LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WIFE ABUSE FOR INDO-CANADIAN SIKH WOMEN

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Individual Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Program [School of Social Work & Family
Studies/ School of Nursing/ Education & Counselling Psychology & Special Education])

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

January, 2003

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Date ___January 29/2003___

Abstract

A qualitative research design, based on Colaizzi's (1978) understanding of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, was used to explore and describe the personal experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Eight women volunteered to take part in this research study. The women were recruited from a social service agency in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Data were collected through in-depth personal interviews that were audiotaped and later transcribed. Data analysis was based on the guidelines proposed by Colaizzi (1978).

Five themes were identified and developed during the data analysis: (1) *An Eroding Sense of Self*; components of this theme included self-doubt, self-blame, and sense of worthlessness. (2) *Changing Face of Fear*; for Indo-Canadian Sikh women, fear alternated from distress about safety to worries about poverty, abandonment, and alienation. (3) *Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*; concern for the children, lack of finances, an attachment to their husbands, and the hope that they would change contributed to the women's profound ambivalence about whether to salvage or end their abusive marriages. (4) *A sense of Overwhelming Entrapment*; this theme was comprised of cultural dictates such as *izzat* (family honour) and the sanctity of marriage. (5) *Reclaiming Personal Strength*; the women utilized multiple sources including their religious faith, support from friends and family as well as psychotherapy to help them to reclaim personal strength.

Having financial assistance, support from their families, and a safe place to go were crucial factors that enabled some of the Indo-Canadian Sikh women to leave their abusive marriages. The women showed incredible strength as they met the challenges

imposed by cultural dictates such as *izzat* and clash of values with the dominant culture regarding marriage and family life. Despite insurmountable challenges and barriers to care, these women continued to persevere in their struggle to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages.

The findings of this study point to the need for more cultural sensitivity training for various legal and health care professionals in order to offer effective and culturally sensitive care for this group of women. The implications of the findings for clinical practice are discussed and recommendations for further research are provided.

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Dedication

Diamond, Emerald, Garnet, Jade, Opal, Pearl, Ruby, and Sapphire thank you for sharing your stories with such honesty, openness, and courage. This research project would not have been possible without your participation. I am forever in your debt. Here's my prayer for each of you.

May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within you
Guide your way on

In memory of my beloved grandfather Munsha Singh Badyal
Baba jee in seven short years you enriched my life in so many ways. With love and compassion you instilled in me the values of hard work, kindness, honesty, and integrity. My fond memories of you I will treasure forever. You will always be my millionaire.

Millionaire
I've got my name on the river,
I've got my name on the sea,
I've got my name on the summer skies,
They all belong to me.
I've got my name on the violets
That grow in their corner fair,
And wherever Nature has planted peace,
My name is written there.
As far as the eye can travel
From where I stand in the sun
I've got my name on the things I see
And I own them, every one!
I've got my name on the singing birds
That mate when Spring is new;
But I won't be selfish with all these things
I'll share them, friend, with you.
There is no deed on the river,
There is no lock on the sea;
Not all the power in the world
Can take their joy from me!
There is no fence round the heavens,
No vault holds the sunset's gold;
The earth is mine and the heavens are mine
Till all the suns grow cold.
The stars are my thousand jewels,
And LIFE is my bread and wine
And all that I see was made for me
And all that I love is mine.
(Author Anonymous)

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER ONE

Scope and Focus

This chapter provides the scope and focus of the current research study, which

sought to describe the personal experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh

women. The chapter is divided into five main sections. Historical background of wife

abuse is discussed in section one. Definitions of key terms are listed in section two. The

rationale, purpose, and significance of the study are outlined in section three. A brief

overview of the methodological approach used for this study is presented in section four.

Section five concludes with a chapter summary.

Historical Background of Wife Abuse

Society and its institutions throughout the history of humanity have condoned

violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Dutton, 1988; Yllo, 1993). Abuse of

women transcends not only socioeconomic but also religious, cultural, and racial

boundaries (Browne, 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dosanjh, Deo, & Sidhu, 1994;

Dutton, 1995; Jiwani, 1997a; MacLeod, 1987; Phillips; 1999; Wetzel & Ross, 1983;

Statistics Canada, 1999; Wiik, 1995). Violence against women incurs enormous health

consequences and is a problem of epidemic proportions that spans all countries

worldwide (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain, 1994). Although it is rarely seen as a public

health issue, at a global level the health burden from domestic violence is comparable to

that posed by cancer, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and cardiovascular disease

(Heise et al., 1994). In the United States, violence against women is the leading cause of

female trauma (Campbell & Sheridan, 1989).

In Canada, results of the General Social Survey (GSS) show that during a time frame between 1994 and 1999 approximately 37% of the women who had ever been married or lived in a common-law relationship reported being physically, emotionally, and/or sexually abused by their intimate partner (Statistics Canada, 2001). The 1993 National Survey on Violence Against Women indicated that about 29% of Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence by their current or ex-partner (Statistics Canada, 1993). "Two women are killed per week as a result of domestic violence. British Columbia suffers the highest rate of violence against women in the country at 59 percent" (Jiwani, 1997b, p. 2).

In the United Kingdom, two women per week are killed by their intimate partners. "Crime Statistics for England and Wales in 1997 showed that 47% of women victims of murder were killed by current or former partner (compared to 8% of men)" (Rawstorne, 2002, p. 26). Extensive research by Dobash and Dobash in 1979, 1987, and 1992 found that wife abuse is reported to the police seven times more frequently than child abuse.

In Japan, approximately 120 murder cases annually are the result of a husband killing his wife by the use of violence (Watanabe, 2002). In Australia, Mouzos who in 1999 investigated 2,821 homicides between 1988 and 1989 found that 60% of women victims were killed by an intimate male partner (Pickering, 2002).

The most commonly reported injuries by women who are physically assaulted by their husbands include black eyes, bone fractures, head injuries, and neurological damage (Campbell, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Heise et al., 1994; Walker, 1984). Women who have been sexually abused report having chronic problems with blood pressure, head-aches, sleep disturbances, pelvic and vaginal pain as well as being highly vigilant

and overly anxious (Burgess, 1984; Eby, Campbell, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995; Waigand, Wallace, Phelps & Miller, 1990). The psychological effects of abuse include intrusive symptoms such as nightmares and hyper-arousal (Herman, 1992). The consequences of abuse have been shown to extend long after the abuse has stopped (Koss, 1993).

Despite its dire consequences, denial of violence against women within the family is widespread because people prefer to cling to the image of the family as an institution representing the best of human interactions, which include nurturance, love, support, and comfort. There are those who have moved past their initial denial of the pervasiveness of domestic violence, but who maintain their silence and fail to take an active stance to help victims and abusers (Pagelow & Johnson, 1988). This may be, in part, due to the ever-enduring belief that the family is a sacred and a private institution - "a man's home is his castle" - and outsiders have no right to interfere.

Wife abuse in countries worldwide has intently been overlooked and even legitimized under certain conditions. Sir William Blackstone in 1768 coined the phrase rule of thumb which stipulated that a man could beat his wife without any remorse or social sanction as long as the stick that he used was no wider than the width of his thumb (Gosselin, 2000; Jiwani, 1997b; Pagelow, 1984). This rule was thought to be a compassionate replacement for the law that previously allowed a husband to beat his wife with any reasonable instrument (Dutton, 1998). Women have suffered incredible atrocities from their husbands for hundreds of years (Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Pagelow, 1984).

Societies around the world have incessantly refused to acknowledge wife abuse as a serious social problem. In 1882 Maryland became the first state to pass a law that made wife beating a crime and by the end of the nineteenth century wife abuse was declared illegal in many American states (Goldman, 1978). In practice, however, the legal system in England, the United States, and Canada routinely ignored the problem of wife abuse unless the woman lost her life at the hands of her husband (Dutton, 1988). Even though wife abuse had become socially repugnant in the western world by the beginning of the twentieth century, it continued to prevail behind closed doors (Gosselin, 2,000). During the 1970s, it was the women's liberation movement that brought the issue of wife abuse and the discrepancies within the criminal justice system concerning this phenomenon under public scrutiny (Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Dutton, 1988; Goldman, 1978). Nonetheless, wife abuse continues to be a harsh reality for many women within Canada as well as other countries around the world (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1992; Gelles & Cornell, 1983; Levinson, 1989).

The recognition that wife abuse is a serious social problem, and not just merely an inter-personal, intra-psychic, or private matter has surfaced only in the last two decades (Dobash & Dobash, 1979b; Greenblat, 1985; Phillips, 1999). Conceptualizing wife abuse as a serious social issue (Campbell, 1998; Fishwick, 1998; Sampselle, Bernhard, Kerr, Opie, Perley, & Pitzer, 1992; Tifft, 1993) has helped tremendously in bringing this phenomenon to the forefront of the academic arena. In the last twenty years, it has attracted the attention of many scholars from diverse disciplines including nursing, social work, sociology, psychology, criminology, and feminist studies (e.g., Faulk, 1977;

Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Dutton, 1988; Frankel-Howard, 1989; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980).

Sociologists, who, for the most part, have concentrated their energy on assessing the incidence of wife abuse using large and nationally representative samples, have found that the actual rate of wife abuse is difficult to determine due to a number of different factors including methodological and definition issues (Romkens, 1997; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Although the ability to collect accurate rates of wife abuse has been restricted by the difficulty of identifying and defining what constitutes abuse, rough estimates of incidence for wife abuse do exist for various countries in the world (Walker, 1999). However, the calculations for the prevalence of wife abuse are likely to be much lower than the actual rates of the problem due to a number of reasons including women's reluctance to disclose abuse to others (Summers & Hoffman, 2002). Some women do not report their abuse due to their fear of reprisal and the stigma associated with being abused (Gosselin, 2,000; Walker, 1999). Despite these difficulties, wife abuse in the last decade has increasingly been recognized as a serious social problem in many countries around the globe (Allen & Cho, 2002; Baldry, 2002; Buset & Pepler, 2002; Pickering, 2002; Summers & Hoffman, 2002; Watanabe, 2002).

Culturally focused research in the area of wife abuse is a very recent and emerging trend. Researchers are now advocating that cultural norms are important in shaping the ways in which the phenomenon of wife abuse is perceived and experienced by different groups of women (Agnew, 1998; Phillips, 1999; Zorn, 1999). Accordingly, several scholars have begun to address the problem of wife abuse within the confines of a specific cultural setting (e.g., Antonopoulou, 1999; Baldry, 2002; Ellsberg, Caldera,

Herrera, Winkvist, & Kullgren, 1999; Fawcett, Heise, Isita-Espejel & Pick, 1999; Phillips, 1999; Watanabe, 2002). While the findings of these studies have substantially increased our knowledge of the plight of women in different parts of the world, more research is still urgently needed to further enhance our knowledge of how abuse affects women of colour within the Canadian mosaic.

Phillips (1999), focusing on the abuse experiences of American Muslim women, noted that women of colour encounter multiple forms of oppression in their struggle to free themselves from the abuse. In Canada, a report compiled by the British Columbia's Task Force on family violence during 1992 indicated that:

> .... [a] woman of colour may be under pressure from her community not to report incidents of sexual or [physical] abuse so that the solidarity of the community is not breached. A woman of colour may then be caught between a system which is offering help to her as a woman, but is racist; and a community which provides support to her as a person of colour, but may not deal with the sexual abuse or [physical] abuse. (p. 229)

These results illustrate that the abuse experiences of women of colour in Canada are likely to be complicated by a number of circumstances including pressure from their ethnic community to keep silent about the abuse and the discrimination experienced by them from the dominant culture. To gain a better understanding of the circumstances that exacerbate the abuse experiences of women of colour within the Canadian mosaic, researchers must proceed in the direction of acquiring in-depth knowledge about these women's abuse experiences. Culturally sensitive, equitable, and ethical care for women of colour necessitates that the treatment plans be based on an understanding of their personal experiences of wife abuse. Without this knowledge, the needs of these women for health care and therapeutic intervention may not be adequately addressed. Educational information and literature used to increase awareness about wife abuse within Canada

must reflect the abuse experiences of the different groups of women who make up the Canadian mosaic. Without this representation, certain groups of women including women of colour, who experience abuse in their intimate relationships, will continue to be rendered invisible, unimportant, and unworthy of attention of researchers.

An extensive literature search revealed that the abuse experiences of women of colour in Canada are largely unexplored by researchers. The abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women are particularly absent in the literature. This scarcity of information is problematic because it leaves many health care professionals, clinical practitioners, as well as social service providers potentially ill-equipped to provide adequate care for this group of women. To address this huge gap in our understanding of how abuse affects Indo-Canadian Sikh women; the present study sought to describe their personal experiences of wife abuse. The rationale, purpose, and significance of this study are discussed in more detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Definition of Terms

In this section, I provide a list of definitions for a number of key constructs including *acculturation, culture, ethnicity, Indo-Canadian Sikh woman,* and *wife abuse* to orient the reader as to how these terms are being used for the purposes of the current research study. It is important to note that these definitions were not imposed onto the experiences of the women in this study. Rather, these definitions act as a backdrop against which discussion of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women is framed.

Acculturation

Acculturation is an elaborate process of surrendering and/or retaining the characteristics of one's cultural heritage (Szapockznik & Kurines, 1980, cited in

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Sodowsky & Plake, 1992). It is a dynamic process whereby the immigrant group "selectively adapts its value system and cultural practices when involved in the process of integrating with and differentiation from the dominant group" (Berry, 1980, cited in Sodowky & Plake, 1992, p.53).

Culture

Culture refers to the intergenerational transmission of values, beliefs, and norms of a specific kinship group that guide its thinking, decision-making, and behaviour in patterned ways (Leininger, 1967; 1991). Culture is dynamic; it is fluid and it is continually evolving.

Collectivistic Culture. It refers to a cultural group that emphasizes interdependence among members of the family and the community. The "self" is perceived as being part of the family and the community within collectivistic cultures. Individuals are highly influenced by the normative structures and institutions of its kinship group. Collectivists favour values such as family integrity, security, conformity, and obedience. The family is the primary unit of survival and its goals take precedence over the goals of the individual. Behaviour is regulated by family and community norms. Maintaining harmony, saving face, and keeping disagreements hidden from people outside the family are characteristic of collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 1990).

Dominant Culture. It refers to the English-speaking group of people in Canada whose history, social context, values, and beliefs grow predominately out of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. This culture is called dominant because it largely dictates the economic and political life of Canadians regardless of the presence of other large cultural groups (British Columbia Task Force on Family Violence, 1992).

Individualistic Culture. It refers to a cultural group that idealizes personal achievement and independence. In individualistic cultures the "self" is viewed as a separate unit and the behaviour of people is less influenced by the opinion of others. This cultural group emphasizes achievement, pleasure, and competition. The pursuit of personal goals is more important and personal likes and dislikes regulate behaviour. Individualists emphasize equality among people (Triandis, 1990).

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a group of individuals who not only perceive themselves as being different but are also recognized by others as being different by virtue of certain attributes such as culture, religion, language, social patterns, descent, and kinship (Driedger, 1989).

Indo-Canadian Sikh Woman

Indo-Canadian Sikh woman refers to any woman who has immigrated to Canada from India or who has ancestors of Indian heritage, is a Canadian citizen, and identifies herself as being Sikh.

Wife Abuse

Wife abuse refers to any ever-married woman who identifies herself as having experienced or is experiencing intermittent or ongoing physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse. It is important to note that for the purposes of this study, wife abuse was not defined for potential participants; rather, women who classified themselves as having experienced abuse in their marriages were recruited.

Physical Abuse. It may take the form of slapping, punching, kicking, biting, pushing, shoving, shooting, burning, stabbing, choking, beating, or using a weapon or

other object to threaten or injure. It can and sometimes does result in death (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Dutton, 1988; Sinclair, 1985; Statistics Canada, 1993; Straus & Gelles, 1990).

Psychological Abuse. It includes excessive jealousy and attempts to control the woman's time, her activities, even how she dresses or wears her hair. It can also involve being harassed at work by phone calls or visits; having prized possessions destroyed. It can take the form of threats of physical violence directed at the woman; her children or her loved ones as well as threats to have the children taken away. It also encompasses threats to harm her property. Psychological abuse can consist of verbally demeaning attacks used to undermine a woman's self-esteem as well as isolation from friends, relatives, and community resources. Additionally, it refers to her limited access to money, transportation and other means required to create and maintain social contacts. If the woman is an immigrant or refugee, her abuser may threaten to have her deported (Barnsley, 1980; Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women; 1993; Dunaway, 1988; Martin, 1976; Sinclair, 1985; Walker, 1984).

Sexual Abuse. It refers to all sexual activity that the woman does not consent to, or does not feel free to refuse participation in because her husband threatens her or her children with violence if she declines his demands (Sinclair, 1985). Forced sexual acts may range from unwanted touching to rape, including extreme jealousy and sexual accusations towards a woman by her husband (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Sinclair, 1985).

I would now like to briefly clarify for the reader as to why I have chosen to use concepts such as *Indo-Canadian Sikh woman* and *wife abuse* rather than one of the other

equivalent expressions that are outlined in the literature. In my perusal of the literature on wife abuse, I became acutely aware of the diversity of terms that have been used to describe this phenomenon and the controversies surrounding the use of particular constructs (e.g., *domestic violence*). Similarly, numerous expressions have been used to describe a heterogeneous group of people who have immigrated to Canada from India and many controversies exist as to which term should be used to describe the subtleties amongst these individuals. My goal is not to critique or reconcile the contradictions that exist in the literature regarding the meaning and use of these concepts. Rather, my intention is to explain my choice of language.

Predominately, terms such as *South Asian, South Asian-Canadian, Canadian Sikhs, East Indians, Punjabis and Indo-Canadians* are used in the literature to describe the diasporaic existence of a diverse group of people of Indian ancestry who are dispersed through out the Indian sub-continent as well as globally. Recently, the broader category of *South Asian* has been used by several social scientists to describe a very heterogeneous group of people including Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Ismailis, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Zoroastrians who have originated from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka (Naidoo, 1994; Ralston, 1988). I have opted not to use aforementioned constructs because they encompass different ethnic, religious, linguistic and national groups. For instance, South Asia, at the present time, refers to an agglomeration of countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal (Assanand, Dias, Richardson & Waxler-Morrison, 1990). More importantly, people of South Asian cultural heritage have immigrated to Canada not only from the Indian sub-continent but also from other

parts of the world including the South Pacific (Fiji), Southeast Asia, Africa and the Caribbean (Assanand et al., 1990; Dua, 1992).

For the purposes of this research, I have chosen to use the concept of *Indo-Canadian Sikh woman* because it expresses important identifying markers of this group of women. This term conveys that these women have an Indian ancestry, Canadian status and an affiliation with the Sikh religion. Decision to limit participation to this distinct group was based on my premise that these women are likely to be confronted with the values of two opposing cultures as they try to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages. The women's own culture, which can be best categorized as being collectivistic, and that of the dominant culture which can be described as being individualistic. Collectivistic culture emphasizes the needs of the family rather than one's personal needs. This contrasts sharply with the values of individualistic culture where "...the individual constitutes the most important unit, and self sufficiency, personal autonomy and independence are highly valued" (Lau, 1984, p. 101). The dissonance between these two radically opposing cultures regarding marriage and family life is likely to pose serious challenges for Indo-Canadian Sikh women as they attempt to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages which other groups of women within the Canadian mosaic may or may not experience. The decision to focus solely on the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women is explained more fully in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Multiple constructs including *family violence, domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, spousal abuse, wife battering, wife beating, wife abuse, conjugal violence,* and *wife assault* have been used by different writers as well as researchers from various

disciplines to describe the phenomenon of violence against women. The definitions of abuse may encompass all or some aspects of the following: sexual, psychological, as well as severe to mild forms of physical abuse (Frankel-Howard, 1998).

The use of concepts such as *family violence, domestic violence, conjugal violence, and spouse abuse* have been criticized by some scholars (e.g., Lamb, 1991; Sinclair, 1985) on the grounds that they camouflage the directionality of the abuse and conceal the identity of the perpetrator of the abuse. Constructs such as conjugal violence and spousal abuse do not explicate whether the abuse is in the direction from the husband to the wife or in the direction of the husband from the wife. Notably, scholars such as Jones (1994) have unyieldingly disapproved of the use of the term *domestic violence* arguing that this construct acts as an "... euphemistic abstraction that keeps us at a dispassionate distance far removed from the repugnant spectacle of human beings in pain" (p. 81).

Expressions such as *wife assault, wife beating, wife battering*, and *wife abuse* are sometimes used to describe the different intensity and severity of violence and, unfortunately, at other times they are used interchangeably. A number of scholars have opted to use constructs of *wife assault* and *wife battering* in their research to refer mainly to physical acts of violence (e.g., Dutton, 1988; Sinclair, 1985; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Statistics Canada, 1993). However, it is important to note that the dimensions of violence reach far beyond the more obvious physical aspects of assault (Jiwani, 1997b; Phillips, 1999; Wiik, 1995). In fact, the impact of sexual and psychological violence can be as damaging if not more damaging with long-term lasting effects as those of physical violence (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women; 1993; MacLeod, 1987). To simply focus on the physical act itself without taking into consideration the psychological

abuse that precedes it, is to lose sight of the larger picture of abuse (Jiwani, 1997b;

Phillips, 1999).

I am cognizant of the fact that abuse in the home arena can also be directed

towards children, the elderly, and in the direction of the husband from his wife. Equally, I

am aware that abuse occurs in dating relationships, common-law partnerships, and same-

sex unions. I, however, have chosen to focus on *wife abuse* because women are more

likely to experience dire consequences as a result of abuse directed toward them by their

husbands. Dobash and Dobash (1988) conclude that it is by taking on the role of a wife

that a woman is most likely to become the victim of systematic and severe violence.

Studies have consistently shown that women are more likely to be the victims of harsh

abuse in their marriages because of the greater strength and force used by their husbands

(Dobash & Dobash, 1979b; Draucker, 1997; Dutton, 1995; Gleenblat, 1985; Hamby,

Poindexter & Gray-Little, 1996). Dobash and Dobash (1979a), in their pioneering study,

found that wives were at the receiving end of serious abuse 75.8% of the time compared

with the husbands who were the targets of severe abuse only 1.1% of the time. Levinson

(1989) concluded that wife abuse was the most common form of family violence in

countries around the globe.

For the purposes of this research study, I have opted to use the term *wife abuse* for

the following reasons: (a) it signifies the direction of abuse from the husband to his wife;

(b) it denotes the abuse experience of ever-married women; and (c) it encompasses a

broad spectrum of abuse (e.g., physical, psychological, and/or sexual). I have limited

participation to ever-married women, based on my knowledge that dating and common-

law relationships are highly frowned upon within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community.

Consequently, women in this community are not as likely to date or have a common-law partner (or at least they are not likely to publicize their participation in such practices). The concepts of *abuse* and *wife abuse* are used interchangeably in the write-up of this manuscript to reduce repetition. Moreover, terms such as *domestic violence, family violence,* etc., are used in quoting or paraphrasing the work of other authors.

Rationale, Purpose, and Significance of the Study

In Canada, multiculturalism, in its ideal form, was envisioned to create a sociocultural milieu where equal participation in the mainstream infrastructures would be unfettered by race or ethnicity. Although the promises proclaimed in the policies of multiculturalism are enticing, the Canadian mosaic, in reality, continues to be structured on the premises of racism and various other inequities (Jiwani, 1997c, 1997d; LeBaron-Duryea, 1992). Multiculturalism became government policy in 1971 when Prime Minister Trudeau introduced the concept of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. He championed the notion of fair treatment of all Canadians and entrusted his government to remove barriers that prevented certain individuals from full participation in the mainstream infrastructures (LeBaron-Duryea, 1992).

The topic of multiculturalism in the last ten years has become the center of renewed debate concerning its efficacy and viability. "Questions about the meaning of multiculturalism are being asked in a climate of growing urgency" (LeBaron-Duryea, 1992, p. 7). Immigration to British Columbia is continuing to rise. In 1990, approximately 28,000 immigrants arrived in the province compared with 23,000 in 1988 and 13,000 in 1986 (LeBaron-Duryea, 1992). Many of the recent immigrants have come from non-European and non-English speaking backgrounds. In 1992, India was the third

main source of new immigrants to British Columbia. A large majority of these immigrants were Sikhs (British Columbia Statistics, 1993; Sidhu, 2000). Despite the growing number of Sikhs in Canada, research concerning this group's adjustment to Canadian life is unbelievably sparse. However, disparaging perceptions of this ethno-cultural group are readily apparent in the media due to its pervasive obsession to cast Indo-Canadian Sikhs in a negative light (Buchignani, 1989; Buchignani, Indra, Srivastva, 1985; Hundial, 2000; Jiwani, 1997a, 1997c, 1997d). A recent article in *The Province* newspaper reported that there is a severe problem of family violence within Indo-Canadian families (Love, 1994, B8). Stereotyped as terrorists and viciously violent, Indo-Canadian Sikh men as well as women face daily assaults on their dignity and identity by the media within the Canadian mosaic.

Although there is no official census data about the incidence of wife abuse among Indo-Canadian Sikh families, anecdotal information suggests that wife abuse exists within this community as it does in other ethno-cultural communities within Canada (Shashi Assanand, personal communication, 2,000; Suki Grewal, personal communication, 2,000; Ranjeet Kanda, personal communication, 2,000). Having spoken with the different community workers in multicultural agencies, and through an extensive literature search, I realized that research documenting the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women is virtually non-existent.

Given the opportunity to do research for my dissertation, I chose to focus on the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women for several important reasons. First and foremost, I have selected this group of women because researchers in the past have largely ignored their experiences of wife abuse. Understanding these women's abuse

experiences is a necessary prerequisite to the provision of culturally sensitive health care as well as legal and social services for this group of women. Knowledge about their abuse experiences could also help to strengthen community links between professionals from the dominant culture as well as those from the Indo-Canadian Sikh community who are interested in providing competent care for these women.

Secondly, I chose to focus on the abuse experiences exclusively of Indo-Canadian Sikh women for pragmatic reasons. Being an Indo-Canadian Sikh woman myself, I am very committed to advocating for the rights of this group of women. I want to deepen my understanding of their abuse experiences so that I may be more effective in my role as a marriage and family therapist. I would like to assist them in their journey of leading abuse free lives by providing adequate therapeutic care as well as education in the format of seminars and workshops. I believe that successful intervention for these women requires that their input be sought in order to gain knowledge of the services that they would find helpful. Equally, learning about the various circumstances that either complicate or ameliorate their experiences of wife abuse would be helpful in designing and implementing treatments plans that are effective and culturally appropriate.

Thirdly, I chose to narrow my focus to examine the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women because I wanted to provide an *emic* or an "insider's" perspective on wife abuse. Most notably, anthropologists who attempt to understand a specific ethnic group according to its own cultural values and norms have used the *emic* perspective (Brislin, 1982, cited in Speight, Myers & Cox, 1991). The strength of an insider's perspective is that it can provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon such as wife abuse by building trust and asking culturally sensitive questions and probing skillfully as

well as appropriately. The limitation of the insider's perspective, on the other hand, is that certain cultural practices such as *izzat* (family honour) may not be probed as fully because of an assumed understanding.

My decision to pursue this research from an ethnocentric perspective, however, has not been an easy one. Historically, many of the Euro-centric and male executed research studies have been rooted in sexist, racist, and supremacist ideologies (Butler, 1995; Dua, 1992; Harstock, 1995; Lorde, 1995). As a consequence, I found myself wrestling with many concerns, fears, and self-doubts as I prepared myself to embark upon this research project. My misgivings, about doing this research from an ethnocentric perspective, revolved around the images that this type of study might cast about my ethnic community and myself as a researcher. Concern about the image of the Canadian Sikhs is understandable since negative stereotypes regarding these individuals are rampant in the reports of the media and the popular press (Jiwani, 1997a). I continually worried that the findings of this research study could be used to further fuel the fire for negative stereotypes and disparaging images of Indo-Canadian Sikh families. Equally, I was afraid that by choosing to examine the abuse experiences of just one ethnic group of women, I could be viewed as propagating the myth that abuse of women is inherent in certain cultural communities. Not to minimize these concerns and fears, in the end it was my genuine concern for Indo-Canadian Sikh women who experience abuse in their marriages that convinced me to press on with this research. I truly believe that in order to address the seriousness of the problem such as wife abuse, concern for women who experience it in their personal lives must take precedence over the concerns about the image of my ethnic community and myself as a researcher.

This research, however, was not aimed at vindicating or vilifying Indo-Canadian Sikhs nor was it an attempt to claim that abuse is culture specific. In choosing to examine the abuse experiences solely of Indo-Canadian Sikh women, I am not insinuating that these women have a "cultural" problem. Rather, I am arguing that the influence of culture in shaping women's abuse experiences is important, and therefore worthy of the attention of researchers who are genuinely concerned with the phenomenon of wife abuse in diverse cultural settings.

The primary purpose of the present study was to describe the personal experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. The study aims to provide insight about this phenomenon from the perspective of the women themselves who have personally experienced it. Ultimately, research based on the abuse experiences of distinct groups of women (e.g., different cultural, religious, socio-economic status, etc.), who make up the Canadian mosaic will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of wife abuse for diverse groups of women within Canada. In view of the emphasis on cultural diversity and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that guarantees equal rights and freedoms to all Canadians, researchers cannot continue to overlook the abuse experience of Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Understanding their abuse experiences is a necessary initial step in the provision of culturally sensitive and equitable health care for these women. However, an exhaustive search of the literature on wife abuse in the Canadian context illustrates that Indo-Canadian Sikh women's abuse experiences have been unexplored by researchers.

Although abuse affects women across many cultures, the cultural and social structures that support men's ability to abuse women are imbued within culturally

specific customs and beliefs (Phillips, 1999). Women's perceptions of abuse are also culturally mediated (Dosanjh et al., 1994;Wiik, 1995; Phillips, 1999). In fact, all human perceptions, according to Saleebey (1994) and Unger (1993), are filtered through the lens of culture since people's accounts of their lives are culturally embedded.

Phillips (1999), focusing on the abuse experiences of American Muslim women, found that the women's interpretations of abuse were filtered through their cultural lenses. She noted that belief in an after-life shaped the ways in which they coped with abuse in their marriages. Many endured their abusive marriages because they believed that by keeping their families intact, they could look forward to rewards in heaven. Phillips went onto say that in Islam women marry to gain religious knowledge, to be able to practice Islam, and to provide good Islamic role models for their children. American Muslim women looked to Islamic teachings to govern their own behaviour and to interpret the behaviour of their abusive husbands. Phillips (1999) concluded that cultural norms regarding marriage were powerful forces that prevented many American Muslim women from leaving their abusive husbands even under the most horrendous circumstances. Her results illustrate that since marriage is the only socially sanctioned intimate male-female relationship in the Muslim culture, it was central to the women's lives. The fear of being alone prevented many of the women in her study from leaving their abusive husbands. A more in-depth discussion of Phillip's research is provided in chapter two.

Similar to American Muslims, Indo-Canadian Sikhs appear to adhere to the values that are generally associated with collectivistic cultures. Collectivists emphasize the notion of self-sacrifice for the sake of the family. They stress the importance of restraint

and harmony, as well as humility, honouring of parents and elders as well as family security (Engler, 1991).

Historically, women's role in India has largely been confined to marriage, the performance of household chores, and bearing and rearing of children (Miller, 1999). Commitment to the family as a way of life is highly valued and motherhood is viewed as an avenue to increased power and status within the family unit. Sons are preferred over daughters and relationships within the family are hierarchical. A more detailed discussion of the family structure for the Sikhs is provided in chapter two. The importance of hierarchical relationships within the family is reinforced by the higher status conferred onto married women over unmarried women, women with children over childless women, women with sons over those without sons, and older women over younger women (Miller, 1999). These cultural dictates, which Indo-Canadian Sikhs seem to be preserving to some degree within their families, are likely to complicate the experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Strong emphasis on keeping their marriages and families intact due to cultural prescriptions such as *izzat* (family honour) could pose serious challenges for these women when they are confronted with abuse in their marriages. Hence, another goal of the present study was to identify the various circumstances (as perceived by the women themselves) that act as barriers or enablers for them as they attempt to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages.

In summary the study sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) What is the *lived experience* of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women?

(2) What circumstances (as perceived by Indo-Canadian Sikh women themselves) act as barriers or enablers for them as they attempt to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages?

The term *lived experience* refers to one's personal experience of oneself, others, and the world (Van Manen, 1990). It is concerned with a person's subjective experience of a particular life event (e.g., wife abuse). A more detailed discussion of this construct and its importance to phenomenological research is provided in chapter three.

In view of the paucity of research on wife abuse from the perspective of Indo-Canadian Sikh women, the present research study is important in that it addresses a huge gap in our understanding of how abuse affects this group of women. This study is also important in the view of the increasing population of Indo-Canadian Sikh families in British Columbia. The Sikh community is by far one of the fastest growing ethno-cultural groups in British Columbia. More than half of the 200,000 Sikhs in Canada live in British Columbia's lower mainland and about 21,000 of them are highly concentrated in Surrey along with another 3,000 in the adjacent town of Delta. Estimates suggest that the Sikh population in the Surrey-Delta region may have increased by as much as 25% over the past few years (Dolphin, 1994; The Globe and Mail, 1992, cited in Lerch, 1996).

The media has labelled the 1996 massacre of the Gakhal family in Vernon, British Columbia as the "second largest massacre in Canadian history", the first being the Montreal massacre in 1989 of 14 women at the Polytechnique in Montreal (Jiwani, 1997a, p. 1). According to Jiwani (1997a), the tragic massacre of the Gakhal and Saran families made front page news due to a number of significant factors including the magnitude and suddenness of the event, the cultural background of the victims, and the

media's obsession with casting this cultural group in negative light. In order to provide balanced and fair reporting, the media must act responsibly and focus on the abuse experiences of the diverse groups of women (regardless of culture, ethnicity, class, or religion) within the Canadian mosaic. The phenomenon of wife abuse for different groups of women needs to move to the forefront of the media as well as popular press given the seriousness of this problem. Wife abuse is an issue that has life and death consequences.

In order to continue with our vision of creating a humane, compassionate, and "just" society in Canada, all Canadians must come together and work collectively toward eliminating violence within the Canadian society. This collective effort must include eradicating violence from the homes of all ethno-cultural groups that make up the Canadian mosaic. To achieve this goal, we must begin by becoming cognizant of how abuse affects women who are differently situated, whether they be aboriginal women, women with disabilities, lesbian women, women of lower-economic status, women of colour, or immigrant and refugee women as well as women of the dominant culture. In this respect, the present research study is significant in the work that is required to increase our knowledge of how abuse affects different groups of women within the Canadian mosaic

Methodological Approach used for the Study

Philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology act as useful guidelines for the present research study. It is the phenomenological approach rather than a particular theory per se which guided this research. Phenomenology as a discipline grew primarily out of Edmund Husserl's work, a philosopher and mathematician, who considered

phenomenology to be a philosophy, an approach and a research method. Spiegelberg (1975) defined phenomenology as a philosophical approach whose primary objective is the direct investigation and description of the phenomenon as consciously experienced, without theories about its causal explanation. This approach to research is inductive and descriptive in its design (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995).

Phenomenological research begins with the *lifeworld* of the person. *Lifeword* refers to the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind (Van Manen, 1990). The *lived experience* of the world of everyday life is the central focus of phenomenological inquiry (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). Phenomenological research aims to elucidate the *lived experience* of a particular life event from the perspective of the person who has personally experienced it. It emphasizes description of the experience from the viewpoint of the person. Spiegelberg (1965) noted that phenomenological approach to research explores subjective phenomenon in the belief that basic truths about reality are rooted in the *lived experience* of the person. It is the *lived experience* that gives meaning to each person's perceptions of a particular phenomenon (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). A person's *lived experience* is influenced by everything internal and external to that person. This construct is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

It is appropriate to use theories as part of phenomenological research to show how the research might enhance the theories or as part of the interpretation (Cohen & Omery, 1994). However, guiding a phenomenological inquiry with a theoretical framework is not consistent with this approach (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Phenomenology affirms the primacy of the lifeworld as a point of departure for research over scientific explanations

of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). Accordingly, the present research study did not rely on any particular theoretical framework to guide its direction and focus. Rather, the participants' viewpoints of the phenomenon of wife abuse provided rich data. The philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology are described further in chapter three.

Phenomenology, based on the ideas of Edmund Husserl, was deemed to be the most appropriate research method for the current study because it purports to explore how a person has lived through and made meaning of a specific phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978; Karlsson, 1993; Van Manen, 1990). It is concerned with the subjective experience of every day life of a person (Giorgi, 1985). Phenomenology has roots in philosophy and was adapted by the social sciences as a method to study human experience (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

Phenomenological research focuses on the experience of the phenomenon (e.g., wife abuse) and tries to trace-out the basic structure of that experience from the viewpoint of the person who has personally experienced it. Phenomenology is not concerned with the facts of the event per se. Instead, it accentuates the meaning of the lived experience of a life event from the perspective of the person. Phenomenological research "… attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 11).

Phenomenological research is closely tied with language (Van Manen, 1990). It attempts to use the language of the person who is describing the experience, and it is within that language that the researcher by reading and re-reading the descriptions of experience derives the meanings of the experience. The researcher works towards developing situational perceptiveness, discernment, and profound understanding of the

phenomenon. The nature of phenomenological writing is to describe and *edify* a phenomenon using participants' anecdotes as a way to deepen the significance of the *lived experience*. Writing also involves re-writing to allow the parts and the whole to come together in such a way that there is great insight and sensitivity to the phenomenon being studied. The aim is to transform *lived experience* into a textual expression that provides a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990).

Several procedural interpretations of phenomenological method including Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985), Spiegelberg (1965, 1975), Streubert (1991) and Van Manen (1984, 1990) are available as guidelines for researchers who wish to pursue research using a phenomenological approach. I chose to use the procedures outlined by Colaizzi (1978) to collect and analyze data for this study. Colaizzi's guidelines, which are explained more fully in chapter three, are based on the premise that researchers can transcend bias, engage with the data free of presuppositions through the device of phenomenological reduction and describe the phenomenon from the perspective of the person who has personally experienced it.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided the background information to demonstrate that research on wife abuse from the perspective of Indo-Canadian Sikh women would be worthwhile. It is my intention that the present study will help foster an understanding of the *lived experience* of wife abuse for this group of women. Ultimately, equitable, culturally sensitive, as well as effective health care and social services for these women need to be rooted in an understanding of their personal experiences of wife abuse.

We cannot afford to continue ignoring the abuse experiences of a growing number of Canadian women, Indo-Canadian Sikh women being just one of the many groups requiring attention in this regard. Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971 introduced the concept of multiculturalism, partly, in the hopes of creating a humane, compassionate and "just" society in Canada. If we as Canadians are to achieve this goal then we must work collectively to eradicate violence from the homes of all Canadians. In the spirit of the new Millennium, all Canadians must begin to have the courage to ask the difficult question of why we continue to tolerate, overlook, legitimize or otherwise dismiss the blatant abuse of people in our Canadian mosaic.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature for the current study. Historical and cultural background of the Sikhs is provided in section one including a description of their homeland, religion, marital practices, family structure, and rules of inheritance. Section two outlines the immigration and settlement patterns of the Sikhs in Canada. Theoretical frameworks that have been proposed in the literature to help explain the causes of wife abuse are examined in section three. Section four discusses the literature on wife abuse. However, given the diversity of research on this topic, review of the literature for the purposes of this study is limited to three main areas: (1) determinants of leaving an abusive relationship, (2) the impact of abuse on women and (3) culturally focused research on wife abuse.

In accordance with the phenomenological perspective a cursory review of the literature was conducted, prior to pursuing the research, in order to verify the need for this study. Phenomenological reduction, which is described more fully in chapter three, was the basis for postponing a more in-depth review of the literature on wife abuse until the data were analyzed (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Phenomenological reduction requires that the researcher continually address personal biases, assumptions, and presuppositions about the phenomenon that is being studied (e.g., wife abuse) and bracket or set them aside in order to obtain "pure" or "true" description of the phenomenon from the vantage-point of the person who has personally experienced it. Although it is extremely difficult for the researcher to separate from his/her personal values and beliefs, the strategy of phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to become cognizant of

his/her presuppositions that may influence the data collection and analysis (Beck, 1994; Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990). Once the data analysis was completed then a more comprehensive review of the literature was carried out and is presented here as well as in chapter five, which discusses the major findings of this study in relation to the extant literature on wife abuse.

Historical Background of the Sikhs

India

The Indus Valley civilization dates back over five thousand years. The golden age of science, literature, and the arts occurred during the fourth and sixth centuries. Arab, Turk, and Afghan Muslims ruled successively from the eighth to eighteen centuries. Prior to the arrival of the British in India, the most significant Muslim dynasty in India was the Mughals who ruled from the early 1500's until the late 1700's (Buchignani et al., 1985). The British gained political control in 1757 and stayed in power until 1947 when India gained its independence. The Punjab, a former province in Northwest India, (now divided into Punjab in India and West Punjab in Pakistan) was the last major part of the Indian subcontinent to fall under British domination. Sikhs of the Punjab became the mainstay of the British Indian army and later served during World War I and II. The Punjab, now a state in Northwest India, is primarily a rural and agricultural area. "About fifty-five percent of the total population of Punjab are Sikhs" (Year Book of India, 1988, cited in Sanghera, 1991, p. 7). Seventy-five percent of the Punjab's population lives in villages and is engaged in agricultural or related occupations. Five percent is in teaching, clerical, or other service occupations. Approximately eighty percent of the village population of the Punjab is Sikh and the remaining twenty percent are Hindu and Muslim.

India is the seventh largest country in the world. It became a parliamentary republic in the British Commonwealth in 1957. Seventy-five percent of its population, which is the second largest in the world, lives in villages. India is a multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-regional country where virtually no uniformity of character, style, food, or dress exists among its 790 million people (Assanand, et al., 1990). Approximately eighteen different languages and sixteen hundred dialects are spoken in the various regions of the country, a fact that makes communication difficult among the people of the same nation (Currimbhoy, 1985).

About 83% of the Indian population are Hindus, 11 percent Muslims and the balance are Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, and Jains. The Mughals, during their dynasty, encouraged conversion to Islam thereby giving an overlay of Islamic religion and culture to a basically Hindu society (Shackle, 1984). Sikh religion emerged during the 16th century (Kaur, 1990; Sidhu, 2000; Zwarun, 1989).

Sikhism

Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism, was born a Hindu of the high-ranking Khattri caste; the concept of caste is explained more fully in a subsequent section of this chapter. Historically, Khattris belonged to a warrior caste. However, over the years, the Khattris had settled into administrative and commercial roles in the Punjab (Shackle, 1984). The Hindu Bhakti movement and the Muslim Sufis, both of whom preached religious tolerance, asceticism, and mysticism, influenced Guru Nanak as a young man. He rejected the validity of a caste system and established means to break down the caste barriers in the Sikh religion (Buchignani et al., 1985). His view of equality was especially appealing to the peasant classes and within few years, Guru

Nanak had attracted many followers. The Mughal Empire, while it had been initially

tolerant of religious renaissance, became increasingly resentful of the growing popularity

of Sikhism. The relationship between the Sikhs and the Muslims deteriorated and

oppression grew with each succeeding generation of the Gurus. In 1740, a powerful

Mughal governor of Lahore instituted a policy of ruthless repression, offering a reward of

each Sikh head brought to him (Jeffrey, 1994).

Four out of the ten Sikh Gurus, including Guru Nanak Dev (1st Guru), Guru Arjan

Dev (5th Guru), Guru Tegh Bahadur (9th Guru) and Guru Gobind Singh (10th Guru), were

the most influential in working towards creating and promoting a distinctive Sikh

identity. From the outset, the successful maintenance of the Sikh identity is to be

attributed to the teachings of Guru Nanak whose early followers were exposed to an

assortment of ideals and blurred identities. The position of the Sikhs was further fortified

by the outstanding quality of Guru Arjan Dev's leadership. It was he who had constructed

the *Harimandir Sahib* (the Golden Temple) at Amritsar which was to become the holiest

shrine of worship for the Sikhs (Shackle, 1984). He also gave Sikhism its scripture

known as the *Adi Granth* which contains hymns written by the first five Gurus as well as

Hindu Bhaktas and Muslim Sufis including Kabir and Farid. Complaints were made to

the Mughal emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) that the *Adi Granth* was derogatory to Islam.

Based on such accusations, Guru Arjan Dev was arrested on the emperor's orders and

executed in Lahore in 1606. His martyrdom marked a turning point in the evolution of the

Sikh identity.

Sikhs, initially, inspired by peaceful ideals, became progressively militant

following the torturous death of Guru Arjan Dev. Hereafter, the use of power and arms in

defense of the faith became an integral part of the Sikh religion. A more significant shift in the Sikh identity was triggered by Guru Tegh Bahadur's horrific death. He was publicly beheaded in New Delhi on November 11, 1675 for refusing to renounce his faith upon orders issued by a Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). After Guru Tegh Bahadur's death, his only son Gobind Singh became the tenth and final Guru of the Sikh religion.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) formalized the change of emphasis from peaceful devotion to warlike confrontation into which the Sikhs had been led by events of history. He inspired the Sikhs with courage and heroism. The changes that he instituted are traditionally associated with an assembly called *Vaisakh*i, which he held at *Anandpu*r in 1699 (Shackle, 1984). On this occasion, he baptized the *Panj Piares* (five beloved ones) by giving them *Amrit* (nectar of immortality). The *Panj Piares* chosen from the different castes were given the surname Singh to symbolize equality bestowed by the teachings of Sikhism. All baptized Sikhs are required to wear the five *Kakkas*. These include the *kangha* (a wooden comb for the hair that symbolizes cleanliness), *kes* (unshorn hair that is a mark of dedication), *kara* (an iron bracelet symbolizing God's unending love), *kirpan* (a sword to defend the faith) and *kacha* (short breeches that is "your reminder that you are to give yourself only to your wife or husband", Zwarun, 1989, p. 3). The five K's have become the symbols of the Sikh faith. The *Panj Piares* were pronounced as the nucleus of a new Sikh order, which came to be known as the *Khalsa* (brotherhood of the pure).

The inauguration of the Sikh *Khalsa* led to a phenomenal transformation of the Sikh identity. From here on in, it was the bearded and turbaned Sikhs of the new order

who were to be regarded as the guardians of the Sikh orthodoxy. The distinction between the *amrit-dhari* Sikhs (baptized Sikhs), *kesh-dhari* Sikhs (those who keep unshorn hair but are not baptized) and *sahaj-dhari* Sikhs (those who subscribe to the teachings of Sikhism but cut their hair) remains a contentious issue among contemporary Sikhs both in the Punjab and other parts of the world. Sikhs have continued to fight to secure and preserve their identity (Kaur, 1990). Their resilience to persevere in their struggle has been stimulated by their constant fear of re-absorption into the vast Hindu majority.

Sikhs consider Punjab their homeland and Amritsar their holy city (Mangalam, 1986). Although they constitute about two percent of the entire Indian population, the Sikhs have continued to play an important role in the economic and political sectors of Indian society. Hallmark of Sikhism is the belief in equality of the sexes. Sikh theology does not prescribe to the caste system, which is a remnant of the Hindu religion. In practice, the caste system continues to prevail among the Sikhs living in India as well as those living in other parts of the world including the United Kingdom, United States of America and Canada (Sanghera, 1991).

Caste System

A *caste* system is a hierarchical social structure in which each caste is irrevocable. A person is born into a specific caste. Each *caste* has its social rules and restrictions, including taboo against marrying out of one's *caste* and rules about food preparation. The *caste* system still exists in the Indian society in spite of the formal elimination of *castes* by the Indian government. Inter-*caste* marriages are disapproved of among Indian people including the Sikhs, even though equality is a strong principle of Sikhism. The pressure to marry within one's own *caste* is beginning to create problems for the Sikhs in Canada

as the second generation of Indo-Canadian Sikh men and women are starting to assert some degree of control over choosing their own marriage partners including demanding the right to marry non Sikhs (Sanghera, 1991; Tee, 1996). "Most of the B.C. Sikhs are Jats, traditionally a landowning, cultivator caste" (Ames & Inglis, 1976, p. 79). Some are Rajput Sikhs; also a landowning *caste* and a small number of Sikhs in British Columbia are members of other *castes*. The Jats consider themselves to be the highest in the hierarchy of *castes* although other groups such as the Rajputs dispute this claim.

Practices of Mate Selection for the Sikhs

The caste system, while fiercely repudiated by the Sikh Gurus, continues to prevail among the Sikhs. This is nowhere more evident than in the rules of mate selection. The *Anand Marriage Act* (based on the scriptural authority) and the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (based on the social codes of conduct drawn up by contemporaries of the Gurus) provide rules and regulations for a Sikh marriage. The *Sikh Rahit Maryada* dictates that no consideration is to be given to caste or *gotra* (bloodlines) of the person in choosing a marriage partner (Jyoti, 1983). The *Anand Marriage Act* specifies that a person related to each other within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity and affinity is not to be accepted as a marriage partner.

In reality, however, rules of caste endogamy (marrying within the caste), village exogamy (marrying someone outside of the village) and gotra exogamy (marrying someone outside of blood relations) are followed by the Sikhs in mate selection. Families of the same caste (e.g., *Jat* which refers to farmers and landowners) living in the same village are considered to be descendents of the same ancestor. Such localized descent groups are arranged into wider *gotras* that incorporate a number of lineages of the same

caste in other villages. Members of a particular *gotra* are regarded as "brothers" and "sisters" and cannot marry each other. In Northern India, marriage is also forbidden with members of the individual's father's father's, father's mother's, mother's father's and mother's mother's *gotras*. "These regulations ensure that marriage alliances are contracted outside the village and over a fairly wide geographical area and that a clear distinction is maintained between those to whom a family is linked by descent on the one hand and by marriage on the other" (Ballard, 1978, p. 183). Sikhs in Canada, many of whom are *Jats*, continue to follow these rules in mate selection (Ames & Inglis, 1976; Assanand et al., 1990).

Sikh Marriage Ceremony

Sikh marriage "is a sacred covenant of life long companionship sealed in the presence of the *Guru Granth Sahib* [Sikh scripture]. Both partners in marriage have equal status and are expected to move in harmony" (Singh, 1988, p. 8). For the Sikhs, marriage is considered to be forever and divorce rate is very low. In India, the dowry system still exists, even though the Indian government outlawed it and established the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961. Marriages are fundamentally fulfilling an economic function in that there is a significant transfer of resources between families (Jain, 1992, cited in Sheel, 1999; Seneviratne & Currie, 1994). Kapur (1973) (cited in Jyoti, 1983) found that among the professionally employed women in contemporary Punjab, the number of women who continue to believe that marriage is a sacrament solemnized primarily for the fulfillment of one's religious and social duty for the good of the family is decreasing. Instead, marriage, in India among the educated elite, is beginning to be viewed as a social

contract that is entered into primarily for the good of the individual and for his/her personal happiness and satisfaction.

The Sikh marriage ceremony can be divided into three distinct stages including the *magni* or *kurmai* (engagement), the *biah* (the wedding ceremony) and the *muklava* (change of residence and consummation of marriage). The *magni* is a social gathering whereby a few relatives of the groom are invited to the bride's home by her parents. The *biah* (the actual wedding ceremony) begins with the *milni* (the ritual meeting of the bride's and groom's relatives). Firstly, it is the father of the bride who meets and makes a gift to the father of the groom. Next, it is the bride's paternal grandfather who performs the same ritual with the groom's paternal grandfather. Then it is the turn of the respective father's elder brothers and younger brothers, etc. (Singh, 1988).

After the *milni*, the wedding party (known as the *barat*, which consists of groom's relatives) is served a light meal at the Sikh temple. The Sikh priest (known as the *granthi*) performs the actual marriage ceremony. The couple takes four marriage vows (*lavans*). The *lavans*, composed by the fourth Guru, symbolize a spiritual wedding to God (Singh, 1988). The first *lavan* is read by the *granthi* from the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Sikh scripture) and then sung by the *ragis* as the couple walks around the *Guru Granth Sahib* in a clock-wise position with the groom leading the bride. In a similar fashion, the couple completes the second, third, and fourth *lavan*. The first *lavan* is concerned with conquering fear, the second deals with love, the third relates to restraint and the fourth pertains to harmony.

The final phase of the marriage ritual is known as the *muklava*. Historically, the time span between the wedding day and the *muklava* ranged anywhere from five to ten years. Presently, however, the wedding ceremony and *muklava* occur on the same day.

The *muklava* refers to the ceremony whereby the bride changes place of residence from that of her parents' home to that of her husband's parents' home.

Sikhs in Canada, for the most part, are continuing to follow the customs and traditions of the marriage ceremony practiced by their ancestors in India. Even in cases where there is an inter-religious marriage, Indo-Canadian Sikh parents prefer to follow the rules of a Sikh marriage ceremony. Anecdotally, I have learned that in some cases where the second-generation Indo-Canadian Sikhs have opted to marry outside of their religion, they are choosing to have two separate wedding ceremonies. One wedding is based on the traditions of the Sikh marriage ceremony and the other on the rules of the religion of the person's marriage partner.

Residential Patterns

Patrilocal rule of residence (living with the husband's family) and *patrilineal* rule of descent (inheritance from the father's bloodline) are found among the Sikhs in India as well as other parts of the world (Sanghera, 1991). In Punjab, it is quite common for immediate relatives to live in houses adjacent to one another. Joint cooking arrangements symbolize the unity of a Punjabi household. *Joint-family* refers to a group of family members living in a single household, acting as a single economic and social unit, which might potentially be divided into smaller elementary families. *Collateral joint-family* signifies that there are two or more married couples of the same generation living together in one household (e.g., two or more brothers and their families living together). *Lineal joint-family* living arrangement denotes that there are two or more married couples of different generations (generally a man, his wife, and their sons and their sons' wives) living together in the same household (Hershman, 1981).

The *collateral joint-family* living arrangement, according to Hershman (1981), is a transitory form, which can be terminated by a conscious decision of its members to separate; whereas the *lineal joint-family* is more stable family form terminated typically by the death of some of its members. The interpersonal relationships of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, husband's unmarried sisters and his wife, as well as older brother's wife and younger brother's wife are potentially conflictual. Conflicts between the two sisters-in-law (e.g., the older brother's wife and younger brother's wife) can sometimes cause the *joint family* to split up and live as two separate families.

Kinship and Kin Relations

In Punjab, patrilineal decent and clan exogamy are inflexible principles, which do not evolve over time to accommodate changing circumstances (Hershman, 1981). For example, a daughter's son and his descendents if they were to move to the village of the maternal grandparents would not be assimilated into the maternal grandfather's family group. Rather, they would continue to retain their own separate patrilineal clan identity based on their father's bloodline.

Fictive kinship ties are extended to people living in the same village. A woman's relationships towards her husband's relatives are organized according to two basic stereotypes of social behaviour, *avoidance and joking* (Hershman, 1981). She has *avoidance* relationships with all of her husband's senior kinsmen especially her father-in-law (*sauhra*). She adopts *purdah* (veil) in the presence of her husband's older brothers as well as her father-in-law. As much as possible, she tries to avoid interactions with these men.

A woman has *joking* relationships with her husband's younger brothers and her husband's younger sister's husband. She does not veil her face in the presence of these men and jokes with them freely. Traditionally, it was rare for a woman's mother to visit her daughter's husband's home or village. Consequently, the two mothers-in-law did not meet one another throughout their lives. The relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law has in recent years changed from one of *avoidance* to one of *joking* (Hershman, 1981).

Within a particular village in India, all men and women of the same generation are considered to be "brothers" and "sisters" and as such have some of the same moral obligations and ritual duties of biological brothers and sisters. A woman adopts *purdah* (veils her face) not only in the presence of her husband's older kinsmen but also in the presence of all men senior of her husband in the village.

Family Solidarity and Family Rituals

Between members of the same village there can be no marriage and therefore the pattern of gift giving and relationships is that of reciprocity and egalitarianism (Hershman, 1981). Conversely, there are ritually prescribed gifts that are to be made by relatives of the bride to the relatives of the groom. The pattern of relationships between the in-laws is that of hierarchy and continual gift giving by the bride's family and the total financial effect of such gifts accounts for a considerable proportion of the amount earned and produced by any household. Such relationships are important in challenging and redistributing wealth but they do not ultimately affect directly the ownership of the means of production. A brother continues to be guardian of his sister even after her marriage. The mother's brother is considered to be the guardian of his sister's children. In

the event that the husband divorces his wife, she can generally return with her children to her brother's household. In such cases, her children would be eligible to inherit equally with her brother's children. The mother's brother continues to give gifts to the children.

Child Rearing Attitudes and Child Socialization

For the birth of her first child, a woman usually returns to her parent's home. If the child is a boy then there is much rejoicing and the husband's parents send gifts to the daughter-in-law including sweets to be distributed to her family members and other people in the village (Hershman, 1981). However, if the child is a girl there is no rejoicing or distribution of gifts. From her earliest days, a woman, in the Indian culture, is taught that her most significant roles in life are those of wife and mother (Jyoti, 1983; Miller, 1999). In fact, if a woman is unable to bear children then she can be divorced by her husband and is often sent back to her father's household. Effectively, it is motherhood that confers the essential qualities that allow a woman to be fully incorporated into her husband's descent group (Hershman, 1981). Children are typically socialized and disciplined by their paternal grandparents.

From infancy, the preparation of the girl-child is for marriage and motherhood. She grows up with the knowledge that her place in her family is not only inferior to her brothers, but also transitory, as she will leave her family when she joins with and accommodates to her husband's family. An Indian woman's identity is considered to crystallize when she enters motherhood. Bearing children, especially sons, empowers her. Her relationship with her son, therefore, becomes layered with significance and evolves into a very complex dynamic. The entrance of a son's wife into the family can pose a serious threat to the emotionally intense mother-son attachment and may give rise to

rivalry between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. Love marriages are potentially disastrous for the mother because the wife then holds the power. When the wife cultivates the love and support of her husband, the joint family can disintegrate if the wife demands to live apart from her in-laws (Gupta, 1976).

Women "...are considered to bear the honour of the family and traditional society is very protective of them" (Assanand et al., 1990, p. 151). The family *izzat* or honour lies heavily with the purity of the daughter before marriage. The covert structural power of women exists in their management of the internal affairs of the family, their responsibility for the growth and development of the family and maintaining family *izzat*. "There is no doubt that the woman who accepts this role and plays it out to perfection, the ideal Indian wife and mother, is revered and loved" (Goldstein, 1972, p. 10). It is a woman's ability to preserve family honour that determines the social position of the family (Roland, 1988). The cultural dictate of family *izzat* is being maintained where possible among Indo-Canadian Sikhs (Lerch, 1996; Sanghera, 1991; Tee, 1996).

Inheritance and Descent

By law, all children in the Indian society are supposed to inherit equally. In reality, however, only sons and unmarried daughters share in the estate. Generally, a son who has been provided with a farm during his father's lifetime makes no claim to the estate. Similarly, sons who have left home and have established themselves elsewhere make no claims to the estate (Jayawardena, 1983). Likewise, the dowry, which has been perceived by some authors (e.g., Goody, 1975, cited in Bhachu, 1981) as a pre-mortem inheritance, prevents a married daughter from making a claim to the estate.

The successor of the ownership of the farm takes control over all assets in recognition of his assumptions of responsibility for those who are still members of the household. Typically, the eldest son succeeds to the ownership of the farm but it is equally recognized that the father's choice is free in this regard. "A variety of circumstances may lead him to designate another son as his successor" (Jayawardena, 1983, p.169). For the Sikhs, descent is patrilineal, which means that son(s) inherit in preference to all others. If there are no sons then a widow is entitled only to maintenance and unmarried daughters are also entitled to maintenance and their marriage expenses. The estate of the deceased is divided into as many shares as the number of sons and the share of each son is then divided into as many shares as the number of his sons (Punjab Customary Law, 1918, pp. 33-35, cited in Hershman, 1991).

Immigration and Settlement Patterns of the Sikhs in Canada

An important factor which contributed to the immigration from India to Canada for the Sikhs was the turbulent history of Punjab produced by the sequential invasions by the Aryans, Persians, Greeks, Bactrians, Sythians, Huns, Mughals and eventually the British. In 1897, a small detachment of Sikh soldiers who had attended Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebration in London, England returned to India via Vancouver. Thereafter, small numbers of Sikhs began to immigrate to Canada in search of employment. They sent favourable reports to their families and friends in India. At about the same time, the Canadian Pacific Railway Steamship Company was promoting emigration to Canada. These factors resulted in a sudden increase in the number of Indian immigrants arriving in British Columbia during the early 1900s. The trickles that began in the early 1900s soon became a torrent, bringing almost 3,000 Sikhs to Canada in 1907

(Buchignani et al., 1985). By 1908, roughly 5,200 South Asians were residing in Victoria or Vancouver; a large majority of them were young men who had made the long trip to Canada without their wives and children (Paranjpe, 1986). Approximately eighty-five percent of the early settlers were Sikhs. The reaction to these new immigrants in B.C. was hostile, with the press and politicians denouncing them as a burden, destructive to the British way of life and as breeders of disease (Buchignani et al., 1985).

As economic depression worsened, anti-Asian sentiments increased and Indians, as well as Chinese and Japanese, became targets of racist hostilities. In 1907, the federal and provincial governments responded to the public outcry against these "undesirable" Indian immigrants with policies which were racist (Buchignani, 1977). The British Columbia legislature disfranchised Indians who were residing in the province and the federal government decided to terminate Indian immigration.

In 1908 an Order-in-Council, known as P.C. 27, was passed to restrict immigration from India to Canada (Sampat-Mehta, 1984). The Canadian government introduced the continuous journey clause that required the trip from the country of origin to be one of a continuous voyage with no stops at other ports en route. This legislation essentially banned any subsequent immigration of Sikhs including the wives and children of men who were already in Canada because no such route existed from India (Buchignani, 1980). The head tax, which stipulated that every Asian immigrant, had to be in possession of two hundred dollars upon landing also terminated immigration from India. Several obstacles including the vicissitudes of Canadian immigration policy and the prejudicial attitudes of Canadians prevented the pioneer Sikhs from establishing their families in Canada until after World War II.

The ban on Indian immigration made it impossible for the pioneer Sikhs to have a normal family life. Moreover, they were isolated from the dominant culture by the attitude of the Canadian society (Johnston, 1984). Because of the harsh treatment that they received from the Canadian government, many pioneer Sikhs crossed the border into the United States and made their way south through the states of Washington and Oregon to the agricultural valleys of California. Due to this massive exit, the South Asian population in British Columbia decreased to 2292 by 1911 (Mehfil, 1995).

Pioneer Sikhs, nonetheless, continued to put pressure on the Canadian government to remove the ban on Indian immigration. They challenged the Canadian immigration laws until about 1914 when a large number of Sikhs were denied entry into Canada what became known as the *Komagata Maru* incident. Thereafter, immigration from India was essentially non-existent until the early 1950s.

When India gained independence in August 1947, the exclusionary ban on Indian immigration began to be lifted and franchise for South Asians in Canada was restored. In 1951, Canada signed a special agreement with the government of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka which stipulated that 150 Indians, 100 Pakistanis and 50 Sri Lankins would be admitted into Canada on an annual basis (Buchignani et al., 1985; Chandrasekhar, 1986). The quota for Indian immigration had doubled by 1958 (Paranjpe, 1986).

In 1967, the Canadian government introduced an immigration regulation known as the point system. According to this new system, independent applicants are ranked based on various criteria such as education, skill, and personal resources. Applicants have to score 50 out of 100 points in order to be admitted into Canada (Wood, 1983). The most

striking feature of the 1967 immigration act was that it eliminated racial, national, and ethnic restrictions for immigrants (D'Costa, 1986). As racist immigration restrictions were dismantled, Indian immigration increased dramatically and by 1971, when the Canadian multicultural policy was established, Indian population in Canada rose from a few thousand to 67,000 (Buchignani, 1989). Between 1967 and 1975, close to 100,000 South Asians had settled in Canada. In these eight years, more South Asians arrived in the country than in any comparable period in the Canadian history (Mehfil, 1995).

There have been two distinct periods of Indian immigration to Canada that can be divided into pre and post World War II (Chadney, 1985). The first wave, taking place between 1904 and 1944, were primarily labourers who found work in the sawmills of British Columbia. Not only were the early immigrants uneducated labourers, but they were also mostly Sikhs from the rural regions of Punjab in India. Many of these pioneers settled in Vancouver and Victoria. The second wave of immigrants, which began in the early 1970s, came from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. These Indian immigrants were highly educated who responded to Canada's need for professionals in the fields of medicine, engineering, and higher education (Sheth & Handa, 1993, cited in Tee, 1996). Although there are apparent similarities in racial features, South Asians in Canada are a heterogeneous group in terms of religion, language, food, dress as well as other traditions and values.

Canada has come a long way from the days when Sir Richard McBride, the premier of B.C., in 1914, advocated "the necessity of keeping [Canada] a white man's country" (Chandrasekhar, 1986, p. 20). Canada is now a multi-cultural society, with one out of every two immigrants coming from the Third World countries (Wood, 1983). The

Sikhs from the Punjab are the largest Indian group, representing over one-half of all South Asians in Canada (Assanand et al., 1990). Over the years, South Asian immigrants have settled in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Although British Columbia was a favourite province of destination among the first wave of Indian immigrants, Ontario now has the largest population of South Asian immigrants (Ram, 1985).

According to the 1991 Census, there are approximately 420,295 persons of South Asian origins residing in Canada. In British Columbia, there are about 103,545 persons of South Asian origin. The Sikh community is by far the fastest growing ethno-cultural groups in British Columbia (Dolphin, 1994). The majority of the South Asians in Canada are first generation, except for South Asians in British Columbia where a growing number of second and third generation Indo-Canadian Sikhs are establishing themselves in various occupations and professions (Mehfil, 1995). Most of the Sikhs in B.C. have come to Canada through sponsorship by relatives. The largest Sikh population in Canada is in B.C.'s Lower Mainland. Large numbers of Sikhs have also settled in Victoria, Duncan, and Nanaimo (Assanand et al., 1990).

Pioneer Sikhs in Canada were led to define the course of their settlement under very harsh circumstances. Lack of family support also affected their adaptation to Canadian society. The hostile response they received from the host society made them extremely conscious of their subordinate status in British Columbia. They became convinced that, without a strong community organization and unity, their survival in this new environment would be jeopardized. Consequently, they have continued to emphasize the importance of a stable social structure to ensure the preservation of their identity,

values and social customs. Their initial experience also helped to reinforce their belief in the superiority of their traditional joint-family structure and in the necessity of retaining it, either in its original form or in its close approximation (Wakil, Siddique & Wakil, 1981).

Indo-Canadian Sikhs, although they have adopted modern values regarding education and occupation, have not relinquished their traditional values about marriage and family life. According to Redway, in 1984, about 38% of all Indo-Canadian families in British Columbia lived as joint-families. Research conducted by India Mahila Association, *Assessment of Needs and Services to South Asian Women in the Lower Mainland,* in 1993 found that 70% of the women who participated in the study preferred living in a nuclear family while the remaining 30% thought that a joint-family situation was better. The movement in orientation from joint to nuclear family results in the loss of some emotional support, particularly from the grandparents (Koehn, 1993). "Sikhs frequently argue that young people today, especially the Canada-born, are rebellious. Youth themselves indicate that they find it increasingly difficult to live up to the traditional family ideals"(Ames & Inglis, 1976, p.83). "The ideal of showing obedience and respect to elders is still maintained by both the Canada-born and India-born youth, although the former are finding it increasingly difficult to conform to the dictates of parents whom they may regard as 'backward' or 'repressive'"(Ames & Inglis, 1976, p. 87).

In Canada, during the 1960's parents or older relatives arranged almost all marriages for their children. Within the last two decades, however, the Indo-Canadian ideal of the arranged marriage has and is still undergoing change. An adaptation of the

arranged marriage is "guided" or "assisted" marriage (Wakil et al., 1981). The parents select suitable persons for consideration by the marriageable person and the prospective partners are able to meet, with the option of refusing if they feel they are incompatible. Separation and divorce are rare within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, as there is strong pressure from the families to stay together. This can be problematic when there are issues of abuse. By migrating, the Indo-Canadian Sikh family is uprooted from a society characterized by kinship ties, interdependence, as well as respect for elders, and moves into a dominant culture that values independence and individualism (Ashcraft, 1986; Lerch, 1996; Naidoo & Davis, 1988; Tee, 1996; Wakil et al., 1981). The clash of values regarding marriage and family life is proving to be difficult for some second-generation Indo-Canadian Sikh men and women (Hundial, 2000; Lerch, 1996; Sanghera, 1991; Singh, 1995a; 1995b).

The *caste* system is still important in selecting a marriage partner and the dowry system also plays a critical role in the marital practices of the Indo-Canadian Sikhs. Dating is usually not allowed. Vaidyanathan and Naidoo (1987) noted that while Indo-Canadian parents are moving toward a more liberal attitude regarding various socio-cultural aspects of their children's acculturation, they continue to resist certain potential changes. Out of all the socializing practices found in Western society, dating and the association of adolescent boys and girls are the most controversial for Indo-Canadian parents (Kurian & Ghosh, 1983). The second generation of Indo-Canadian Sikhs is caught between two cultures. Most of them have been educated in Canadian schools and the socialization within the school system appears to have had a significant impact on their relationships within the home. The various changes in values are creating a clash of

traditions (Ashcraft, 1986), throwing families into crisis, including domestic violence, and a sense of alienation and displacement among the second generation Indo-Canadian Sikhs (Tee, 1996).

Having discussed the historical, religious, and cultural background of the Sikhs, which provides a socio-cultural context for understanding the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women, I now turn to the review of the literature on wife abuse. The following section provides a discussion of three major theoretical frameworks that have been proposed in the literature to help explain the causes of wife abuse.

Theoretical Perspectives of Wife Abuse

Society's response to wife abuse has been partially determined by the manner in which violence against women has been conceptualized (Varcoe, 1997). The roots and causes of wife abuse continue to be vehemently debated amongst various authors. Feminist scholars argue that the existing power imbalance between men and women in their intimate relationships need to be addressed in order to fully understand the dynamics of violence against women (Yllo, 1993). Working independently, theorists from different disciplines have developed three major theoretical frameworks including psychological, sociological, and feminist perspectives (Bograd, 1988; Dutton, 1995; Yllo, 1993). These distinct viewpoints have resulted in contradictory explanations of wife abuse.

Psychological Perspective

Initial attempts to explain wife abuse were focused on the psychopathology of the victim and the perpetrator (Dutton, 1995). This emphasis gave rise to diagnostic labels such as the sadistic, aggressive male and the masochistic, passive female. A masochistic

woman was described as selfless, dependent, and passive (Carter, 1997). Freud, using single case studies from his clinical practice, argued that an abused woman had an unconscious wish to be abused. He promulgated images such as "...the seductive daughter, the nagging wife, and the lying hysteric" (Pleck, 1987, p. 146). Following in Freud's footsteps, many of the earlier studies sought to identify specific personality traits that predispose women to abuse. Earlier clinical research findings suggested that women who experienced abuse in their marriages were "...masochistic (Shainess, 1984) or at least wanted or deserved the abuse because of some internal personality defect or willful provocative behavior (Snell, Rosenwald, & Robey, 1964)" (Walker, 1993, p. 145).

More recent research, however, has failed to show that women who experience abuse have distinct psychological characteristics thereby challenging the notions of predisposition. Instead, it has been speculated that various traits and personality profiles of women who have experienced abuse appear to be consequences rather than antecedents of abuse (Koss, Goodman, Browne, Fitzgerald, Keita & Russon, 1994; Stark & Flitcraft, 1996; Walker, 1993).

Many of the psychological explanations have been predicated on the assumption that the victims and perpetrators of abuse are the products of abnormal or dysfunctional families. Social learning theory is based on the premise that a person who has witnessed or experienced abuse is likely to either perpetrate abusive behaviour or be victimized. It focuses on observational learning, modelling, and reinforcement. According to this theory, an individual is likely to exhibit abusive behaviour particularly if it brings about positive results. Crowell and Burgess (1996) contend that male violence against women continues to prevail, partly, because it brings positive reinforcement for the perpetrator:

"it releases tension, leaves the perpetrator feeling better, often achieves its ends by cutting off arguments and is rarely associated with punishment for the perpetrator" (p. 60). Several authors have noted a direct connection between exposure to abuse as a child and use of violence (Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987). Some studies have documented that men who grow up in violent homes are more likely to use violence in their marriages and women who have witnessed their mothers' abuse are less likely to leave an abusive relationship (Gelles, 1976; Straus et al., 1980).

Lenore Walker (1979) introduced the theory of learned helplessness. It is based on the assumption that a cycle of violence has three distinct phases. The first of these is known as the *tension building stage*. During this stage, a gradual escalation of tension occurs and may include incidents of abuse such as name-calling. The man's verbal and physical attacks on the woman become exceedingly severe. Denial and rationalization for the abusive incidents also characterize this phase. The second phase is referred to as the *acute stage*. During the *acute stage*, major violent acts take place and a woman faces the greatest risk of serious injury. The third phase is known as the *honeymoon stage*. During this phase, the man is remorseful and often pleads for forgiveness, promising that he will not hurt her again. He expresses kindness and affection towards her; consequently, she is willing to trust that the abuse will not occur again. According to Walker (1979; 1984; 1993), the honeymoon phase becomes shorter and shorter and the abuse becomes more frequent and severe over time. Walker (1984) speculated that after experiencing repeated cycles of violence, a woman might become convinced that attempts to leave the abusive relationship are futile. She may feel that there is no way to control or stop the abuse. Walker (1993) refers to this psychological change as learned helplessness. She argues

that it "...does not mean [that women] learn to behave in a helpless way" (Walker, 1993, p. 135). Rather, *"learned helplessness* describes the process by which organisms learn that they cannot predict whether what they do will result in a particular outcome (Seligman, 1975)" (Walker, 1993, p. 135). She concludes that many women, who have endured abuse in their marriages, experience a sense of helplessness and it often leads to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. Downs (1996) criticized Walker's theory on the ground that "learned helplessness reduces battered women to the status of dogs...[and] denies the very integrity and potential agency that women wish to attain" (p. 155).

In addition to focusing on the psychopathology of the victim, theorists working from a psychological framework have also examined the psychopathology of the perpetrator. Some proclaim that a perpetrator exhibits behaviours similar to persons suffering from personality disorders (Tifft, 1993). Abusive men have been described as unusual, atypical, and pathological (Dutton, 1995). While there is no unitary profile of a man who abuses his wife (Gondolf, 1988), some general characteristics have been identified. Studies have documented that "...men who batter are often more hostile than nonbatterers (Bersani, Chen, Pendleton, & Denton, 1992; Gondolf, 1988; Maiuro, Cahn, Vitaliano, Wagner, & Zegree, 1988), suffer from low self-esteem (Gondolf, 1988), and exhibit a high need for control ... (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986)" (Hampton, Vandergriff-Avery, & Kim, 1999, p. 47). Abusive men are also described as extremely jealous (Dutton, 1995) and more sexually aggressive toward their wives compared with non-abusive men (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1986). They tend to avoid responsibility for the abuse and place the blame on their wives' behaviour or personality which they believe

pushed them to their limit of personal control (Hampton et al., 1999). The problem with the psychopathology model is that it does not explain which personality traits are associated with wife abuse. In addition, by focusing on mental illness as a cause of violence, it ignores the fact that many men who are abusive are not considered to be mentally ill (Wallace, 2002).

Dobash and Dobash (1992) criticize the psychological theories on the grounds that they regard wife abuse as an individual problem suffered by deviants needing psychiatric care rather than as a social problem in need of general solutions. They argue that no effective remedy for wife abuse, a social problem, can be premised exclusively on the individual's psychopathology. Similarly, Bograd (1988) argues that by focusing on the psychopathology of individuals, this viewpoint excuses men, implicates women and concludes that the differences between abused and non-abused women are the causes rather than the consequences of abuse. Another criticism of psychological theories is that they do not explain why all people who have witnessed and/or experienced abuse do not exhibit violent behaviour.

While the eagerness on the part of researchers to document psychopathology of women who have experienced abuse has recently come under attack, the legacy of blaming the victim remains. Jones (1994) and Bograd (1988) noted that women who remain in their abusive relationships continue to be described as passive, dependent, masochistic, placating, helpless, and potentially responsible for as well as deserving of the abuse. The main criticism of the psychological perspective is that it focuses on the weaknesses rather than strengths of women who have been abused in their marriages.

Sociological Perspective

Sociological perspective explains violence in terms of external stresses and breakdown of the family. It assumes that various structures and norms cause and legitimize abuse within the family unit (Gosselin, 2000). Researchers, working from a sociological perspective, have identified several variables that are related to abuse including age, sex, and socioeconomic status. Studies have shown that rates of abuse (for both the perpetrator and the victim) are highest for those between the ages of 18 and 30 years (Bergman, 1992; Gelles & Straus, 1988; Arias, Samios, & O'Leary, 1987; Wolfner & Gelles, 1993).

With regard to the sex of the perpetrator, the data is highly contradictory and controversial. Some scholars advocate that men and women are equally abusive in their intimate relationships. Stark and McEvoy (1970) found that the number of cases where the wife hit her husband were essentially equal to those where the husband hit his wife. Similarly, Straus and Gelles (1986) concluded that wives and husbands were almost equal in their use of violence. The credibility of these findings is somewhat suspect because the authors of these two studies did not distinguish between defensive and offensive violence. Nonetheless, Straus (1993) continues to support the notion that women initiate and carry out assaults on their partners at approximately the same rate as men perpetrate attacks against their intimate partners. He, however, points out that due to the greater force used by men; women are more likely to suffer serious injuries. "Data on injury pattern confirm that it is women, not men, who sustain injuries in conflicts between males and females in intimate relationships" (Kurz, 1993, p. 90).

Smith (1989) in reviewing the literature on violence surmised that "...with the exception of the work of Straus [and his associates] most research testifies to the fact that in overwhelming majority of cases, domestic violence is perpetrated by men against women" (p. 15). More recent studies have also documented that men are more likely to be the perpetrators rather than victims of severe abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992).

In terms of socioeconomic status, studies indicate that abuse is more common among those who are poor, unemployed, and have low-prestige jobs (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Pelton, 1978; Wolfner & Gelles, 1993). Conversely, it can be argued that the lower socioeconomic groups are over-represented in the literature because they are under greater public scrutiny (e.g., due to their increased use of welfare as well as legal, medical, and social services). Smith (1989) pointed out "...that middle class families are less willing to draw outsiders' attention to the problem they experience and make more use of private medical care and other resources" (p. 15).

Results of a recent national survey illustrate that for rates of domestic abuse there is "...no variation by victims' educational level" (Statistics Canada, 1999, p. 7). However, women with the lowest household income (e.g., under $15,000) are at a higher risk of abuse compared with those who have higher incomes (e.g., over $15,000) (Statistics Canada, 1999). Johnson (1995) argues that while stress resulting from poverty, inequality and various forms of deprivation may be contributory factors in domestic violence, only a small proportion of those who experience such conditions behave violently towards their partners, and many who are abusive are neither poor nor deprived. The correlation between socioeconomic status and abuse appears to be somewhat

spurious because individuals who have higher personal incomes may seek various ways to conceal the abuse from the public view.

Systems theory evolved out of the sociological framework and is based on the assumption that violence between family members has many causes (Straus, 1973; Giles-Sims, 1983). It implies that there is a chain of events such that the actions and reactions amongst family members represent links in a chain. Abuse, according to the systems theory, functions to maintain the system or to reestablish equilibrium (Bograd, 1992). Systems theory has been critiqued for its narrow focus on the family microsystem and its implication that a woman encountering abuse is a naïve collaborator. Inferring her complicity in the abuse echoes the prevailing provocation myth.

Therapists, working from a systems standpoint generally adopt a stance of neutrality towards the perpetrator and the victim of abuse. This position of neutrality has been discouraged on the grounds that it does not provide a woman with a sense of validation, support, and empowerment. Joint family therapy, for cases involving abuse, has been criticized by Bograd (1984), who contends that such work colludes with the abuser and prohibits the woman from speaking freely. It also conveys that abuse is a joint problem thereby reinforcing the myth that a woman is partially responsible for the abuse.

Feminist Perspectives

In the literature there appears to be no unified feminist theory regarding wife abuse (Bograd, 1988). Instead, a number of different perspectives have been described (Dobash & Dobash, 1979a; Hansen & Harway, 1997; Yllo, 1993). Among them are the radical feminist perspective and that of the social feminism. Although feminists and feminist theories vary dramatically, collectively, what unifies them is a concern for the

experiences lived by women and how feminist work can improve the services delivered to victims and survivors of wife abuse.

The radical feminist perspective regards patriarchy to be the primary cause of wife abuse. Working from this standpoint, feminists do not regard patriarchy as a discrete and measurable variable like age, sex, or socioeconomic status. Rather, they argue that patriarchy, the system of male power in society, is a very complex and multidimensional variable. This perspective assumes that violence is intrinsic in the relationship between men and women and manifests itself in sexuality as well as in the social and political institutions of society (Coomaraswamy, 1995). In its most extreme form, this perspective holds that all men will be abusive (MacKinnon, 1993). Studies informed by this perspective have found a direct link between men who abuse their wives and non-egalitarian sex-role attitudes (Smith, 1990; Stith & Farley, 1993). Several scholars have also noted higher levels of wife abuse among couples who engaged in husband-dominate decision-making styles (Straus et al., 1980).

Socialist feminism regards violence to be a vital part of the social and economic forces that operate in society. According to this perspective, the struggle is not against men and male domination alone but against systems of exploitation that disempower women. It assumes that economic exploitation is the primary trigger of wife abuse. The goal is not to take power away from men, but rather, to equalize it and share it between both genders (Gosselin, 2000). Women's economic dependence disempowers them and makes them not only susceptible to violence but also unable to fight against violence (Coomaraswamy, 1995). Yllo and Straus (1990) found a curvilinear relationship between the status of women and wife abuse. These authors examining the status of women and

rates of wife abuse within the United States noted that as the status of the women increased, the rate of wife abuse tended to decrease.

"There can be no doubt that feminist analyses have added greatly to our understanding of domestic violence by viewing it in the context of power relationships and the more general position of women in society" (Johnson, 1995, p. 117). Feminist theories, however, fail to explain adequately why some females abuse their lesbian partners or why some women in joint-family living arrangements abuse other women in the household? More specifically, "the role of mothers-in-law in the battering of wives as seen in Iran, among the Indo-Fijians, and formerly in Taiwan seems counterintuitive to the feminist case" (Campbell, 1999, p. 208).

In summary, discussion of the different theories on the causes of wife abuse indicates that wife abuse, which is a complex social problem, cannot be adequately explained or comprehensively studied using any of the theories that have been thus far described. Instead, some theorists are now urging for integrated models (e.g., Dutton, 1994; Miller, 1994; Renzetti, 1994). Even though approaches to integration may be contentious, it seems that this is the direction that scholars in the future will need to take in order to make useful strides in providing a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of wife abuse.

Review of the Literature on Wife Abuse

Determinants of Leaving an Abusive Relationship

Many of the earlier studies focused on the question of: Why does she stay? Initially, it was believed that if a woman could be persuaded to leave her abusive husband then the abuse would stop. However, psychotherapists, researchers, and advocates are

now beginning to realize that when women leave, the abuse does not necessarily stop. In fact, abusive men continue to harass, stalk, and harm the women long after they have left the abusive relationships, sometimes even resulting in someone's death (Browne, 1987; Walker, 1989; Walker & Meloy, 1998).

Gelles (1976) was one of the first researchers to investigate the phenomenon of wife abuse. He interviewed thirty-three women who had been physically abused in their marriages. He found that women who had experienced severe and frequent abuse were more likely to leave their abusive husbands compared with women who experienced mild and infrequent forms of physical abuse. He also noted that women who had been victims of abuse in their childhood and those who had fewer resources were less likely to leave their abusive husbands. He went on to say that out of the women who did seek outside help, most found it be of little benefit because "most agencies and most legal organizations are quite unprepared and unable to provide meaningful assistance to women who have been beaten by their husbands" (p. 666). He concluded that circumstances that restricted women's ability to leave their abusive relationships included the frequency and severity of abuse, as well as abuse experienced as a child, available resources, response of helping agencies, and the woman's perception of the normalcy of the relationship.

Leaving an abusive relationship is characterized by intense and often conflicting emotions for a woman (Landenburger, 1993). Turner and Shapiro (1986) proposed a two-stage model to explain the losses that women may experience in terminating their abusive relationships. The first category includes loss of the idealized relationship and has to do with unmet expectations of what the relationship was supposed to be like. When abusive

episodes challenge the idealized image of a relationship a woman may try to deal with the dissonance by blaming herself. She may begin to believe that she has to try harder to make the relationship work. The second set of losses has to do with lack of trust and security. Turner and Shapiro (1986), recognizing that there are individual variations in ways that women work through their losses, suggest that the sequence of stages that the women go through in grieving the loss of the relationship appears to be quite similar. The mourning is marked by a pattern of denial, anger, bargaining, grief, and acceptance.

Malloy (1986) examined psychological and demographic variables as predictors of women's decisions to leave their abusive partners. She hypothesized that while some women have the necessary resources to leave a violent relationship, there may be psychological variables that cause them to stay with their abusive partners. Administering various questionnaires to 127 women who were living in a shelter, Malloy found that women who did not blame themselves for the abuse were more likely to leave their abusive partners compared with those who blamed themselves for the abuse.

Wetzel and Ross (1983) noted that fear and isolation made it difficult for women to leave. They concluded that fear based on many violent acts and innumerable threats, is the most immobilizing factor for a battered woman. Their results also indicated that women progress through a series of stages in making a decision to leave usually manifested by leaving and returning a number of times prior to making the final break. Other studies have shown that the women's hope that their husbands will change is often an explanation for why some stay with their abusive husbands or why women are likely to return to their abusive partners if they agree to enroll in counselling or some sort of anger management program (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

Barron (1991), based on in-depth interviews with six women in Richmond, British Columbia, found that social support, resources, relief from the abuse, and the women's loss of hope that their partners were ever going to change were factors that allowed them to leave their abusive partners. She noted that support was most helpful when it was expressed in terms of believing the woman, validating her feelings and desire to leave as well as providing some kind of assistance to act on that decision. Resources such as financial and legal assistance and a safe place where a woman could go were helpful in enabling the women to leave her partner. Similarly, Johnson (1995) noted that "the provision of safe, secure accommodation is one of the prime requirements for women experiencing violence at the hands of their partners. The lack of such accommodation may result in women reluctantly staying in a violent relationship" (p. 120). Periods of respite from the abuse were also helpful in enabling the women to leave because during this time they "...experienced the freedom to think, make their own choices, and to evaluate their commitment to the relationship" (Barron, 1991, p. 88). Finally, the women's loss of hope that their husbands were ever going to change contributed to their decision to leave. This finding is consistent with that of Gondolf's (1988) who concluded that "battered women are more likely to leave a relationship when it s is clear that the batterer is not going to change or that the batterer is a generally dangerous person" (p. 37). Other authors have also concluded that women are more likely to leave when the abuse becomes extremely severe (Ferraro & Johnson, 1982; Gelles, 1976; Pahl, 1985).

Johnson (1992), using a sample of 426 women who were living in a shelter for battered women, found that women who were employed were less likely to return to their

abusive husbands compared with those who were unemployed. Bowker (1983) noted that contact with family members and positive experiences with social service providers were important variables that enabled the women to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages. Hoff (1990) concluded that the women's decision to leave is multifaceted. She stated:

> For each woman the circumstances and events leading to that decision are unique to her situation: the fear that he would kill her; that she would kill herself; fear for her children or her family; recognition that there is no hope for change; the shock of a particular beating; the horror of being beaten while pregnant. (p. 62)

Given the complex nature of women's decision to leave "the wonder is not that women find it hard to leave the scene of the violence but that so many find the courage to do so" (Victim Support, 1992, p. 8). Studies have consistently documented that women show resilience, initiative, and a high degree of resourcefulness in face of severe abuse (Browne, 1987; 1997; Gondolf, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). Women remain in their abusive relationships not due to passivity but due to repeated unsuccessful attempts to escape.

Bowker (1983) noted that women persistently sought help in an effort to free themselves from the abuse. Other studies have shown that the more prolonged the abuse, the more varied were the women's help-seeking activities. For instance, Gondolf (1988) found that women on average contacted five potential sources of help and over half had contacted the police and 20% sought legal advice. Women "…increase their help-seeking efforts in the face of increased violence. They try in a logical, consistent way to assure themselves and their children protection and survival. Such efforts supersede fear, giving up, depression, or the passivity of the learned helplessness state" (Hampton et al., 1999, p. 55).

In conclusion, a review of the studies on a woman's decision to end her abusive relationship indicates that the decision to leave is very complex and multifaceted. Studies have shown that a woman is more likely to leave, as the abuse becomes more frequent and severe. Having a safe place where she can go to escape the abuse is another important factor in her decision to leave. Additionally, a woman is more likely to leave if she receives helpful responses from friends and family as well as social service providers who not only support her in her decision to leave but also provide means for her to act on that decision. Moreover, being employed and the loss of hope that her partner is ever going to change are important variables that enable a woman to leave.

Impact of Abuse on Women

The consequences of wife abuse are extensive. Studies have shown that violence experienced by women in their intimate relationships is both prolonged and severe. Pahl (1985) found that about 62% of the women in her study had been subjected to violence for three or more years and the injuries that they had suffered ranged from cuts and bruises, through broken bones and damaged eyesight, to ruptured spleen, stab wounds and a fractured skull. These findings are consistent with those of Binney, Harkell and Nixon (1981) who focused on the abuse experiences of women living in the different refuges in England and Wales. The results of this large survey indicated that about 73% of women had endured incredible violence for three or more years prior to leaving their abusive husbands and a third of them had suffered life-threatening attacks or had been hospitalized for serious injuries. The types of assaults the women had encountered from their male partners included being kicked, pushed into fires or through glass, being thrown against walls or downstairs, being punched and having their hair pulled out. Two

thirds of the women in this study indicated that mental cruelty was one of the reasons why they left home.

Jones, Maclearn and Young (1986) in their Islington Crime Survey found that approximately 25% of the women were attacked with weapons such as bottles, knives, scissors, sticks, clubs, and other blunt instruments. Nearly half of these women sought medical advice and about 25% of them had been hospitalized at least overnight. Similarly, other studies have found that about half of all victims of wife abuse report an injury of some sort and about 20% of them seek medical assistance (Greenfield, Rand, Craven, Klaus, Perkins, Ringel, Warchol, Matson, & Fox, 1998). In the state of Washington, women accounted for approximately 39% of all the hospital emergency department visits for violence-related injuries in 1994 and 84% of all the individuals who were treated for injuries inflicted by an intimate partner. A woman is more likely to be injured if she is assaulted by her male partner than by a stranger (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995). Women's injuries from physical battering range from bruises and scratches to stab wounds or internal bleeding. Some injuries cause permanent impairment and can be life threatening (Hampton et al., 1999). The injuries that the women suffer as a result of physical assault remind us that wife abuse is a crime that can lead to serious consequences for women including mortality.

Some scholars have noted that even a single assault can cause permanent emotional scars but the severity and repetition of violence is extremely deleterious to the women's psychological adjustment (Follingstad, Brennan, Hause, Polek, & Rutledge, 1991). Stark, Flitcraft and Frazier (1979) examined the medical records of 481 women who sought treatment at an urban hospital emergency room. The pre-assault medical

records for women who had experienced assault were similar to those who had not experienced assaults. The two groups did not differ significantly on a number of suicide attempts, drug use, or use of psychiatric emergency services. Post-assault comparisons, on the other hand, revealed significant differences on all of these measures thereby suggesting that deficits in psychological functioning are more a result rather than a cause of assault.

More recent research on women who have experienced abuse also illustrates that women typically suffer serious psychological damage due to the ongoing abuse in their intimate relationships. These women frequently exhibit low self-esteem (Phillips, 1999; Rieker & Carmen, 1986; Wiik, 1995) and suffer from feelings of loss and inadequacy (Turner & Shapiro, 1986). Continual abuse can also lead to depressive symptoms among women (Andrews, 1987; Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986) and learned helplessness (Walker, 1979; 1993). Feelings of helplessness are the result of feeling trapped and unable to escape from the abuse (Kakar, 1998). When a woman internalizes the blame for the abuse her self-esteem begins to decline which leads to even greater feelings of depression (Dutton, 1995). Some women report symptoms of stress such as lack of sleep, weight loss or gain, ulcers, nervousness, and irritability as a consequence of the abuse. Walker (1985) noted high levels of anxiety, fear, panic attacks, depression and other clinical symptoms among women who had been subjected to ongoing and severe abuse.

Consequences of psychological and sexual abuse appear to be as serious as those of physical assault (Gelles & Harrop, 1989). Walker (1984), using a sample of 435 women from the Rocky Mountain region, found that the women rated psychological abuse to be the most painful. In a more recent study, Walker (1993) noted that the

psychological terror experienced by women who endured both physical and sexual abuse frequently led to physiological symptoms such as feelings of suffocation and heart palpitations. Women's reactions to abuse by their male partners parallel those of individuals who have been subjected to extreme forms of torture and trauma (Koss et al., 1994). Abuse is often seen as a major determinant of female suicide attempts (Phillips, 1999; Stanko, 1985; Stark & Flitcraft, 1995; Wiik, 1995) and of posttraumatic stress disorder (Browne, 1992; Herman, 1992). Studies have also documented feelings of shame, worthlessness, and self-blame among women who have experienced physical, psychological, and sexual abuse in their intimate relationships (Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; LaViolette & Barnett, 2000).

Lasting effects of sexual abuse include anger, hatred, and feelings of betrayal. Other long-term consequences of marital rape are a potential exposure to HIV and AIDS (Eby, Campbell, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995). These types of diseases can result in loss of life or a complete change in life activities for women. Finkelhor and Yllo (1985) found that for most of the women their study, the experience of rape continued to have an emotional impact on their lives for years and even decades later. The most common long-term effects of sexual abuse were inability to trust men, an aversion to intimacy and sex, and a lingering fear of being assaulted again.

Women who have experienced abuse in their marriages have many reasons for contacting health care professionals (Pahl, 1995). In terms of personal pain and suffering, it is impossible to gauge the costs of family violence. However, the National Research Council has projected that family violence in the United States costs somewhere between 1.7 billion and $140 billion annually (Chalk & King, 1998). Included in these estimates

are medical costs, foster care, and lost productivity due to victimization. Chalk and King explain that the variation among the estimates of cost stems from differences in the variables selected to generate the figures. One estimate included a high set of indirect costs associated with pain and suffering. The use of different prevalent rates of abuse is also a factor that contributes to the wide range of costs that result from family violence. Regardless of the lack of exact figures, it should be apparent that the problem of violence against women is far from being personal, it incurs immense health care costs that affect all of us (Gosselin, 2000).

Culturally Focused Research

Increasingly, researchers are advocating that more attention needs to be focused on the abuse experiences of women of colour and other marginalized groups of women including lesbian women, elderly women, and women with disabilities. Only in the last decade has consistent effort been made to address the phenomenon of wife abuse within the confines of specific cultural settings (Dosanjh et al., 1994; Ellsberg et al., 1999; Horne, 1999; McWhirter, 1999; Kozu, 1999; Phillips, 1999). This section provides a review of the research initiatives that have focused on the abuse experiences of women within a particular cultural group.

Dosanjh, Deo, and Sidhu (1994) explored the abuse experiences of fifteen South Asian Canadian women. The primary goal of the study was to determine the specific needs for services and barriers to getting help for this group of women. The participants were recruited from community-based organizations, agencies, and transition houses in Vancouver, British Columbia. The women answered a number of questions about themselves including questions pertaining to their education, age, sponsorship, and

financial status as well as questions about their husband's education, age, entry into Canada, and relationships with members of the extended family. The women ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-five years. Their residency in Canada varied from one month to eighteen years. Nine out of the fifteen women had immigrated to Canada under the sponsorship of their husbands. All of the women had a minimum of high school education, which they had completed either in Canada or in their own country of origin. Six of the women were fluent in English, eight of them had a very limited command of the English language, and one did not speak English at all. Consequently, most of the interviews were conducted in Punjabi, Hindi, or Gujrati.

Dosanjh, Deo, and Sidhu found that many of the women in the study felt socially, psychologically, and financially dependent on their husbands. Most of them had little or no control over their own earnings or the family finances, which further contributed to their dependency on their husbands. Moreover, fear of reprisal, lack of financial resources, inability to sponsor members of their own family of origin, and fear of having their children taken away if they decided to leave their abusive husband, were all part of the women's abuse experiences. The authors noted that reporting abuse to the proper authorities thrust the women into yet another unknown territory of different language, values, customs, and way of life. Due to various reasons including lack of competency in the English language, the women found it difficult to report abuse to the legal professionals.

One of the major barriers, identified by the women that prevented them from leaving their abusive husbands was their dependency on their husbands. Time spent in Canada had little or no bearing on the type or severity of the abuse that the women

experienced from their husbands. Nonetheless, the women who did not have landed immigrant status felt particularly vulnerable and alone when the abuse took place. Many of these women indicated that they were afraid to report their abuse to anyone because of the fear of being deported. Their husbands used such fears as an effective method to control them. They also limited their contact with other people and denied them the privilege of watching television programs on the multicultural channel that informed viewers about crisis management and resources that were available to abused women. With little or no knowledge about their rights in Canada and having been separated from friends and family, the women felt alone, isolated, powerless, and trapped in their abusive marriages.

The results of the study also indicated that many of the women in the study expressed suicidal ideation. One woman commented... "I have become insecure, unsure, powerless and feel like committing suicide" (p. 31). In addition, the women described having low self-esteem and being constantly worried about finances as well as childcare. Their reluctance to disclose family concerns to outsiders prevented them from seeking or accepting assistance from outside sources. The authors noted that only two of the fifteen women had left their abusive husbands. These women felt extremely guilty for not being able to endure the abuse for the sake of their children.

The women cited a number of factors including alcoholism, limited financial resources, and family conflict, which they believed, contributed to the abuse that they suffered from their husbands. Three out of the fifteen women in the study stated that the "small" dowry that they brought at the time of their wedding also contributed to the abuse that they experienced in their marriages.

Furthermore, the results of this study illustrated that the women's help seeking preferences and experiences varied considerably from one case to another. For example, some women found the police officers that intervened on their behalf to be very helpful, while others felt that the police officers minimized the problem or aligned themselves with the husband. Women's organizations and ethnic media were seen as valuable sources of information and education regarding wife abuse.

The authors concluded with a list of suggestions and recommendations made by the women that they believed would be helpful for them. The women asked for more information about their rights in Canada. They also indicated that they would like to see more Punjabi-speaking and culturally sensitive workers in the transition houses and wanted access to culturally sensitive childcare. As well, they suggested that more Indo-Canadian therapists be trained to better meet their needs.

Phillips (1999) examined the abuse experiences of seventeen American Muslim women. The sample was comprised of women who had personally experienced abuse in the past as well as those who had not personally experienced abuse but were aware of the phenomenon within their community through the abuse experiences of friends, family, or acquaintances. In addition to American Muslim women, two interviews with Muslim men were conducted. These two interviews, according to Phillips, were conducted solely for the purposes of gaining information to bolster understandings of the context in which American Muslim women experienced abuse.

Participants ranged in age from twenty to fifty-nine years. Among the participants, there were ten Muslim converts and the remaining seven were born Muslims. Educational attainment of the women in the study ranged from high school to

doctoral levels. Three group interviews (with 3 to 6 participants) and seventeen individual interviews were conducted.

Phillips identified five themes. One of the themes revolved around the Islam ideals, which were the reference point for many American Muslim women. These ideals profoundly shaped the women's understanding of how marriage and divorce should be. Phillips noted that perceptions of Islamic ideals governed the women's interpretations and responses to all life events including abuse. She also noted that the hope that the abusers would eventually change was part of women's abuse experiences. "The answer to the problem of abuse in many participants minds was to bring abusers back to Islam – back to the straight path, to, in effect, show them the error of their ways" (p. 335).

Another theme dealt with how Islam provides women with identity, connection, and order. Phillips found that American Muslim women who challenged the abuse in their lives risked being labeled as being "un-Islamic". The community pressure to stay married was a common experience among the women in the study. "When participants resisted this pressure they tended to be ostracized by other Muslims – an intensely painful experience, since being Muslim is, in essence, for many women akin to being part of a collective" (p. 337). Phillips also noted that divorced American Muslim women did not fit well within their community's social structure. Several of the women indicated that the benefits of the community life outweighed the difficulties of living with an abusive husband. The Muslim community was described by the women "...as if it were a living entity, one that nourishes, shelters, and strengthens Muslims in the context of predominately Christian America" (p. 332).

Although the community provided women with a sense of identity and connection, it also responded to their abuse in ways that were harmful for them. Some women indicated that their ethnic community was unprepared to deal with the problem of abuse. "In most cases support for abusers was high and for victims seeking divorce was low" (p.338). In addition, the tendency to view women as potential sources of dishonor and of divorce as shameful created significant barriers for American Muslim women as they attempted to free themselves from the abuse. The women were typically blamed for their abuse and the community essentially turned a blind eye to their suffering.

Phillips also noted that Muslim culture promulgated clearly defined gender roles for men and women based on the underlying assumption that these roles were natural and immutable. Women were expected to obey their husbands in all matters. "For some, this expectation translated into the belief that they could not leave the house, or invite others over without the permission of their husbands, contributing to the problem of isolation in situations of abuse" (p. 340). Moreover, their husbands' demand that they keep silent about the abuse exacerbated their experiences of wife abuse. Those who continued to comply with their husbands' command to keep the abuse hidden from others became depressed and some exhibited suicidal ideation.

Moreover, Phillips indicated that the distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims were reinforced both within and outside of Muslim communities. Discriminatory attitudes of non-Muslims toward Muslims compounded the abuse experiences of American Muslim women. The sting of prejudice "…no doubt reinforce fears that Muslims will be misunderstood by non-Muslim service providers. Among participants, this fear translated into avoidance of non-Muslim therapists" (p. 342).

Negative attitudes towards American Muslims by the non-Muslim American contributed to the women's tendency to seek help from other Muslims first and from non-Muslims only as a last resort. Phillips surmised that "distrust of non-Muslim service providers will likely increase in cases where service providers make recommendations that are clearly ignorant of the social context that abused Muslim women face" (p. 345). She goes on to say that in cases where a woman believes that she cannot leave the house without her husband's permission, safety planning would need to address this issue first and foremost.

Moreover, listening to the women's concerns about being misunderstood and acknowledging the difficulties they face will validate American Muslim women in important ways thereby empowering them to think through potential problems and be better prepared to face them. Phillips urges health care professional and social service providers to modify the standard intervention strategies in order to adequately meet the needs of this group of women. She concluded that American Muslim women "caught in a web of constraints", often endured abuse for many years before they finally broke free from the abuse in their marriage (P. 350). Her results support the need to create alternatives to care for this group of women due to the numerous barriers that they face in receiving the help they so desperately require to deal with the aftermath of the abuse.

Miller (1999) examined the abuse experiences of women in India. She indicated that national survey data on wife beating in India were not available. Hence, she provided examples of wife abuse, which were gleaned from a variety of sources including ethnographies and articles in journals and magazines. She stated, "reference to wife

beating among both higher and lower strata are found in the literature but say nothing about comparative frequency or degree" (p. 207).

According to Miller (1999), a young bride in India is continually harassed by her husband and mother-in-law to bring more gifts from her family of origin even after the dowry has been paid. "When harassment fails, the bride characteristically is murdered by dousing her with kerosene and then setting her on fire" (p. 208). Dowry demands by her in-laws are the most frequently mentioned reason for a woman's ill treatment.

Indian women who are employed are beaten as well as those who are unemployed. Wife beating can be found in both nuclear and joint families. "Having in-laws on the scene does not protect a woman from being beaten; rather, it often seems to exacerbate wife abuse" (p. 209). However, "the presence of a mother-in-law is not a necessary ingredient for wife beating, as women in nuclear households are also beaten" (p. 209).

Alcohol consumption is another contributing factor for wife abuse in India. Horowitz and Kishwar (1984, cited in Miller, 1999) reported that alcohol abuse is common in many villages of the Punjab and that inebriated husbands tend to beat their wives. In the rural areas, a high-caste woman if she were to seek a divorce from her abusive husband would be seriously stigmatized. Miller noted that for Indian women "…suicide appears to be the ultimate way out, resorted to by unknown numbers of women every year" who experience abuse in their marriage (p. 211).

Miller (1999) stated that "…no systematic study of wife beating in India has been done, and only a very few case studies undertaken by women's organizations exist" (p.

212). She concluded her article by saying that it is important that wife abuse becomes a

topic of research attention in the Indian-subcontinent because:

> ...without careful research, it is difficult to judge the extent of the problem or which areas and subpopulations are most at risk. Socially focused studies are needed to help determine how one might best devise targeted programs to subvert or circumvent social structures that place women at risk of being beaten – sometimes to death – as a matter of daily routine. (p.212)

Kozu (1999) examined the phenomenon of wife abuse for Japanese women. Kozu

noted that public awareness about domestic violence in Japan has increased since the

early 1990's. Statistics from the Japan Bar Association's hotline Services for battered

wives indicate that Japanese women "...are likely to stay in marriage and suffer for a

long period of time" due to a number of different cultural factors (p. 51). The Japanese

traditional family structure is patriarchal and specific hierarchical roles are prescribed

within the family. After marriage, a woman moves in with her husband's family and

takes up the role of *yome* or bride of his family. Within this context, she has a low status

in the family unit. Divorce is traditionally viewed as being deviant. Hence, women who

experience abuse in their marriages continue to endure the abuse due to cultural taboos

against divorce. Kozu concluded:

> The Japanese tend to avoid conflict for the sake of saving [face and maintaining harmony within the family]... The absence of democratic communication as a means of conflict resolution results in the virtual divorce...[whereby]...spouses give up the intrinsic relationship and maintain the legal relationship only. While maintaining a superficial relationship, such a couple tends to speak to each other only under very impersonal conditions at home. (p. 51-52)

This example illustrates that due to cultural taboos against divorce, some women in the

Japanese culture remain in their marriages but find ways to dissociate themselves from

the abuse from their husbands.

Whirter's (1999) article profiled the struggles and triumphs of Chilean women. She noted that "...Chile remains the only country in the Western world in which divorce is illegal" (p. 38). The prohibition against divorce compounds the problems faced by Chilean women who experience abuse in their marriage because it makes it extremely difficult for them to free themselves from the abuse. Moreover, lack of resources and shelters where women can go to escape from the abuse are virtually non-existent in Chile. The first shelter for battered women in this country was opened in 1996. Despite the challenges that they face, some Chilean women do eventually succeed in breaking free from the abuse in their marriages. "The strength of the women has made an impression on their children, many of whom indicate continuing changes in the future" (p. 39).

To summarize, the literature on wife abuse from different countries has greatly contributed to our knowledge of how specific factors pose serious challenges for women in various cultural settings as they attempt to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages. It has been documented that the low status of women in the hierarchical family structure of joint families, cultural sanctity of marriage and concerns about saving face and preserving family honour make it extremely difficult for women in some cultures to break free from the abuse in their marriages. In India, some women view suicide as the only option to escape from the misery of the abuse in their marriages.

Although certain cultural factors complicate the abuse experiences of women in various countries, it seems that women of colour who are residing in the United States and Canada face even greater challenges because of numerous circumstances. Fear of alienation from their own ethnic community as well as worries about discrimination and racism prevented many of the American Muslim women from accessing services that

could potentially help them to combat abuse in their marriages. Consequently, they endured abuse for many years before finally breaking free.

An extensive review of the literature on wife abuse reveals that the experiences of wife abuse for women of colour within the Canadian mosaic are largely unexplored by researchers. Abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women are particularly absent in the literature. To narrow this huge gap in our knowledge of how abuse affects Indo-Canadian Sikh women; the present study sought to explore their experiences of wife abuse. Understanding these women's personal experiences of wife abuse is a necessary first step in providing culturally sensitive as well as effective care for this group of women.

Summary of the State of Knowledge

Three distinct theoretical frameworks have been used to explain the causes of wife abuse including psychological, sociological, and feminist perspectives. Psychological theories are predicated on the assumption that wife abuse is the result of psychopathology of the victim and the perpetrator. Sociological frameworks view violence as a product of social structures and feminist perspectives concentrate predominately on the issues of power and control.

Research studies have consistently shown that women stay with their abusive partners not because of passivity but due to repeated unsuccessful attempts to escape. Having a safe place where they can go in order to escape the abuse is an important factor that enables women to leave their abusive relationships. Support from family, friends, and social service providers in the form of financial assistance, validation, and empowerment can also help women to leave their abusive partners.

A woman is more likely to be assaulted by her intimate partner than by a complete stranger. Physical assault can lead to permanent injuries for women including death. Consequences of psychological and sexual abuse are just as serious as are those of physical abuse. Women experience high levels of anxiety, fear, panic, depression and even suicide ideation as a result of the on going abuse in their intimate relationships.

Research studies on wife abuse within the confines of specific cultural settings indicate that multiple factors contribute to the difficulties that the women, from different cultural groups, experience as they attempt to extricate themselves from the abuse. Cultural beliefs about the sanctity of marriage, family honour, dowry, and saving face as well as prohibitions against divorce pose serious challenges for women in some countries as they struggle to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages. However, for women of colour residing in the United States and Canada, the sting of prejudice, lack of competency in the English language as well as an immigrant status combined with the various cultural dictates of their ethnic group are likely to compound the challenges that they face as they attempt to end abuse in their marriages.

Research documenting the abuse experiences of women of colour within the Canadian mosaic is virtually non-existent. Abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women are particularly absent in the literature. In order to secure culturally sensitive and effective interventions for this group of women, researchers must begin by gaining a better understanding of the factors that exacerbate or ameliorate the abuse experiences of these women. The present study was undertaken with the goal of enhancing knowledge about the *lived experience* of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women thereby providing a basis for improving services for them.

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CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach that was used for the current study. First, I present the historical background of phenomenological philosophy; then I discuss the basic tenets of phenomenology. The rationale for selecting Husserl's method for this study is explained in section three. Procedures used to collect, analyze, and transform the data into a final text are outlined in section four. The criteria and techniques used for establishing trustworthiness and rigour of the findings are discussed in sections five and six respectively. Ethical considerations for protecting the rights of the participants are reviewed in section seven and section eight concludes with a chapter summary.

Historical Background of Phenomenological Philosophy

The word phenomenology was first introduced in philosophy as early as 1765 (Kockelmans, 1967). Hegel used this term to refer to knowledge as it appears to consciousness. The concept of *phenomenon* was derived from the Greek root *phanesthai*, which means to flare up, to show itself, to appear (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology as a discipline grew principally out of Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976) work during the first decade of the twentieth century (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). Transcendental phenomenology (which is essentially a descriptive approach) is associated with Husserl whereas hermeneutics (which is an interpretive technique) is linked with Heidegger (Schwandt, 1997). Hermeneutics aims to bring out tacit meanings of the phenomenon.

In the philosophy of phenomenology *ontology* and *epistemology* have been given the most emphasis. *Ontology* is concerned with the nature and relations of being, whereas *epistemology* emphasizes the fundamentals of knowledge (Cohen & Omery, 1994). The ontological component is concerned with the nature of reality, that is, whether a *real* world exists that can be known (a realist philosophical viewpoint) or whether reality is assumed to be relative and thus constructed by the individual (a relativist philosophical position) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the knower and what can be known. Heidegger focused on ontological ideas whereas Husserl was concerned with epistemological questions.

Husserl's intention was to advance a philosophy that enabled science to address complex human concerns in a more rigourous and meaningful way (Anderson, 1991; Boyd, 1993; Field & Morse, 1985; Knaack, 1984; Oiler, 1982; Ray, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1982). He strove to develop phenomenology as a "science of origins" (Husserl, 1971, cited in Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 69). He claimed that by using the method of *epoche* (i.e. holding in abeyance one's preconceived ideas about the phenomenon through a strategy of deep self-reflection), one could seek the roots of knowledge in subjective experiences (Ray, 1994). Husserl argued that all genuine knowledge ultimately rests on inner evidence and believed that human consciousness rather than objective facts shape one's experience as well as understanding of the world (Boyd, 1993; Field & Morse, 1985; Knaack, 1984; Oiler, 1982).

He sought to identify and describe essential, *a priori* structures that constituted human experience and referred to such descriptions as *eidetic*. *Eidetic* descriptions, according to Husserl (1931), were fundamental, free of bias as well as interpretation. He

argued that such descriptions could be attained only through phenomenological reduction (a procedure of deep self-reflection whereby the researcher suspends prejudgments, personal biases, and restores a stance of openness) (Giorgi, 1997; van Manen, 2,000). Phenomenological reduction was deemed to be necessary because by circumventing interpretation it allowed the phenomenon to be seen naively (i.e., without bias). Husserl's ideas offered researchers a way to stand back from typical everyday meaning of life and transcend to its larger meanings (Cohen & Omery, 1994).

By the time that Heidegger came to work with Husserl, Heidegger was already an established scholar interested in illuminating the "beyond ordinary" meanings of humanness, referred to as Being or Sein (presence), as opposed to the everyday meaning of humanness, called being or Dasein (to be there). Heidegger and Husserl shared a commitment to the phenomenological motto, "Zu den Sachen" or "To the things themselves" (Speigelberg, 1982) as well as a belief that the lifeworld (i.e., being in the world) could not be known unless studied phenomenologically. Over time, however, these two philosophers branched off into different paths.

Heidegger criticized Husserl for the way he had conceived phenomenology. Heidegger believed that no method could enforce the revelation of truth (Cohen & Omery, 1994). He rejected the idea that phenomenon could be known free of bias or interpretation and identified hermeneutics which is an interpretive technique whereby one goes beyond mere description of what is manifest and tries to uncover hidden meaning by anticipatory devices (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Schwandt, 1997). Heidegger viewed hermeneutics as a philosophical viewpoint as opposed to a scientific method.

Dissension between Husserl and Heidegger led to the development of three distinct schools of phenomenology over the years. Giorgi (1970) and his colleagues at Duquesne University formed one such school based on the principles of Husserl. The primary goal of this approach is to describe accurately the phenomenon from the perspective of the person who has personally experienced it (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Osborne, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1989; Van Kaam, 1966). What gets produced as knowledge emerges from the dialectical exchanges between the researcher and the participant (Anderson, 1991). Meaning is contextually constructed as an intersubjective phenomenon. Intersubjectivity refers to the use of language whereby human beings create meaning in interaction with one another (Anderson, 1991). Husserl sought to avoid all conceptually bound and theoretically constructed beginnings. His approach seeks to illuminate the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the person who has personally lived through it.

The hermeneutics school of thought, on the other hand, is based on Heidegger's ontological ideas. This perspective seeks to bring out hidden meanings of a given phenomenon. It strives to discover meaning that is not immediately manifest to our intuiting, analyzing, and describing (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Heidegger was interested in searching for the meaning of *Being* (Spiegelberg, 1982). This search for meaning is both unique and fundamental to the human because humans are privileged entities who are concerned about being and thus have a certain understanding of the meaning of Being (Cohen & Omery, 1994).

The third main school of thought that developed is called the Dutch "Utrecht school". Max Van Manen (1984), a Canadian educator and researcher, introduced and

explicated a hermeneutics-phenomenological approach that is grounded in German and Dutch philosophical underpinnings. His approach seeks to be simultaneously descriptive and interpretative integrating the traditions of both Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutics. Van Manen's approach was formulated with a pedagogical focus and has been widely utilized in practice-based disciplines such as education and nursing.

Phenomenology is first, and foremost, a philosophy which is very complex and multi-faceted. Over the years, it has changed considerably both across and within different philosophers. Consequently, there is not a singular phenomenological research method. Instead, numerous interpretations and modifications of phenomenology are available for researchers. Caelli (2,000) notes that "...at a recent conference in Colorado, eighteen different forms of phenomenology were identified" (p. 367) and at the present time, the development of research methods based on phenomenological philosophy is an "...ongoing, unfinished project" (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 5). There are no unanimous criteria used to discriminate between the different phenomenological methods because different disciplines (e.g., counselling psychology, education, nursing, psychology, and sociology) have forwarded different typologies.

There is an ongoing debate and tension between the efforts to establish ways of generating and analyzing data (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; Van Manen, 1990) on the one hand, and a criticism that methodological preconceptions lead towards a phenomenological positivism (Bolton, 1987, cited in Nicol, 2001) on the other hand. Nonetheless, a common thread that binds different forms of phenomenological research methods is the desire to understand the phenomenon in naïve, unfettered ways that

necessitate an attitude of openness acquired via phenomenological reduction (Nicol, 2001).

Caelli (2000) distinguished between European and American phenomenology. She argues that American phenomenology has extended phenomenological research in valuable ways that are particularly useful for the health sciences. Caelli noted that European phenomenology, for the most part, has investigated abstract phenomena including consciousness, being, and perception. In North America, however, phenomenology primarily has been used in the health sciences where practice has precedence over theory. American phenomenology has tended to describe participants' *lived experience* of a phenomenon within the context of culture rather than searching for a universal meaning of the phenomenon which has been the domain of the European phenomenology.

Van Manen (2000) reviewed studies on the basis of different philosophical orientations. He concludes that within American context, practice based phenomenology supercedes specific orientation because theoretical commitments are subsidiary to an interest in the practice and application of phenomenological principles.

Edmund Husserl's approach is a useful method for human science inquiry that aims to understand the experience of a life event from the viewpoint of the person who has personally lived through and made some meaning of it. It strives to describe rather than to interpret a particular life event. Since the primary goal of this study was to describe, rather than explain, the abuse experiences of the Indo-Canadian Sikh women, Husserl's method seemed most appropriate. From this point onward, whenever I use the term phenomenology, I am referring to the descriptive approach developed by Husserl

and his followers rather than hermeneutics advanced by Heidegger and his contemporaries.

Basic Tenets of Phenomenology

Husserl (1931) viewed phenomenology not only as a philosophy but also as a science and a research method. He sought to answer the question – what do we know as persons? He was interested in the discovery of meanings and *essences* in knowledge. *Essence* refers to the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness. It denotes the "necessary and invariant features of objects" (Schmitt, 1967, p. 139), which are identified by intuitive seeing rather than derived through empirical abstraction. Husserl believed that if we suspend belief in the existence of what we presuppose the phenomenon to be and employ imaginative variation (i.e., what it could and could not be) then we could ultimately arrive at the invariant features of the phenomenon or its *essence*. He did not claim that phenomenology was the only method for studying human experience. Rather, he argued that it was a science of pure possibilities carried out with systematic concreteness (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, since it seeks to describe the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspective of the person, requires the researcher to set aside his/her presuppositions, reflect on the experiences of participants, and by using intuition to describe the essential structures of the phenomenon under investigation. His research method consists of three interlocking steps including (1) phenomenological reduction, (2) description, and (3) search for *essences* (Giorgi, 1997). The phenomenological reduction is a methodological device that was invented by Husserl to help make research findings more precise. In everyday life, one lives in the "natural attitude" wherein one takes things

for granted (Husserl, 1970). This, according to philosophical viewpoint, is naïve because things and events do not simply appear; nor are they always what they seem to be (Giorgi, 1997). To enter into the attitude of the phenomenological reduction requires one to put aside past knowledge in order to describe the essence of the phenomenon from the perspective of the person who has personally experienced it.

The second step is known as description. It refers to the use of language to articulate the intentional objects of consciousness within the constraints of intuitive evidence (Mohanty, 1989). It is through the medium of language that one is able to communicate to others the objects of consciousness to which one is present, exactly as they are presented (Giorgi, 1997). Description attempts to elucidate the person's *lived experience*. Analysis of the data is especially sensitive to the participant's own description of his/her personal experiences of the phenomenon. It attempts to provide a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience a particular phenomenon. Interpretation, however, is not description because in order to account for a phenomenon it brings a perspective to the given either from theory or for pragmatic reasons. The debate about whether or not interpretations are necessary for human phenomenon is still not resolved even at the philosophical level (Giorgi, 1997).

The third step is known as the search for *essence*. Husserl delineated the technique of *free imaginative variation* to allow one to search for the *essence* of the phenomenon. *Essence* is the "… fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is. It is a constant identity that holds together and limits the variations that a phenomenon can undergo" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 6). *Free imaginative variation* is a strategy whereby one freely changes different aspects of a phenomenon to

determine whether or not the phenomenon remains identifiable with specific aspects being changed (Giorgi, 1997). The essence or nature of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner (Cresswell, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). The aim is to transform the lived experience into a textual expression of its *essence* – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful. Strict followers of Husserl's principles insist that the objective of phenomenological description is achieved entirely through a direct grasping (intuiting) of the essential structure of the phenomena as they appear in consciousness (Giorgi, 1997).

Rationale for Selecting Phenomenology

Husserl's method stresses the importance of the involvement of a human being in the world; the term *lived experience* emphasizes this focus (Boyd, 1993). *Lived experience* refers to an individual's inner world (e.g., his/her yearnings, expectations, perceptions, feelings, coping stances and feelings about feelings) (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991). A person's inner world also incorporates his/her political, social, and religious orientation (Crandall, 1997; Maki-Banmen, 1998; Satir et al., 1991). Explicit as well as implicit beliefs characterize one's inner world. The implicit inner experience of the person can be made explicit through the use of process questions (i.e., questions that attempt to access one's deeper levels of experience).

Experience of things or events include sense perceptions (e.g., seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling) and other phenomena such as believing, remembering, anticipating, judging, intuiting, feeling, caring, loving, imagining, and willing. I was

particularly drawn to this emphasis on the world of everyday experiences (i.e., the lifeworld). Phenomenology was a method of choice for the current study because it aims to describe the reality of the phenomenon from the perspective of the person who has personally experienced it, rather than imposing distortions of conceptualized, theorized, or categorized pre-understandings of the phenomenon (Schwandth, 1997). I believe that understanding the experience of abuse from the viewpoint of Indo-Canadian Sikh women is a necessary first step in securing culturally sensitive care and services for this group of women.

Second, Husserl's method aims to produce action-sensitive-understanding which finds its beginning and end in the practical acting of everyday life and leads to a practical knowledge of thoughtful action (Van Manen, Bergum, Smith, Ford, & Maeda, 1987). It seeks to illuminate the phenomenon of interest by identifying the structures that are typical or common for group(s) of people (Polkinghorne, 1989). It is not interested in testing a particular hypothesis, hunch or theoretical proposition per se. Rather, it is based on the premise that a person's inner reality plays a critical role in shaping the way in which he/she makes meaning about a particular life event. A person experiencing a particular life event is most consciously connected to the personal experience of that phenomenon and therefore is in the best position to describe it (Osborne, 1990).

Thirdly, I chose this method because it is useful for an inquiry that seeks to understand human experience (Cresswell, 1994; Osborne, 1994). Several scholars (e.g., Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; Osborne, 1990; Sandelowski, Davis, & Harris, 1989) suggest that this research method is appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon or when aspects of the phenomenon cannot be easily quantified. Given that abuse

experiences of Indo-Canadian women have not been documented in the literature, and knowing that the experience of abuse is difficult to quantify, I considered Husserl's method to be most appropriate for my study because it is concerned with description rather than prediction or interpretation of the phenomenon.

Research Design

A qualitative research design, using the phenomenological method based on the ideas of Husserl (1931), was utilized to examine the experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. This approach is interactive and collaborative involving both the researcher and the participant (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1985; Van Manen, 1990). In phenomenology, the researcher is present and involved with the participant rather than being distant and presumably impartial during the course of research (Colaizzi, 1978). Due to the researcher's deep involvement, his/her personal beliefs and assumptions can potentially influence all aspects of the research from the wording of the question, deciding what the data are, to collecting the data and finally interpreting it (Osborne, 1990). The technique of phenomenological reduction is used throughout the different stages of the research to minimize the effects of the researcher's personal biases on the collection and analysis of the data.

Participants

The participants were recruited from a social service agency in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Prior to the selection of the participants, I met with counsellors at the agency and explained the nature and purpose of my study. I addressed any concerns and questions that they had regarding my research in a personal and caring manner. Following my meeting with them, I left copies of the letter (Appendix B), which

provided background information about the study as well as instructions on how to contact me, to be distributed to potential participants. Advertisement notices (Appendix E) were also posted at the agency in an effort to recruit women for the study.

Eight women volunteered to take part in the study. Five of them were seeking assistance from the agency and heard about the study from their counsellor. The remaining three women had learned about the study through word of mouth; two of them found out about the study from acquaintances that had already participated and a community nurse advised one woman about the study. The technique of purposive sampling (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992; Osborne, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1989), which requires the researcher to select participants who can illuminate the phenomenon of interest, was used to choose women who could describe the phenomenon of wife abuse from their personal experiences. Patton (1990) suggests that the logic and power behind purposeful selection of participants is that the sample should be information rich.

In phenomenological research, the sample size is not predetermined. Generally it is deliberately kept small due to the breadth and richness of the data that is collected from each participant (Baker et al., 1992). Several scholars (e.g., Colaizzi, 1978; Cresswell, 1994; Morse, 1994) recommend approximately six to eight participants for phenomenological research because of the extensive amount of information that is gathered from each participant using personal and in-depth interviews. Lengthy and repeated interviews are necessary to facilitate participants' descriptions of their experiences thus accounting for there typically being fewer subjects in studies that use phenomenological approach.

All of the women made the initial contact with me via telephone; during our conversation, I asked each of them several questions (Appendix D) to ensure that she was eligible for the study. Any concerns that she had about the study were addressed at this time. As well, each woman was informed that participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that she could withdraw at any time without any consequences. She was also assured confidentiality and anonymity.

Criteria for Inclusion

The women were required to meet the following criteria to be included in the study:

(1) They were Indo-Canadian Sikh women who had experienced abuse in their marriages (participation was limited to this group of women because their experiences of abuse are particularly absent in the literature on wife abuse within the Canadian context).

(2) They were married, separated or divorced (women in dating and common-law relationships were not included in the study). My choice to limit the participation to married women was based on the knowledge that dating and common-law relationships are highly frowned upon within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community. Taboo against dating and common-law relationships means that these practices are not common (or at least are not publicized) among women in this ethnic community.

(3) They were Canadian citizens. I chose to focus on the abuse experiences of this group of women based on my premise that these women are exposed to two very opposing cultures (e.g., their own as well as that of the dominant

culture). Therefore, these women are likely to experiences certain challenges in dealing with the abuse in their marriages that other groups of women within the Canadian mosaic may or may not experience.

(4) They were fluent in English. Participation was limited to English speaking Indo-Canadian Sikh women because I did not want to obscure the meaning of their personal experiences through translation. Instead, I wanted to use their own words to describe their subjective meanings of the *lived experience* of wife abuse.

Data Collection

The women who met the criteria were invited to take part in the study. An appointment was scheduled at a location and time that was mutually convenient for the woman and myself. Locations (e.g., office space at the agency, office space at the community center, private office space at the woman's work place, or a room in a woman's home) were chosen with consideration to the convenience and safety for the women. Two women chose to meet with me in their homes; two of them chose a private meeting space at their place of employment after work hours. One woman chose to meet with me in a private office space at the community center, which was near her home. The remaining three women chose to meet with me in a private office space at the agency where they were receiving therapy for the abuse.

I met with each woman at an agreed upon time and location. In all cases, I sought to ensure that the venue was safe, that confidentiality would be maintained and that there would be no interruptions during the interview. Following the initial introductions, a few minutes were spent in casual conversation to establish rapport with each woman. Prior to

commencing with the interview I made sure that the woman felt safe and comfortable in the room. I also spent time at the beginning to review the contents of the consent form (Appendix A) and an introductory letter (Appendix B). Any questions or concerns that the woman had regarding these documents were answered at this time. She was then asked to sign two copies of the consent form; one copy was given to her in order to ensure the protection of her rights and I retained the other copy for my records. Written consent was obtained from all of the participants following an explanation of the study and prior to the start of the interview.

All of the interviews were conducted in person and were audiotape recorded. In phenomenological research, the interview is the most commonly used method of gathering information (Cresswell, 1994; Colaizzi, 1978; Osborne, 1990) because it allows for direct inquiry, discussion, and clarification with the participant regarding the experience. The interviews were unstructured (Weiss, 1994). This type of interview permits the participant the freedom in sharing of experiences, of thoughts, and emotions (Mishler, 1986). Spontaneous descriptions of the abuse experience were elicited from the participants using various probes and questions (Appendix C). The initial interviews ranged from approximately two and half to five hours in duration and were carried out over a time span of about three months. I came to the interview with the assumption that empathic listening is central to an effective interview. Using attentive and empathic listening can enable the woman to develop her thoughts, construct her meaning and use the language she wishes to use to express herself with authenticity. My intention throughout the interview was to establish a high degree of rapport with each woman. The quality of the data is dependent on the researcher's ability to develop a trusting

relationship with the participants. Sensitivity to the women meant knowing when to allow silences, when to probe more deeply, and when to change the direction of the conversation (Merriam, 1988). I used skills such as rapport building, listening, attending, empathizing, communicating warmth, paraphrasing, clarifying, summarizing, and expressing positive regard for the women to collect thick descriptions of their abuse experiences (Brammer, 1993; Hutchins & Cole, 1986; Ivey, 1988).

Based on my past research experience, and supported by the literature, participants frequently want to know something about the researcher (Lather, 1991; Mies, 1993). Many of the participants wanted to know if I were married. I told them that I was not. They also inquired about my interest in this topic. I replied that I wanted to learn more about the phenomenon of wife abuse in order to be more effective in my role as a marriage and family therapist. I answered their inquiries about myself openly and honestly. The "goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical" (Oakley, 1981, p. 41). Being mindful that it is impossible to completely eradicate the implicit power imbalance between the researcher and the participant; I used a number of strategies to reduce the impact of my privileged position in the interviews.

The technique of reflexivity is viewed to be helpful in transcending differences of power, culture, and class. Ahern (1999) describes bracketing and reflexivity as "…fruit from the same tree" (p. 410). Through the process of bracketing (Appendix F), I became cognizant of the fact that women may have difficulty trusting me due to various differences such as class, marital status, and level of education as well as differences in the experiences of abuse. I have not experienced the phenomenon of wife abuse in my

life, I am not married, I am highly educated, and I grew up in a middle class family. Continually attending to these difference allowed me to facilitate a more collaborative working alliance between the participants and myself (Harding, 1989).

As a trained therapist, I was skilled in establishing rapport, attuned to the impact of posing questions in different ways, aware of non-verbal behaviour, and used to being engaged in the moment while simultaneously attending to the participant, the conversation, and the environment. I used these skills to put the participants at ease during the interview. I also adapted my communication style to match theirs. I was relaxed and friendly and I invited the women to voice any concerns that they might have about the research. I expressed empathy, respect, and consideration towards the women, both verbally and non-verbally.

Initial Interviews

I began the interview by asking each woman questions about her personal background (Appendix C). This allowed her to feel at ease with the interview and gave her an opportunity to establish rapport with me. I inquired about the abuse experience by asking each woman the following general question. "In as much detail as possible, can you please tell me what your experience of wife abuse has been like for you?"

Throughout the interview, I employed the skills of active listening, empathy and unconditional positive regard for the woman. Without considerable skill in empathic communication, a researcher is unlikely to gain access to the lifeworld of the person, who is being interviewed (Osborne, 1994; Polkinhorne, 1989), particularly when the phenomenon being investigated (e.g., wife abuse) is extremely sensitive and personal.

The focus of the interview was on the woman's personal experiences of the abuse. I asked the participants to describe the actuality of their *lived experience* rather than to give opinion or hearsay about the phenomenon. I encouraged them to tell me, especially through the use of examples, what the abuse experience had been like for them. Probes such as: Can you tell me more about that? What was that like for you? How did you feel when that happened? Can you give me an example of what you mean by that? (Appendix C) were used to clarify information and to encourage further descriptions thereby allowing each woman to give as detailed information about her personal experiences of abuse as possible. I asked for clarification rather than relying on assumptions of common understandings with regard to the use of specific words and/or expressions. Paraphrasing was also used to keep the participants focused in their descriptions of the abuse experiences.

Phenomenological research aims to get as close to the *lived experience* of the person as possible by making the interview minimally intrusive (Osborne, 1990). Although I had prepared in advance a number of questions, probes, and prompts (Appendix C); they were used only as guidelines and were not rigidly followed. Rather, I drew on my skills as a trained therapist to gather the information in a caring and professional manner. I had no specific agenda for the interviews. Hence, the women were free to tell their personal stories of abuse as fully, completely, and honestly as they desired.

During the interview, I did not take any field notes. This enabled me to be fully present for the woman as I listened to her personal accounts of abuse. I was pleasantly surprised as to how freely the women spoke about their abuse experiences. Perhaps, the

bond between the women and myself fostered the openness with which they disclosed information about their abuse experiences. Oakley (1981) suggests that information about other peoples' lives can be acquired more readily on a basis of friendship rather than in a structured and formal interview.

The women described their abuse experiences in approximately a chronological order beginning with the initial incident of the abuse. Many of them expressed sadness quite openly as they talked about their personal experiences of abuse. One woman, in particular, cried throughout the entire interview. I listened to her words, which at times were softly whispered through her tears, with extreme care and concentration, thereby allowing her to express the depth of sadness that she felt comfortable in sharing with me. I was friendly, calm, attentive, courteous, and considerate in my interactions with her. I did not attempt to rescue her from her pain at any time during the interview. At the end, she thanked me for listening to her story with patience and respect. She said that she felt lighter and found the interview to be quite healing for her. Several authors comment on the emancipatory potential that story telling often evokes in research participants (Alty & Rodham, 1998; Banks-Wallace, 1998; Demi & Warren, 1995). Mishler (1986) maintains that empowerment is experienced as a consequence of an interview setting in which the interviewee is given a certain degree of latitude and control regarding the content and direction of the interview.

There were also moments of laughter and mutual silences in the room during the various interviews. I typically concluded the interview by asking the woman if there was anything else that she wanted to share with me. Once the interview was over, each woman was given an honorarium of $20; another $20 honorarium was given at the end of

the second interview as described in the consent form (Appendix B). I also provided a list of telephone numbers of trained therapists specializing in wife abuse to each woman in case she wanted to speak further with someone about any memories that may have been triggered during the interview. In two cases I made a point of asking the women if they would be okay in driving home because they had expressed a lot of pain and sadness during the interview. Both of them assured me that they were fine. Caution and care was always taken at the beginning and at the end of each interview to ensure the safety and comfort of the women. Women's emotional well being was a primary focus during the interviews.

After each interview, I took extensive field notes (sometimes in the car before I drove home) and recorded my impressions, thoughts, and reactions about the interview. There was one woman, in particular, for whom I felt a strong sense of admiration at the conclusion of the interview. On my drive home, I found myself wondering as to how she could be so resilient and persevering given what she had experienced. These sorts of thoughts and reactions were recorded in my field notes as well as in my research journal.

Throughout the data collection, I explored various emotions that surfaced for me as a result of the interviews (particularly feelings of sadness) with a colleague, who is a trained therapist. It is harrowing to be immersed, over a long period of time, in graphic accounts of physical assaults as well as of emotional degradation that the women experienced. In order to safeguard myself from the distress that I experienced during the interviews, I maintained close contact with a colleague. Prior to each interview, she would call to check in with me. She would ask me how I was feeling about the interview and inquire if I had any safety concerns about the woman whom I was about to interview

as well as myself. These conversations enabled me to be emotionally prepared for each interview. After the interview, I would typically call my colleague and share with her my reactions about the interview. Continuous dialogue with my colleague allowed me to detach from the pain and sadness that I was privy to during the interviews. As well, these interactions helped me to remain grounded, centered, and focused throughout the data collection.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all of the audio tape-recorded interviews myself. While this process was very time consuming, and somewhat overwhelming, it enabled me to immerse myself in the stories of the women. As I finished transcribing each interview, I read the transcript and simultaneously listened to the audiotape to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. The audiotapes were erased once the accuracy of the transcription had been achieved. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the women.

The data were analyzed using the seven step interpretive guidelines proposed by Colaizzi's (1978). Unlike other methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a "cookbook" set of instructions (Keen, 1975, p. 41). It is more an approach, an attitude, and an investigative posture with a certain set of goals. Analysis is the most difficult aspect of phenomenological research and also the most creative.

Colaizzi astutely points out that the procedures for data analysis that he proposes are meant to be used only as guidelines and are by no means definitive. He goes on to say "…both the listed procedures and their sequences should be viewed flexibly and freely by

each researcher, so that..." depending on the approach of the researcher these guidelines can be modified in whatever way seems appropriate (p. 59).

The goal of phenomenological data analysis is to categorize the investigated phenomenon into meaningful themes that reflect the commonalities in the participants' experiences. In phenomenological research, it is necessary that the researcher have no preconceived notions or expectations present to guide the analysis of the data (Field & Morse, 1985). Presuppositionless description of meaning via intuitive reflective insight is the mode of analysis. Spiegelberg (1982) maintains that "...careful intuiting and faithful descriptions are not to be taken for granted and they require a considerable degree of aptitude, training, and conscientious self-criticism" (p.689).

During the data analysis, I considered the data against the more substantial question such as what qualities make this phenomenon what it is and without which it could not be? I attempted to avoid imposing my interpretations. Instead, I relied primarily on direct usage of the women's quotes thereby preserving their meanings about their abuse experiences. I was not seeking a grand or comprehensive theory of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women, nor did I wish to tidy up contradictions in the women's personal accounts of abuse. Rather, my intention was to document and present the voices heard throughout the interviews.

Bracketing (Appendix F) was used prior to analyzing the data in order to ensure that the essential "truths" of the participants abuse experiences could be discovered. The endeavour to truly suspend one's beliefs is often difficult, particularly, with sensitive research topic (Cowles, 1988). However, my frequent return to the original transcripts and re-reading of the quotes reflected attentiveness to the contents of the women's

personal accounts of abuse in order to allow the complexity and diversity of their experiences to remain intact.

I proceeded with data analysis using the "line by line approach" (Van Manen, 1984, p. 60). Essentially, I considered each sentence in the transcript and tried to discern what it meant in regard to the phenomenon of wife abuse. Through the use of phenomenological reduction (Appendix F) I tried to maintain an attitude of openness throughout the data analysis. The data were analyzed using the following steps.

Step 1. I read each transcript several times to acquire a general sense for the woman's abuse experiences. In some cases, I read the transcript five or six times in order to become more familiar with the woman's *lived experience* of wife abuse. Each reading led to further thoughtfulness and reflection on particulars of the *lived experiences* of abuse.

Step 2. During this stage, I read each transcript several times and continually asked myself – what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon of wife abuse. I then used a highlighter to mark the various statements in each transcript, which I thought were pertinent to the woman's experience of wife abuse. This procedure is known as "extracting significant statements" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). Once the significant statements were identified in each of the transcripts, I then extracted these statements and cut and pasted them into a new file on the computer.

To ensure the accuracy of the procedure of extracting significant statements, I gave a copy of a transcript (identifying information was removed to maintain confidentiality of the woman) to a colleague and asked her to underline the statements that she thought were relevant to the woman's experience of wife abuse. Once she had

completed this task, the two of us met and compared transcripts. In both cases we had highlighted essentially all of the same statements.

Step 3. During this phase of the analysis, I engaged in a very rigorous chore of reviewing every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph in order to elicit the participant's meanings. I rewrote each of the "significant statements" using my own words to express the meaning(s) that I thought the woman was conveying in her statement(s). Colaizzi (1978) refers to this procedure as "formulating meaning" units (p. 59). In "formulating meaning" units I attempted to capture the woman's meaning, going beyond her words but still staying within her meaning. I continually attended to my bracketed presuppositions and personal biases to ensure that they did not dictate the nature of the meaning units that were formulated during this stage of the analysis. A meaning unit refers to those words or phrases, which express a unique and coherent meaning; clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows it. At this point all general meaning units were included even redundant ones.

To determine the accuracy of the meaning units, I gave copies of four different transcripts, which contained the women's original statements as well as my formulated meaning units to a colleague. She was asked to check if she thought that the meaning units that I had formulated captured the meanings of the women. There were very few statements where my colleague felt that the meaning units needed to be reworded. After our discussion, the two of us were able to agree as to how those sentences could be re-worded to more accurately reflect the meaning(s) that the women were communicating. Veracity of the meaning units was later verified with the women during the second interview.

Step 4. Formulated meaning units were then aggregated into "cluster of themes" (Colaizzi, 1978 p. 59). I grouped together all of the meaning units that I thought were quite similar to one another. Redundancies were eliminated at this point. Once the various clusters of meaning units were grouped a general heading was derived that fully described the contents of the information within that theme. Each theme was then worked and re-worked until a sense of internal consistency was achieved. Nonetheless, in some cases, the meaning units overlapped and could potentially be placed under two different theme headings. In such cases, I re-read the woman's original transcript in order to decide the most appropriate placing for the meaning units. I made every effort to ensure that the themes were true to the experience of wife abuse as described by the participants themselves. Streubert and Carpenter (1999) suggest that the researcher must dwell with the data for as long as necessary to ensure a pure and accurate description.

Time and caution were taken at this point to assess whether or not there was anything in the actual transcript that was not accounted for by the themes. In addition, discrepancies among and/or between the various themes were noted. Themes were examined, eliminated, added, or reformulated in order to improve the goodness of fit between the data and the themes. Moreover, some themes were collapsed, reworked, and refined in an effort to increase the internal consistency of each theme and to reduce the external overlap between the different themes. Refinement of the themes was continued until they encompassed all of the relevant material in the transcripts and fully reflected the experiences of the women. I began with fifteen different themes at the beginning of the data analysis. However, with feedback from the participants, my supervisor, committee members, and peer reviewers, in the end five themes were established.

For example, four of the preliminary themes, which were entitled "Controlling Behaviour of the Abuser", "Maltreatment from the In-laws", "Increased Vulnerability", and "Feeling of Loss and Despair" were collapsed and subsumed under the theme of "An Eroding Sense of Self". Similarly, the themes of "Concern for the Children", "An Attachment to the Abuser" and "Profound Hope" were amalgamated and integrated into a theme called "Feeling Extremely Ambivalent". In this way, the fifteen themes were reworked and refined to develop a total of five themes. This continuous process of refining the themes was carried out in order to improve the internal consistency of each theme and to reduce the external overlap between the different themes.

Discovering themes is at the core of the phenomenological researcher's analytic activity. In identifying and developing the themes, I continually asked myself the following questions. Have I worded this theme correctly? Do these concepts belong together? Have I accurately captured the sense of the theme? Did these themes emerge from the data or did I make them up? There was a constant movement of going back and forth from the transcript to the meaning units, to the clusters of meanings, to the themes.

Step 5. The results of the analysis to this point (e.g., the five themes) were integrated and written up into a description of wife abuse. Colaizzi (1978) refers to this as "an exhaustive description" of the investigated phenomenon (p. 61). Various examples and quotations, which were extracted from the women's transcripts, were used to substantiate the claims made within the themes. The description of the themes is presented in chapter four.

Step 6. At this point, the information from the "exhaustive description" (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61) of the themes was synthesized into a concise and as fundamental structure as

possible of the phenomenon of wife abuse. In an effort to accomplish this task, I identified various features that reflected the commonalities in the women experiences of wife abuse and integrated them into a succinct description, which was written up in the form of a common story.

Step 7. This part of the analysis required me to return to the participants to verify with them the accuracy of the "significant statements", "meaning units", the "themes", and the "common story" that were derived from the data collected from them. I met with each participant individually and asked her to read over the descriptive results and invited her to comment on whether they captured her experience of abuse. More specifically, each woman was first given a list of "significant statements" that were extracted from the transcript of her personal interview and was asked if the "meaning units" that I had formulated captured what she was trying to communicate by her original statements. Next, she was given a list of her personal themes and was asked if the themes accurately reflected her experience of wife abuse. Finally, each woman was given a copy of the "common story" and was asked if it captured her personal experience of wife abuse. Changes that participants offered at this time were worked into the final analysis of the results.

Follow up Interviews

After the data were analyzed, a follow up interview was conducted with seven of the eight participants. I was unable to contact one woman using the telephone and pager number that she had given me at the time of the initial interview. The time frame between the first and second interview was approximately eight months. It is possible that during

this time, circumstances for this particular woman changed to the point where she may have had to move to a different location.

The goal of the interview was to allow the participants to respond to the data analysis. The women were invited to add any missing information that was relevant and/or to suggest changes to the thematic descriptions so that the themes would more accurately reflect their abuse experiences. The follow up interview with each woman appeared to be more comfortable and congenial compared with the initial interview. It focussed on sharing my preliminary analysis with the women and provided an opportunity for them to clarify or expand on these findings.

All of the follow-up interviews were conducted in person at a time and location that were mutually convenient for the woman and for myself. These interviews lasted from about an hour and half to three hours. At the beginning of the interview, each woman was given a copy of the "significant statements", "meaning units", "list of themes" and a copy of the "common story" to read over. To confirm the accuracy of the meaning units, each woman was asked if the statements that I had written up captured what she was trying to communicate. Any changes that the woman offered were noted at this time and were later reworked into the final write up of the manuscript.

To verify the veracity of the themes and the common story, the women were asked the following questions: "How do my descriptive results compare with your experience of wife abuse? "What aspects of your experience have I omitted?" "Is there anything else you want to add to the list of the themes and/or the common story?" Is there anything in the themes or the common story that you do not agree with?

Some women suggested that certain aspects of the themes should be highlighted, elaborated on, or modified to improve the goodness of fit between the themes and their perceptions of their experiences. Discrepancies and/or new information that participants offered were integrated into the final write up of the results.

On the whole, the women indicated that the themes resonated very strongly for them. Four out of the five themes (i.e., *An Eroding Sense of Self*, *Changing Face of Fear*, *Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*, and *A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment*) were particularly salient for the women. However, the theme of *Reclaiming Personal Strength* was not as prominent for some women, especially those who were in the very early stages of self-healing.

At the end of the second interview, many of the women expressed an interest in receiving a copy of the common story and the final write up of the themes. Hence, arrangements were made with the recruiting agency to provide the women with a draft of chapter four. The women were asked to telephone or email me if they had any comments or questions regarding the manuscript. Five of the seven women contacted me and told me that they really enjoyed reading this chapter. They especially liked the various quotes that I had used from their own as well as other women's interviews. All of them indicated that other Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing abuse in their marriages would find this chapter useful. The women were told that once the dissertation was completed a copy would be made available to them as well as other Indo-Canadian Sikh women through the recruiting agency.

Criteria for Establishing Trustworthiness of the Findings

Frequently, qualitative research is evaluated against criteria that are suitable only for quantitative research (Krefting, 1991). Agar (1986) astutely points out that the concepts of *reliability* and *validity* are relevant primarily to quantitative research and do not fit the requirements of qualitative research. *External validity*, which refers to the ability to generalize the findings of a study to the larger population from which the sample was chosen (Payton, 1979), is one of the key criterion of good quantitative research.

Just as there is need to assess the accuracy of quantitative data using different criteria, there is also a need to confirm the trustworthiness of qualitative findings (Krefting, 1991; Leininger, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). Important criteria for assessing integrity of the findings involve considering how carefully the research question was pondered and framed; how respectfully the research was carried out; and how persuasive arguments were developed in the written account (Angen, 2000). In qualitative research, reliability and validity are often explained in terms of credibility, fittingness of the data, auditability, and confirmability (Sandelowski, 1986).

Sandelowski (1986) defines a credible study as one which presents such faithful descriptions of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognize it from those descriptions as their own. Going native, which refers to a case where the relationship between the researcher and the participant becomes so enmeshed that the researcher has difficulty distinguishing her own experience from that

of the participant, is considered to be a threat to the credibility of a qualitative study (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). To avoid this threat, I kept field notes to document my perceptions of the interviews and as a means of confronting my own beliefs and opinions (Krefting, 1991). In addition, I used debriefing sessions with my colleagues and members of the research committee and described my feelings and thoughts throughout the course of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Miles and Huberman (1984), *holistic fallacy* can also pose a threat to the trustworthiness of the findings of the qualitative research. It refers to the tendency on the part of the researcher to make the data seem more patterned and regular than it actually is. To guard against the holistic fallacy, I embedded the themes in the *lived experiences* of the women and worked towards reflecting both the typical and atypical elements of their experiences (Sandelowski, 1986).

The study is said to be credible if the readers can recognize the description of the *lived experience* as mirroring aspects of their own experience of the same phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). I tried to step back and look at the total, as well as immerse in the specifics in order to create a text that incorporated a tension between what is unique and what is shared. Guba (1981) has outlined four aspects of trustworthiness that are relevant for qualitative research. These include (a) *truth-value*, (b) *applicability*, (c) *consistency*, and (d) *neutrality*.

Truth-Value

In phenomenological research, truth is considered to exist in the phenomenon as it is experienced or lived by the participants. *Truth-value* refers to the steps the researcher has followed to establish confidence in the truth of the findings for the participants and

the context in which the study was undertaken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In quantitative studies, truth is often assessed by how well threats to the *internal validity* of the study have been controlled or minimized (Sandelowski, 1986). *Internal validity* is ensured by eliminating or reducing the effects of various *confounding variables* through the use of procedures of randomization (Campbell & Stanley, 1966).

In qualitative research, *truth-value* is usually obtained from the description of the participants' experiences of a given phenomenon as lived and perceived by the individuals themselves. *Truth-value* of the results for this study was established by verifying with the participants to see if the findings accurately reflected their experience of wife abuse.

Applicability

Applicability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts and settings or to other groups of people (Guba, 1981). In quantitative research, *applicability* refers to the ability to generalize the findings of a study to the larger population from which the sample was selected (Payton, 1979; Sandelowski, 1986). The ability to generalize is determined by how well the threats to *external validity* have been managed (Sandelowski, 1986). Sampling techniques are important ways of ensuring that threats to external validity have been minimized.

Qualitative research uses the criteria of *fittingness* or *transferability* to assess the applicability of the results (Guba, 1981). A research study meets this criterion when the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that is similar to the conditions of the study (Licoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba argue that *transferability* is more the responsibility of the person wanting to transfer the findings to another situation or group

of people than that of the researcher of the original study. It is addressed by ascertaining the extent to which the researcher has provided adequate descriptive data to enable others to apply or transfer the findings to other contexts or respondents. Lincoln and Guba stipulate that as long as the original researcher provides sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison, he/she has addressed the problem of *applicability*. This criterion is met when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail and arrive at comparable conclusions given the same data, perspective, and situation. It is important to note that the aim of phenomenological research is not to generalize the results to other groups of samples but rather it intends to illuminate the life stories of the individuals who have personally experienced a particular life event.

To augment transferability, "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) of the procedures used to collect, analyze and transform the data into the final text was provided. Hence, the reader can decide for him/herself as to how well this criterion was met for the current study. Additionally, I have provided explicit information about my personal values, beliefs, and characteristics (Appendix F) to allow the reader to judge for him/herself as to how my biases may have influenced the manner in which I collected and interpreted the data for this study. As well, I provided a copy of chapter four to an Indo-Canadian Sikh counsellor who works closely with Indo-Canadian Sikh women who have experienced abuse in their marriages and asked her for feedback. She said that the findings of this study were consistent with what she has learned about the abuse experiences of this group of women through her work with them.

Consistency

In quantitative research, *reliability* is the criterion used to assess the *consistency* of the results. *Reliability* is the extent to which repeated administrations of a measure or an instrument provide the same results. It also refers to the degree to which a measure administered by a different individual produces equivalent result.

In qualitative research, criteria for assessing *consistency* are the researcher, the participants, and peer-reviewers. To increase the consistency within the study, I used the "code-recode procedure" (Krefting, 1991, p. 221). It involves coding the data, waiting a period of two weeks and then recoding. Participants were also given the opportunity to review the results in order to ensure that their experiences of abuse were accurately reflected. As well, I consulted with peer reviewers, my research supervisor, as well as my committee members to further enhance the consistency of the results.

Neutrality

In quantitative research, *objectivity* is the criterion used to ensure *neutrality*. *Objectivity* is achieved through the use of procedures such as instrumentation and randomization (Krefting, 1991). An objective researcher is someone who is not influenced by and does not influence the results of the study so that the results can be replicated by any other researcher. Thus, in quantitative research, the researcher attempts to remain distant and impartial.

In qualitative research, however, the researcher attempts to increase the worth of the findings by decreasing the distance between him/herself and the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that in qualitative research *confirmability* needs to be the key

criterion for *neutrality*. It is concerned with ensuring that the data, interpretations, and outcomes of the study accurately represent the views of those who participated in the study. This was achieved by verifying the *truth-value* of the findings with the participants as well as two peer reviewers (Krefting, 1991).

Procedures for Establishing Rigour

Techniques of rapport building, journaling, phenomenological reduction, member checking and peer examination were used to establish the rigour for this study. A brief description of each of these strategies follows.

Rapport Building

Time was spent at the beginning of each interview in casual conversation as a means of establishing rapport with each participant. Moreover, attention was given to building rapport with each participant throughout the interview. Establishing rapport with participants in phenomenological research is important because it allows participants to share with the researcher sensitive and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. I used my skills of empathy, active listening, probing, and perception checking to create a safe and trusting relationship with each of the participants.

Journaling

Journaling is another way that a researcher can enhance the credibility of the findings of a study (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). I kept a research journal in which I recorded my thoughts, feelings and reactions about the different aspects of the data collection and analysis. This allowed me to monitor my experiences within the research context. The journal also contained the various questions, problems, and frustrations that I experienced during the different stages of the research. Writing personal thoughts and

feelings about the different aspects of the research enabled me to attend to certain

feelings (e.g., sadness) and concerns (e.g., fear, self-doubt) in order to reduce their

influence on the interpretations of the results for the study. I found myself at times feeling

extremely overwhelmed with the pain and sadness that the women had shared with me

during the interviews. I shared such feelings with a number of my colleagues who are

trained therapists and was thus able to keep myself motivated, focused, and centered

throughout the data collection and analysis. These conversations helped me to use my

personal experiences and understandings in a way that enhanced rather than hindered the

research findings by creating a text that represented the abuse experiences of the women

in a experiential and feeling way.

Phenomenological Reduction

The technique of *phenomenological reduction* is another way of ensuring

credibility of the research findings. Four main types of reductions have been identified in

the literature. The first of these is known as the *phenomenological reduction*. It refers to

the technique whereby the researcher breaks from the natural attitude. The second type of

reduction is described as the *phenomenological psychological reduction*. It is a procedure

whereby the researcher brackets the world but not the empirical subject. The third form

of reduction is known as the *eidetic reduction*. It reduces the objects to their *essence*. It

refers to the strategy whereby the researcher derives general themes or patterns of the

phenomenon from the information collected from the participants (Cohen & Omery,

1994). Although Husserl did not give detailed instructions on how to accomplish this

form of reduction, it has been interpreted to mean dropping references to the individual

and particular (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Finally, the *transcendental phenomenological reduction* brackets the empirical subject as well as the world (Giorgi, 1997).

In this section, I will briefly discuss the phenomenological reduction. The other forms of reduction have mostly philosophical significance and are refinements of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenological reduction is a technique of self-reflection whereby the researcher makes explicit his/her beliefs, assumptions, and biases regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Colaizzi, 1978; Van Manen, 1984, 1990). While it is impossible for the researcher to separate from his/her personal beliefs and values, self-reflection allows the researcher to become aware of the possible presuppositions that may influence the data collection and analysis (Beck, 1994; Kvale, 1983; Osborne, 1990). The researcher by exploring his/her personal assumptions and beliefs aims to reduce the effects of such biases when approaching the data (Baker et al., 1992; Colaizzi, 1978).

Phenomenological reduction allows the phenomenon to come directly into view, rather than to be observed (and distorted) through one's preconceptions. Husserl used the metaphor of *bracketing*, which he derived from his mathematical background, to refer to a technique whereby the researcher aims to suspend his/her beliefs regarding the phenomenon under investigation. *Bracketing* is an important component of phenomenological research. It is a strategy of attempting to recover original awareness of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Historically, bracketing arose from Husserl's idea that in order to participate in the phenomenological research one needs to transcend oneself to a state of pure consciousness so as to reveal the lived experience of the person in a true or pure way. Later, Merleau-Ponty interpreted Husserl's ideas of phenomenological

reduction as a search within oneself to come to know the presuppositions, beliefs, and biases one holds about the phenomenon under investigation and then putting them aside to allow the data to speak for itself.

Bracketing enables the researcher to have an attitude of openness. It is carried out throughout the various stages of the research (e.g., data collection, data analysis, etc.) to allow the researcher to attend to the *lived experience* of the participants. The types of presuppositions that need to be bracketed are those gained from reading the literature on the phenomenon under investigation (e.g., wife abuse) and personal experiences of that phenomenon. Making these assumptions explicit to the reader enables the reader to judge how well the researcher's perspective has illuminated the phenomenon under investigation (Osborne, 1990).

In order to gain a true understanding of the phenomenon of wife abuse from the perspective of Indo-Canadian Sikh women, I attempted to set aside (e.g., bracket or suspend) my personal beliefs, assumptions, and biases regarding this phenomenon. Specifically, I tried to set aside my personal insights about wife abuse that I had acquired from reading the various books and articles on this topic. I also sought to set aside the previous knowledge that I had gained about this phenomenon from my professional work as a family therapist. A brief synopsis of my knowledge of wife abuse and some of my personal assumptions and insights regarding this phenomenon that I have gained through deep self-reflection is presented in Appendix F.

Member Checking

The usefulness of *member checks* has been debated within the literature (Giorgi, 1985; Lather, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1993). *Member checking* in

qualitative research refers to the strategy whereby the researcher returns to the participants with a copy of the final results to check with them to see if their experience of the phenomenon under investigation has been accurately interpreted and portrayed by the researcher. Lather (1991) posits that if researchers do not return to the participants and consider refinements in light of their reactions then the findings may be invalid. Sandelowski (1993) cautions that taken to extremes in the interest of representation, this form of refinement can paralyze the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that "... the member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Others agree that it is important to have the participants review the results of the analysis to ensure the material is correctly stated and that nothing has been added or deleted (Reinharz, 1983). Accordingly, I returned to the participants with a copy of the preliminary results to verify with them whether or not I had accurately reflected their experiences of wife abuse. The technique of *member checking* allows the participants to have the opportunity to check over the results to assess if they recognize their experience of the phenomenon in the final results of the study. It decreases the chances of misrepresentation thereby enhancing the *truth-value* of the findings.

Peer Examination

Peer examination is another technique that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define it as "...exposing oneself to a disinterested peer ...for the purpose of exploring aspects of inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit with the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). It involves the

discussion of research findings with impartial colleagues who have experience with qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that the strategy of *peer examination* is one way of keeping the researcher honest. Colleagues can increase the credibility of the results by checking categories developed out of the original data. For the purposes of this study, two independent readers were asked to read over the original transcripts of the interviews to determine whether the list of the themes and the common story accurately reflected the information in the original data (e.g., the interview transcript).

One of the peer reviewers was a registered psychologist working in the area of sexual abuse and trauma. The second reviewer was a sociologist working as a consultant for qualitative research methods. Both of these reviewers have a solid understanding of phenomenology. They each received a different copy of the woman's transcript, a list of the themes as well as a copy of the common story. They were asked to read the transcript and to scrutinize the themes and the common story. Each of them was interviewed separately and was asked a number of questions regarding the fit between the transcript and the themes (Appendix G). Their feedback was used to further refine the themes. Some of the themes were collapsed to enhance the internal consistency of the themes. Titles of two themes were changed to better reflect the contents within the themes.

A list of the final five themes was later emailed to each of the peer reviewers for their comments. They both stated that these themes accurately reflected each woman's experiences of wife abuse. Reviewer one found that the themes of *An Eroding Sense of Self, Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*, and *Changing Face of Fear* were extremely congruent with her understanding of the abuse dynamics acquired through her work with women who have experienced abuse in their marriages. Reviewer two commented on the

complexity of the abuse experienced by this group of women. She indicated that the different strands of abuse including the maltreatment from the in-laws and the challenges that the women faced in receiving treatment were informative. She found the themes of *An Overwhelming Sense of Entrapment* and *Reclaiming Personal Strength* to be most connected with the woman's personal account of wife abuse.

Ethical Considerations

Several steps were taken to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner and that the rights of participants were protected. First and foremost, data collection did not begin until approval had been received for this study from the University of British Columbia's Ethical Review Committee (Appendix H). The standards and guidelines approved by the review board were followed throughout the study.

Women were recruited from community-based agency (prior approval from the agency had been received and was submitted to U.B.C.'s Ethical Review Committee) to ensure that the women had some sort of support services already in place to help them to deal with their experiences of wife abuse. All interviews were conducted in locations that were convenient and safe for the women. All of the consent forms, the master list of names, interview transcripts and field notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet. The audiotapes of the interviews were erased once the interviews had been transcribed. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and the final write up of the results to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of the women.

In a discussion of ethical issues in nursing research, Burns and Grove (1993, 1995) identify four areas of concern. The first is the right to self-determination. The

authors explain that individuals should be "... treated as autonomous agents, who have the freedom to conduct their lives as they choose without external controls" (Burns & Grove, 1995, p. 368). These authors suggest that researchers must inform participants about their rights and the nature of the research that is being undertaken. In order to address the women's right to self-determination, I provided a brief overview of the study, as well as a copy of the introduction letter and the consent form to each woman. Each woman was informed about her rights as well as the nature and purpose of the study. I also notified each woman both verbally and in writing that her participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that she could withdraw from the study at any time.

Secondly, Burns and Grove (1995) discuss the right to privacy. This is described as "... the right to provide or prevent access of others to... records [of participants]" (p. 372). In this respect, the audiotapes were kept in a locked filing cabinet at a safe location (e.g., an office) so that no one other than myself could gain access to the data. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the audiotapes were erased to further protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the women. All of participants were told that my committee members and two independent readers would have access to the typed transcripts of the interviews. In these cases, all identifying information was removed to protect the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms were used in the written transcripts.

Thirdly, participants have the right to fair treatment (Burns & Grove, 1995). This means that participants should be chosen for reasons directly related to the problem being studied and not for their easy availability, compromised position or friendship with the researcher. The women for this study were recruited from community-based agency. The main reason for limiting the sample to clinical setting was to ensure the safety of the

women. Moreover, these women were self-identified as having experienced abuse in their marriage. I did not impose any criteria as to what constitutes "wife abuse" onto the women who decided to take part in this study.

Finally, Burns and Grove (1995) cite the importance of protecting research participants from discomfort and harm. The risk of discomfort, according to Burns and Grove, can range from "no anticipated effects…to certainty of permanent damage" (p. 376). I did not anticipate that this research would cause participants serious harm. However, I was aware that the women might experience certain level of distress in describing their abuse experiences. I provided telephone numbers of therapists specializing in abuse to all of the women at the end of the initial interview in case any of them wished to pursue further therapeutic work to deal with any painful memories that may have been triggered by the interview. More importantly, since many of the women were recruited from an agency, all of them were already working with a counsellor or a community worker about their issues of abuse.

Additionally, I used my counselling skills to manage the distress the women expressed during the interview. I, however, did not provide counselling to any of these women. Each of the women, at the beginning of the interview was informed, both in writing (Appendix B) and verbally, that if she expressed suicidal and homicidal ideation confidentiality would have to be breached and appropriate interventions would be undertaken to maintain safety of those at risk. None of the women expressed suicidal or homicidal ideation. Equally, each woman was told that if she disclosed information about her children being abused then I would be obligated to report that information. The women did not reveal any cases of child abuse.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the methodological approach that guided the present research study. Historical background and philosophical tenets of phenomenology were outlined. Procedures for collecting and analyzing data were described as well as the criteria for establishing trustworthiness of the findings and strategies used to establish rigour for the study. Finally, ethical considerations that were utilized to protect the rights of the women were summarized.

Chapter four provides an in-depth description of each of the five themes that were identified and developed during the data analysis. Interpretations of the findings and implications for clinical practice are discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER FOUR

Description of the Results

This chapter describes the results of the current research study. Following an initial orientation of the participants as a group, each individual woman is introduced to acquaint the reader with her personal history. Concern for the woman's safety, confidentiality, and anonymity prevented me from writing more detailed biographies for each of the participants.

Section two describes the women's abuse experiences using the framework of five themes that were identified during the data analysis. In keeping with Husserl's precept of "returning to the things themselves"(cited in Colaizzi, 1978, p. 56), I focused on providing *eidetic* descriptions of the women's abuse experiences. *Eidetic* descriptions are free of bias as well as interpretation and can be attained only through *phenomenological reduction* (Giorgi, 1997; van Manen, 2000).

Section three presents the common story, which was derived by integrating the subjective experiences of wife abuse of the participants. The common story is essentially a compendium of the collective abuse experiences for this group of women. Polkinghorne (1989) claims that the reality of a particular phenomenon emerges not as one absolute and objective view, but rather as a composite picture of how the persons who have experienced that phenomenon perceive and understand it. The final section concludes with a chapter summary.

Participants

General Synopsis

Eight Indo-Canadian Sikh women volunteered to participate in this inquiry. All of the participants identified themselves as having been abused by their husbands and, at the time of the initial interview, were receiving some form of psychotherapy to deal with the aftermath of this abuse. They ranged in age from thirty-one to forty-eight years with an average age of thirty-seven years.

They all spoke Punjabi and English fluently and were Canadian citizens. The interviews were conducted in English. Three of the women were university educated and the remaining five were high school graduates. They varied greatly in their socioeconomic status: two were on income assistance, three were working for minimum wage, and three were earning relatively high salaries working in administrative careers.

All of the women had married Indian men who identified themselves as Sikh. Five of the men were born and raised in India, one in England, one in Malaysia, and one in Canada. At the time of the second interview, two of the women were still married, two were in the process of divorcing their husbands and four were legally divorced. Among the women who were divorced, one had been divorced for about two years, one for nearly five years and two for approximately six years. Prior to the time that their marriages ended, two had been married for almost a year, one for approximately three years, two for nearly six years, and one for roughly twenty years. Of the two women who were still living with their husbands, one had been married for about seven years and the other for nearly fifteen years. Six of the women had children who ranged in age from three to fourteen years and two of the women did not have children.

One woman was born and raised in Canada, three were born in England, one in Singapore and three in India. Of the three women born in England, one moved to Canada when she was about eight years old and the other two immigrated to Canada during their early twenties. Among the three women who were born in India, one moved to Canada at the age of six, another at the age of seven and the third woman immigrated to Canada at the age of twenty-one. The woman born in Singapore immigrated to Canada during her mid-twenties.

The participants were heterogeneous in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and duration of marriage. Polkinghorne (1994) affirms that a diverse sample extends different aspects of the *lived experience* thereby allowing the researcher to paint a more holistic picture of the phenomenon. The limitations of this study, regarding the variety of women who participated, are discussed in chapter five. A brief introduction for each woman follows.

Individual Profiles

In this section, each woman is introduced in terms of her upbringing, family support system, and type of abuse that she experienced. The aim of these profiles is to provide a sociocultural context for understanding the women's struggles and triumphs. To maintain confidentiality, the information that could potentially identify the women has either been removed or altered. Moreover, pseudonyms are used to protect the women's anonymity.

Diamond has five sisters and one brother. She grew up in a joint family living arrangement and had a happy childhood. Diamond was born overseas and came to Canada before the age of ten along with her family. Diamond's marriage was arranged

for her by one of her brothers-in-law who live overseas. The abuse in Diamond's marriage began on the first night of her honeymoon and became increasingly severe over time. Diamond's husband was physically, psychologically, and sexually abusive towards her. Diamond left her husband a few years ago and now lives with her parents along with her one child for whom she has sole custody. Diamond's ex-husband lives overseas and she has not had any contact with him for the past few years.

Emerald was born and raised in Canada. She is the middle child of three children. She grew up in an abusive family environment and witnessed her mother's abuse on many different occasions. After graduating from high school, Emerald went abroad to marry a man that her parents had chosen for her. Emerald's husband immigrated to Canada a year after they were married. The abuse in Emerald's marriage began soon after her husband arrived in Canada and became exceedingly severe with each passing year. Her husband was physically and psychologically abusive. After enduring the abuse for many years, Emerald left her husband when she was pregnant with her second child and moved in with her parents. She later moved out of her parents' home and now lives as a single mother in a two-bedroom suite that she rents in a multi-unit house. Emerald and her ex-husband share joint custody of their two children.

Garnet is the second youngest of four children. She has two sisters and one brother. Garnet was born and raised overseas. She grew up in a very close knit family. Her parents are now retired and live overseas along with her two siblings. One sister lives in British Columbia. Garnet met the man whom she married through a family friend. Born and raised in Canada, he was travelling abroad when Garnet was introduced to him. Garnet came to Canada about a week before she was to get married. Immediately after

the wedding, Garnet moved in with her husband and his family. The abuse in Garnet's marriage began within days of her being married and quickly escalated. Garnet's husband was psychologically abusive towards her. She divorced her husband a few years ago and now lives on her own in a rented apartment.

Jade is the second youngest of seven children. She has five sisters and one brother. She was born and raised overseas. Jade moved to Canada about seven years ago. She grew up in a loving and caring family. Her parents are now retired and live overseas. Three of her sisters also live overseas and two of her sisters live in British Columbia. Her brother lives in Eastern Canada. Jade met her husband at a training seminar that she was attending through work. They dated each other for about a year before getting married. The abuse in Jade's marriage began soon after she was married and became increasingly severe with the passage of time. Jade's husband was physically, psychologically, and sexually abusive. Jade left her husband a few years ago and is currently in the process of filing for a divorce. She now lives on her own in a rented basement suite.

Opal is the eldest of eight children. She has four sisters and three brothers. She had a happy childhood. Opal was born and raised overseas. She immigrated to Canada during her early twenties. Most of her family members now live in Canada. She met her husband through her sister-in-law. Opal and her husband dated each other for a few months before they decided to get married. The abuse in Opal's marriage began within the first year of her marriage and has continued over the past few years. Opal's husband is psychologically abusive towards her. Despite the unrelenting abuse in her marriage, Opal has decided to stay with her husband for a number of different reasons including her concern for the well being of her children, family honour, and personal finances. She

currently lives with her husband and their two children in a newly built home that they own in a very affluent neighbourhood.

Pearl was born overseas. She is the middle child of three children. Pearl moved to Canada at a fairly young age along with her family. She grew up in a very loving and caring family environment. Having graduated from high school, Pearl went on to university and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree. She was introduced to her husband by one of her relatives. Pearl and her husband dated each other for about a year before they decided to get married. The abuse in her marriage began during the first year of her marriage and became progressively worse over time. Her husband has been physically and psychologically abusive towards her. About three years ago, Pearl and her husband briefly separated. After being apart for nearly a year, Pearl and her husband reconciled. Presently, Pearl and her husband are living together along with their one child in a family home that they recently built.

Ruby is the second youngest of four children. She moved to Canada at a very young age along with her family. She grew up in an abusive family environment in which her father sexually abused her. A social worker removed Ruby, during her late teens, from her family home after her disclosure of sexual abuse. Ruby has not had any contact with her family since that time. Ruby went abroad to marry a man who had been chosen for her by one of her co-workers. Her husband immigrated to Canada a year later and the abuse in her marriage began within days after he arrived in Canada. He was physically, psychologically, and sexually abusive. After suffering abuse for a number of years, Ruby left her husband to go live in a transition house; she was pregnant with her second child at that time. Ruby and her husband have been divorced for a number of years. Currently,

Ruby lives in a two-bedroom suite that she rents in a subsidized housing complex. She has sole custody of her two children.

Sapphire has two sisters and one brother. She grew up in a very affluent and nurturing family environment. Sapphire was born and raised overseas. She immigrated to Canada in the late1970s. She married a wealthy businessman who was chosen for her by her father. The abuse in Sapphire's marriage began during the first year of her marriage and increased in severity as well as frequency over the years. Her husband was physically and psychologically abusive towards her. Sapphire briefly separated from her husband ten years ago. However, after a few months of living with her parents, she reconciled with her husband. Four years ago, Sapphire left her husband to go to a transition house along with her two children. She returned to her husband within two weeks because her children were unhappy about living in the transition house. Sapphire and her husband have been legally separated for a few years. Presently, Sapphire lives with her two children in a home that she owns. She is in the process of filing for a divorce.

The biographies of the participants illustrate that many of them had experienced multiple forms of abuse. The type of abuse that they experienced and its implications for clinical practice are discussed in chapter five. It is important to note that the women who entered "arranged" marriages were not the only ones who experienced abuse from their husbands. Nonetheless, their coping strategies may have been influenced by the kind of marriage that they had. These ideas are explored further in chapter five. The following section provides a description of the women's abuse experiences.

The General Structure of Wife Abuse

Todres (1998) maintains that the aim of the general structure "...is to establish what is typical of the phenomenon and to express such typicality in an insightful and integrated manner" (p. 122). The general structure of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women is comprised of five common themes that were identified during the data analysis. The procedures that I used to develop the themes are outlined in chapter three.

The five themes included (1) *An Eroding Sense of Self*; components of this theme were self-doubt, self-blame, and sense of worthlessness. (2) *Changing Face of Fear*; fear alternated from distress about safety to worries about poverty, abandonment, and alienation. (3) *Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*; concern for the children, lack of finances, an attachment to their husbands, and the hope that they would change contributed to the women's profound ambivalence about whether to salvage or end their abusive marriages. (4) *A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment*; this theme was comprised of cultural dictates such as *izzat* (family honour) and the sanctity of marriage. (5) *Reclaiming Personal Strength*; the women utilized multiple sources including their religious faith, support from friends and family as well as psychotherapy to help them to reclaim personal strength.

These five themes exemplify the *essence* of the abuse experience for the participants. While each theme may be part of the abuse experience of any woman who has ever encountered abuse in her intimate relationship, certain dimensions of the themes are complicated for Indo-Canadian Sikh women due to a number of circumstances including cultural prescriptions such as the dowry, respect for elders, and *izzat*. The clash of values between their own culture and that of the dominant culture regarding marriage

and family life also complicate their experiences of wife abuse. These aspects of their abuse experiences are discussed more fully in chapter five.

This section provides an exhaustive description of each of the five themes. Quotations from the individual women are woven throughout the discussion of the themes to substantiate the claims made within them. Quotes have been edited to clarify the women's meanings as follows: three consecutive dots denote the deletion of the dialogue that was not directly relevant to the significance of the passage and/or weakened its comprehension. Rounded brackets identify non-verbal body language or specify what is being referred to when it is not explicitly expressed in the excerpt. Square brackets signify my insertions into the conversation.

An Eroding Sense of Self

All of the participants experienced an eroding sense of self. Components of this theme included self-doubt, self-blame, and a sense of worthlessness. The constant denial of the abuse led some women to second-guess themselves. The covert nature of psychological abuse added to their self-doubt. Endless accusations contributed to their sense of self-blame. Constant criticism, insults, and mind games undermined their confidence. Extreme isolation that they experienced due to their husband's controlling behaviour also contributed to their low self-esteem. Cultural mores such as the dowry and respect for elders as well as power differentials between family members resulted in further deterioration of the women's sense of self. The severity of physical and sexual abuse also diminished their sense of self-worth. It was under these circumstances that the women continued to experience an eroding sense of self.

Many of the participants reported that their husbands repeatedly denied the abuse. "My husband does not think that he is being abusive. He keeps denying it" [Sapphire]. They also mentioned that their husbands and in-laws often colluded with each other in denying the abuse. "My husband and his family were trying to minimize it. They kept saying that is not abuse. You don't know what you are talking about" [Pearl]. Opal remarked, "…my mother-in-law said 'it's not like he beats you', she thinks that is the only way that he can abuse me."

Faced with the incessant denial and minimization of the abuse, many of the women initially coped by rationalizing and/or downplaying its severity. "It was almost as if every time that he drank, there was this change in his personality" [Jade]. Emerald said, "I kept telling myself, 'he does not mean that, he's just under a lot of stress'". Pearl stated:

> …my husband at the beginning would throw something, or he would slam the doors, but that was something I had not been so concerned about…I kind of just excused it as 'oh he's having a bad day', or I would say to myself 'it's not that bad'…I guess I was afraid to admit the truth.

Over time, they began to second-guess themselves in response to the persistent denial of the abuse. "I started to think that maybe I was making a big deal about nothing, like he had me believing that" [Pearl]. Garnet remarked, "I literally thought that I was going mad. I really thought that I was going crazy because no one in his family was acknowledging the abuse." These statements reveal how the women became increasingly unsure of their perceptions and some even started to doubt their sanity. Denial of the abuse was multi-layered for Indo-Canadian Sikh women because not only their husbands but also their in-laws (many of whom lived with them) continuously denied and/or minimized the existence of the abuse. This dimension of Indo-Canadian Sikh women's

abuse experience in relation to other groups of women is explored more fully in chapter

five.

The covert nature of psychological abuse added to the women's sense of self-

doubt.

> I think verbal abuse is the worst type of abuse because it really gets to you. At
> first I couldn't even tell my parents that he was being verbally abusive, I mean
> what proof could I give them, it's hard to know. You think that you are going
> crazy... all those put downs, they get to you, they really do... I would wake up
> like four in the morning and I couldn't get back to sleep again...I wasn't eating,
> or sleeping, my head was filled with so many worries. I was worrying so much
> that my adrenal was just working over time and my stomach was always knotted.
> [Pearl]

Similarly, Opal spoke of the elusive aspect of psychological abuse:

> ...the verbal abuse in my opinion is very difficult to deal with because no one
> really believes that you are being abused. But when he hits me and I have a black
> eye or something then people are more sympathetic. I mean most people think
> only if he hits me that that is the only type of abuse, they don't consider verbal
> abuse as being serious. But I think the pain and the hurt of verbal abuse is very
> harmful...I mean mentally, he is really draining me.

Garnet further explained its underhandedness:

> ...in my case there were no bruises, there was no black eye, there was no this or
> that. I was walking around the way that I am today. People would say to me, 'well
> what is her problem, she keeps on crying, like what is her problem?' I found it
> hard for people to sympathize with me because the type of abuse that I
> experienced was more mental or verbal...they don't understand. They did not see
> any bruises and there were no bandages on me, it was a broken heart, it was
> everything gone from here (points to her heart and starts crying). I felt so empty in
> here (points to her heart again)... when someone beats you up, you have the
> bruises to prove that you have been beaten up but with mental abuse, it is so hard
> to prove that.

Jade talked about its lasting effects, "... with physical abuse you get a bruise, it

disappears but the mental and verbal abuse you can never erase that". These excerpts

portray the permanent scars of psychological abuse. Repeatedly, the women mentioned

that the people, to whom they disclosed their psychological abuse, did not consider it to

be very serious because there were no outwardly visible signs of abuse. They also indicated that it was difficult for them to talk about this form of abuse with other people because "no one" could "really relate" [Garnet] to what they were going through. Lack of sympathy and empathic understanding concerning the deceptive nature of psychological abuse left the women wondering if they were going crazy.

Although instinctively they knew that they were not at fault for the abuse, the endless accusations convinced them that they were somehow culpable. "It was always his anger but I began to think that something was wrong with me" [Pearl]. Jade stated:

> … he would beat me for no good reason…Then he would turn around and say to me 'it's all your fault, you are late again, how many times do I have to tell you that I want you to come straight home from work'…He would never give me a chance to explain or anything.

Receiving virtually no reprieve from the abuse and unable to reason with their husbands, they began to blame themselves. Their sense of being responsible for the abuse was further reinforced through their in-laws, friends, and family members who encouraged them to stay and "…try harder to make things work" [Emerald]. As they internalized the blame, the women focused their energies towards finding ways to reduce the likelihood of the abuse. "I was putting so much of the onus on myself. I kept thinking if only I could find another solution, if only there was another way, if only I could be a better wife" [Pearl].

Many tried to stay one step ahead of their husbands hoping to neutralize the possibility of the abuse. Jade indicated that she attempted to "…read [her husband's] mind…" and did her best to fulfill his demands. Emerald said that she avoided discussing certain matters with her husband because she "…did not want to annoy him." Others talked about keeping the house clean, making sure that dinner was ready on time, and

asking the children to be on their best behaviour. They used expressions like: "I was afraid to rock the boat"[Pearl], "I didn't want to upset him"[Ruby], and "I was willing to bend over backwards"[Sapphire] to demonstrate the degree to which they tried to do things perfectly so as not to anger their husbands.

Despite their efforts, the abuse would still occur:

....(my children) would go out of their way to be nice to him so that he would not get angry with me. I would always have dinner ready for him and the kids were usually on their best behaviour and you know the slightest thing would set him off. [Sapphire]

Diamond reported:

...one time I was doing the dishes and I had taken my wedding ring off and I had forgotten to put it back on. He noticed that I was not wearing my wedding ring, and he said, 'oh, you don't like me anymore, you don't want to wear the wedding ring anymore' and just because of that he started hitting me.

Ruby remarked, "...one day I had forgotten to take the meat out of the refrigerator and he hit me so hard that I had bruises all over my body. At work I couldn't even lift the coffeepot." Jade stated:

...he just flipped out about the fact that I had thrown his...(clothing item) away. He began to shout at me and demanded to know why I had done that...He just went livid and he was pushing me around...that was the first time I had seen full-blown rage, I mean I had seen sides of him in a very minute way but to see him acting that way that day...I was scared as to what he might do.

The extreme rage, jealousy, and unpredictability of their husbands left the women feeling like they were walking on eggshells.

The meaning that the women made about the abuse further compounded their sense of self-blame. Several of them attributed the abuse to their personal karma. "I think it was part of my karma, like I had to go through that with him" [Sapphire]. She defined karma as follows:

...karma is always about your account being right...so that basically if I have made mistakes in the past then I have to pay for them in this lifetime. You just have to accept that. That is the way it is...it's like you have imprints of your past life in your mind but you can't remember what you did in your past life. That blueprint leads you to the development of certain personality traits in you. You have to evolve as that soul ...Everything happens for a reason, this is what I have come to believe.

Ruby remarked, "...I think that it is fate... I needed to go through that. I don't know how else to explain it. Maybe that's just the way my life was supposed to be." Opal revealed, "...it is in my karma, karma from my past life...maybe in my past life I did something bad to somebody and that is why I am paying for it now, ...like you take rebirth and somehow you pay for your past sins." In attributing abuse to their personal karma, some women continued to blame themselves for the abuse because they believed that it was punishment for past sins.

Day by day, their sense of self-blame intensified and they did whatever they could to forestall the abuse. Some gave up their career aspirations to appease their husbands:

> I wanted to go for my Ph.D. but instead I put my husband on a pedestal...his life was everything to me. I wanted to please him in every way so I put my ambitions on the back burner...I was so ambitious before, like when I was in university, I was going to go for my Ph.D. in (name of the state in the U.S.)...I did so much for him and he does not even know what I gave up for him...I did it all for him because I just wanted him to love me. That's all that mattered. [Sapphire]

Having lost the opportunity to pursue post-graduate education, their career options were limited. Lack of personal income meant that some of the women were completely dependent on their husbands for financial support. Consequently, they tried even harder to ward off the abuse.

In utter desperation, one woman struggled to change even personal attributes in an effort to placate her husband. "I used to think that if only I could change my tone of voice then he would stop hitting me. I thought that if only I could be the perfect wife. I kept

thinking that if I just tried harder" [Pearl]. These statements illustrate the extent to which the women had internalized the blame for the abuse and the lengths to which they were willing to go to prevent its reoccurrence. Ultimately, they tried to emulate the image of the "perfect wife" in order to avoid the abuse from their husbands.

In insidious ways, the abusive men methodically attacked their wives' personal pride thereby chipping away at their confidence. "He was always just finding faults" [Diamond]. Ruby remarked, "...he would always tell me that I did not know how to dress properly, he never liked what I would wear and...[yet]...he would never let me go shopping either." Sapphire said:

> ...he was always just playing mental games with me. I was totally destroyed mentally and physically and it took me a long time to finally realize that he never ever really loved me...Now I think I don't know how stupid I could be to go through with what I went through...I am an educated woman and you would think that how, like why did I put up with all of that abuse for so long?

The constant criticism undermined the women's confidence to the point where they began to question their intellectual abilities. Derogatory and demeaning remarks also contributed to their low self-esteem:

> ...my husband was always telling me that I was not pretty enough for him...He would tell me that I was ugly. I started to feel so ugly...I would look at myself in the mirror and I would... (starts crying) my god, ...I just never felt happy about myself. It was stuck in my mind, like how ugly I was ...like I just didn't think I was anything. [Diamond]

Ruby said, "...he would always just put me down and make me feel like I was really stupid. He would always just look down on me... that's why I think inside of myself I just didn't have any self-esteem." Jade reflected, "...Oh God, I used to be a great person to be around. I was so bubbly and spontaneous...[but] in the last three years I didn't want to do anything. I was no longer the person that I used to be." Even the women who were

tremendously outgoing, intelligent, and self-assured before they got married indicated

that they started to feel mentally and emotionally destroyed by the ongoing abuse.

The isolation that they experienced due to their husbands' controlling behaviour

also contributed to their declining sense of self:

> ...he was a control freak. He wanted to control me. I was quite independent
> before I met him but over time, he was becoming very possessive. I went from
> this independent and bubbly person to a person whose life was getting totally
> wrapped around him...he did not like me spending time with my family. He
> hated it. One time I wanted to go and spend a night over at my brother's house
> and all of my family was there and he told me that I could not go over there...I
> have two sisters here and yes I do like spending time with them but he did not
> like that. It just got to the point that in such a small time frame he made them feel
> uncomfortable even to call me or come over here...He would question my time
> when I would come home from work. He would say, 'you are ten minutes late,
> why are you ten minutes late?' Later on he began to accuse me of lying to him, he
> would say that I went and visited my sisters when I didn't. I was just working late
> and I would come straight home. But he thought (long pause) well he just did
> not trust me. He had absolutely no trust in me none whatsoever even if I was ten
> minutes late because of traffic he did not believe me. [Jade]

Diamond said that her husband monitored her every movement and regulated her contact

with people to the point where:

> ...he would always go through my phone book to see if there were any numbers
> that belonged to guys. If he found any numbers that he thought belonged to guys,
> he would call that number to see who that person was and find out why I had that
> person's number.

Ruby recounted, "...he just didn't give me any room. Like, he would expect me to go to

work and come straight home. He just didn't give me any freedom or any spare time to

do whatever I wanted to do." Sapphire reported, "...my husband never let me socialize

with anyone. I didn't have any friends and I was just at home all by myself all the time."

These statements illustrate the extent to which the abusive men restricted their wives'

personal freedom.

Excessive isolation intensified the women's feelings of loneliness and despair. Their feelings of loneliness were further compounded by the fact that some of their family members were living overseas and therefore were unable to provide the support that the women needed to cope with the abuse. "There were many nights where I would just lock myself in the washroom and just cry and cry and cry (starts crying) …that went on for a very long time" [Diamond]. Sapphire reported, "I was lonely and my family didn't want to come over to our place because they didn't know if he was going to insult them or whatever and so for years it was like that." Ruby remarked, "…my sisters, like they did not want to get involved with my problems because they had their own families to think about so I was left alone…I was trying to deal with it all by myself." Women's relationships with their families were drastically altered and in some cases destroyed due to their husbands' controlling behaviour. Lack of contact with friends and family, due to geographical distance as well as their husbands' controlling behaviour, triggered feelings of helplessness for many of the women.

The women indicated that their husbands became exceedingly domineering with the passage of time. "I actually kept a diary of the things that happened…When I read my diary now it is quite shocking. It's shocking as to how controlling he was becoming…in a time frame of about three months, he made my life a living hell" [Jade]. Other women used statements such as "I couldn't even go to any Indian functions" [Diamond], "I gave up my social life" [Garnet] to convey the degree to which their activities were governed by their husbands. Unable to participate in any social and leisure activities, the women began to feel as though they were prisoners in their own homes. Feelings of helplessness were complicated for Indo-Canadian Sikh women because some of their family members

were living overseas. Hence, contact with the community via social functions within the Indo-Canadian community was an important source of connection and support for them. This loss, due to their husband's controlling behaviour, was particularly painful for the women. The way in which this aspect of their abuse experience compares to that of other groups of women is examined more in-depth in chapter five.

The severity of physical abuse also contributed to the women's sense of powerlessness:

> He broke my finger (points to the finger) he bent it back. He damaged my finger so much that for three months I was off from work. Even after that it was hard for me to return to work because I couldn't use my whole hand (sighs) ...and one time he broke down the door to the bedroom, like there was nothing I could do to stop him. [Sapphire]

Although the results of physical abuse were devastating, several of the participants indicated that the aftermath of sexual abuse was even more disturbing:

> ...I started having nightmares during the day. Like, I still had a job and I would come to work on the skytrain and I would fall asleep on the skytrain...I was not sleeping at night, and that's when I would have nightmares when I was sleeping on the skytrain. All I was seeing was his face and him just coming towards me. [Diamond]

Ruby remarked, "...I don't know whether I am coming or going...Sleep wise, I don't sleep since I left my ex-husband, I just can't seem to sleep." Nightmares, flashbacks, and sleep disturbances were painful consequences of sexual abuse.

It is important to note that providing examples of sexual abuse proved to be difficult for the women, and given the sensitive nature of this topic, I refrained from probing the participants to get more detailed information as to what they meant by sexual abuse. When they told me that they had been sexually abused, I believed them. I was not

interested in learning what sorts of behaviours constituted sexual abuse (perhaps that

could be an undertaking of another researcher).

Cultural prescriptions such as the dowry added to the women's sense of

worthlessness. Some believed that the harsh treatment that they received from their in-

laws was partly related to the size of the dowry that they brought at the time of their

wedding:

> [My mother-in-law's] expectations for my parents were high, when we got
> married they gave quite a bit...Like, the dowry kind of thing, I think they gave
> a lot. They gave a lot of gold and this and that and I guess she still wasn't
> satisfied. So when our daughter was born, I think that she expected more gold
> and stuff like that from my parents. They did a lot but not to the extent that she
> wanted them to and after that she became more and more unhappy with me.
> ...she did everything to twist things around to the point that I became very
> stressed out... no matter how hard I tried I could not measure up to the
> expectations of my mother-in-law. [Pearl]

Emerald provided this example to reveal the cruelty that she experienced:

> ...my in-laws always said that since I was the only daughter my parents should
> have bought me a house at the time of my wedding. My parents gave me so much
> money and they were always helping me financially but my in-laws wanted more
> and more...My mother-in-law always put me down. She always criticized me. I
> would do all the housework...and still she would accuse me of not doing enough
> chores, she would swear at me. No matter how hard I tried I could never ever
> please my mother-in-law and my husband always took her side... I think my in-
> laws thought that if they made my life miserable that I would ask my parents to
> buy me a house just to make them happy but I did not think that was fair. I mean
> my parents had already done so much for me. I just could not ask them for
> anything else.

These statements indicate that the expectations of a dowry are ongoing with the bride's

family being indebted to the groom's family over the course of the marriage. It is in this

sociocultural context that Indo-Canadian Sikh women are likely to experience abuse from

their in-laws throughout their married lives. Repeatedly, the women mentioned that

regardless of their efforts, they could not measure up to the expectations of their in-laws. This loss of control over their lives greatly contributed to their eroding sense of self.

The cultural imperative of respecting elders added to the women's sense of worthlessness:

> ...my sister-in-law (husband's older brother's wife) was very cunning. She would make me do all the housework but if someone came over to our house then she would tell me to sit down and rest. So in front of the company she would appear to very nice to me... I just kept quiet about how badly she treated me because it was ground into me from a very early age to always obey my elders. I was always told to never disrespect them and I never did. [Sapphire]

Pearl remarked:

> ...she is older than I am, she is my mother-in-law, and I am supposed to respect her and all that, so I kept saying to myself, 'I can bite my tongue,' for six years I had done this. I had never spoken back to her. I never challenged her authority. At times I was really mad at her but I just had to bite my tongue. I always just kept quiet and even though inside of me, it was all just boiling up.

These examples demonstrate that respecting their elders was so deeply ingrained into their psyches that it made it difficult for them to challenge the authority of their in-laws in general and mothers-in-law in particular. Feeling powerless to do anything to stop the abuse from their in-laws, the women silently endured it. Having a low status within her husband's family, a woman (particularly if she is the wife of the youngest son) is especially vulnerable to the abuse from her in-laws. The power hierarchy of Indo-Canadian Sikh families is configured such that the eldest male holds the highest ranking. Hence, a woman's father-in-law has the greatest power within the family system, then the mother-in-law, then her eldest brother-in-law, etc. Accordingly, the wife of the eldest son would have more power within the family unit compared with the wife of a younger son and the wife of the youngest son would have the least amount of power. It is in this

sociocultural context that a woman married to the youngest son is likely to be the most vulnerable to maltreatment from her in-laws.

Power differentials between the two families resulted in further deterioration of the women's sense of self-worth. Pearl talked in great length about the difference in power between her family of origin and her husband's family of origin and how those power differentials impacted her:

> ...I think that she (mother-in-law) felt that they were superior because she was the boy's mother that is why she was not pleasant towards my parents and that was always okay with them. My parents would always say that as long as she is okay with you; it doesn't matter, my dad would say, 'it doesn't matter whatever she does to us, she can throw her shoes at us, or whatever it's okay, we will take it because we are the girl's parents.' But it always bothered me...that old fashioned thinking...I resented that because I couldn't imagine having a daughter of my own that I would ever feel that I was inferior to whomever she marries like that guy's family...it really bothered me.

The above example indicates that not only the woman herself but also her entire family of origin could potentially experience indignation from her in-laws. This aspect of Indo-Canadian Sikh women's abuse experiences and how it relates to those of other groups of women is discussed in more detail in chapter five.

With each passing day, the women's sense of worthlessness spiraled to the point where they began to lose interest even in the simplest form of personal grooming and self-care. Ruby disclosed, "...I don't take care of myself, like sometimes I eat a lot just to soothe myself. But before I always took really good care of myself, like I used to watch what I ate, I used to watch and make sure that my weight was right and ...stuff like that. Now I just don't care anymore." Jade revealed, "...I was kind of becoming more and more a recluse...I was becoming like a vegetable. I did not want to do anything or see

anyone." Opal conceded, "...I am just very tired of everything, emotionally I feel very drained."

Feeling exhausted, lonely, confused, and discouraged some attempted suicide:

>...I was really, really, really depressed. At that point I thought everyone is better off without me. I thought this world is better off without me in it. I just thought that I don't need to be here. That is how bad I was feeling...and for whatever reason, I don't know, I guess I just wasn't thinking clearly and that night I got so extremely depressed that I took an overdose...I think that's the lowest that I hit...I was taking whatever I could find. I just didn't want to deal with it anymore. I was just at the end of my rope. I just didn't want to deal with anything anymore. I just felt that everything was stacked up against me...I don't know how I thought that I was so very much trapped or whatever and that was really scary... I was so unhappy...and I couldn't believe that someone like me was ready to take my own life. I just couldn't believe that I had hit rock bottom. Here I had everything going for me and this was not working and I was ready to throw everything away just because of this one thing. [Pearl]

In summary, the women started to second-guess themselves because the people around them including their in-laws with whom they lived did not validate their perceptions about the on-going abuse. The covert nature of psychological abuse added to their sense of self-doubt. Although instinctively they knew that the abuse was not their fault, the countless accusations convinced them that they were somehow responsible. As they internalized the blame, they put the onus on themselves to find ways to reduce the likelihood of the abuse. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to stop the abuse, some women began to feel powerless. The constant criticism, mind-games, insults, and put-downs also contributed to their diminishing self-worth. The extreme isolation that they experienced because of their husbands' controlling behaviour intensified their feelings of loneliness and despair. The severity of physical and sexual abuse added to the women's sense of worthlessness. Cultural dictates such as the dowry, respect for elders, and power differentials between family members resulted in further deterioration of their self-worth.

It was in this sociocultural milieu that the Indo-Canadian Sikh women continued to experience an eroding sense of self.

Changing Face of Fear

All of the participants experienced intense fear starting with the initial incident of the abuse and extending to life long after the marriage had ended. Their fears oscillated between concerns about safety and worries about alienation. Some indicated that divorce was not an option for them (even in the face of prevailing abuse) because they did not want to risk being stigmatized by their family, friends, as well as their community. It was under these conditions that fear continually shaped the women's perceptions and actions as they tried to cope with the abuse in their lives.

Several of the women revealed that they were afraid to disclose their abuse to other people because they did not want to jeopardize their own safety as well as that of their loved ones. "I did not want to tell my parents because I didn't want them to worry. Especially my mom, she is very weak. She worries so much and I couldn't handle it if something happened to her just because she was worrying about me" [Pearl]. Ruby said:

> ... my-coworkers had seen the bruises on my face and they were ready to call the police and finally I convinced them not to do that. I knew that I would be in more trouble if my husband found out that I had told the police, that is the reason why I did not want the police involved. I was really afraid... I was scared about what my husband might do if he found out...I was always scared of my husband.

The fear of reprisal prevented the women from acquiring the help that they needed to combat the abuse in their marriages. Left to fend for themselves, they were constantly fearful of their husbands.

In an effort to reduce the likelihood of being injured or killed by their husbands, they were perpetually in a state of high alert. "I was always looking over my shoulders,

frantically making sure that I was out of harm's way" [Emerald]. Ruby said, "I was jumpy whenever I was around him because I thought I could walk into some sort of a booby trap at any moment. I never knew what I could expect from him." These statements demonstrate the degree to which the women were afraid of their husbands because of the imminent threat of abuse.

Lacking the physical strength to protect themselves, they felt frightened, scared, and terrified in the face of ongoing abuse. "I was so scared, I didn't know what he was going to do. I just started to cry" [Jade]. Pearl reported, "...one time he put his hands around my throat and he did not stop when I asked him to. That was a very frightening feeling because physically he is a lot bigger and heavier than I am." Some indicated that their safety was threatened to the point where they were fearful for their lives. "My parents were worried that if I went back to my husband that he might kill me" [Emerald]. Garnet remarked, "...I was petrified. I did not sleep a wink all night." The women were constantly looking for possible signs of danger and became increasingly intimidated, anxious, and hyper-vigilant as the severity of the abuse escalated.

With each passing day, the women's fears changed from concerns about safety to worries about poverty. Some experienced a continuing sense of financial loss beginning with marriage and extending to life after the relationship break-up. "My husband did not have any money. He had nothing. When we got married, we actually took out a credit line jointly. I had some savings and that credit line was secured on my savings...he stole that money from me. He thinks that it was his money" [Jade]. Diamond declared, "...I am not able to buy a house anymore and I am not able to give my son all those things that...he needs or he wants." Garnet remarked, "...my husband had taken everything.

Everything was gone. I was penniless. My apartment was empty and I still called it a home." Having lost all of their personal belongings, the women were left wondering how they were going to take care of themselves. Financially destitute, they were afraid that they would not have any money even for food or shelter.

For some, the never-ending fear evolved into a heightened sense of trepidation, mistrust, and skepticism. "I just find that I don't really trust men anymore and I don't really trust people anymore" [Opal]. Diamond stated, "…now I am very cautious about people, like before I just trusted anybody but now I don't trust people as much." Jade said:

> … it will take me a long time, a very long time before I trust another man. I don't know if I will ever settle down with a man again…I have now accepted that I am willing to be on my own. People tell me that not everybody is (pause) well like not all guys are like that. But to me if I do meet another man, I will always ask myself if there is another side to him. Just like my ex-husband's situation. I mean he was very loving at times but then he was also a monster. There was this wonderful side and then there was this other side, I will always question that.

These examples illustrate the extent to which the women grew to be suspicious of people in general and men in particular due to the abuse that they experienced in their marriages. Some continued to be fearful of men and at times wondered whether they would ever regain their trust in men.

The shame associated with being abused added to the women's fear of alienation; for some, it prevented them from disclosing their abuse to other people thereby limiting their choices of interventions and strategies of coping:

> …I think it is shameful to tell other people that my husband is abusive with me. It really gets me down and it really bothers me but I have kept my abuse hidden from most people. I don't want to go and tell everyone…I think in the Western culture women are more open about their abuse, they are more likely to go for help, but I think that Indian women do not want to involve outsiders in their family problems. [Opal]

The fear of ostracism contributed to the women's need to keep the abuse a secret. Some believed that they had no options except to suffer in silence in order to preserve their family integrity within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community.

The stigma of a divorce added to their fear of alienation. Several women indicated that divorce was not an option for them because they did not want to risk being ostracized by their families or the community at large. Among those who did receive a divorce, one woman experienced extreme abandonment. "My family gave up on me and the whole East Indian society gave up on me too…no one is doing anything to help me. I am on my own" [Ruby]. She went on to say, "…every weekend, like East Indian people go to some-one's house or some-one comes over, I don't have that." This loss of support from family and community compounded the women's fear of alienation and abandonment.

Hierarchical relationships within their husbands' families also contributed to their fear of abandonment:

> …my in-laws began to turn my husband against me. They began to make up all sorts of stories about me. The problems between my husband and I got so bad that at one point we even began to go for marriage counselling. My husband would come out of the sessions feeling good about what the counsellor had said and he would make the effort to improve communication in our marriage. But then…my mother-in-law would call every Monday morning and he would begin to listen to her and we would be back to not getting along in our relationship. His mother had such a hold on him that he would always listen to her even if she was lying, he would believe that she was telling the truth…I felt very shut out by him. [Garnet]

Garnet went on to say, "…the constant meddling…" that she experienced from her mother-in-law caused her relationship with her husband to deteriorate to the point where "…[she] was always just crying." These statements illustrate the degree to which the influence that a mother had on her son impacted his relationship with his wife. Although

the women did whatever they could to strengthen their relationships with their husbands, the powerful pull that a mother had over her son, countered the changes that the women were able to make in an effort to improve their interactions with their husbands. The ways in which this element of the Indian culture complicated the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women compared with those of other groups of women is explored further in chapter five.

The loss of a dream to have a "real" marriage added to the women's fear of being alone:

> …what happened to me, I don't think of that as a marriage, I feel like I got cheated out of chance to have a real marriage…I wanted a husband who loves me, not someone who is abusive to me…and you know it is not that easy to find somebody anymore since you know I am divorced, I have a child. It's not (starts crying…silence…still crying…) you know it's not that easy, it is not easy at all. [Diamond]

Given that the Indo-Canadian Sikh community frowns upon a divorce, those who had ended their abusive marriages were doubtful about the possibility of meeting another man within the community who would be willing to re-marry them. It was under these conditions that they felt cheated out of a chance to have a "real" marriage. The realization that they might not ever re-marry intensified their fear of being alone. How this dimension of fear for Indo-Canadian Sikh women compares with that of other groups of women is discussed more thoroughly in chapter five.

To summarize, profound fear permeated the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women commanding practically every aspect of their lives. It was present while they were still living with their abusive husbands as well as long after they had left them. The threat of retaliation continually influenced the ways in which they managed the abuse in their marriages. Over time, the unremitting fear evolved into heightened sense of

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suspicion, mistrust, anxiety and hyper-vigilance. Some feared that they would not ever be able to restore their sense of trust and safety. The shame associated with being abused and the stigma of a divorce added to the women's fear of alienation. Hierarchical relationships within their husbands' families compounded their fear of abandonment. The possibility of not re-marrying within their community exacerbated their fear of being alone. It was in this sociocultural context that fear continued to shape Indo-Canadian Sikh women's thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours as they coped with the abuse in their marriages.

Feeling Extremely Ambivalent

All of the participants felt extremely ambivalent about whether to stay with their abusive husbands or to leave them. For many, it was primarily concern for the children that contributed to their profound ambivalence. They expressed concern for their children in a variety of ways. On the one hand, they worried about the impact that poverty, absence of a father, and lack of contact with extended family would have on the lives of their children. On the other hand, they were concerned about the adverse effects that witnessing the abuse might have on their children's well being. Wanting to do what was best for their children, they constantly struggled with their decision about whether to stay or leave. Lack of finances, an attachment to their husbands and the hope that they would change added to the women's ambivalence.

Many were torn about whether to stay with their abusive husbands or leave them in order to protect themselves as well as their children:

> ...I ran into the garage, like I still had my nightie on, so I just grabbed a raincoat and put it around me. He came into the garage...he grabbed me by the shoulders and he threw me against the wall and I banged my head really hard...my head started bleeding...and from the corner of my eye I saw my daughter there. I

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thought to myself, 'I can't believe she is seeing all this', so many thoughts were running through my head...I just kept wondering if I was doing the right thing for my daughter's sake...it was so difficult to know what was best for her. [Pearl]

Opal expressed the tension that she felt within herself in this heartfelt way:

> [My younger daughter] does not want me to leave her dad. She says, 'dad will die if we leave him.' That is why I don't know what to do. I am caught in the middle. I want to think about my kids too. I try to cope. I don't know what to do... I want to make sure that I provide stability for my daughters and that I take care of them. I don't want my kids to run away from home, I don't want them to turn to drugs...so more than anything it's because of my kids that I don't want to leave him.

Emerald elaborated:

> ...my husband was always hitting me and I was afraid that he might kill me...one time he was hitting me and then he took out a knife and I asked him 'are you trying to kill me?' I told him that our daughter was watching...I told him to think about our daughter...then he just thought about it and he put the knife down, otherwise I might have been killed with the knife.

As the abuse became more severe, worry about their own safety as well as that of their children escalated. In its extreme form, the perceived choice seemed to involve the prospect of homelessness or the possibility of in-utero threat to an unborn child. "I guess the only reason that I left was because I was pregnant and I did not want anything to happen to the baby. I was scared that I might lose the baby if I did not leave him" [Ruby]. Concern for their children was a strong incentive for some women to leave their abusive husbands. Nonetheless, the decision to stay or leave was fraught with many uncertainties and dilemmas.

Several of the women worried about the possible adverse effects that witnessing the abuse might have on their children:

> ...at that time I had my daughter and I was afraid that she was going to see all that abuse. I wanted to protect her. I did not want her to grow up in that kind of a home. I wanted my daughter to be safe...I thought my daughter is growing up and she is going to see this. I mean she is quite young right now but she still sees what

> is going on…one time he hit me on my nose and I got a nosebleed and my daughter saw that…I didn't want [her] to continue to see that kind of stuff so that was the main reason that I thought of [for] wanting to leave my husband. [Emerald]

Some were prompted to seek therapy for their children to allow them to heal from any negative effects of having witnessed the abuse. "My son knew that something was wrong with me. He started doing poorly in school and finally I got him to see a counsellor too. Counselling has been helpful for both of us" [Diamond]. Pearl reported, "…I put my daughter into therapy because I just did not want her to be affected by all of this (witnessing of abuse)." Worry about their children's well being was a constant stressor for the women. It left them feeling extremely apprehensive about whether to stay or leave.

Faced with on-going abuse, some contemplated suicide as a way of freeing themselves from the "prison of darkness" [Ruby]. However, their concern for their children became part of even this imagined escape. With her voice wavering as she tried to fight back the tears, Ruby whispered," I think that if it hadn't been for them (her children), like I think I might have killed myself but I keep thinking if I die who will look after them?" Similarly, Emerald described her motivation to stay alive for the sake of her children:

> …when he was beating me up, I just wanted to commit suicide. I just wanted to kill myself. I used to think what kind of life is this? I used to think that I would be better off dead. But then I would say to myself, 'I have to think about my children. Who is going to look after my children?' I knew that if I killed myself then my children would not have an easy life. I thought about my kids and I think that is what stopped me from committing suicide.

So strong was their sense of maternal protectiveness that they were willing to do whatever they could to assure the safety of their children. Wanting to do what they

thought was best for their children; they continually struggled with their feelings of doubt, uncertainty, and indecision.

Although several of the women left their husbands to go to a transition house, they usually returned home because of their concern for the children:

> ...my kids were not happy about staying in the safe house...they just wanted to get back home...Actually for me it didn't matter where I was as long as I was safe but for my kids it did, like they really wanted to come back home. They wanted to go back to their own school, they wanted to be with their friends and that was really hard for me. I felt really sad for my kids...so that is why I came back home. [Sapphire]

A distressing sense of worry preoccupied the women as they ruminated about how the absence of a father would effect the lives of their children. "He loves our daughter very much that's why I wanted to do whatever I could to make this marriage work" [Pearl]. Opal reported, "...I don't want my kids to be apart from their father. He's good to the kids... I'd rather sacrifice my life to make a better life for my kids." She went on to say, "...I just pray to God that my daughters will have a better life than what I have gone through. I keep hoping that my kids won't suffer the same fate." These statements reveal the extent to which the women sacrificed their own futures for those of their children. Several of the women felt obliged to stay with their abusive husbands in order to keep their families intact for the benefit of the children.

For those who left their abusive husbands, some continued to worry about how the relationship break-up would impact the future of their children:

> ... my son (starts crying) like he wants me to get married again, like he wants a dad (still crying) for him (long silence and then with wavering voice) like some people see my son as a problem. Like they tell me that I won't be able to find a good guy because I have a child. You know that makes me sad. That makes me really sad. [Diamond]

The women worried not only about the safety and well being of their children but also about how their decision to divorce their husbands would impact the potential marriage partners that their children would have. For instance, Ruby agonized over the possible consequences that her divorce might have on the type of men that her daughters would eventually marry. Even though her daughters at the present time are quite young, Ruby is already worried that they will not be able to marry within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community due to the fact that she is divorced from her husband:

> ...my daughters are going to have a very difficult time. It is going to be very hard for them to get married within the East Indian community, oh yeah, I mean there is no doubt about it they're going to have a hard time getting married to an East Indian man because (voice begins to waver) well (pause) like because I am divorced from my husband...

This sort of thinking left the women feeling extremely indecisive about whether to stay or leave. Since family integrity is an important factor in choosing a potential mate within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, the women continued to worry about the negative consequences of their divorce on the future of their children. The risk of losing contact with extended family members also contributed to their profound ambivalence:

> I really feel sorry for my two daughters. Like, it's hard for them because every time some function takes place on his side of the family, they are not included... in the past year his parents have only seen the kids once. I mean they don't even call to see how we are doing...When they do come over, they expect the girls to go to them and give them a hug or something but obviously the girls aren't going to do that because they really don't know them that well. I think that for my girls they are just strangers...how can they expect them to know their grandparents when they don't even make the effort to come and visit the girls on a regular basis. [Ruby]

In a variety of ways, the women continued to worry about how the absence of a father would affect the future of their children. Equally, they were concerned that the lack of contact with paternal grandparents and/or extended family members would have a

negative impact. It was in this sociocultural context that the women were continually

ambivalent about their decision to stay or leave.

One woman talked about the positive effects of her decision to leave her husband:

> …now they don't have to deal with that unhappy situation every evening
> and my daughter, the older one who is now thirteen has distinction in
> school. My leaving my husband has even started to affect the grades of
> my …[children]. So now I know I have made the right decision to leave him.
> Now I know that I don't ever want to get back together with him. [Sapphire]

Knowing that her children were doing better emotionally and academically assured

Sapphire that she had made the right decision to leave. However, the impetus to provide

stability and security of an intact family on the one hand and benefits of an abuse free

environment on the other hand, left the women in a quandary about whether they should

stay with their abusive husbands or leave them.

Lack of finances also contributed to the women's extreme ambivalence about

whether to salvage or end their abusive marriages:

> …when I lived with him, I knew that as an East Indian man he would take care of
> us. Even if he would have to work double shifts…he was providing for us quite
> well, and there was always a roof over our head. There would always be food in
> the house and the bills were always paid and stuff life that. Now I am finding it
> difficult to make ends meet. I hardly have any money. I worry about how I am
> going to be able to afford it when my daughters want to go to college or
> university. [Ruby]

Some were unsure about whether they would be able to make ends meet if they left their

abusive husbands. Prospects of extreme poverty and homelessness continually weighed

on the women's minds as they struggled with their decision to stay or leave.

An attachment to their husbands added to their feelings of ambivalence. "I just

feel for him that's what always kept me in the dark" [Sapphire]. Similarly, Garnet

expressed the perplexity that she felt. "I think he had this split personality and I was

always so confused. One minute he was very nice to me and he would talk to me and the next minute he was just so mean." She went on to say, "…when he came home from work he bought me flowers and he apologized and said, 'I am so sorry for what I did, I take it all back.' He turned into a nice guy…he apologized and we started to get along quite well." Their husbands' precarious mix of abusive and loving behaviour left the women wondering whether they should salvage or end their abusive marriages. Jade said:

> …one minute he would be such a great person, a quite loving person and the next minute he would be like a monster…he would buy me flowers, I am not talking about one or two roses, he would always buy me a dozen of fresh looking red roses. Whatever I liked he would buy it for me…God, I thought I had hit gold when I met him because he just appeared to be the perfect man…He was really romantic and charming. I guess I kind of got caught up in all of that.

An attachment to their husbands was confounded by the fact that they often expressed remorse for the abuse with extravagant gifts, genuine apologies, and convincing promises to change their abusive behaviour.

The women were hopeful that their husbands would change and the abuse would eventually cease. Hence, they gave them countless chances to reform. "I really wanted him to change, I kept thinking if only he would just change. I kept wishing that he would change and that is why I kept giving him a second chance" [Pearl]. Opal remarked, "I still think that he might change too." Sapphire revealed that after years of hoping that her husband would mend his ways, she finally realized that he was not going to do so:

> …now I know that he will never change, before I kept hoping that he would change for the sake of the children, but now I have no hope that he will ever change. So, I think just knowing that he was not going to change helped me to make up my mind to leave him. Like, even now he thinks that he does not have a problem, he just keeps denying it. So that is how I know that he is never going to change. I know that now. I think in the past it was just wishful thinking on my part but now I know (sighs) now I know that I am never getting back together with him.

Jade stated that "…[by] reading, researching, and analyzing why he was the person that he was…all of that helped me to realize that he was not going to change and that I would be better off without him." The women's hope that their husbands would change greatly contributed to their feelings of ambivalence. It was only when they realized that their husbands were not ever going to change that some were compelled to leave them.

In summary, the women were torn about whether they should stay with their abusive husbands or leave them in order to protect themselves as well as their children. Lack of finances, an attachment to their husbands and the hope that they would change also contributed to their profound ambivalence. Concern for the children manifested in worry about the possible adverse effects of witnessing abuse as well as the social and emotional impact of the father's absence. The women continued to worry about the future of their children and did their best to ensure that they were safe. Several of the women sought therapy to allow their children to address the negative effects of having witnessed the abuse. Although the desire to protect their children's safety was the final catalyst that compelled many to leave, some continued to stay with their abusive husbands to keep the family intact for the "good" of their children. They were worried that their children would not be able to marry within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community if they divorced their husbands. Hence, in a sociocultural milieu where the integrity of the family is extremely important in choosing a potential marriage partner, the women continued to be apprehensive about their decision to stay or leave. How this segment of Indo-Canadian Sikh women's abuse experiences relates to that of other groups of women is discussed more fully in chapter five.

A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment

Another theme that arose from the personal accounts of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women was the sense of overwhelming entrapment. This theme was comprised of cultural dictates such as *izzat* and the sanctity of marriage. Some women believed that the duty to preserve *izzat* at any price added to their feelings of entrapment. Sanctity of marriage also contributed to their sense of being "stuck in [the] marriage" [Opal]. It was in this sociocultural context that many felt hopelessly trapped.

The pressure that they felt to keep their marriages intact for the sake of family honour compounded their sense of entrapment:

> ...it was in about 1994 that I was sort of thinking of leaving him. Then, I told my family that I was going to leave my husband. Then my dad started saying (pause) you know how Indian families are (pause)...he said, 'don't do that, he will change, we will talk to him. You can live with us until you can afford to get your own house. We will help you to take care of your son.' So, they were doing all that. My brother started saying, 'don't do that because you know I won't be able to show my face to my friends. What will they say to me? What will they think of me?' So it was all about them, it was not about me. No one was thinking about my happiness...they were all just worried about their izzat...I used to think to myself 'I am stuck with this guy for the rest of my life.' I used to think that's it, I just felt like that was the end of my life (starts crying)... [Diamond]

Feeling betrayed and abandoned by her family, Diamond continued to endure the abuse from her husband for a few more years. However, when her husband accused her of sleeping around with other men, Diamond decided to divorce him because she said that she"...didn't even as much as look at another man." Since preserving chastity of the woman is highly valued within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, a husband who questions and/or doubts his wife's infidelity is essentially insulting her in the worst possible way. It was in this sociocultural context that Diamond felt compelled to divorce

her husband who she believed stripped her of her moral integrity by falsely accusing her of sleeping around with other men.

Opal also spoke about her obligation to uphold *izzat*:

> ...I am the eldest in the family, if I were to leave my husband what kind of example would I be setting for my younger sisters...Also, if I were to get a divorce from my husband then my younger sisters might have a hard time getting married because people will say their other daughter got divorced, we don't want to marry into this family because they think that the other daughter might do the same thing and they don't want their son to be divorced...our community is very close-knit and people talk. I think that is why it is important for you to maintain a good family name...in our Indian culture, when a man and woman meet, the first thing they do is to check your family background...so in the back of our minds we have this notion that we don't want to split up our family even if our husband beats us. It is important to keep the family together. We think that if we leave our husband that we are ruining our parents' name. We don't want to ruin our family name. That is the only reason some of us feel that we are stuck in our marriage.

These statements illustrate that women's sense of entrapment was compounded by the fact that their decision to divorce their husband could potentially jeopardize the chances of their younger siblings, particularly their sisters, of marrying within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community.

The women continued to preserve *izzat* not only for the sake of their younger siblings but also their parents:

> ... my *mama jee* (mother's brother) tried to tell my dad a few years ago to bring me home because he knew that my husband was hitting me and beating me up everyday. But at that time my dad was thinking too much about his izzat. He was worried about his izzat that is why he wanted me to stay with my husband and try to work things out...Now I have two children. I mean what is going to happen to me now? [Emerald]

In a myriad of ways, the women's duty to uphold *izzat* intensified their feelings of entrapment. Some felt betrayed and abandoned by their family members who encouraged them to stay with their husbands and work things out for the sake of family honour. During the early stages of the abuse, concern for family honour took precedence over

personal happiness for many of the women. However, as the abuse became increasingly severe the women's families sometimes not only intervened but also provided tremendous support that enabled the women to leave their abusive husbands. The type of support that the women received from their families is discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Cultural beliefs about the sanctity of marriage added to the women's sense of entrapment:

> …in our culture, people believe that when you get married you are married for life. They don't care if you are happy or not in your marriage, they want you to stick it out. You have to make your marriage work. It does not matter if the man beats you up everyday… the importance of marriage is so ingrained in me that even though I want to get a divorce my conscience won't let me do that. I think we learn from a very early age that we marry for life. I think that especially if you have kids then it is really hard to get a divorce because you don't want to lose your kids. [Opal]

A strong sense of duty to uphold a marital relationship and the responsibility to not bring shame to her family or that of her in-laws kept some Indo-Canadian Sikh women hopelessly trapped in their abusive marriages. It was under these circumstances that cultural beliefs such as *izzat* and the sanctity of marriage contributed to their overwhelming sense of entrapment. The ways in which the cultural dictates such as *izzat* compounded the sense of entrapment for Indo-Canadian Sikh women compared with that of other groups of women is described more in-depth in chapter five.

Reclaiming Personal Strength

Reclaiming personal strength was another theme that arose from the participants' personal accounts of wife abuse. Some women, however, were further along in their journey of regaining their inner strength compared with others. For instance, two of the

participants who were still living with their husbands were at the very early stages of rebuilding their sense of self-efficacy.

The women utilized a number of sources including their religious faith, support from family and friends as well as psychotherapy to help them to regain their inner strength. Introspection acquired through reading and journaling were also helpful in their journey of self-empowerment. The compassion that they felt for those who were still being abused was a critical marker on their path of self-healing.

Burdened with heartache and melancholy the women turned to their religious faith for comfort:

> ...I just couldn't find any peace, like except in my case, ...I love listening to *kirtan* (chanting from the Sikh scripture). Like I could listen to it all the time and the words I felt were for me...It made me feel better [How did it do that?]...I just think that it gave me inner strength because I felt that the words were speaking to me. The words like the words of the kirtan were just telling me to get stronger, like they seemed to be saying I guess what I mean to say is that they were telling me, they were telling me that 'we're behind you.' It was almost like good always wins, I don't know, like I don't know how to describe it, it was – um – it was very, very uplifting for me. I wanted to do the kirtan myself I loved it so much. I still love it. I could just listen to it for hours. I could just stick in the cassette and I could just lose myself in the words. This was something I could do anytime day or night. [Pearl]

Opal described the sense of calmness that she derived from reciting Sikh scripture:

> ...I do Padh (reading of the Sikh scripture) and then when I do the Ardash (Sikh Prayer) then I ask him to help me to go through with this life. I ask him to give me strength to go through the pain that I am going through and then I feel a little bit of peace in my heart...I feel happy when I do Padh then I think that I did something good for myself.

Sapphire said that reciting from the Sikh scripture gave her a sense of hope and tranquility:

> ...I read the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh scripture)...what is written there really makes me feel good and the meanings are so nice... reading those words kind of give me hope...it's like once you ask God for help you find that the people that

you want will be there for you…now all of the sudden I see that doors of opportunity are beginning to open up for me…When you have that faith in God, the signs are there, messages of help are there for you that's how I feel. I think doing the Padh (reading of the Sikh Scripture) has really helped me…Like, I began to feel more positive about myself. I don't feel so lonely anymore…I now go to the *Gurdwara* [the Sikh temple] and I have met some nice people there…I just feel more peaceful.

For some women, their religious faith gave them a sense of inner calm, for others it rekindled their sense of optimism. One woman revealed that going to the *gurdwara* allowed her to break through her sense of loneliness and despair.

The women expressed their renewed sense of strength in diverse ways. "I am now stronger. I am also starting to become a bit more independent" [Opal]. Although Opal continued to live with her husband, she sought ways to dissociate herself from the pain of the abuse. Reciting various verses from the Sikh scripture provided her with some relief from the pain of the abuse. Support from her family was also helpful in allowing her to rebuild her personal strength. She said, "I went and stayed with my parents for two months and he was begging me to come back home. He told me that he missed me and that he really needed me". Respite from the abuse gave Opal a sense of empowerment.

Pearl, who also still lives with her husband, said that he is not as abusive as he used to be ever since her parents intervened. It was in this context that Pearl talked about regaining her inner strength and a strong sense of voice:

…I think it somehow made me stronger…Now I just don't second-guess myself. I go more with my instincts and I trust myself more…I go with my instincts, I really do and before I didn't do that…I voice what I want, I think before I kept it bottled up for so long.

Support that they received from their family, friends, and/or in-laws helped some of them to reclaim their personal strength. "His younger brother is on my side. He told my husband, 'like you should straighten out, I mean you have two beautiful kids, what

are you doing?' His whole family is on my side and that's been helpful for me" [Ruby].

Jade said:

> ...his brother gave me a lot of support. He tried to talk to him while I was going through all of this. He tried to explain to him that what he was doing was wrong ... His family gave me a lot of support. His brother in particular was very supportive... my sisters gave me a lot of support [too]. They would tell me, 'you are a warm, kind, loving person.' They used to say that to me continuously. That helped me a lot.

Pearl's family also provided support:

> ...my parents wanted to know, they said 'for what reason, like why are you hitting our daughter.' They wanted to know that. They said to me 'we totally back you up. We will deal with this.' They said, 'you don't have to be taking this'...I have a lot of support so I think that gave me strength...I think it really helped that my parents were supportive...They wanted to deal with it so that made it easier for me.

Likewise, Garnet's parents were sympathetic and supportive. "They have paid for all of my legal fees and they still give me money just to cover the bills and stuff like that. I don't know what I would have done without their support."

Some women received support from friends. "I have a really good friend who also is experiencing abuse in her marriage so it helps me to talk with her. She can relate to what I am going through" [Opal]. She went on to say, "...I have another friend whose mother went through the mental and verbal abuse that I am going through...she really understands what I am going through more than other people." These conversations with her friends provided Opal with a sense of validation and empowerment.

Social support from family members, in-laws, and friends helped some of them to free themselves from the abuse. For others it provided respite from the abuse. Their in-laws and family members often intervened by confronting their husbands. Family meetings, whereby the two families (e.g., the woman's family of origin and her

husband's family) would get together to deal with the abuse, were effective in reducing the extent of the abuse that the women experienced in their marriages. Support from their families was extremely instrumental in allowing the women to regain their personal strength and freedom:

> ...I like my independence now and I don't feel fearful all the time...I am slowly beginning to get back to who I was before I married him. Like, I am starting to pursue the things that I wanted to do for myself...I am much more positive now ...I like helping other people because it makes me stronger...My sister tells me that now I am even stronger than before. She jokes with me and she tells me that I am now even stronger than she is. She used to be my pillar of strength when I was having so many problems in my marriage and now she is turning to me for advice. She is so amazed with me. She said, 'no one would know that you are the same person.' [Sapphire]

Reflecting back on their experiences of abuse, the women revealed their painful journey of perseverance. In their move towards reclaiming personal power the women continued to seek help from a number of different sources. They found psychotherapy to be helpful in allowing them to work through the lasting effects of the abuse. However, seeking treatment proved to be difficult for some women because of their lack of knowledge about services. "I didn't know where I could go for help, so for years I did nothing. But one day what I did was I called Zenith 1234 and this is how I got in touch with my counsellor" [Emerald]. Sapphire remarked, "...I think what makes it difficult for a lot of the Indian women is the fact that many of them don't know that they can go somewhere for help."

Coupled with the lack of knowledge about services was a scarcity of appropriate resources:

> ...I found that there are very few places where I could go for help... the door has been shut in my face so many times. I mean the police didn't really help me. Legal aid said, 'I can't help you.' So there I was back into my parent's pocket for finances...A lot of people just close the door in your face...to tell you the truth,

there are very few programs that can actually help Indo-Canadian Sikh women. [Garnet]

In the face of disappointment and obstacles, the women continued to persevere in their search for effective treatment. They sought help not only from police officers but also lawyers and psychotherapists. Despite the doors of opportunity being shut in their faces, the women did not give up on their resolve to find someone who could help them to deal with the aftermath of the abuse. This became evident in their responses to my question, "What do you think would be helpful for Indo-Canadian Sikh women?" Garnet replied:

> ...I think a lawyer who knows and understands our culture and who wants to help women like myself would be helpful...What really helped me was, it was this multicultural society out in Surrey. The counsellor who works there wrote me a really good letter indicating what Indian women go through in the process of a divorce. That letter allowed my lawyer to build a really good defense on my behalf.

Jade answered:

> ...I don't think there is enough support for Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing abuse in their marriages...I had to go to Surrey or I had to go to Burnaby where the community is of larger scale. We need more resources for Indo-Canadian Sikh women in Vancouver and Coquitlam area. I think there needs to be more Indo-Canadian counsellors because they can relate to the issues that we face. One of the things that I really noticed was that when I went to see a white, I mean an English counsellor and it is no fault of his, I had to explain our culture to him. I had to keep doing that.

The clash of values with the dominant culture posed serious problems for the women in their search for effective interventions. Although the women at times had to travel long distances to get the help that they needed, they remained determined in their quest to find someone who could help them. Lack of cultural sensitivity training on the part of some counsellors and police officers meant that the women at times had to educate the various professionals whose assistance that they were seeking:

> ...I didn't find the police to be very nice...They don't know too much about our

culture.... Like the police, when I went to them they did not really understand ...I think that the police need to learn more about our culture. [Can you tell me more about what you mean by that?] Well, like the police needs to know that it's not easy for an Indian woman to reach out to the police. It is really hard for us to report something like that. The police needs to be a bit more understanding. [Diamond]

In addition to seeking assistance from lawyers, counsellors, and police officers, they sought help from support groups for battered women. Although they tried tirelessly to acquire the aid that they needed to cope with the aftermath of the abuse, they continued to encounter difficulties due to the opposing values regarding marriage and family life between their own culture and that of the dominant culture:

...I went to one support group and it was made up of all white women. I felt so out of place in that group. I went to two sessions and then I began to ask myself what I was doing there because these women did not have anything in common with me...I really needed to be in a more specific group. I needed to be with women who were going through the exact same things that I was going through ...I think the only people who will be able to relate to my experience are those women who have experienced what I have experienced. [Can you please tell me more about what you mean by that?] What I mean is that other Indo-Canadian Sikh women are more likely to have stuff in common with me than white women are. I mean it is so easy for someone who has not gone through it to say well do this or do that. I don't expect them to understand. They just can't relate because our culture is different. [Jade]

The above example illustrates the challenges that the women faced as they traversed between two radically different cultures. The women described this experience of straddling two opposing cultures as living a double life.

A sense of living a dualistic life due to the conflicting values regarding marital practices between the Indo-Canadian Sikh culture and those of the dominant culture added to the hardships that the women faced when they sought treatment. Garnet elaborated:

...when I went to the battered women's society, she (counsellor) told me that they had a support group for battered women. But the thing is the group was made

up of almost entirely white women. I kept thinking they would not understand where I am coming from. To me it was as if I would be judged by them, like they might just think, 'you really asked for it, what do you expect from a man that you met only once and then you decided to marry him. You agreed to marry him after meeting him once, like were you mad, are you crazy?' They don't know our culture, like they don't know that this is our way of life. Like when I try to tell this to them, I look like I am stupid... I don't think that they really understand my experience, even though they are trying to be helpful, they somehow give me the impression that they are better than me. Our lifestyle is so different...People look at me and say, 'Garnet, you are so modern.' Yeah, I can be modern. I can be Indian. I can put on a suit and I am Indian. That is the difference, we live a split life. Only another Indian person who lives that life will understand that...We just grow up learning that kind of stuff so we don't question it, to the white people it might seem as if that is why I got abused, I mean they might think 'what did she expect? She agreed to marry a man she hardly knew.' But my sisters also had arranged marriages and they are all happy. So I don't think that I asked for it just because I agreed to have an arranged marriage.

She provided this example to illustrate how the difference in values contributed to the re-

victimization that she felt:

My experience was so different from the experience of other women in the group...Many of these women had no idea what the dowry system is all about. They were thinking that it is about buying and selling, but the dowry is more than that... I kept thinking how am I going to connect with a group like that. I just felt so judged by them, like they seemed to believe that arranged marriages are so backwards and they had no idea what the dowry system was all about. My experience must have looked very odd to them. I just didn't feel like I could continue with a group like that...I mean no one really understood what I had gone through. They all seemed to have more in common with each other. I felt like the odd person out...[Can you tell me how your experience of abuse was different?] Well, they did not have the experience of divorce being such a black mark on their family reputation. They had no idea what an arranged marriage was all about. I think some of them actually thought that if I had agreed to have an arranged marriage then what did I expect. They don't know that many people in our culture have arranged marriages and for some people arranged marriages actually work quite well. I don't think that the abuse that I experienced in my marriage was a result of me having an arranged marriage. [What do you think the abuse was about?]...I think the abuse was the result of my husband's temper. He could not control his temper that's what I think the abuse was about and also his parents were meddling too much in our relationship.

In a variety of ways, differing values regarding marital practices between the

Indo-Canadian Sikh culture and the dominant culture posed problems for the women as

they sought treatment. Many indicated that the mainstream counsellors were ill equipped to handle the complexity of the abuse that they faced. They also mentioned that the various support programs and counselling services that they tried to access did not adequately address their needs due to the fact that most treatment interventions are based on Euro-centric values. The differences in values regarding marriage and family life between the Indo-Canadian culture and the dominant culture left the women feeling "judged" and/or "misunderstood" by the health care and legal professionals of the dominant culture. Notably, it was the lack of understanding of cultural practices such as arranged marriages, the dowry, and *izzat* that exacerbated the problems that the women encountered as they sought treatment from counsellors who were members of the dominant culture. Even well intentioned counsellors, who are misinformed about various cultural practices, can inadvertently contribute to the women's feelings of re-victimization. Naïve comments, intrusive questions about the dowry system and arranged marriages, as well as insensitive remarks regarding these practices can leave the women feeling as if they are being blamed for the abuse.

Even though the women experienced tremendous set backs and obstacles in their pursuit of practical and appropriate treatment, they continued to persevere and eventually did find counsellors who were not only empathic but also effective. "I started going to a counsellor to deal with all the stress and problems that I was having…she is the one who has really helped me, otherwise I would still be so nervous and so stressed out" [Emerald]. Jade reported, "…counselling was helpful for me…as I was working things through with my counsellor it was becoming more and more clear to me that I was better

off without him." With the help of psychotherapy, the women started to embrace their newfound strength:

> ...I am pleased with myself that I was able to leave him. That I did that; that I was able to leave him on my own. I feel really proud of myself. I am so happy that he's out of my life...I think that now I am starting to get more confident about my looks. I feel much better about myself now. [Diamond]

Reading about other women's experiences of abuse helped several of the women to recognize that they were not to be blamed. It also validated their experiences and allowed them to gain a sense of clarification and a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of abuse:

> ...reading about women who had been abused was also helpful for me...I started to read a lot of books and through all of that I began to realize that I did not do anything wrong. I really didn't. I finally realized that I was not the one that was at fault...I am continuing to read about women who have been abused and it clarifies for me the things that I am going through. It gives me a lot of clarification. One day, I would like to be the person who can provide that support for other abused women. I want to do that. [Jade]

In addition to reading, Jade revealed that keeping a journal was therapeutic. "It was only when I started to keep a diary that I could make any sense of it...I used to refer back to my diary and it was shocking for me to read what I had gone through. All of this opened up my eyes."

An important catalyst in their journey of reclaiming personal strength was a sense of compassion that they felt for women who were still being abused. "I wish I could do something for other Indo-Canadian Sikh women because no one deserves to be treated like that in their marriage. I wish I could give my strength to these women" [Jade]. Opal remarked, "...I want to help our women, I want to help them because there is not enough places where they can go for help." Sapphire stated:

> ...once you stop being afraid then you can think more clearly but fear can really

mess you up. Fear can mess up your thinking that's what it was like for me...I would like to talk to our women who are still being abused and I would try to help them get over that fear of talking to other people, that's what I would want to do.

Realizing that resources and services for Indo-Canadian Sikh women who experience abuse in their marriages are limited, some became strong advocates for those who were still experiencing abuse.

To summarize, the women mentioned their religious faith and support from their family, friends, and/or in-laws as important sources of help and inspiration in their journey of self-healing and personal empowerment. They also found psychotherapy to be beneficial in allowing them to reclaim their personal strength. Additionally, two women revealed that reading books on the topic of abuse and keeping a journal were critical in their journey of self-expression and autonomy. They expressed their renewed strength in a variety of ways. Some became strong advocates for other Indo-Canadian Sikh women who were still experiencing abuse in their marriages. Positive changes, such as their strong sense of voice and emerging self-confidence, were a source of great pride and satisfaction for them. With the help of psychotherapy, the women began to believe that their lives had value and purpose. Their compassion for other women who were still experiencing abuse was also a key ingredient in their fight for personal power.

The Fundamental Structure of Wife Abuse

In this section, I present the fundamental structure of wife for Indo-Canadian Sikh women using the format of a common story, which was derived during the analysis of the data. According to Colaizzi (1978), the final goal of data analysis is to produce a fundamental structure of the phenomenon, which refers to the smallest number of constituents that comprise the phenomenon.

Thematic analysis was used to identify the features of wife abuse common to this group of women. These elements, it is suggested, are basic components of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women and can be presented in the form of a common story. While parts of this story may be universal for any woman who has experienced abuse in her marriage, other segments of the story exemplify various circumstances that complicate the abuse experiences for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. For instance, cultural imperatives such as the dowry, respect for elders, and *izzat* contributed to the difficulties that Indo-Canadian Sikh women faced as they struggled to free themselves from the abuse. Equally, the challenges and barriers that they experienced in seeking treatment compounded their abuse experiences.

Common Story

As with any other woman, an Indo-Canadian Sikh woman enters her marriage with profound hope. She believes that her marriage is sacred and a lifelong commitment. When she first encounters abuse in her marriage, she copes by minimizing and/or rationalizing its severity. Over time, she begins to doubt herself in response to the incessant denial of the abuse by her husband as well as her in-laws. She starts to question her physical appearance, her intellectual capabilities, and her self-worth because of the constant criticism. Cultural prescriptions such as the dowry, respect for elders, and hierarchical relationships within her husband's family also contribute to her sense of worthlessness. Her perceptions of herself change due to the insults, scare tactics, and controlling behaviour of her husband. Her low status within her husband's family adds to her eroding sense of self.

Instinctively, she knows that the abuse is not her fault. However, repeated accusations convince her that she is somehow culpable. Her sense of being responsible for the abuse is also reinforced through friends and family who encourage her to stay with her abusive husband and try harder to make the marriage work for the sake of family honour. Her sense of self-blame is further exacerbated by her cultural beliefs of fate and destiny. In attributing the abuse to her personal karma she may continue to blame herself for the abuse due to her belief that it is punishment for past sins.

As the woman internalizes the blame, she tries to do whatever she can to avoid the abuse not only from her husband but also her in-laws. With the ever-present threat of danger, she is perpetually in a state of high alert. Panic-stricken, she frantically tries to stay one step ahead of her husband – anticipating his every whim – thereby hoping to neutralize the possibility of the abuse. In utter desperation she may even struggle to emulate the image of a "perfect" wife in an effort to appease her husband. Her attempts to maintain peace at any price often leave her feeling as if she is walking on eggshells.

Her sense of self-worth steadily declines and she tries even harder to forestall the abuse. Being isolated from friends and family some of whom may be living in India or England, she continually wrestles with powerful emotions including extreme loneliness and despair. She lives in constant fear and at times feels that no place is safe. Because of her fear of alienation, she may believe that she has no options except to suffer in silence. She finds it difficult to disclose the abuse to other people because of her fear of reprisal and the shame associated with being abused. Ending an abusive marriage may not be an option for her because divorcing her husband could potentially place her at risk for being ostracized by her friends, family, as well as her community.

Day after day, she remains ambivalent about whether to stay with her abusive husband or to leave him. She is hopeful her husband will mend his way and that the abuse will eventually cease. Hence, she gives him countless chances to reform. Concern for her children add to her feeling of ambivalence. She worries not only about the safety of her children but also about prospective marriage partners for them. Maternal instincts to protect her children, even unborn children, and/or the loss of hope that her husband is ever going to change are strong incentives that compel her to leave. Nonetheless, her decision to end her marriage is fraught with many dilemmas and uncertainties. Even in the aftermath of the relationship break-up, she may worry about how her decision to divorce her husband will impact the livelihood of her children. Given that divorce is frowned upon in the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, she doubts whether she will be able to remarry within her community. She feels cheated out of a chance to have a "real" marriage. The possibility of not re-marrying contributes to her fear of being alone and keeps her feeling apprehensive about whether to stay or leave.

At times, she feels completely trapped. Cultural beliefs regarding the sanctity of marriage as well as an obligation to preserve family honour further compound her feeling of entrapment. Maltreatment that she encounters from her in-laws exacerbates her experience of abuse. Feeling trapped and discouraged, she contemplates suicide as a way to free herself from the prison of darkness. Concern for her children keeps her motivated to stay alive despite the hardships that she experiences in her marriage.

Burdened with heartache and melancholy, she may turn to her religious faith for comfort. She may also seek support from her friends, family, and/or in-laws. She usually requests help from a psychotherapist as a last resort. In her search for an effective

treatment she encounters discouraging and at times insurmountable challenges. Lack of knowledge about services, scarcity of appropriate resources, and conflicting values with the dominant culture regarding marriage and family life pose serious obstacles and barriers for her as she tries to deal with the aftermath of the abuse.

Painful flashbacks, nightmares, and thoughts of suicide often overpower her as she commences her journey of self-healing. Scars from physical injuries are constant reminders of the atrocities that she has endured at the hands of her husband. While the consequences of physical assault are quite devastating, she concludes that the effects of psychological abuse are even more far-reaching and at times utterly debilitating because of its innocuous nature. Despite the challenges and disappoints that she encounters, she continues to persevere in her struggle to reclaim personal strength. At times reciting verses from the Sikh scripture is the only viable source that gives her sense of hope and personal freedom.

With the help of psychotherapy and support from friends and family, she tries to reclaim parts of herself that she gave up in an effort to appease her husband and his family. Her journey of self-healing usually begins in therapy when she finds a therapist who is supportive and respectful of her. As well as individual therapy, she may decide to seek group therapy. Cultural beliefs about destiny and fate may contribute to the actions that she takes to manage and/or combat the abuse in her marriage. It may also influence the pace at which she progresses in her journey of self-healing because overcoming her sense of self-blame may require more effort on her part in order to counter the belief that she is paying for past sins.

In talking with her therapist as well as other Indo-Canadian Sikh women who have experienced abuse, she realizes that she is not the only one who has experienced abuse. Caring and positive interactions with these women allow her to recognize that the abuse was not her fault. She starts to establish meaningful relationships with women who have had similar experiences. Realizing that appropriate resources and services are limited for Indo-Canadian Sikh women, she may become a strong advocate for those who are still experiencing abuse in their marriages because of her desire to help such women.

With the help of her religious faith, support from friends and family as well as her psychotherapist, she begins to believe that her life has value and purpose. As she acknowledges her inner strength, she starts to plan for the future. Proud of her newfound strength, she initiates her personal battle to overcome the unrelenting fear that she continues to feel. She sets new goals for herself and begins to plan what she would like to accomplish both personally and professionally. She may decide to return to school in order to upgrade and pursue a rewarding career. While she has achieved a number of milestones in her journey of self-healing, she learns that life has its ups and downs.

She admits that there are times when the lasting effects of the abuse, which are compounded by the maltreatment that she received from her in-laws, completely overwhelm her. Occasionally, she finds herself struggling to maintain a positive outlook in life. In the face of challenges and obstacles, she continues to persevere in her fight to regain her personal power. She acknowledges that reclaiming inner strength is a day-by-day journey. She is enthusiastic to be embarking on this road of self-healing and looks forward to rebuilding her sense of trust and safety.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a comprehensive description of the five themes including (1) *An Eroding Sense of Self*; (2) *Changing Face of Fear*; (3) *Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*; (4) *A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment*; and (5) *Reclaiming Personal Strength*. Each of these themes reveals a vital aspect of the phenomenon of wife abuse as experienced by Indo-Canadian Sikh women. While individually the themes shed light on essential components of the abuse experience, collectively they paint a holistic picture that depicts the integrated experience of wife abuse for this group of women. The themes were anchored in the participants' descriptions of wife abuse and reflect both the typical and atypical elements of their experiences (Sandelowsky, 1986). Quotations and examples from individual women embedded throughout the discussion of the themes accentuate the voices of the women and substantiate the claims made within the themes.

In chapter five, I add my voice to the interpretation of the results as I examine them in the context of the extant literature on wife abuse. The ways in which the findings of this study challenge and/or contribute to what we already know about the phenomenon of wife abuse are discussed. The subtle cultural nuances that complicate the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women compared with other groups of women are also described. In addition, the limitations of the study, implications for clinical practice, and recommendations for further research are discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of the Major Findings and Conclusions

This chapter provides a discussion of the major findings for the present research study. The chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section opens with a summary of the purpose and results of the study. Section two discusses the finding of this study in relation to the extant literature on wife abuse. Section three focuses on the implications of the findings for clinical practice. Section four describes the limitations of the current study and section five provides recommendations for further research.

A Summary of the Purpose and Results of the Study

The main purpose of the present study was to describe the personal experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. A qualitative research design, based on Colaizzi's (1978) understanding of Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology, was used to collect data from eight Indo-Canadian Sikh women. All of the women identified themselves as having experienced abuse in their marriages and, at the time of the initial interview, were receiving some form of psychotherapy to deal with the aftermath of this abuse. Data were collected from the women using in-depth personal interviews and were analyzed using the guidelines proposed by Colaizzi (1978). Five themes were identified during the data analysis including (1) *An Eroding Sense of Self*; (2) *Changing Face of Fear*; (3) *Feeling Extremely Ambivalent*; (4) *A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment*; and (5) *Reclaiming Personal Strength*. The ways in which each of these themes is similar and/or different from what is already known about the phenomenon of wife abuse are discussed in the following section.

Discussion of the Themes in Relation to the Extant Literature on Wife Abuse

In this section, I discuss the major finding of the present study in the context of what is already known about the phenomenon of wife abuse. While the current study was not a comparative study, the results do allow for some comparisons to be made with previous findings about wife abuse. More definitive conclusions and knowledge claims would have been possible if data were collected from diverse cultural groups of women.

An Eroding Sense of Self

An eroding sense of self was a common theme for Indo-Canadian Sikh women who participated in this study. Components of this theme included self-doubt, self-blame, and sense of worthlessness. The women began to doubt their sense of competence and judgment in response to the persistent denial and minimization of the abuse by their husbands. This finding is consistent with that of other studies. Andersen, Boulette, and Schwartz (1991), who examined the abuse experiences of Caucasian women in the United States, found that women's self-doubt was associated with the tactics of mind control used by abusive men. Murphy and Casardi (1993) noted that abusive men tend to downplay the extent of the abuse often through questioning their partner's perceptions or sanity. Wiik (1995), focusing on the abuse experiences of five immigrant women in the Canadian context, concluded that the lack of validation of women's perceptions that the abuse was going on contributed to their sense of self-doubt.

While a sense of self-doubt seems to be a common response to the denial and/or minimization of the abuse by their husbands for most women, for Indo-Canadian Sikh women their sense of self-doubt is likely to have been compounded because not only their husbands but also their in-laws denied the abuse. Several of the participants for this

study indicated that they moved in with their husbands' families after their marriage. This living arrangement may have increased their susceptibility to self-doubt. The women mentioned that it was extremely difficult for them to counter the denial of the abuse by their husbands; to have two or more of his family members colluding with him in denying the abuse led some to wonder if they were going crazy. This finding suggests that Indo-Canadian Sikh women are likely to experience high levels of self-doubt due to the interference from their in-laws, many of whom may be living with them. Caucasian women, who also experience self-doubt, may be less affected by the influence of their in-laws because they are not as likely to be living with them. Further research using samples of women from various cultural groups would be helpful in extending our knowledge about how the joint-family living arrangement, compared with nuclear-family living arrangement, might impact the women's sense of self-doubt.

Self-blame was another outcome of the ongoing abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Previous studies have also documented that women tend to internalize the blame for the abuse (Campbell, 1989; Dutton, 1995; Frieze, 1979; Porter, 1983; Wiik, 1995). "Battered women blame themselves for a variety of reasons: for causing the abuse, for being unable to modify it, or for tolerating it and not leaving sooner" (Dutton, 1995, p. 180). Frieze (1979) found that as the frequency of the abuse increased so did women's tendency to attribute the blame to themselves. Porter (1983), focusing on the abuse experiences of Caucasian women recruited from shelters for battered women, noted that many of the women in her study blamed themselves for the abuse until they finally reached the point at which they believed that they were not doing anything wrong. She indicated that the women attained this awareness through counselling.

Although some Indo-Canadian Sikh women realized that they were not at fault, gaining this insight through counselling and reading about other women's experiences of abuse, others continued to blame themselves. In general, the women who attributed the abuse to their personal *karma* were more likely to continue to blame themselves because they believed that the abuse was punishment for past sins. This type of thinking prevented some of them from leaving their abusive husbands. One of the women, in particular, who believed that the abuse was the result of her personal *karma*, continued to endure the abuse from her husband. However, Indo-Canadian Sikh women's religious belief in *reincarnation,* fate, or destiny was not the only circumstance that impeded their progress in achieving freedom from the abuse. Other factors such as cultural beliefs about *izzat* and the sanctity of marriage, as well as the clash of values regarding marriage and family life with the dominant culture also contributed to the challenges that they faced as they struggled to combat the abuse in their marriages. These aspects of their abuse experiences are discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Studies have consistently shown that diminished self-esteem and self-confidence are consequences of male violence against women (Cascardi & O'Leary, 1992; Phillips, 1999; Rieker & Carmen, 1986; Wiik, 1995). "Told often enough that one is worthless, one will begin to believe it" (Thorne-Finch, 1992, p. 37). Weitzman (2,000) examined the abuse experiences of well-educated and wealthy American Caucasian women who were recruited from her clinical practice. Weitzman noted that "as the woman's self-esteem withers, she becomes increasingly vulnerable to attacks on her personality and readily believes and integrates her husband's accusations that she has caused his insults, rages, and assaults" (p. 154). Phillips (1999) surmised that all participants in her study to some

degree experienced a negation of self wherein they lost the right of self-definition. She went on to say that those who experienced extreme levels of "…negation of self allowed husbands and/or community members to dictate how they lived their lives" (Phillips, 1999, p. 296). For Indo-Canadian Sikh women, derogation from their husbands and their in-laws as well as various cultural customs such as the dowry, respect for elders, and hierarchical relationships within their husbands' families contributed to their sense of worthlessness. Feeling utterly worthless some Indo-Canadian Sikh women attempted suicide as a way to free themselves from the pain of the abuse. Depression and suicide ideation have also been documented as sequelae of abuse among Caucasian, American Muslim, and immigrant women (Hanmer & Saunders, 1984; McWilliams & McKiernan, 1993; Phillips, 1999; Stark & Filtcraft, 1995; Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1979; Wiik, 1995). Stark, Flitcraft and Frazier (1979) estimated that about one third of suicide attempts are made by women experiencing domestic abuse. Rosewater (1988) concluded that much of what is inappropriately diagnosed as being a psychiatric illness is actually a reaction to prolonged and frequent violence, with the accompanying mental torment by the abuser.

In conclusion, Indo-Canadian Sikh women's experiences of self-doubt, self-blame, and sense of worthlessness appear to be similar to Caucasian, American Muslim, as well as immigrant women in some respects. What seems to distinguish the experiences of self-doubt, self-blame and sense of worthlessness for Indo-Canadian Sikh women from that of other groups of women is the impact of specific circumstances such as their religious belief in *reincarnation*, cultural customs of dowry and hierarchical relationships within the family unit. Having a low status within their husbands' families, Indo-

Canadian Sikh women may be more vulnerable to an eroding sense of self than would be women from other cultural groups particularly those from individualistic cultures where equalitarian rather than hierarchical relationships are more prominent. Additional research using samples of women from diverse cultures would be helpful in advancing our knowledge about how the particular dimensions of self-doubt, self-blame and sense of worthlessness seem to vary for women from different cultural backgrounds.

Changing Face of Fear

Corresponding to the findings of previous studies (e.g., Barnett & LaViolette, 1993; Mullender, 1996; Phillips, 1999; Wiik, 1995; Weitzman, 2000; Wetzel & Ross, 1983), results of this study show that Indo-Canadian Sikh women experienced intense fear as a result of the on going abuse in their marriages. Weitzman (2000) noted that sense of shame and fear for highly educated Caucasian women was exacerbated by their belief that they should have been smart enough to read the signs. "They [were] afraid of looking foolish, stupid, or ignorant at having 'chosen' an abusive husband" (p. 27). This fear prevented them from seeking the help that they needed to end the abuse in their marriages.

Mullender (1996), who studied the abuse experiences of women living in refugees in Britain, noted that women who were regularly assaulted by their male partners became extremely fearful. Wetzel and Ross (1983) concluded that fear of reprisal was one of the main reasons why the women in their study were hesitant to leave. Hart (1993) as well as Jenkins and Davidson (1999) have documented that leaving or attempting to leave is one of the most dangerous times for women who have been abused by their husbands. Even if a woman successfully leaves and relocates in a different city, region, or country she may

still be accessible to her ex-husband through her workplace or court-ordered sharing of child custody. Hence, women continue to be fearful of their husbands even long after they have left them.

Previous research studies on wife abuse, using samples of Caucasian women, have consistently shown that worry about safety is a common response to the unremitting abuse for most women. However, for Indo-Canadian Sikh women, concerns about being ostracized by their in-laws, families, friends, as well as their community added to their fear of being alone. Since divorce is highly frowned upon within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, several of the women who had divorced their husbands were doubtful about whether they would find another Indo-Canadian Sikh man who would be willing to marry them. The realization that they might not be able to re-marry within their community intensified these women's fears about loneliness, poverty as well as trust and intimacy. While fear about loss of status and trust are also common for other groups of women including Caucasian and American Muslim women, what seems to distinguish the experience of fear for Indo-Canadian Sikh women is the possibility of not being able to re-marry.

Weitzman (2000) found that upscale abused women also experienced the fear of being ostracized and rejected. She noted that these women were fearful "...that their friends and family would shun them when they spoke out about their torment" (p. 27). She concluded that for wealthy women, their financial resources afford them anonymity, which paradoxically contributed to their isolation and torment. Other scholars (e.g., Hermansen, 1991; Phillips, 1999) have noted that Muslim women who were divorced did not fit well within the social structures of their Muslim communities. The finding of these

studies as well as those of the current study seem to indicate that fear of being ostracized limits the women's choices due to the shame associated with being abused and/or divorced. Additional studies using samples of women from various cultural groups are needed before more conclusive claims can be made about how the women's fears of being alone and/or "displaced" vary across the different cultural groups.

Feeling Extremely Ambivalent

Studies have shown that the act of leaving an abusive marriage is extremely difficult for women. Women are reluctant to leave for a variety of reasons including the lack of finances, not having a safe place where they can go to escape the abuse, an attachment to their husbands and the hope that they might change (Barron, 1991; Gondolf, 1988; Phillips, 1999; Weitzman, 2000). The women's concern about how the absence of a father might impact the well being of their children also contributes to their profound ambivalence (Henderson, 1990; 1993; Wiik, 1995).

Corresponding to the findings of earlier studies, many of the Indo-Canadian Sikh women who participated in this study felt ambivalent about their decision to stay or leave because of their concern for their children, lack of finances, an attachment to their husbands and the hope that they might change. However, what appears to be different for Indo-Canadian Sikh women compared with other groups of women is that their concern for their children went beyond worries about their emotional well-being and safety to worries about potential mates for them. One woman in particular continued to worry that her daughters would have a hard time marrying within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community because she was divorced. Concern for their children's future marriage partners added to the Indo-Canadian Sikh women's profound ambivalence about whether

they should salvage or end their abusive marriages for the sake of their children.

Additional research using samples of women from diverse cultural backgrounds is

needed before more definitive conclusions can be drawn about whether this aspect of

Indo-Canadian Sikh women's experience is unique. It is possible that women from

collectivistic cultures, where marriages are typically arranged based on the family's

background, would feel extremely ambivalent about their decision to stay or leave

because of their worries about who their children will marry. This concern may not be as

salient for women from individualistic cultures where marriage partners are chosen based

on individual qualities and preferences.

A Sense of Overwhelming Entrapment

Research studies have shown that nearly all of the women who have been abused

by their husbands feel some degree of entrapment in their marriages (Chin, 1994;

Dosanjh et al., 1994; Kozu, 1999; Muellender, 1996; Phillips, 1999; Wiik, 1995;

Weitzman, 2000; Whirter, 1999). Weitzman (2000) noted that "while battered wives of

all socioeconomic classes wish to rid their marriages of abuse and often view it as a

personal failing, the inability to put an end to the violence is publicly judged and

criticized unequally among the classes" (p. 27). She goes on to say that for highly

educated and wealthy women who appear to have everything going for them; their

"...feeling of entrapment seem unfathomable to those of us who are not in their situation"

(p. 30). For a variety of reasons including the stigma associated with being abused,

women from diverse socioeconomic status as well as religious and cultural backgrounds

feel trapped in their marriages.

To some extent, Indo-Canadian Sikh women's feeling of entrapment appears to be similar to that of other groups of women. However, what seems to differentiate the degree of entrapment that they feel in their marriages is the cultural prescription of *izzat*. Several of the women indicated that they felt completely trapped in their marriages because of the pressure from their family and community to stay with their abusive husbands for the sake of family honour. The cultural sanctity of marriage also added to their sense of entrapment. One woman revealed that the importance of marriage was so deeply ingrained into her psyche that it prevented her from leaving her husband even in the face of unrelenting abuse. This finding is consistent with that of Phillips (1999) who noted that for some American Muslim women the benefits of being accepted by their community outweighed the difficulties of living with an abusive husband.

The findings of the current study combined with that of Phillips (1999) suggest that women from collectivistic cultures seem to experience a high level of entrapment in their marriages due to cultural taboos against divorce. More research using samples from diverse cultural groups would be helpful in expanding our understanding of how the women's sense of entrapment varies across cultures. It is likely that women from collectivistic cultures would experience greater degree of entrapment in their marriages compared with women from individualistic cultures. Behaviour in collectivistic cultures is established by family and community norms whereas in individualistic cultures personal likes and dislikes regulate one's behaviour. Hence, a woman from an individualistic culture would be more likely to divorce her abusive husband because her needs would take precedence over those of her family and community whereas in a

collectivistic culture a woman might feel obligated to endure the abuse in order to preserve her family's honour.

Reclaiming Personal Strength

The findings of this study illustrate that Indo-Canadian Sikh women sought help from a number of different sources including their religious faith, friends, family, in-laws, as well as legal professionals and health care providers in their move towards reclaiming their personal strength. Despite the challenges that they faced they continued to persevere in their search for someone who could assist them. This finding is congruent with the results found by several other scholars (e.g., Browne, 1987; Bowker, 1983; Gondolf, 1988; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). Women in Bowker's (1983) study persistently sought help. Gondolf (1988) concluded that women on average contacted five different sources of help in an effort to free themselves from the abuse.

Although abused women from various socioeconomic, religious, and cultural backgrounds encounter numerous difficulties in their move to liberate themselves from the abuse in their marriages, for Indo-Canadian Sikh women this component of their experience seems to be exacerbated by a number of circumstances. For instance, the clash of values regarding marriage and family life between the Indo-Canadian Sikh culture and the dominant culture add to the challenges that Indo-Canadian Sikh women face in their pursuit of effective treatment. Repeatedly, the women mentioned that the various legal and health care services that they tried to access proved to be ineffective for them. The women indicated that they often felt "judged" and/or "misunderstood" by the health care and legal professionals who were from the dominant culture. This finding is consistent with that found by Phillips (1999) who noted that the sting of prejudice "…no doubt

reinforce fears that Muslims will be misunderstood by non-Muslim service providers" (p. 342). Further research on the abuse experiences of women of colour within the Canadian mosaic would be beneficial in increasing our knowledge about how these women's perceptions about prejudice and discrimination contribute to the challenges that they are likely to experience in their struggles to combat the abuse in their marriages.

Implications for Clinical Practice

The paucity of information regarding wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women represents a barrier to the provision of culturally competent care for these women. The lack of research on wife abuse from the perspective of these women conceals this problem not only from the eyes of those within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community but also people from the dominant culture. Violence against women in every culture demands attention so that culturally sensitive and effective care can be provided for women of diverse cultural backgrounds. Continuing to utilize clinical interventions that are based on Euro-centric values ignores the complexity of the phenomenon of wife abuse as experienced by Indo-Canadian Sikh women as well as other women of colour within the Canadian mosaic. Most specifically, a safety plan which focuses only on keeping a woman's intention to leave hidden from her husband may not be appropriate for an Indo-Canadian Sikh woman who may be living with her in-laws. In such cases, the woman would need to utilize innovative strategies to conceal her plan to leave her abusive husband not only from him but also from her in-laws who may be monitoring her movements quite closely. Hence, developing a safety plan for an Indo-Canadian Sikh woman who is living with her in-laws may need to be much more elaborate and carefully executed in order to ensure the safety of the woman.

Another area that requires attention is the development of community linkages. Creating true safety for Indo-Canadian Sikh women may hinge on our ability to build coalitions and form productive collaborations between social service providers from the dominant culture and members of various organizations within the Indo-Canadian Sikh community. As a result, attention must be directed towards building community linkages between the health care professionals and leaders of Indo-Canadian Sikh community organizations.

Henderson (1999) noted that an adequate response on the part of health care providers for women who encounter abuse in their intimate relationships is characterized by knowing the available resources, by raising the topic of violence with the women and by acting as a support and advocate for the women. She went on to say that taking direction from the women regarding their personal choices is more likely to lead to effective care for them. Indeed, by listening to Indo-Canadian Sikh women in a non-judgmental and respectful manner and then working together with them to plan an approach that is best suited for their unique situations will give these women a sense of validation and empowerment. In building community linkages, health care professionals can become more familiar with community resources as well as services thereby enhancing their ability to intervene effectively with Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing or have experienced abuse in their marriages.

The findings of this study provide valuable insight for health care and legal professionals who are genuinely interested in helping Indo-Canadian Sikh women to end the abuse in their marriages. Results of this study illustrate that many of the women had experienced multiple forms of abuse including physical, psychological, and sexual. While

the consequences of physical abuse were quite serious, several of the women indicated that the results of psychological abuse were even more debilitating and long lasting. The women also mentioned that they found it difficult to cope with the aftermath of this form of abuse because the people they disclosed their abuse to including health care and legal professionals did not consider it to be very serious. Psychotherapists can help Indo-Canadian Sikh women to heal from this type of abuse by adopting a compassionate, respectful, and non-judgmental attitude and by believing the women about the severity of the psychological abuse. Allowing the women to work through the pain of the psychological abuse at their own pace, in an environment that is safe, will allow them to gain a sense of empowerment and validation.

As well, the findings of this study indicate that women who entered arranged marriages were not the only ones who experienced abuse in their marriages. However, the women who had agreed to an arranged marriage were more likely to live with their in-laws compared with women who had chosen their own husbands. Living with their in-laws appears to have increased some Indo-Canadian Sikh women's sense of self-doubt. Experiencing a great amount of self-doubt, they are likely to seek assistance from health care professionals particularly their family doctors. These women may present themselves to health care providers with symptoms that resemble psychiatric conditions. Medical professionals must exercise caution and do a thorough assessment by asking direct questions about abuse rather than being quick to prescribe psychiatric labels or medications to such women. Tranquilizer use is actually not recommended in cases involving domestic abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1980) for a variety of reasons including the heightened risk of attempted suicide by women who have experienced abuse in their

marriages. Moreover, use of tranquilizers may make it difficult for women to think clearly in times of abuse when they need to have all their wits about them in order to protect themselves from serious harm or injury. A psychiatric label may also make it difficult for an Indo-Canadian Sikh woman, as well as any other woman, to gain custody of her children because the courts may deem her as being an "unstable" or "unfit" parent for the children.

Social workers, workers in the transition houses as well as crisis-line workers must exercise sensitivity and caution in devising a detailed safety plan when working with Indo-Canadian Sikh women as they are likely to be under tremendous scrutiny not only by their husbands but also their in-laws many of whom may be living with them. Hence, for these women, whose movements may be constantly monitored, making a telephone call to the police for help or planning an escape route could prove to be extremely difficult. Professionals working with this group of women must refrain from having a negative or "judgmental" attitude towards these women's particular situations in order to provide effective and ethical care for them.

Additionally, the results of this study suggest that some Indo-Canadian Sikh women are likely to continue to blame themselves for the abuse due to their religious belief of fate, destiny, or *karma*. Psychotherapists will need to take this into consideration in their work with this group of women. Moreover, although counsellors, social workers, and nurses are ethically responsible to inform the women of the increasing risk to their safety if they continue to stay with their abusive husbands, they must be careful not to pressure or push the women into a decision to leave their abusive husbands. Nor should care for these women be subject to the condition that they will receive assistance only if

they are willing to leave their abusive marriages. Indo-Canadian Sikhs women's lack of action may not be a reflection of passivity, subordination, or helplessness. Rather, their reluctance to leave may be based on realistic fears of serious consequences they will face if they do divorce their abusive husbands including discrimination from the dominant culture and the possibility of not being to re-marry within their community.

In their work with this group of women, counsellors need to take the time to explore the various options that are available for the women, assess possible consequences of specific choices and then give the women the freedom to choose the options that are best suited for their individual situations. Allowing the women to work at their own pace in deciding whether to stay or leave will provide them with a sense of being listened to and being properly understood. Attention should always be directed at providing the women with information about resources, and helping them to gain insight and awareness about the dynamics of abuse so that they may make choices that are safe for them.

The findings of this study also point to the need for more cultural sensitivity training for the various health care and legal professionals. As well, more Indo-Canadian Sikhs need to be actively recruited and trained in the health care professions including medicine, psychiatry, counselling, social work, and nursing in order to provide culturally sensitive and adequate care for Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing or who have experienced abuse in their marriages.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that outreach initiatives through community organizations such as the Sikh gurdwaras, ethnic media, and women's organizations would be helpful in increasing the women's awareness about the

availability of services and resources that could potentially help them. Acknowledging that they are being abused and informing the women that there are resources that can help them are important steps that should be taken by health care providers in order to effectively help Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing or have experienced abuse in their marriages.

Limitations of the Study

Results of phenomenological research are not intended to be generalizable. Rather, the goal of this type of research is to illuminate the life stories of individuals who have personally experienced a particular life event. The findings of this study provide valuable insight about the phenomenon of wife abuse as experienced by a group of eight Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Caution should be exercised in applying the information from this study to other groups of Indo-Canadian Sikh women who may or may not be similar to this group of women. For instance, participation for this study was limited to English speaking Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be applicable for non-English speaking Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are experiencing or have experienced abuse in their marriages. It is possible that these women may face even greater challenges in acquiring effective treatment for wife abuse due to their lack of fluency in the English language.

Another limitation of the current study is that the participants were recruiting from a clinical setting. Hence, the results of this study may not be characteristic of all Indo-Canadian Sikh women in the general population who may differ from this group of women in important ways. For instance, the women in the clinical sample may have

come from more violent relationships than would other groups of Indo-Canadian Sikh women.

Another limitation of this study is that the results represent a retrospective "snapshot" of personal experiences of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Essentially, the research was based on self-reports of the participants' experiences of wife abuse. Consequently, it is possible that some parts of their abuse experiences were not described because they were not as salient for the women at the time of reporting or that some aspects of their abuse experiences were so painful that the women may have repressed them. A retrospective self-report of the abuse experience may also have been altered by the passage of time. Even though a retrospective account of one's abuse experience might not be as accurate because of distortions arising from the passage of time, the advantage of such an account is that it may actually allow the person to provide a more complete description of the phenomenon. In essence, the person would have had an opportunity to reflect back on the experience and to integrate it consciously and verbally thereby allowing one to give a more fuller description of the experience (Hycner, 1985).

Additionally, the participation for this study was restricted to Indian Sikh women who had a Canadian status. Hence, the findings of this study may not be representative of Indian Sikh women who are recent immigrants. It is likely that fear of being deported as well as lack of knowledge about their rights in Canada may influence the strategies that non-Canadian Indian Sikh women would utilize to cope with the abuse in their marriages. The lack of support from friends and family many of whom may still be living in India

could further exacerbate the experiences of wife abuse for an Indian Sikh woman who is a recent immigrant to Canada.

As well, the results of this study may not generalize to other groups of women of colour within the Canadian mosaic such as the Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, Ismali Canadians, and Iranian Canadians. Women from collectivistic cultures in some respects are likely to have similar experiences. However, there may be specific religious beliefs and/or cultural dictates that could alter the ways in which the women from different religious and cultural orientations perceive and cope with the abuse in their marriages. Research documenting the abuse experiences of the diverse cultural and religious groups of women is needed to further advance our knowledge of what aspects of the abuse experiences appear to be similar and/or unique for the different groups of women within Canada.

Finally, this study was descriptive rather than explanatory. While various "hunches" can be inferred about what the phenomenon of wife abuse is like for Indo-Canadian Sikh women, definitive conclusions about the causality and extent of the problem of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women are beyond the scope of this study. More research, using larger samples of Indo-Canadian Sikh women that are randomly selected from the general population of the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, would be helpful in assessing the incidence and prevalence rates of wife abuse within this community.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study show that providing examples of sexual abuse proved to be difficult for Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Additional research focussing on this

component of their abuse experiences would provide helpful insight about what constitutes sexual abuse for these women. This information would allow psychotherapists to gain a better understanding of sexual abuse for this group of women thereby providing basis for improved program planning and service delivery for them. Additional research using longitudinal research design, despite its logistical difficulty, would also be beneficial in furthering our understanding of the dynamics of wife abuse for Indo-Canadian Sikh women.

The present study focused on the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women who were living in an urban setting. Hence, the findings of this study may be applicable only for this group of women and may not be representative of the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women who are residing in rural areas. Research examining the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women living in rural areas where services and contact with their ethnic community may be limited might yield different results.

The women who participated in this study ranged in age from thirty-one to forty-eight years with an average age of thirty-seven years. Therefore, the results of this study may be representative only of this age group of Indo-Canadian Sikh women. More research with Indo-Canadian Sikh women between the ages of 18 and 30, a cohort that is in a high risk group for abuse according to previous research based on samples of Caucasian women (e.g., Bergman, 1992; Wolfner & Gelles, 1993), would be useful. Such research would advance our knowledge about how the abuse experiences of Indo-Canadian Sikh women vary in different age groups. Furthermore, the participants of the present study represent a group of Indian Sikh women who are fluent in English and have

a Canadian status. Additional research documenting the abuse experiences of non-English speaking and Indian Sikh women who are recent immigrants would be helpful in enhancing our awareness of how this group of women copes with issues of wife abuse. It is possible that the fear of deportation and lack of competency in the English language may further exacerbate the abuse experiences of these women.

The women who took part in this study represented a clinical sample. It is likely that this group of women may have come from more violent relationships. Additional research on Indo-Canadian Sikh women recruited from various sources including community organizations such as the Sikh temple would extend our knowledge about the dynamics of wife abuse for women in the general population of the Indo-Canadian Sikh community. Finally, further research focusing on the abuse experiences of other groups of women including Chinese Canadians, Japanese Canadians, Iranian Canadians, German Canadians, Irish Canadians, Scottish Canadians, etc., could provide valuable insight about how the experiences of wife abuse for women from collectivistic cultures are similar and/or different compared with women from individualistic cultures.

Conclusions

Health care and legal professionals should not assume that the findings of this study provide evidence that Indo-Canadian Sikh women who experience abuse in their marriages have a "cultural" problem. Nor should they conclude that wife abuse is more prevalent or more accepted in the Indo-Canadian Sikh culture. Instead, recognizing that wife abuse is rampant in every culture will lead to more compassionate and effective care for women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Researchers must continue to document the experiences of wife abuse using samples from various cultural groups so that we may

gain a better understanding of the aspects of this phenomenon that are similar or different for diverse cultural groups of women within the Canadian mosaic.

The findings of this study indicate that a number of circumstances such as hierarchical relationships within the family unit, *izzat*, and the sanctity of marriage made it difficult for Indo-Canadian Sikh women to leave their abusive marriages. The clash of values between the Indo-Canadian Sikh culture and the dominant culture regarding marriage and family life also contributed to the challenges that these women faced in extricating themselves from the abuse. Being caught between two different cultures seemed to add to the dissonance that Indo-Canadian Sikh women experienced as they tried to cope with the abuse in their marriages. On the other hand, there were specific cultural factors including the women's religious faith, support from their in-laws and families in the form of financial assistance and confronting the abuser through family meetings that were helpful in allowing some of them to combat the abuse in their marriages. Their religious faith served as a guidepost for Indo-Canadian Sikh women; it gave them a sense of strength, comfort, support, as well as hope and in some cases kept them safe from the grip of suicide.

Caution should be exercised in applying information from this study to Indo-Canadian Sikh women as a group. Instead, the findings of this study should serve as background knowledge to frame clinical encounters for these women with an important caveat that other Indo-Canadian Sikh women may or may not share similar experiences as described by the women in this sample. Most specifically, health care and legal professionals must not assume that for every Indo-Canadian Sikh woman her in-laws are potentially a threat in undermining her sense of authority and self-confidence. Although

several Indo-Canadian Sikh women indicated that their abuse experiences were complicated by the maltreatment that they received from their in-laws, others mentioned that their in-laws were strong alleys for them as they attempted to free themselves from the abuse in their marriages.

Finally, drawing on Indo-Canadian Sikh women's strengths, rather than their reluctance to leave their abusive marriages, will ultimately lead to the implementation of clinical interventions that foster their sense of agency and integrity. Indo-Canadian Sikh women who find it difficult to leave their abusive marriages are not being passive, submissive or "traditional", rather they are truly afraid of the consequences including discrimination and sense of displacement that they might face if they were to leave. These fears combined with cultural sanctity about marriage and *izzat* keep some Indo-Canadian Sikh women captive in their marriages. Throughout this research, I have been struck by these women's resilience, resourcefulness, and ingenuity in seeking effective treatment for themselves. Despite insurmountable challenges and barriers, they continued to persevere in their search for someone who could help them to deal with the aftermath of the abuse. Several of the women, despite the resistance from their families and with very little support from the legal and health care professionals from the dominant culture, managed to extricate themselves from the abuse in their marriages. This, of course, is antithetical to what one would predict from a learned helplessness perspective.

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Appendix C

Interview Format

Orienting statement

The following statement was read to all of the participants at the beginning of the interview.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I am doing this research project to learn more about wife abuse from the perspective of the Indo-Canadian Sikh women. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am interested in knowing what the abuse experience has been like for you personally.

Please feel free to take as much time as you need to tell me about your experience of abuse. You may want to discuss your experience of abuse as if it were a story, with a beginning, middle and end.

During the interview, I may ask you for more information or clarification about something that you have said in order to better understand your experience. You are not obligated to answer any questions or discuss anything that you do not feel comfortable with.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

Questions for building rapport

1. Can you please tell me a bit about your self (For example, what was it like for you to grow up in your family)? Tell me a little more about...
2. Were you born in Canada? (If not, when did you come to Canada, what was that like for you)?
3. What was school life like for you?
4. What sorts of leisure activities do you enjoy?
5. What kind of work do you do? (How do you like working as a _____)
6. How long have you been married?
7. How did you meet your husband?

Questions about the abuse experience

1. In as much detail as possible, Can you please tell me what the experience of wife abuse has been like for you?

2. (What sorts of things happened in your marriage that led you to believe that you were being abused? Can you tell me a bit more about that? Can you give me an example? What was that like for you? How did you feel when that happened to you?
3. Can you please tell me more about your experience of abuse?
4. Can you please elaborate on that? What happened next?
5. What was that like for you? What meaning does that have for you?
6. What sorts of things have you found helpful (or difficult), as you have tried to deal with the abuse? Have you found anything else that has been helpful or difficult in your efforts to cope with the abuse (e.g., are there certain people or services that you have found helpful or difficult to deal with)?
7. Is there anything in particular that influenced your decision to leave (or stay in) your marriage? Can you tell me more about that? Can you please give me an example? How has that been helpful? Is there anything else that may have influenced your decision to leave or stay in your marriage? Can you tell me more about that?
8. What meaning have you made about the abuse that you experienced in your marriage? Can you please elaborate on that? Can you tell me what you mean by that?
9. What are your thoughts as to what the abuse was about?
10. What sense have you made about your experience of the abuse that you experienced in your marriage?
11. What do you think the abuse was about?
12. What do you think contributed to the abuse that you experienced in your marriage?
13. What do you think caused the abuse?
14. Why do you think the abuse happened?
15. If you could tell another woman who is in a similar situation to the one that you are/were in, what would you want to tell her about your abuse experience?

Concluding remarks

1. Is there anything else that you want me to know about your experience of abuse?
2. Do you have any questions about the research or anything else at this time?

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview with me.

Appendix D

Selection Criteria

Women who were interested in participating in this research were asked the following questions to ensure that they met the criteria to be included in the study.

1. Did you or your parents, (grandparents, etc.) immigrate to Canada from India?

2. Are you married? (Separated, or divorced)?

3. Which religious group do you affiliate yourself with?

4. Are you a Canadian citizen?

5. Have you experienced abuse in your marriage?

6. Would you be willing to talk about your abuse experience?

7. Would you be comfortable with doing the interview in English?

Bracketed Presuppositions

Researcher's personal history greatly influences the process through which understanding and conclusions are reached (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Essentially, the researcher's biases shape the way in which he/she chooses to gather and interpret information. Therefore, a researcher who chooses to use Husserl's transcendental phenomenological method is required to suspend his/her own presuppositions using a technique of deep self-reflection which is know as phenomenological reduction or "bracketing". Using the strategy of bracketing, the researcher intensely reviews the biases that he/she may have about the phenomenon under investigation in order to make them explicit to both him/herself as well as the reader. After acknowledging the orientation of the researcher, the reader can determine for him/herself as to how well the researcher has illuminated the phenomenon under investigation. In this section, I briefly outline my personal background and my biases, assumptions, as well as beliefs about wife abuse.

I am an Indo-Canadian Sikh female whose paternal grandfather immigrated to Canada from India in 1906. I speak Punjabi fluently and recently I learned to read and write Punjabi at University of British Columbia (UBC). I also read, write, and speak Hindi at an elementary level.

I grew up in a middle class and close knit family. I am the oldest of six children; I have four younger brothers and a sister. I am still single. Most of my extended family members live within a 100-mile radius of the Greater Vancouver area. My parents are very involved with the Indo-Canadian Sikh community in Duncan, British Columbia. I

am quite connected with the Indo-Canadian Sikh community both in Duncan and the Lower Mainland.

In the past few years, I have participated in community organizations including the Indo-Canadian Women's Group and the Punjabi Women's Association. I am deeply religious. I am a trained *Kundalini* yoga instructor and I have been teaching yoga for the past six years. As part of the yogic regime, I do *Sadhana* (early morning reading of the Sikh scripture) and *Kirtan* (chanting of the Sikh scripture mantras) on a regular basis. My parents, although they respect the values of both moderate and orthodox Sikhs, align themselves more with the moderate camp. My father, who has been clean-shaven all of his life, began to wear a turban in 1992. While my father wears the outward symbols of the Sikhs (i.e., beard and turban), he is not a baptized Sikh. Actually, no one in my immediate family is baptized as a Sikh.

Growing up in the Indo-Canadian Sikh community, I had learned certain values about the role of women in the Sikh culture. From infancy, a woman is socialized to be the "good daughter", then to become a "good wife" and ultimately a "good mother". She is considered to be a repository of *izzat* and is expected to maintain family honour and the sanctity of her marriage at any price. A woman maintains *izzat* of her family by being an obedient daughter, a dutiful and faithful wife, and devoted as well as loving mother.

I have a master's degree in counselling psychology. I am a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) and an approved supervisor with the AAMFT. I have worked as a marriage and family therapist for the past several years in social service agencies and private practice.

My interest in the phenomenon of wife abuse dates back to my undergraduate training in psychology when I took a directed studies course on wife abuse with Dr. Don Dutton. During my master's degree in counselling psychology, I did a number of papers and presentations on wife abuse for the family therapy course that I took with Dr. Adam Horvath. My clinical work with women at the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) during my masters program further shaped my understanding of wife abuse. In 1995, I went to Delta Mental Health to do my doctoral internship with Dr. John Banmen where I had the opportunity to work with a number of Indo-Canadian Sikh women who had encountered abuse in their marriages. The stories that the women told me made me realize the complexity of this phenomenon and the challenges that these women faced in dealing with this issue.

Over the past several years, I have read extensively on the topic of wife abuse. Equally, I have attended a number of workshops and conferences on wife abuse to learn more about this phenomenon in order to be more effective in my role as a therapist. My work with Indo-Canadian Sikh women, who had experienced abuse in their marriages, allowed me to realize that the various interventions and strategies that I had learned and was using were proving to be ineffective. Many of these women told me that they did not want to leave their abusive husband because of cultural beliefs and norms. One Indo-Canadian Sikh woman told me that if she left her abusive husband he would tell everyone that she had run off with another man. She explained that this would ruin her family's *izzat*. Her experience of abuse and the distress that she felt about cultural prescriptions of *izzat* and sanctity of marriage contributed to her suicidal ideation. Eventually, she managed to leave her husband and her family supported her decision to do so.

As I continued to work with more Indo-Canadian Sikh women, who had experienced abuse in their marriages, I quickly realized that I was neither competent nor adequately prepared to work in the area of abuse with this group of women. I also learned that the previous research studies on this topic did not provide me with the in-depth information that I needed to be more effective in my role as a therapist for these women. More importantly, my training in counselling psychology had not prepared me to work with the multiple issues (e.g., cultural expectations, lack of resources and racism) that compounded the effects of abuse for these women. I wanted to learn more about their experiences of wife abuse so that I could begin to be more effective in my work with them. To this end, I have decided to pursue research on this topic using a group of Indo-Canadian Sikh women for my doctoral dissertation.

Through the process of deep self-reflection, I have become aware of various assumptions that I will need to put aside or bracket in order to concentrate on the stories of the women that I interview for the purposes of this study. For instance, I do not believe that arranged marriages are abusive for women. In my data collection, I will need to bracket this belief because some of the women that I interview may consider their arranged marriage as being a major reason for the abuse that they experience in their marriages. Moreover, I grew up in a relatively egalitarian family. My parents, from my point of view, seemed to have a democratic decision-making style. However, in my conversations with other Indo-Canadian Sikh friends and colleagues, I have come to realize that this is not the norm. Consequently, I will have to bracket my expectation that intimate relationships can be egalitarian, as this may not be the experience of the women that I interview.

By reading the material on wife abuse, I have come to realize that racism is another barrier that many women of colour face as they attempt to deal with abuse in their marriages. For instance, research studies have documented that women of colour encounter multiple forms of oppression both from the professionals whose help they seek and members of their cultural community (Phillips, 1999). The sting of prejudice from members of the dominant culture leaves the women of colour feeling reluctant to reach out for help from professionals who are from the dominant culture. Consequently, I am prone to look for themes of racism in the stories that the women tell me. However, I will need to attend to this assumption to ensure that I do not ask women any leading questions as a way of confirming this belief.

Anecdotal information also leads me to expect that Indo-Canadian Sikh women who experience violence in their homes may choose not to leave their abusive husbands for a number of different reasons including *izzat* (family honour), stigma of a divorce and financial worries. I do not believe that Indo-Canadian Sikh women who choose to remain in their abusive relationships are being subordinate, submissive, passive, or helpless. Rather, I commend them for exhibiting courage in dealing with competing systems of values and norms (i.e., their cultural norms as well as those of the dominant culture). Therefore, I am likely to search for themes of courage, strength, and power in the interview material from the Indo-Canadian Sikh women. I will need to bracket this belief so that I do not impose my expectation of personal power on the part of Indo-Canadian Sikh women who have experienced abuse in their marriages.

Tait (1994), in her newspaper column, wrote an article describing the phenomenon of wife abuse within the Indo-Canadian community. She noted that Indo-

Canadian women, (who had lived in Canada for an extended period of time, who were fluent in English, who were aware of Canadian laws regarding domestic abuse and knew how to contact the police), faced insurmountable difficulties when they tried to deal with abuse in their marriages. Upon reading this article, I became very curious as to the nature of the difficulties that these women may have encountered in their attempts to combat the abuse in their marriages. My hunch is that the web of constraints that these women face involves their desire to maintain their cultural expectations concerning marriage and their yearning to live an abuse-free lifestyle. Hence, I expect that these women will be traversing through the terrain of wife abuse with dualistic and often very conflicting ideologies. However, I need to bracket this presupposition. It is possible that the women I interview might not experience any dualistic or conflict of values because they may have decided to choose one of the following options. (1) They may want to preserve their cultural values about marriage and family life and disregard those of the mainstream culture. (2) They may have found a happy medium of incorporating the norms of their own culture and that of mainstream culture regarding marriage and family life. (3) They may have decided to relinquish the expectations pertaining to marriage of their own cultural group and instead may have adopted the values of the dominant culture regarding marriage.

I will bracket the above-mentioned beliefs, values, and expectations so that I can discover and describe the "real" or "lived" experiences of wife abuse of the women themselves. I realize that I may not be able to totally separate myself from my personal values and biases. However, by mentioning these preconceived ideas, I am hoping that the reader can decide for him/herself as to how my biases may have influenced the

information that I chose to focus on and the themes that I derived from the women's experiences of wife abuse. I am cognizant that the description of wife abuse that I ultimately produce from the personal accounts of Indo-Canadian Sikh women is a reflection of who I am as a person, and how I am situated. Anderson (1991) astutely points out that it is not as if the researcher, in phenomenological research, is describing structures that are out there and are independent of the researcher and the participants. Rather, the knowledge that is produced using this perspective results from the dialectical process between the researcher and the participant.

Appendix G

QUESTIONS FOR PEER REVIEWERS

1. In what ways do you think the transcripts and the themes were connected to each other?
2. In what ways do you think they were not connected to each other?
3. What struck you about the transcripts that may have been omitted in the themes?
4. What was your impression of the themes?
5. Do you have any other questions, comments or suggestion?