered women’s experiences. This study indicated significant connections between childhood experiences of abuse and/or witnessing of parental abuse during childhood; consequently—according to the author—adult relationships were likely to mirror abuser-abused for both men and women, with a frame of reference or attitude that embraced physical abuse as normative in intimate relationships.

The query is commonly made within the context of physical abuse regarding the influences or circumstances that lead to women remaining in their abusive environments.

It should be borne in mind, however, that in many cases, leaving the situation provides no guarantee of safety for women and children (Burman & Chantler, 2005). This unfortunate reality also exists in the Jamaican context (ECLAC & UNIFEM, 2003). In addition, Dunn (2005) supported this view about the questionable safety of abused women who leave their abusive situations, based on the findings of her study, which was carried out in the United States of America (USA) on American women.

Revised Image of Physically Abused Woman: Hero or Victim?

A revised or alternate image of women who choose to remain in the abusive environment was also invoked based on Dunn's (2005) investigation, wherein the woman is viewed as a survivor and hero for her children, rather than a passive victim. Also, what appears to be passive, pathological behavior of remaining in the abuse, are intentional actions strategically carried out after weighing the advantages and disadvantages for themselves and their children of leaving at a particular time. In her study, Dunn postulated that what appears to be passive and pathological behavior could be characterized as heroic and sacrificial behavior from women who, "in their strength, sanity, and relative nobility...strategically stay for a period as "agents" who are ultimately planning toward "eventual liberation" (p. 22).

Rationale for the Decision to Leave or Stay

Turning Point. Interestingly, in response to the query about influences that result in battered women remaining in their abusive situations, Grauwiler (2008) pointed out that some women's decision to seek help or leave, may emerge after a period of time and unfolding of events that might climax at a "turning point" (p. 314) characterized as "critical events," and "moments or epiphanies" (p. 314). This study indicated how most

of the participants reported coming to the realization that they had taken enough abuse, and, therefore, left quickly, or sought assistance. In addition to Grauwiler, Gage (2005) indicated their participants' reported dissatisfaction with social structures where they sought help. This dissatisfaction was related to the long-term safety of themselves and their children, as well as the structures' failure to hold their abusive partners accountable. In addition to these findings, Grauwiler's study indicated most women valued the role their partner played in their children's lives, and sought help to address the abusive situation without breaking up the family.

The Role of Religion and Gender. According to Gengler and Lee (2001) women's decision to tolerate abuse might be borne out of religious beliefs and possible lack of a facilitative environment for validation and help within the church. They also noted that female ministers were found to be more open to educating themselves about abuse and facilitating assistance for the women. As a result, they indicated the likelihood that where there were deeply traditional belief systems, and also male clergy, the women might experience a sense of aloneness in this situation and remain silent (Gengler & Lee, 2001).

Role of the Researcher

The phenomenological approach required that the researcher preserve and present participants' perspectives gained from interviews (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). This was done by setting aside prior views, experiences, and knowledge of the phenomenon, and approaching the phenomenon, as best as possible, with fresh eyes, "as if viewing it for the first time" (Hays & Singh, p. 50) through the eyes of the abused women—an action referred to as epoche or bracketing. Self-awareness and vigilance

characterized the stance of the researcher during this study, who was both instrument and major conduit for data collection and analysis. The researcher, as a woman, mother, wife, and counselor who has constantly treated this population over time, had to vigilantly guard against subjectivity and personal response to the data that could affect the validity of the study (Hays & Singh). The role of researcher was maintained, while retaining humanitarian awareness and sensitivity to participants' state throughout the interview.

Methods

A qualitative approach was selected for this study because the aim of the study was to gain access to the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007) of a cross-section of battered women in Jamaica, rather than pursue figures and confirm theories and statistics. In particular, a transcendental phenomenological methodology was well suited to uncover the essence of the experience of being battered. This methodology was meant to “investigate the meaning of the *lived experience* of people” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 32) in order to garner a sense of “the core essence of human experience or phenomenon” (p. 32) from the participants' perspective. The research sought to answer the following research questions:

7. What is the essence of the lived experiences of physically abused female intimate partners in Jamaica who remained with their abusive spouses for some time before deciding to leave?
8. What influences and conditions affected the women's decision to remain in their abusive contexts for the period of time that they did?
9. How do the findings of this study compare with extant literature on this topic?

Participants

Purposive sampling methods were employed in an attempt to obtain a sample with the range of desired criteria (Hays & Singh, 2012). Efforts were made to achieve some level of stratification of the samples based on the range of demographic characteristics specified. A demographic questionnaire garnered key information related to selection criteria, such as participants' age, length of time cohabiting/married, length of time being abused, parental, religious, economic, and educational statuses. Pre-screening demographic and psychological activities took place via telephone during brief twenty to thirty minute sessions, prior to main face-to-face interview sessions.

The researcher's aim was to identify 10-12 women who have suffered physical abuse at the hands of their male intimate partners, and remained within the abusive context despite the abuse. Eleven women met the inclusion criteria of having been cohabiting or married to their partners for at least two years, and were no longer in their abusive relationships. Efforts were made to recruit women who were between 20 and 60 years old, to facilitate an examination of women across a wide developmental lifespan, who have experienced possible changes in cultural and social structures. The sample acquired included women were between 20 and 48 years old during their period of abuse. Participants were sought who fulfilled the following demographic characteristics: (a) religious and not religious; (b) parents and non-parents; (c) employed and unemployed, (d) high, medium, and low socio-economic status; and (e) high, medium, and low educational status.

Nine participants selected for this study identified as Christians—Evangelical and otherwise—with various levels of activity/inactivity in their religious contexts. All

participants were parents, and 10 of them were employed. The women all had a minimum of high school education, with two of them having completed graduate studies, and the others having benefitted from tertiary education of some sort. The participants all identified as being within the range of lower-middle to middle class in socio-economic status.

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants their exact profiles and descriptions, including demographic information, were withheld or altered to prevent identification. Participants were sought based on referrals from domestic violence shelter managers, clergy, medical personnel, and other reliable sources, but the actual sample for this study was recruited based on referrals from medical and mental health personnel. An invitation letter was distributed directly to prospective participants and to contact persons who referred them. This letter was also emailed to interested persons at their request, or researcher or contact person for expediency and confidentiality purposes conveyed its contents verbally. Five nominated individuals failed to meet the inclusion criteria of the study. Potential participants were pre-screened for demographic eligibility as well as psychological wellness to participate and tell their stories.

Psychological screening instruments, the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI II), and the Trauma Symptom Checklist-40 (TSC-40), were used to assess participants mental status as it related to existing levels of trauma symptomatology, including depression and suicidality. Only individuals who had scores in the zero to minimal range on these instruments were deemed fit to participate in the study. Participants were offered three counseling sessions free of cost with competent mental health professionals, if they felt the need for counseling after the interview process.

Data Collection Process

This process was guided by the research questions, and data was collected from selected participants via a taped, semi-structured interview that lasted for approximately ninety minutes. Interviews took place in safety-designated locations. A conceptual mapping task (CMT), based on methods employed by Martin, Slemon, Hiebert, Hallberg, and Cummings (1989), and Leitch-Alford (2006), was incorporated as a key element of the interview process. During the CMT, participants were guided toward constructing and organizing their experiences in a visual format. This activity facilitated the generation of rich data, and also provided an opportunity for participants themselves to be involved in detailed analysis of the content of their stories (Martin et al.). The CMT involved the following two-pronged activity embedded in the interview: a process of free association and recall by participants, and a process of organizing concepts emerging from the free association recall activity into a conceptual map that depicted links and connections between ideas and concepts (Martin et al.).

The interview process covered four phases: Rapport building phase, recall of phenomenon phase, organizing of experience/creating conceptual map phase, and interview wrap-up phase.

Phase one: Rapport building. This phase involved setting participants at ease and ensuring they were fully cognizant with the process ahead.

Phase two: Recall of phenomenon. The activity of free association and recall involved allowing participants to relax and reflect on their experiences of the phenomenon being studied, while the researcher recorded key ideas from their reflections

on Post-it® notes (1-7/8 inches x 2-7/8 inches), with only one idea recorded on each note. Questions meant for clarification and elaboration, were asked during this time.

The initial question meant to help participants relax and ease into the interview was, “Please tell me the story of how you and your partner/husband met, starting at the early stages before you were married or decided to live together.” When participants gained a sense of relaxation, they were then asked direct questions that addressed their physically abusive experiences, beginning with, “Please speak about how and when the relationship became abusive. Take your time and speak about what your abusive experiences were like, what influenced you to stay, and perhaps what role faith/spirituality had in the course of the experience.”

When participants were finished with their stories, the researcher asked them to take the notes and examine the concepts recorded on the notes to confirm their accuracy. This activity of examining the concepts and ideas noted by the researcher facilitated member checking (Creswell, 2007), which assisted in promoting trustworthiness of the results. Participants were invited to freely make changes and additions as they saw fit.

Phase three: Organizing the experience. This step involved participants being provided with a large sheet of cartridge paper or newsprint—approximately 24 inches x 22 inches—which was placed on top of a lapboard (Leitch-Alford, 2006). Participants were then asked to arrange the notes on the lapboard in a fashion that accurately and visually represented how the concepts related to each other. Participants were allowed to adjust their arrangements until they were satisfied with the accuracy of the arrangements, then they were asked to draw circles or geometric shapes around groups or clusters of concepts that were closely related. They were then asked to label the clusters of

concepts, then draw lines that connected concepts, or use arrows to indicate directional flow between certain concepts (Martin et al., 1989; Leitch-Alford, 2006). During this process, the researcher encouraged participants to freely use any visual symbol of their choice that best represented their experience.

Phase IV: Reflection. Finally, the researcher encouraged participants to pause for a final look at the map they had created, and take time to reflect on the process and end product. The researcher followed with these questions:

3. “What strikes you as you look closely at your map?”
4. “What do you see as the most important thing to know or understand about your experience?”

Probing questions to gather desired information were as follows:

“Please take one last look at your map. Is there anything else that you feel must be said about your entire experience?”

Of note is the fact that these interviews were intensely dark experiences for this researcher, as evidenced by the following journal reflection—an integral part of the verification process—written by this researcher after an interview:

I have been carried into a very dark place with this interview. No, I don't know what it is like to be beaten naked and then raped. When she looked in my eyes and asked me the question, with her eyes filled with tears, I didn't know what to say. I saw—felt her horror. It was palpable in the room, and when she paused, and I said, “Are you ok?” I felt I was somehow talking to myself. I was glad she paused and collected herself. I very much needed to do the same, and the things I would have said as a counselor, I could not say as a researcher. These spoken words would have helped me to deflect the horror, but would have been seen as an “intervention” for the client. This is not therapy, this is real life, real world experience of being beaten and humiliated. This is a dark place for me, but I can appreciate even more, what it was like for these women. I respect them very much, these, my Jamaican sisters.

Data Analysis

In keeping with rigorous phenomenological data analysis practices as outlined by Moustakas (1994), Hays and Singh (2012), and Creswell (2007), the taped interviews were transcribed afterwards as soon as possible by the researcher, who, first of all, consciously bracketed personal views, knowledge, and experiences of the phenomenon. The steps involved in Moustakas' modification of van Kaam's Phenomenological Data Analysis, which was published in 1959 and 1966, was used as a guide for the process. The researcher took note of all nonverbal communication cues and nuances, including tears, laughter, and pauses, exhibited by participants during the interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher then read and re-read the transcripts, isolating statements that spoke to the lived experiences of the participants. The process of horizontalization was then carried out, characterized by coding and grouping of statements, to formulate meanings, which were then clustered together into themes that were common to all participants. Extracting the invariant constituents from the data and clustering them, while unnecessary expressions/content was eliminated, served to highlight the themes. From the invariant constituents and themes, textural and structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences were constructed for each participant. The individual textural and structural descriptions were then used to yield a "composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience" that represented all participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Verification Methods

Creswell (2007) indicated that from a total of about eight possible verification techniques, at least two should be used for true demonstration of rigor. In this study three

techniques: (a) member checking, (b) peer debriefing, and (c) reflexive journaling were implemented, to facilitate satisfactory trustworthiness of findings.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), and Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking has been acknowledged to be the most important strategy for establishing trustworthiness. This technique, which allows participants to be actively involved in data analysis, was stringently implemented, as participants were allowed to check and confirm how well their stories have been understood, and their meanings portrayed and recorded by the researcher. Participants in this study were invited to examine and make adjustments to concepts noted by the researcher during the CMT, until they were satisfied that what was recorded accurately fitted their subjective perspective. In addition, their conceptual maps served to cement their participation in ensuring that the fidelity of their stories—including meanings, feelings, and essence of their individual experiences—was honored and accurately conveyed.

Researcher debriefing activities were also an integral element used to strengthen the verification process. According to Patton (2002) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), this activity would involve a peer or colleague external to the research team, who would ask difficult questions that would help the researcher honestly and clearly process the impact of the study on the researcher. These authors pointed out the importance of the debriefer's role in forcing the researcher to answer hard questions about the methods used, as well as the meanings ascribed to the participants' statements and overall stories. Creswell (2007) also highlighted the importance of the debriefer in allowing for catharsis and providing sympathy and support as the researcher processes feelings that are being evoked by the research process. This researcher fully submitted to debriefing activities.

This was done on more than one occasion, due to the intense nature of the study. During these sessions, the researcher was reminded that in spite of the intensity of their ordeals, the participants were no longer in their abusive situations.

Another very important verification activity that was employed in this study was that of reflexive journaling carried out by the researcher. Hays and Singh (2012) highlighted the crucial purpose served by documenting reflections pertaining to the impact of the study on the person of the researcher as the study progressed. According to Hays and Singh, various aspects of any study may impact the researcher, including reactions to participants, the content of their stories, and the need for flexibility in data collection methods. The researcher's journaling activities formed an audit trail that provided a record of the workflow nuances associated with this particular study (Hays & Singh, 2012). This audit trail recorded the flow of work carried out during this study that provided evidence to the rigor of the verification process.

Researcher's Psychological Care

Very serious consideration was given to the fact that the researcher in this study of a very painful, negative phenomenon was the main conduit for data collection and analysis, yet is human, fallible, and emotional (Hays & Singh, 2012). It was, therefore, most important for the researcher to constantly self-monitor, and to pause and step away from the process temporarily when necessary, in order to address the negative effects of the data on her psyche.

Researcher debriefing activities provided an opportunity and space for the researcher to temporarily withdraw from the research process when it became psychologically overwhelming (Hays & Singh, 2012). The untainted emergence of

participants' views about their experiences was, therefore, preserved, as well as the psychological well being of the researcher.

Findings

It should be noted that each participant's story was presented in her own voice, using Jamaican patois in some instances, which is a normal way of communicating in everyday conversation. Examples of words used in patois versus conventional words include the word, "thump," which translates to "punch;" "buss ass;" which translates to "beaten up or beating;" "im," which translates to "him" or "he;" and "di," which translates to "the." For ease of understanding, translations for certain Jamaican words will be placed in brackets within the women's quoted comments. The following four main themes were extracted from the data: (a) faith, (b) hope, (c) poor judgment, and (d) secrecy. For the purpose of this study, faith encompasses belief and adherence to a system of beliefs and values, which are Christian or non-Christian (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>).

The themes of faith and hope emerged in various forms and degrees from the stories of all eleven participants. The theme of poor judgment was strongly evident for all participants, except Callie and Della, and Mary's story was the only one in which the theme of secrecy was not evident.

Faith. This theme was noted with Selena, who chose her partner, a pastor, because she felt he could help to advance her spiritual growth. She explained, "I was pretty new in the faith, and for a minister, I thought it would be great to be with someone who could help me in my faith." Her faith also influenced her to remain in the abuse, as she explained, "I had made a commitment before God and man to stay in there, so I got

married and I had to stay in there. Before God, I mean, leaving, I think God would be really upset with me.” Selena spoke about the response she received from an elder in the faith as she said:

He would encourage me to just work it out...Marriages are never perfect and this is just my cross to bear, so he would talk to my husband about it, maybe one time, and that was it, but he just said the Bible says it was my cross.”

She also mentioned another comment from an older woman in the faith that reinforced what she was told before, “She would say, she’s sorry I’m going through it, but that’s what I signed up for and I must just trust God. So that was her advice to me all the time.” In Aurora’s case, her faith beliefs seemed to have kept her going back after each beating. She explained, “The Bible says you can’t go out! There is no divorce! You’re trying to live a moral life, so I went back.” Aurora’s faith evolved negatively, as she described how it was destroyed, and her spirituality was broken down:

My spirituality broke down. I tried to follow the teachings, and it is a part of you, and you don’t believe anything better exists outside there...I was keeping those guidelines in mind. All my efforts to keep the guidelines destroyed my faith completely, completely!

Tanya’s faith ebbed and flowed, and she described how the God of her faith, kept her from committing murder-suicide. She reported the following:

I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal...I draw my firearm and called out to God and said, “Father give me strength!” And He did, and I put away the firearm.

Helen, a minister of religion and leader in her church described how she had to “blot God out of her mind” in order to maintain her sanity in the wake of a viciously abusive episode:

He came over me, putting his hand in my throat and slamming me against the wall. I started screaming...He began to shout at me: “Shut up and stap yu noise!”

He then flung me on the...bed, put the cushion over my face, and began pressing it into my face. I started fighting to push him off. He eventually got off me and I sat up in shock! I felt like I was going out of my mind with shock...I felt like I had to blot God out of my mind for a while because I could not understand how He was standing by and watching this happen to me. It seemed that this was the only way to keep my sanity.

Hope. This element was noted in the stories of all participants. It was found to be expressed either overtly or was inferred from their words or behaviors. Of significance, is the fact that hope existed for change in their partners' behaviors, for deliverance from their abusive situations, or both, at varying times in the relationships. The data also revealed that all participants moved to a stage of hopelessness, followed by their exit by deliverance or escape from their abusive contexts.

Della, a pastor's wife, reported how she kept positive during the abuse, "maintaining hope in God that better would come." She also said she "considered the abusive period as a season that will pass." After sustained abuse over time, her sense of hopelessness that her husband's behavior would change could be noted in her words, "I thought that I can lose my life in this abuse. I thought it best to leave than to lose my life. I decided not to give him a chance to draw blood." Hope was inferred from the words and behaviors of Callie, Tanya, Mary, and Helen, who prayed and/or pursued counseling. Helen was hopeful that counseling would change her husband's behavior, as evidenced by her report that, "We had eight counselors in that short time of marriage...I lost count of the unofficial counselors." In the end, her hopelessness was evident as she related how she escaped her abusive husband, after being locked in the house for a while, "He placed the keys on the table, and I grabbed mine, ran to the outer grill, and escaped with my house-slippers on, and only my toothbrush in hand." Mellie was a teenager in high school when she met her partner, who was also in high school. She reported how she

converted to Rastafarianism, his belief system, “just to please him.” She spoke reflectively about hope toward the end of her interview, “I can see why women stay with abusive men. There is always a hope that things would change, would regularize, and would be righted. I was hoping for a family but it never worked.”

Poor Judgment. This is a theme that emerged strongly for eight participants: Selena, Aurora, Tanya, Gina, Mary, Nellie, Helen, and Mellie. These women’s stories indicated their poor judgment within one or more of the following contexts: (a) ignored or overlooked warnings or red flags, (b) hasty approach to relationship, and (c) youth and immaturity.

Selena admitted to her rushed behavior and ignoring of warnings signs as she said, “I realized there were red flags that I ignored...I ignored all of that and said this was all part of the relationship, and I just wanted to get married to him.” Gina’s own words described her hasty involvement with her partner, “I wouldn’t say there was much dating. It was like we jumped into the relationship from the deep end. We didn’t take time out to learn about each other, and then eventually got together.” She also recounted how her partner slapped her before they were married—a major red flag—which she ignored, and proceeded to marry him:

And then something happened and he had slapped me, and we had a big issue about it. And then another time...He slapped me before we were married. Slapped me in face! [She placed her hand on her cheek as she spoke].

Secrecy. This theme emerged from 10 of 11 participants’ stories. It was found to emerge alongside one or more of the following: shame, pride, and protection. Regardless of the alignment, secrecy was identified as either a means of addressing these elements,

or could be viewed as facilitating them in some way. Maintaining secrecy meant pretending that things were fine, when they were not.

In Selena's case, secrecy was the means by which she sought to protect her husband. She explained that, "Protecting him was important; he was a minister, and protecting him was paramount." An analysis of Selena's transcript revealed how much she experienced physical abuse amidst a context of secrecy and pretense. She explained her situation in the following way, "Church was difficult. I had to put up a front to show people we were doing ok. Every Sunday...it was like a show like we were on stage." Aurora's story revealed how she kept her abusive marriage secret so that she would not be viewed as an "idiot" for tolerating the abuse. Secrecy, therefore, appeared to have helped preserve her pride. She explained:

You never give your friends the full truth, because they are going to say how you could have taken all of that—"seriously, are you for real?" You look like an idiot because nobody in their right mind would stay after certain things, you know?

Aurora's words also illustrated she maintained secrecy for the sake of self-preservation. She explained, "I would be afraid to talk in a counseling session, and I would be afraid to go home, because I talked too much and I'm going to get beaten up." Cecille's comments indicated her perceived importance of secrecy. She asked, "What do you tell people? How do I tell people something like that?" She added emphatically, "I had to keep this secret! There is a sense of aloneness." She added:

People would ask how are you doing? I would wonder if it was a loaded question, and they saw something wrong and that was why they asked. I became paranoid...I did not feel safe. The church environment was not safe. In the church culture where I'm from, you did not talk about those things as a pastor's wife.

A computer-generated unified representation of these themes is illustrated in Figure 1. This model is titled “The Abusive World of the Jamaican Woman.” It illustrates the Jamaican woman’s world of abuse that is accessed by poor judgment, as shown by the arrow pointing from poor judgment toward the circles. Within the darkness of her abusive world, there resides faith and hope, with both touching in the darkness of the abuse. Their partial positioning in the darkness of abuse indicates that both elements are impacted by her abuse, and they also have an impact on her abusive world. They both also protrude outside the abusive circle, indicating their path of escape for the women. The triangle of secrecy and its attendant elements support the woman’s dark world of abuse. This is noted by the circle of the abusive world resting on top of the triangle of secrecy. The two-way arrows from secrecy to abuse illustrate their symbiotic relationship, as they both perpetuate each other.

Based on the findings of this study, the essence of the lived experiences of Jamaican female intimate partners as illustrated in the Appendix can be expressed in the following way:

A reality occupied by faith and hope in various forms, which is sometimes hastily accessed via poor decision-making, and is characterized by brutal and inhumane treatment, meant to demoralize and extinguish the personhood of the abused, as it seeks to gain and maintain control over her, while fostering shame and fractured pride within her, as well as protection of her abuser, via a firm cloak of secrecy, which also sustains it.

Discussion

Further insight into the complexity of the world of abuse of these women, as described in the above explication of the essence of their lived experiences, can be gained from the following comment made by Cecille as she responded to the question of why she did not leave:

I did not make a decision to leave, for one, our status, a pastor. What do you say when people ask you why you are leaving? You don't tell someone you are leaving because your husband is abusive to you. You don't tell your children that you are leaving because their father is physically abusing you. A big thing was my image, but most of all, the most important thing was my husband's image...I believed saying that to someone would destroy his ministry. So I just didn't think I should say it to anyone. I just thought it would destroy the children and his ministry, and I just thought I could ride it out and make it through each one.

Her comments reflected important elements of Figure 1, where secrecy, protection of partner and children, and preservation pride were evident. The violence of Tanya's world was revealed in her detailed account of a battering she received from her partner after which she married him a month later. Tanya and her partner are both police officers:

When the physical abuse started, before we got married, we moved in January, and getting ready to go to work, he drove, and I didn't drive, and the argument was about his daughter who lived with us who was very nasty, and I spoke with her about cleaning up, and he did not take kindly to it; and after he dropped her at school, he came back home and I did not take kindly to his strong language, very, very, verbally abusive—he's like that even now—and I responded likewise, and before I know what happened, I was on my back on the bed with this man squeezing the life out of my neck. I blacked out for, I don't think it was long, and the only thing I could do is reach for a nice crystal lamp next to me, and hit him in his face, and he eased up, and even then, he was still on me thumping me, punching me [she doubled her fists to demonstrate], and the only way I could stop him, believe me, I had to draw my gun. And when I draw my gun that was in my waist, that was when he eased off and stopped hitting me. My neck was so, so swollen, and lucky for me, scarves were in style, and it didn't look out of the way to wear scarf. It was black and blue, badly swollen, and I hid that well, and we drove together to work afterwards, and nobody knew what happened.

In Tanya's case, her display of poor judgment in ignoring this incident, which occurred before marriage, provided the door to her abusive relationship. There are also the elements of secrecy, protection, and pretense evident in her account.

Mellie described her partner's behavior in the midst of abusing her, "He would draw me into the room and send my son outside, and beat me up, and then have sex with

me, and then he would cook.” She added that he enjoyed beating her, and then he would have sex with her. Afterwards, he would force her to lie down with him:

He took joy out of beating me up; he was aroused, and when he was finished beating me, he would have sex with me—beating and then sex, beating and then sex, and then he would force me to lay down with him and sleep like nothing happened.

With her eyes filled with tears and fixed on the researcher, she provided the following additional details about her abuse, speaking as though she were actually in the situation:

Tek off you clothes, mi ago beat you [speaking the words of her abuser]. And him start tek off him belt, that’s what him always do, and him beat mi, him beat mi, beat mi pon mi naked skin, and mi scream “Help me! Uuno help me help mi! Somebody help me! I bawl, and not only my face weal up, but my whole body, my legs swell up, and not only my face had the cut across it, but also cut across my chest across my breast cut, and him beat mi naked, beat mi naked, beat mi naked, and a bawl, a bawl out to people and nobody wouldn’t come.

Undoubtedly, the voices of these participants revealed their worlds of abuse that was quite complex and multidimensional. The themes were strongly evident, and intertwined to produce their abusive realities

Findings vis a vis Extant Literature

Faith. The literature supported the varied roles and forms of faith in abusive contexts. Cares and Cusick’s (2012) research with abused Jewish women in the United States indicated their abusive husbands exploitation of their faith in order to gain and maintain control over them. In Selena’s statement, she indicated how she felt manipulated, and her subsequent response:

What he did a lot too was use the scriptures a lot to make me feel guilty. There was a lot of manipulation with using scripture, and that was why I had to learn the scriptures for myself. I had to take time to do so, because something wasn’t right with what he was saying.

In a seminal study, Burnett (1996) highlighted abused women's behavior of repeatedly returning to their abusive partners, thereby suffering further abuse. She indicated that this behavior was noted in women with strong religious beliefs that lead them to think it is their duty before God, and indeed to their husbands, to remain in their abusive marriages, and demonstrate their religious faith. An example of this is noted with Aurora, who left and returned to her husband on more than one occasion, before leaving for good. She said:

So I keep going back to my husband; I would sneak out and go, and eventually I would go back to him...the Bible says there is no divorce; You're trying to live a moral life, so I went back...I would thief out and go to him and have sex without mama knowing...I feel I cannot say no to him.

Burnett added that the teachings these women received, directly or indirectly, might have suggested that physical and emotional abuse are "hardships of married life that must be endured" (p.146). Selena's words that she was told, "the Bible says it was my cross," reflect these teachings.

Potter's (2007) study carried out with 40 battered black women in the United States, highlighted the successes and disappointments these women encountered with spirituality and religion, in an effort to escape their abuse. These findings support the results of this Jamaican study. Cecille, for example, expressed her disappointment stating how at times, she "felt that it was unfair for me to be living my life for God for so many years and to be in a situation like that."

Hope. In an early study carried out with abused women by Lee-Hargrove (1996), it was noted that of all the reasons given for the women's decision to stay in the abusive situations, two reasons were given more frequently: (a) children, and (b) hope that their partner's behavior would change for the better. In her qualitative phenomenological

study with five abused women, Duley (2012) noted the theme, “hoping things would change,” emerged from the stories of all participants. All 11 participants in this study were noted to have expressed hope in one form or another. Helen was noted to be constantly seeking counseling—a behavior reflecting inherent hope. She explained, “We had eight counselors in that short time of marriage...I lost count of the unofficial counselors.”

Shurman and Rodriquez (2006) indicated that hopelessness was an affective predictor that women were ready to end their abusive relationship. These results were reflected in this study. Mellie described her cognitions, as she lost hope that her partner would change, and, therefore, sought to terminate her relationship, once and for all. She said:

The reality is that your life just crumble, and you have to move on, you have to make a decision. And I had to make a decision in my life to sever all ties and become an enemy; not to encourage him, for him to understand it was finished, in order to get my life back. I had to stop taking and taking...”

In the case of Tanya, Aurora, and Nellie, their sense of hopeless led them to contemplate ending their lives. Aurora said, “And I look at a bottle of pills because I could see no way out, I wanted to end my life.” Tanya considered killing her children, and then herself, as she said, “I took up my firearm and thought which child I would kill first, then second, and then obviously me haffi dead. I have to kill myself afterwards. I was suicidal.”

Poor Judgment. Short, McMahon, Chervin, Shelley, Lezin, Sloop, and Dawkins, (2000) carried out studies related to abuse survivors’ identification of protective factors and early warning signs for intimate partner violence (IPV). Their findings indicated that once violence began in the women’s relationships, regardless of how early, it would

usually escalate over time. The stories of these Jamaican women indicated that the early abuse did escalate. Lang (2012) highlighted the fact that early warning signs were rationalized and set aside in various ways when they presented themselves. Tanya's report of how she rationalized her first battering, then got married and endured severe abuse, "I said to myself, "I am a police officer, and so is he. If anything, I will use my gun to defend myself." So probably in my mind I am bad, you know...." In their hasty involvement with their partners, the majority of these Jamaican women failed to observe basic rules of building healthy relationships, and rushed into their relationships. Bradley and Gottman (2012) highlighted the importance of not being hasty, based on their study with women who ignored warnings and paid the price. In Aurora and Mellie's case, they both became involved while they were in their teens. Aurora's words indicated her youth and inexperience:

This was the Lord; this was religion, so I couldn't understand the social aspect of relationships that this could impact things later on. This just did not dawn on me at the tender age of nineteen or twenty. Coupled with the fact that at that age, you feel that you want to be exposed to certain experiences but you want to do it in the right way.

Secrecy. With the exception of Mary, all participants' stories reflected this theme, which was noticeably associated one or more of the following: shame, pride, and protection. Secrecy was noted to somehow mitigate these elements, and/or facilitate them. According to Anderson, Cockcroft, Ansari, Omer, Ansari Khan, and Chaudhry (2010), numerous abused women across the world keep their abuse secret with the reasons including (a) fear of damaging their reputation, (b) bringing dishonor/shame to their families, (c) fear of exacerbating the abusive situation, and (d) fear of separation or divorce, and subsequently losing custody of their children as a result. Results gleaned

from research carried out in Australia by Spangaro, Zwi, Poulos, and Man (2010) also indicated that the women in their study did not disclose for fear of their partners finding out, thereby exacerbating the problem of abuse. Selena's words indicated her desire and her rationale, "He was punching me. I hid it because I believed in protecting him, because he was in ministry, and I didn't want anyone to look down on him in any way." Aurora's words highlighted her desire for self-preservation: "I would be afraid to talk in a counseling session, and I would be afraid to go home, because I talked too much and I'm going to get beaten up."

Revised View of Abused Woman

In considering Dunn's (2005) postulated revised image of the abused woman as a heroic, sacrificial survivor, rather than a helpless, passive victim, evidence of this revised image may be noted in the stories of these Jamaican women. Cecille's report, for example, described how she assessed her situation and planned her escape, when the time was right:

I made up my mind after the car incident. I was even stronger and became more determined that I must get out of this. I became more disconnected, and was always looking for the escape path. I seized the opportunity to escape..."

Tanya, on the other hand, had plans to protect herself at all costs. She said, "I started sleeping with a butcher knife under my bed, which he didn't know about, because I said I wouldn't draw my firearm again. We slept in the same bed, but he didn't know."

In considering Dunn's (2005) revised views of the abused woman, and Walker's (1977) postulation of learned helplessness, the findings of this study did not support the latter view.

Influences/Condition Facilitating Tolerance of Abuse

This study revealed that the participants' decisions to remain in their abusive contexts were influenced by: (a) Spiritual/faith beliefs and values pertaining to marriage and Christianity, (b) concern for their children's well-being in the aftermath of full disclosure of the abuse and ensuing separation, (c) hope for change, (d) protection of their image and their partner's, (e) shame/pride, (f) love, (g) weakness of will, (h) lack of a sense of self-sufficiency (although these women were not economically dependent on their partners), (i) value of partner's presence in children's lives, regardless of abusive behavior, (j) not wanting to have to start over with another man and have children for other fathers, (k) desire not to disappoint family or embarrass family, and (l) initial denial and rationalization of abuse. These reasons have been supported by the literature (Anderson et al., 2010; Burnett, 1996; Duley, 2012; Dunn, 2005; Gengler & Lee, 2001; Grauwiler (2008); Lee-Hargrove, 1996; Spangaro, Zwi, Poulos, & Man, 2010; Yoshihama, 2002; Yount, 2005.

Acquired Meanings

This study yielded two categories of meanings and understanding that emerged from the participants' abusive experiences: (a) value and confidence in themselves, and (b) God's presence in their lives, knowing Him, and understanding the scriptures for themselves, apart from previous teachings. Regarding the first category, Selena's words attested to this category, "I didn't value myself enough because I allowed my husband to step all over me, and I think my self-esteem was really low, even before I came into the marriage." Mary's words reflected what she thought of herself and her behavior, as she said with contempt, "Stupid! I was stupid to have stayed!" Understanding was also

gained about a lack of self-confidence and fear of public opinion, as Georgia's words illustrated, "I was held captive by my fear of being on my own and of what people would say; afraid I would not be able to manage...I had no confidence in myself."

With respect to God's presence, Nellie's words acknowledged God's presence even when she did not know Him. She said, "Looking at this [her map], I'm so glad. I feel like, 'thank God I got out of it!' How did I get out of it? God was there even though I didn't know Him." Tanya's words indicated her understanding and acknowledgment that it was God who took care of her. She said, "I tell you, anybody going through this and don't look to God cannot go through it...It's God who carry me through."

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was that of a lack of demographic diversity that would have broadened the perspective gained and strengthened the findings. The desired spread across age, educational and socio-economic status (SES), religious/faith status, parental, and employment status was not achieved. Nevertheless, the participants, selected via purposive sampling, provided valuable, rich data for the study.

Implications of the Study

Faith-Based Teachings and Beliefs

The findings of this study have illuminated the powerful influence of faith and religious belief systems in the participants' abusive situations. These beliefs impacted their decisions to remain after the abuse started, and in some cases, faith provided strength and direction to escape. These findings indicate a need to revise religious teachings that state directly, or imply, that battering is to be borne in marriage, because it is the woman's duty to remain in order to honor the marriage vows and demonstrate her

faith. It must be taught that by its very nature, battering is against the biblical principles of marriage, and should not be tolerated. In addition, religious doctrines that appear to facilitate tolerance of a husband's abuse of their wives must be addressed. Programs to bring about change in these areas must be implemented at all levels of faith-based communities, from local churches to the highest levels organizational and denominational levels. It is crucial that church leaders seek to equip themselves to deal with family violence issues, including the matter of accountability of abusers, and safety for women and children. In essence, there needs to be dialogue about domestic violence and spousal abuse within all faith-based contexts. The introduction of this dialogue during premarital counseling should prove useful in that it would represent an effort at preventative intervention. Clergy and counselors alike should equip themselves to manage these premarital sessions with competence.

Counselor Competence

This study indicated the important need for counselors to equip themselves to address the issue of faith within the context of abuse. Counselors must seek to implement a counseling perspective that frees the abused woman from a sense of obligation to her abusive partner (Burnett, 1996). Counselors must, therefore, be able to guide the abused woman from her false beliefs and assumptions about herself and her abusive situation, which have kept her in the abuse, and must lead her toward healing and a new perspective of her God, herself, her life, and others (Senter & Caldwell, 2002).

These findings have highlighted how much damage is done to the psyche of the abused woman. The counselor must, therefore, ensure personal competence to objectively deal with the harsh realities—physical and otherwise—of the abuse, and lead

the woman toward healing and restoration. This has serious implications on counselors' training, self-awareness, and self-monitoring.

Educating General Population

Another important consideration that has been brought to the fore by this study is the need for open seminars about abuse in secular contexts for the general population at all levels, including church, school, community, and national levels in Jamaica. These findings also indicate the dire need to conduct seminars and workshops to teach important skills pertaining to healthy relationship building, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and attending to warning signals in relationship development, among other important subjects. These seminars should be geared at youth and adults alike. These seminars should be carried out by appropriately trained persons, including counselors, teachers, and clergy. This would constitute preventative as well as remedial action.

Conclusion

It is greatly anticipated that the findings of this study will inform the tailoring of valuable, culture-specific responses to the phenomenon of physical abuse in varied settings in Jamaica, including the counseling field, and faith-based and social settings. Indeed, hope exists that the insight gained will prove useful beyond Jamaica's borders, and serve to fill the gaps in information that still remain.

Finally, in light of the findings in this study related to the theme of faith, serious note should be taken of the fact that the scriptures are powerful, whether they are applied appropriately or wrongly. Based on the related experiences of most of these women, a particular understanding and application of the scriptures resulted in their sustained

physical abuse, which some believed could even have ended in their demise. Therefore, the data emits a strong call to implement or affirm healthy teaching and application of the scriptures, specifically as it relates to intimate partner relationships.

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Appendix

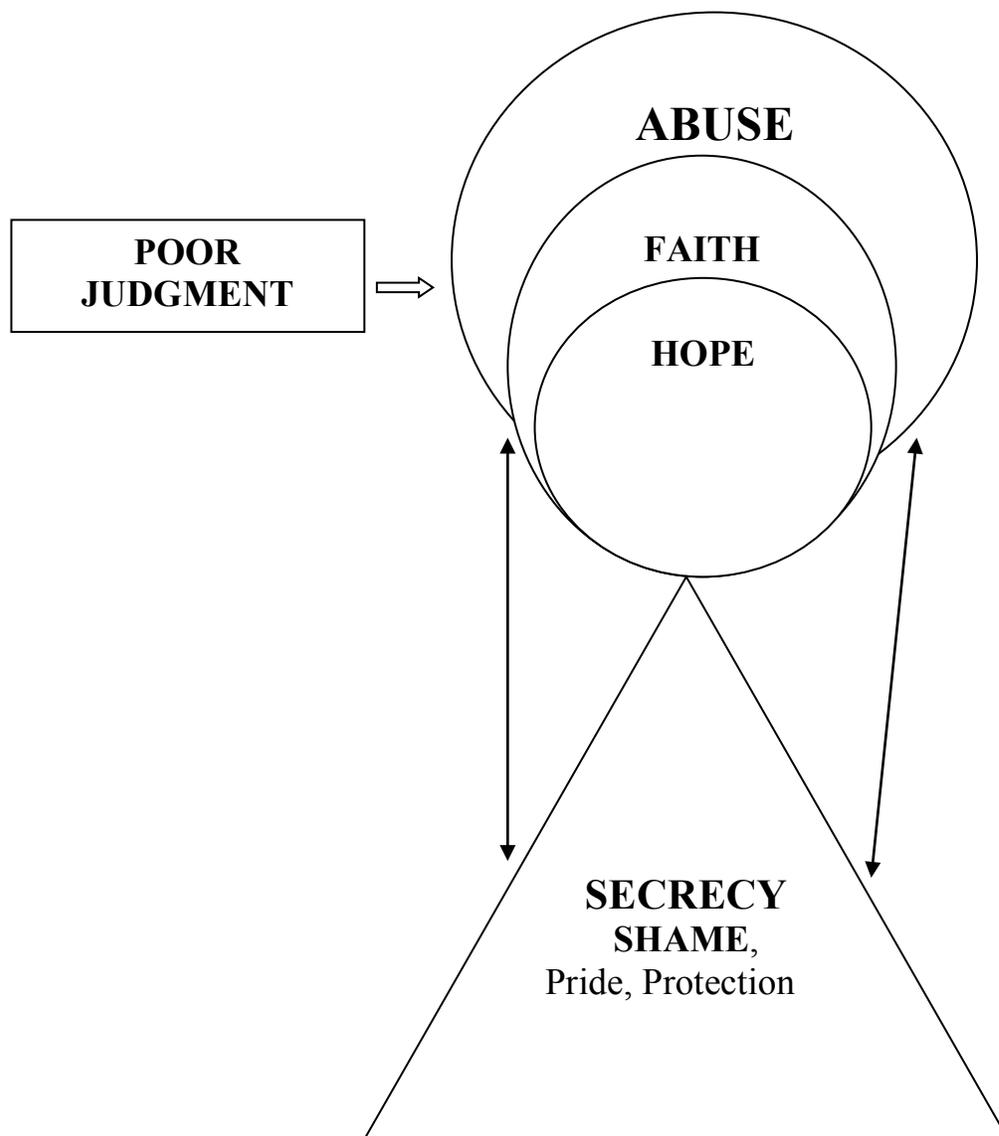


Figure 1: The Abusive World of the Jamaican Woman