

Trapped in the Cycle of Violence: A Phenomenological Study Describing the Stages of Coping with Domestic Violence

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ABSTRACT One of the most persistent maladies of domestic violence is that its victims are always blamed, even by trusted sources of social capital support, for staying in an abusive relationship. Questions as to why the woman victim does not leave are always asked, and most often women are blamed for continuing to stay. This brings to the fore the question of their coping strategies as it relates to abusive partners. This paper specifically examines how women go through and cope with domestic violence. A qualitative descriptive, exploratory and contextual study was conducted with women who are victims of domestic violence. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with women who volunteered to participate in the study. A sample was purposively selected of women who were staying with their abusive partners, tolerating abusive relationship for a period of more than 20 years. Ethical measures were adhered to bearing in mind the sensitivity of this research. Findings revealed six stages of coping which abused women go through as they ride on what was become known as the Walkers' Cycle of Violence. It is important to understand the world that a victim of domestic violence lives in, and the paces they take, so as to be able to understand her and be able to provide the necessary support without being judgemental. Ultimately, empowerment strategies, as opposed to run-of-the-mill 'holistic approaches', are recommended for redeeming the victim's lot and redirecting the survivor's coping skills beyond institutional intervention.