

Running Head: MALE SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

NARRATIVES OF MALE SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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A dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the degree of

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Abstract

This study explores the narratives of three male survivors of childhood domestic violence. The research question delves into how the males' childhood experiences of witnessing domestic violence impacted their adult identity and their outlook on life. It also explores the perceived impact on their adult relationships. A dialogical narrative analysis (Frank, 2010a, 2012) as methodology was used to inform the study. Six interviews were carried out with three participants. Results show that all males experienced a turbulent, chaotic childhood intertwined with a reality of love and abuse and characterised by the process of getting in between their parents' fights. In their adult relationships, they all experienced challenges with isolation and anger. The participants perceived their adult identity to have also been impacted by their continued exposure to violence in childhood in relation to how they make sense of their masculinity while dealing with post traumatic symptoms. The recollection of narratives of male childhood experiences which is an under-researched area in the domestic violence literature can add to the knowledge of what it is like for males growing up in families where there is violence. The study is also helpful for professionals who support children and their families caught in the dynamics of family violence.

Keywords: Male witnesses of domestic violence, dialogical narrative analysis, narratives

Declaration of Authenticity

FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELLBEING

DECLARATIONS BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Narratives of Male Survivors of Childhood Domestic Violence

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Name of Student

13/08/2019

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Dedication

To the brave little men who showed me courage and touched my heart.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Preamble

“Family is supposed to be our safe haven, very often it’s the place where we find the deepest heart ache.” (Iyanla Vanzant)

Children deserve to be born into a loving and nurturing family, but the reality is that some are born into families where there is abuse, power and control. There are many misconceptions of what domestic violence entails (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018). As a key worker in a domestic violence shelter, I met people who work with victims of domestic violence and struggle to understand the hardships involved in coming out of an abusive relationship and the impact of such traumatic experiences. This is even so in relation to the impact on children and their experiences in living in such a distressing context. Even less is known about males who grew up in a context of abuse. The common accepted knowledge is that males normally mirror the aggressive behaviour witnessed, especially when the child engages in externalising behaviour (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 2003; Zarling et al., 2013).

This research will focus on males who witnessed domestic violence while growing up and will look into how they perceive to have been impacted by this experience. It is a retrospective study which will attempt to delve into the complexities of males’ experiences by taking into account the different types of abuse they were exposed to and how they have understood its impact on their adult life. This research study will be informed by Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) (Frank, 2010a, 2012), a qualitative methodology that helps one illuminate the subjective experience of all participants by taking into account various contexts.

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is defined as aggressive behaviour within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner (Clear Charity, 2014). Although women can be violent in intimate relationships, several studies show that violence is overwhelmingly borne by women at the hands of men (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002). There are numerous definitions of domestic violence due to a great intersectionality (Levinson, 1989; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005), leading to different countries having varying outlooks of domestic violence. In fact, Malta had a definition of its own until recently when the Council of Europe set forth important standards for violence against women. Consequently, a Convention was established, aiming to develop a comprehensive framework across different countries.

This settlement known as the Istanbul Convention, signed by the Council of Europe Committee in April 2011, has been ratified in Malta on 13th June 2018 and defined domestic violence as “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim” (Istanbul Convention, Article 3b). This law advancement emphasizes member states’ obligation to fully address violence in all its forms and to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators (Council of Europe Treaty Series - No. 210).

In understanding domestic violence, it is important to acknowledge its complexities, mostly its various causes, dynamics, contexts, links and consequences involved (Ali, Dhingra & McGarry, 2016). Intimate partner violence is maintained through a cycle that goes through four major phases starting with tension building events going onto the violent acts, to actions of reconciliation that lead to periods of remission (Geldard & Geldard, 2010). The cycle of

abuse and the great risks involved when the victim tries to seek help, make it increasingly difficult to get out of an abusive relationship (Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee, 2000), particularly as women who fall victims to violence are faced with a lot of barriers (Naudi, Clark & Saliba, 2018). In their study Naudi et al., (2018) found that women who seek help in the Maltese context are most likely challenged by eight barriers namely: cultural, socio-economic, survivor-related, perpetrator-related, offspring-related, informal networks (family and friends), psychosocial / health care / education provision and justice system (including police and courts).

This throws light on the serious repercussions domestic violence presents for children witnessing such horrid realities (Fong, Hawes & Allen, 2017).

Rationale

There is a lot of research conducted on the impact of domestic violence on children. However, most studies either look at the experiences of both genders during childhood and try to find an association with the personality traits that develop (Georgsson, Almqvist & Broberg, 2011; Turner et al, 2012; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith & Jaffe, 2003), or consider only the perspective of women, their childhood exposure and impact on their adult relationships (Amann Ganinotti & Pallini, 2008; Sammut Scerri, 2015; Madhani et al., 2017). Very few studies, if any, focus on the childhood experiences of males who witness domestic violence. Therefore, this study will contribute to the awareness of the experiences that males go through while growing up in such a context and their understanding of how such experiences impacted their adult life.

This study attempts to shed light on the reality of three men who were exposed to violence by those who were supposedly loving and nurturing them. This is taking into consideration that such a phenomenon might remain implicit, possibly due to the fact that it is

quite challenging to disclose certain matters in a male-dominated society where the male figure is expected to display rationality rather than emotional reflexivity (Affleck, Glass, Macdonald, 2013). Thus, this study will attempt to come close to the experiences that these males have endured at a young age and the perceived impact on their lives.

Research question

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What stories do males who witness domestic violence throughout their childhood have to tell and how did their experiences impact their adult identity?
2. What is their outlook on life and are there any perceived repercussions on their adult relationships?

My interest and position in the study

My interest in this study stems from my experience working with victims of domestic violence and their children in a domestic violence shelter. My role was to provide emotional support while also helping the families through a more structured care approach in relation to parenting, self-care, home management and legal issues. Furthermore, in working within a context where the male figure is usually the perpetrator, I started to become more interested about the experiences of the male witnessing the act (Gil-González et al., 2007).

In reflecting about my work I am now able to understand how my interest in this study has been influenced by my own inclination towards attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) and resilience in the context of abuse, and how one's life, identity and relating self are formed while being impacted by violence. Attachment and resilience have been central in how I have come to make sense of my own personal experiences in understanding my own

identity and sense of self in relationships. My interest is reflected through my position as I have a great inclination for social justice.

Conceptual frameworks

An attachment and resilience perspective. Attachment style forms in early childhood through the relationships and interactions the child experiences with their primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1988). It influences the child's expectations of relationships as the child would have an understanding of their identity and relating self depending on the representations of these in their early years. Positive experiences of early family relationships support the formation of a secure attachment style (Bowlby, 1988), whereas prolonged exposure to traumatic experiences from early childhood can lead to the formation of an avoidant-ambivalent attachment style. Indeed, the child who has been exposed to domestic violence may develop an experience of people around them as unreliable (Bowlby, 1969). Thus, an attachment perspective in this study will support an understanding of how the males' early childhood experiences may impact their adult relationships.

This study will also take a resilience perspective, defined as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000, p.543). This process of adaptation through trauma is seen as resulting from an interplay between one's protective factors within themselves and in their immediate environment (Vetere, 2013; Rutter, 2007). This research will look into the males' resilience throughout their development within a traumatic environment (Place, Reynolds, Cousins, & O'Neill, 2002).

A social constructionist and critical realist perspective. A social constructionist framework investigates how social reality is constructed within a particular culture (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Such a standpoint postulates the idea that any type of experience or activity is a

social and cultural process (Schwandt, 2001). As is relevant to this study, such a stance looks into the subjective experience i.e. the conditions and implications for different versions of human realities, experiences and social practices (Willig, 2013). Thus in terms of social constructionism, what counts as violence is socially constructed and varies over time (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Meanwhile, there is also an agreed upon definition of domestic violence that is enshrined in law. This study will not focus on the ‘truth’ of what happened in the participants’ families, but on the present understanding and their construction of it.

Additionally, this research adopts a subtle critical realist framework. This perspective assumes the position that the individual representations and characteristics that form one’s personal experiences are active parts that support the formation and existence of a bigger reality. Thus, in line with this research this framework recognizes the participants’ experience while acknowledging that the social construction of their reality is shaped through extant resources such as culture, language and gender (Burr, 2015; Parker, 2005).

The Maltese context. Domestic violence in Malta has made significant steps forward in relation to an increase in awareness and policy improvements particularly through new legislation acts (Chapter 581). However, culture, beliefs and principles in Malta emerge out of strong Catholic beliefs that influence how society conceptualises its views of domestic violence (Naudi, 2004). Although the impact of religion is lessening with the secularisation of the newer generations (Abela, 2016), such a traditional religion holds societal values that embrace stereotypical gender roles and norms. These reflect a patriarchal society ingrained with conceptualisations of honour and shame resulting in a high gender inequality making women in Malta more at risk of being victims of abuse (Clark, 2012). Through such a high gender inequality, claims of female victim exaggeration and provocation of the violence can

endure. This shows a significant lack of awareness and understanding of domestic violence which leads to the omission of the varying types of violence that go beyond physical abuse (Naudi et al., 2018).

Definition of terms

Domestic violence (DV): The definition of DV has been defined earlier. At times the terms ‘intimate partner violence’ and ‘intraparental violence’ will be used to signify the violence between two people in an intimate relationship. This can be the participants’ adult intimate relationships as well as their parents’.

Perpetrator: The person exerting direct and / or indirect violent behaviour in any form or context on the participants’ mothers and on the participants. In this dissertation as stated by the participants, the perpetrator refers to a male perpetrator in a heterosexual relationship.

Layout of the study

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of the extant literature on the diverse impact involved in witnessing domestic violence in childhood and the impact on adulthood, taking into account gender differences in witnessing abuse and protective factors. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used, the research design, methods of data collection analysis, and strategies for credibility and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the results through a narrative representation with ample quotes extracted from the data. In Chapter 5, the stories are discussed collectively. The final chapter, includes a summary of the salient findings, the strengths and limitations of the study, implications for practice, service development and recommendations for research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to present a review of the extant literature on the experience of childhood DV, specifically of males who witnessed DV in their family while growing up. It will delve into the literature about the impact DV has on childhood development, followed by a discussion on the differences in impact between males and females. This will then be linked to the relational and personal outcomes in adulthood while considering the resilient factors. This chapter will also outline the gap in research on males and their childhood experiences of DV.

Search strategy

For the purpose of this literature review, I carried out a thorough search on the HyDi database which incorporates multiple sources including – SAGE Journals, Springer Link, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Social Science, ScienceDirect. I used key words that focus on DV, its impact on childhood development and the outcomes in adulthood: “impact of DV exposure”, “cultural influence on DV”, “meta-analyses of intimate partner violence”, “gender differences in witnessing DV”, “intergenerational transmission of violence”, “adult outcomes following exposure to abuse”, “longitudinal studies on males’ exposure to DV”, “male adults outcome of abuse”, “adult relationships following abuse”, “resilience”, “narratives of resistance to violence”.

The impact of witnessing intimate partner violence on childhood development

Awareness about the effects of DV on childhood and the respective developmental outcomes has been evolving throughout the last three decades (Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). Studies show that where there is DV, there is a heightened chance that children are exposed to the violent events witnessing up to 95% of the abuse and this happens even before

they reach the age of 6 (Graham-Bermann, Lynch, Banyard, DeVoe & Halabu, 2008; Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner & Ormrod, 2010). This high exposure to DV leads to a number of risk factors in the child's emotional and psychosocial development (Cooper & Vetere, 2005), with the outcomes depending on the nature of abuse witnessed and the age at which it happens (Fong et al., 2017). These characteristics are important as they help comprehend the extent to which a child may develop behavioural, emotional and psychological difficulties (Kitzmann, Gaylord & Kenny, 2003).

Several correlational studies show the difference between child witnesses to non-witnesses, illustrating that the psychosocial outcomes of children coming from conflictual families are significantly worse compared to those coming from non-violent homes (Adamson & Thompson, 1998). Margolin and Gordis's (2000) review of theoretical and empirical literature of children's reaction to DV proposes that violence may disrupt children's abilities to face normal developmental challenges. Indeed, meta-analysis studies and systemic reviews have shown how witnessing DV in childhood predicted several difficulties including behavioural, cognitive, emotional, social, psychological and academic problems which were carried on to adolescence (Fong et al, 2017; Vu, Jouriles, McDonald & Rosenfield, 2016). Even though the impact of DV varies depending on the multiple aspects involved, being exposed to abusive scenarios affects children significantly as it has profound negative repercussions, even later on in their adult relationships (Fong et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2008).

The literature shows a correlation between exposure to intimate partner violence and difficulties with externalising problems such as aggression, hyperactivity and oppositional behaviour (Zarling et al., 2013). However, other meta-analysis and correlational studies show that there might be difficulties with internalising problems (Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008; Paterson, Carter, Gao, Cowley-Malcolm & Iusitini, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003). These include

depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, suicidal thoughts and adjustment difficulties, which due to their invisible nature may not be considered as alarming. This inconsistency in literature may be due to research samples, as studies that draw samples from shelters of DV tend to produce results of more externalised behaviour due to children experiencing further difficulties in addition to DV (Fong et al., 2017).

Moreover, when children move out of the family household and end up living in shelters they are at elevated rates of social competence difficulties (Stagg, Wills & Howell, 1989). Hughes and Barad (1983) suggest that children raised in a context of violence who also end up living in a shelter suffer in forming a conceptualised sense of self, high anxiety levels and problem behaviour such as adjustment difficulties in most areas of their life. This seems to be exacerbated by the co-occurrence of child abuse, which irrespective of whether these children end up living in shelters or not, it seems to lead to an increased level of emotional and behavioural problems that go beyond the experience of exposure alone (Jouriles, McDonald, Slep, Heyman, & Garrido, 2008).

Although the timing of exposure to DV is not a moderator giving a precise measure of behavioural difficulties, studies on immediate and long-term consequences of exposure to traumatic experiences show that witnessing violence from birth may interfere with the development of a secure attachment style (Cook et al, 2017). The literature illustrates that ideally the first relational encounter offers the necessary stability and security as it profoundly affects every component of the human condition being the mind, body, relationships, and values (Levy and Orlans, 1998). However, traumatic events weaken attachment, trust and relationships, resulting in an insecure attachment style (Bowlby, 1969). Here several studies produced mixed findings in relation to the maternal role in parenting. Being the victim makes it especially hard to cope while raising children, as the mother would

be acting from a survival position. Thus, while she may still cater for her children's needs, it may be a struggle to connect and offer stability to the child in such a disruptive context (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001; Sims, Hans & Cox, 1996). Conversely, recent quantitative studies indicate that mothers may compensate for the impact of DV by being more effective parents (Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, & Semel, 2003).

Apart from the formation of an insecure attachment style, the impact of the violence witnessed has lasting effects that persist even after the child is separated from the perpetrator (Jouriles, Rosenfield, McDonald & Mueller, 2014). This is because witnessing traumatic events in early childhood may lead to disruptions in the brain's physical structure (Blair et al., 2017), which may also be a risk factor in relation to the development of psychopathology (Sayed, Iacoviello & Charney, 2015). Moreover, studies show that the loss of capacity for self-regulation that results from trauma exposure may have a "sleeper effect" (Graham-Bermann, Miller-Graff, Howell, & Grogan-Kaylor, 2015). This means that children who experience DV during the initial years of life may present behavioural difficulties such as intense feelings of anger, fear and sadness only later in their development (Holmes, 2013).

Gender differences in witnessing abuse

When taking into consideration gender in predominantly male-dominated societies, boys and girls are normally socialised through stereotypical gender roles which tend to link dominance to males and dependency to females (Campbell, 1993; James, 1996). The socialisation process is part and parcel of the children's exposure to DV. In their comparative study, Davies and Lindsay (2004) examined the correlation between witnessing intraparental violence and adjustment problems, and found that due to their gender role, girls who are expected to keep good social relationships and connections were more likely to experience adjustment difficulties than boys.

In a meta-analysis on the influence of socialisation on violence and the difference between boys and girls, James (1996) found that boys are generally raised with the belief that they are entitled to exert aggression in order to maintain control, while females are discouraged to use aggression. However, there is a discrepancy in research about the type of behaviour boys and girls engage in when exposed to DV. Meta-analysis literature indicates that boys display greater externalised behaviour, whereas girls exhibit more internalised behaviour (Evans et al., 2008, Vu et al., 2016; Wolfe et al., 2003). While such studies indicating that boys exhibit more externalised behaviour than girls (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 2003) deduce that they may be more at risk of becoming perpetrators, other research has at times shown a greater correlation between girls exposed to DV and the presentation of aggressive behaviour (Cummings, Pepler & Moore, 1999; Holmes, Voith, & Gromoske, 2015).

This inconsistency in research is emphasised further through other studies which conclude that there are no relative gender differences in the experience of DV exposure (Kitzmann et al., 2003; Wolfe et al., 2003). It seems that this contradiction in research results from an inability to arrive at a specific outcome due to a large heterogeneity between variables. Furthermore, there are only few empirical studies based on thorough theoretical basis on gender, and this might have resulted in a greater lack of control on confounding variables (Wolfe et al., 2003). Indeed, recent meta-analysis studies show the need to consider children's age, type of violence, and type of outcome when examining the effects of DV (Sternberg, Baradaran, Abbott, Lamb & Guterman, 2006).

Outcome in adulthood and the intergenerational transmission of violence

The literature on adults following witnessing of DV throughout childhood is very limited. The majority of research tends to look at the impact on childhood and the continued likelihood of certain risk factors, instead of looking at the long-term impact and the specific life outcomes following such traumatic experiences (Watson MacDonell, 2012). Moreover, existing studies on the gender differences in adult outcomes are also limited (Davies, DiLillo & Martinez, 2004; Sammut Scerri, 2015). When it comes to the intergenerational transmission of violence there is also an inconsistency in research findings. While a good number of studies based on Bandura's (1973) social learning theory conclude that DV is replicated through generations (Black, Sussman & Unger, 2009; Breslin, Riggs, O'Leary & Arias, 1990), recent systematic reviews of research suggest a low to moderate association between witnessing DV and its reproduction in adulthood (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012).

While the relationship between childhood exposure to DV and the intergenerational transmission of violence is highly established especially in relation to being more commonly perpetrated by men (Bassuck, Dawson & Huntington, 2006; Jin, Eagle & Yoshioka, 2007), there are many inconsistent findings in delineating the etiology and predictability. In fact, a methodological review and critique of the extant literature on the intergenerational transmission of violence by Haselschwerdt, Savasuk-Luxton & Hlavaty (2017), determines that there is too much methodological variability and yet too little methodological complexity to truly inform an examination and discussion of results. Other studies also indicate that it is important to note that not all men who witnessed family violence while growing up had become abusive towards their partner (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Roberts, Gilman, Fitzmaurice, Decker & Koenen, 2010). Some researchers have argued that those males who

witnessed DV throughout childhood and who exhibited violence in their adult relationships, have an “impaired masculinity” due to having acquired a limited understanding of resolving conflict (Pickup, Williams & Sweetman, 2001).

In view of such mixed results, more recent literature including longitudinal research studies and systematic reviews have been trying to examine the diverse aspects involved in this phenomenon. These studies conclude that a history of violence in the family of origin is a powerful risk factor, but not a predictor of intimate partner violence in the child’s adult relationship (Fong, et al., 2017; Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Pingley, 2017).

Watson MacDonnell’s (2012) review of the literature with regards to short-term and long-term impacts of abuse discovered that both internalising and externalising problems lead to negative outcomes in functioning, health, psychological wellbeing and relationships that continue to persist in adulthood for both males and females. Although it is important to note that retrospective studies might be limited by errors in recollection, they suggest that both males and females who experienced internalising problems in childhood due to witnessing domestic abuse tend to be at risk for psychopathology in adulthood, with those who were in the borderline range in childhood risking to get worse over time (Graham-Bermann et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Jouriles et al. (2014) in their longitudinal study on violence in families examined the impact of DV on conduct problems. Their study suggests a causal role in the development of conduct problems that acts as a predictive factor of mental health disorders. In another prospective-longitudinal study in which participants were followed until the age of 21, Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi & Silva (1998) found that adult partner abuse resulted from developmental issues from multiple life domains such as leaving school early, conduct

problems at the age of 15, delinquency, and substance abuse, suggesting that early problem behaviour was a more consistent predictor of abuse than exposure to DV.

In assessing the link between witnessing intimate partner violence and the perpetration of violence in adulthood, various studies emphasised the influence of culture as a risk factor. Islam et al.'s (2017) study specified that while violence is a frequent practice among Bangladeshi men, males who were exposed to violence during childhood were more likely to become abusers themselves. According to Islam et al., (2017) this suggested an intergenerational transmission of violence resulting from social learning, as they seem to operate through internalised working models and hold attitudes that justify the violent acts.

Research seems to focus on how having experienced DV in the family of origin leads to violence in one's family in adulthood. Similar to the literature on the childhood impact of DV, studies on adult outcomes illustrate adjustment problems that might mirror in interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, internal processes and cognitive functions (Vu et al., 2016). Additionally, research on adult outcomes shows a correlation to the emergence of trauma symptoms like depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and risk behaviours amongst which predominates substance abuse (Fagan and Wright, 2011).

However, few research studies consider other factors which could have posed certain limitations on extant literature that seeks to investigate the outcomes of exposure to intimate partner violence in relation to the intergenerational transmission of violence (Loham, Nepl, Senia & Schofield, 2013). In their study, Loham et al. (2013) investigated cross-sectional and retrospective literature on the intergenerational transmission of violence and found that most failed to reflect on the impact of certain research factors such as sampling methods, researcher bias and variables. Indeed, several studies did not assess for participants' individual or family behaviours, like the impact of one's emotional and psychological

wellbeing or events eliciting family stress. Therefore, while most of the studies they reviewed suggest that violence in the family of origin leads to violence in the family of destination, their research did not support a direct link between witnessing DV in childhood and the perpetration of violence in the next generation.

Potential protective factors and resilience

Although there is little research on the strategies children use to cope with abuse, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of understanding the complexities and uniqueness of the impact of witnessing abuse (Howell, 2011). In his review of the literature Edleson (1999) proposed an understanding of the children's general moderating factors and their essential role in supporting children to cope through such traumatic adversities. His study showed that the time elapsed from exposure to violence, whether the child has been abused, and the child's age and gender are all important factors that impact how the child's responds.

Kimball's (2016) systematic review of the literature, in which he also revisited Edleson's study (1999), shows that children exposed to DV cope through emotion-focused strategies rather than problem-focused solutions. Therefore, children protect themselves in such a context by avoiding talking about the violence, rather than getting away from it. Indeed, various studies agree that the children's high endurance in such a complex destructive environment is in itself a display of their resilience (Jenkins, 2011). Children's resilience to DV shows astounding strength. What supports further their ability to bounce back in the face of these traumatic events are trusting relationships with others, particularly the maternal figure, leading to a higher avoidance of negative outcomes (Vetere, 2013). In fact, other studies have found that mothers who were attuned to their child's intense feelings of anger and sadness were able to avert the onset of externalised behaviour difficulties (Johnson &

Lieberman, 2007). This is because the solid presence of a maternal figure supports the development of affect-regulation, a reflective communication style and a positive view of others as trustworthy (Vetere, 2013). According to Graham-Bermann et al. (2009) the same internal and external factors, namely maternal mental health and parental skills, were linked to better adjustment. Moreover, their study identified the variables in resilient children resulting in higher scores of self-worth and self-competence and low scores of depression compared to other clusters (Graham-Bermann et al., 2009).

In view of the high beneficial effect of trusting relationships, research suggests that intervening through a systemic approach that points to both parent and child in practice, would provide the child with increased functionality (Sammut Scerri, 2015). Other research also shows that the parenting style which translates into a good parent-child relationship mitigates the harmful effects of DV exposure on the child's development (Kimball, 2016). Furthermore, Vetere's (2013) theoretical study suggests that resilience is also influenced and maintained by the child's extracurricular activities that act as a protective factor.

The fact that the majority of the literature focuses on the negative outcomes of exposure to DV, limits the understanding of the same negative behaviours due to a restricted ability to identify and control the co-occurrence of the growth of resilient factors (Howell, 2011). In view of this, this study aims to acknowledge the participants' understanding of what has been helpful to them during exposure without attenuating the participants' traumatic experiences.

The focus on the male gender

By focusing on males, this study attempts to delve into the complexities of the males' stories and highlight the significant aspects of their lives that are generally dismissed. It aims

to give weight to the recall of feelings, thoughts, relationships, dynamics, events, perspectives and reflections that the male participants experienced while being brought up in a context of DV. Additionally, it endeavours to inquire the impact their realities had on their development as children and adults. This will give the reader the opportunity to engage with the male participants at a personal level through their own stories, to have a greater awareness and understanding of their experiences.

The focus on males will also help in understanding the impact of violence on their identity. Røberg, Nilsen, & Røssberg, (2018), in their study which aimed at exploring how men participating in a gender-specific trauma-stabilizing intervention experience treatment following severe sexual and physical childhood traumatisation experiences, found that men who have been through several traumatic events tend to be more socially isolated than women. Indeed, males who have been through severe traumatic events tend to have more difficulty establishing their own families and have a lower employment status (Røberg et al., Hopton & Huta, 2013). Even though, Røberg et al.'s (2018) study focuses on severe child abuse rather than exposure to DV, it gives an indication of the impact of trauma on the males' identity given that males who witness DV may also be direct victims of abuse (Jouriles et al., 2008). Furthermore, irrespective of the traumatic event men in Røberg et al.'s (2018) study had experienced, what prevailed throughout was the feeling of shame that had further repercussions on the males' self-image.

The experience of shame is often the result of a dominant masculine culture that favours "strong men", which also leads to reluctance in seeking help (Levant, Hall, Williams & Hasan, 2009). A male is expected to be performance-oriented and emotionally-reticent, making it hard for stereotypical men to seek or engage in any therapeutic support (Andronico, 1996). Moreover, feelings of shame may also lead to a general lack of expression of feelings and thoughts, which has been described by Levant et al. (2009) as 'gender role alexithymia' a

supposedly higher shame level that follows being a man and victim of abuse (Aakvaag, 2016).

Conclusion

When comparing the amount of literature on the impact of childhood exposure to DV to that on adulthood outcomes following exposure to intimate partner violence, there is a gap in research studies that investigate exclusively the impact on males. Nonetheless, most of the literature suggests that males who witnessed abuse during childhood engage in the transmission of violence in their intimate relationships i.e. that most studies' results stand by the notion of repeated male perpetration in adulthood as a result of childhood exposure to DV (Bassuck et al., 2006; Jun et al., 2007) despite prospective-longitudinal studies showing otherwise.

Given the complexity in literature about the various implications of witnessing DV, especially the lack of research on males, this research in being qualitative using a narrative methodology, will hopefully support in bridging this gap by delving deep into the experiences of male participants' exposure and their perceived repercussions in adulthood.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter aims to explain the research process used in exploring the experiences of male survivors of childhood DV. It presents the rationale behind choosing a narrative methodology, a thorough description of the participants, how they were recruited and other background information. The methods through which data was gathered, organised and analysed is specified together with the strategies of verification and the ethical principles followed. Lastly I will discuss my position and experience as the researcher.

Research question

This research study evolved from the following questions which it will also attempt to answer: What stories do males who witness DV throughout their childhood have to tell and how did their experiences impact their adult identity? What is their outlook on life and are there any perceived repercussions on their adult relationships?

The need for a qualitative study

A qualitative method of inquiry is adopted to get a closer reflection of the participants' reality, being that the amount of research on the short-term and long-term effects of male childhood exposure to DV is quantitative (Vu et al., 2016). A qualitative study enables an in-depth investigation and a detailed understanding of the traumatic events each participant lived through (Creswell, 2012). It reflects how people make sense of the world while living through specific events (Coyle, 2007). This fits the aim of this study as it attempts to present the male participant's ontological review of their childhood experiences while being exposed to DV, and the respective impact on adulthood.

In this respect, a narrative research design was chosen for this study since this approach facilitates the understanding of the participants' stories in all its complexities

through an inquiry process which allows for a holistic understanding of their realities (Riessman, 2008). At present the literature lacks retrospective qualitative studies that focus specifically on the stories of males who went through traumatic life events during childhood and the outcomes of such experiences in adulthood. Therefore, a qualitative investigation allows a closer view of the perspective through which they form an understanding of their own experiences (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

Narrative analysis (NA) was deemed most appropriate than other qualitative methodologies as it weaves together a sequence of events to form a cohesive story, allowing an in-depth look into how an individual's story illustrates the larger life influences that created it (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Thus, in contrast to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), it does not focus only on people's perspectives to bring insight into one's motivations to describe events (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Indeed, narrative takes into account the person within the culture that surrounds the story (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Furthermore, NA provides the opportunity to present a story that incorporates a variety of aspects and individuals without the need to fracture the data or offer theoretical explanations for past events, as is the case with grounded theory (Payne, 2007).

The distinguishing feature of NA is its focus on the story (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). Through the narration of a story one is able to explain one's own place in the world and shape the way in which they would like to be seen (McAdams, 2011). It gives participants the opportunity to tell their story while taking their own position within it, in constructing their identity and not simply being the result of it. NA is also chosen as the most applicable methodology to this research as one of its main characteristics postulates the idea that "identities are narratives, stories people tell...about who they are and who they are not" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 201) Another point which comes out of this argument is that identity is fluid and this is an important aspect in the representation of my research as this study does

not presume a position that the participants' stories in this research are finite, but understands that they are ever evolving.

Stories allow the revelation of contextual surroundings, the emotions and motivations behind the actions taken (Polkinghorne, 1995). NA gives a stronger emphasis on human lives as culturally and relationally constructed, and motivates one to think beyond the surface more than other types of qualitative research methods (Riessman, 2008; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). It is therefore the methodology which best helps bring out the reality of these men.

The ontological and epistemological stance

The philosophical underpinnings of NA are based on an ontology of relativism and an epistemology that relies on constructionism (Smith, 2013a). Ontological relativism assumes that psychosocial phenomena are various and are created and dependent on our conceptions and interpretations, while epistemological constructionism means that knowledge is constructed and is thus imperfect and fallible (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). My standpoint lies within these ontological and epistemological stances and takes on a theoretical sensibility that relies on narrative constructionism (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2014).

This position identifies with the assumption that reality is dependent on the ways one comes to know it. It is in fact a sociocultural oriented approach that understands human beings as meaning-makers who make use of narratives, that are cultural and social relations resources that enable one to interpret, direct and communicate life experiences which further lead to the creation and organisation of their life events and the way in which they make sense of who they are (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). This standpoint presumes that while the stories one tells are personal, they are reflected through the contextual framework in which they are told.

Concurrently, this is integrated with a subtle critical realist position, as I believe that a reality exists independent of the narrative resources that helps one to tell their story (Hammersley, 1992). Thus, while stories are told and understood in terms of constructionism, I also identify with the perspective that subjectivity does not eliminate the existence of an objective reality. This means that I also subscribe to the idea that different realities can be faithfully represented in denoting a particular phenomenon, therefore contributing to capturing the complexities of a bigger independent reality. Keeping in mind that one can only know the social world from their own viewpoint, my attempt is to elicit the participants' stories in all their authenticity as a representation of a genuine search for knowledge that could contribute to further social awareness.

Research Methodology

By taking a thorough consideration of the diverse elements that constitute NA, DNA is considered as the best approach through which to conduct my research analysis (Frank, 2010a, 2012).

Dialogical narrative analysis. DNA extends the focus on what the content and structure of the stories do, i.e. what happens as a result of telling the story (Frank, 2010a, 2012). Therefore, DNA is sensible to the effect of one's story and how well it represents them. It focuses on the trajectory of the story being told, allowing the researcher to interpret the trail the narrative takes (Frank, 2010a). Indeed, Frank (2006) understands stories as "artful representations of lives; stories reshape the past and imaginatively project the future" allowing people to revise their sense of self (p.33).

Being that DNA is not bound by a prescriptive model of data analysis which is followed by other qualitative methods like in IPA, it enables the researcher the movement of thought which encourages curiosity and initiates new perspectives (Frank, 2010a). In fact,

according to Frank (2010a, 2012) DNA spurs imagination that may lead to new insight about a particular phenomenon. This makes it a heuristic process allowing me to interpret the structure of the participants' stories as they evolve by empathically immersing myself in the narrative process. This way, I am able to visualize the stories' structure and identify the direction they take (Gergen & Gergen, 1983), supporting a thought process which may lead to uncovering aspects in the participants' experiences which were previously unnoticed (Frank, 2010a).

This process of analysis is guided by five methodological commitments (Frank, 2010a). The first commitment is to recognize that any individual voice is actually a dialogue between voices. DNA sees this as crucial in that no voice is ever singular as it contains multiple other voices and every story is made up of a co-construction between the merging voices of different speakers (polyphony) and the multiple codes of language usage by different voices (heteroglossia) (Bakhtin, 1984). The second commitment is to remain suspicious of monologue. What matters is to witness the voices and to give them an evocative force so that the storytellers could hear each other as well as being heard collectively. Through this analysis the participants' stories come into contact, enabling each voice to be heard alongside other voices that expressed similar experiences. Thus giving shape to what could become a dialogue.

The third commitment seeks to extend the dialogue further in the perspective of stories as having temporary independent lives. Humans tell stories to represent experiences. Stories are both subjective, as well as external. Thus, the participants' real sense of selfhood is constrained by the resources they have available to tell their own story, as well as by the stories told to them (Nelson, 2001). The fourth commitment is that of unfinalizability. According to Bakhtin (1984) it is in conjunction to the unfinalized nature of persons. This can be defined in terms of the fact that people tell stories in order to review the understanding of

themselves in their identity and this process is done again and again with every subsequent story told, which in this study translates as respecting the participant's aptitude for continuing change. However, analysis requires consistency which is allowed for by the stability of the narrative resources, as unlike the storyteller, they remain constant.

The final commitment is a commitment to the analysis that does not summarize findings with the implication of the story's finalizability, and a position of superiority to it (Frank, 2006). Rather, I will aim to intensify the participants' possibilities for hearing themselves and others and seeking to expand the reader's sense of responsibility in their response to the stories. This will be done by underlining what is at stake within the stories as a form of response in itself (Frank, 2006).

Analysis is then done through a process of questioning through resource, circulation, affiliation and identity questions, and questions on what is at stake for the storyteller (Frank, 2006). Moreover, DNA enabled me to confront the contradictions in and between the individuals' experiences, to understand the impact on the constructions of the self (Mattingly & Garro, 1994).

Participants

Selection-criteria. The criteria for the participants selection was based on the premise that they had to be males who witnessed DV while growing up. The participants chosen were recruited as ex-residents of a second stage residential home for women and children who experienced DV.

Participant access. Initially, I contacted the Director of Fondazzjoni Sebħ, formerly Kummisjoni Ejjew Għandi, a Non-Governmental Organisation committed to social justice and equality, offering services to children and youths, victims and survivors of DV. A

thorough description of my research and its objective was given, requesting assistance to contact ex-residents of a second stage DV residential home as prospective participants. I was given approval to contact the Head of Home of the second stage DV shelter, who would act as intermediary (Appendix A). I explained in detail the purpose and procedures of my research study and presented my information sheet and consent form (Appendix B and C). The ex-residents who fit the research criteria were identified and contacted by the Head of Home and asked whether they were willing to participate. This was done in order to abide by a formal ethical procedure and avoid any form of coercion.

The participants were all familiar with the Head of Home as a professional, who explained to them my study's nature and objective and their eventual involvement as prospective participants. They were provided with the information sheet, and once they consented to participate in my research, I contacted them by phone to set a date for the interview. Upon meeting each participant individually, I presented them once again with the information sheet and the consent form to further explain and discuss any potential queries, subsequently gaining signed consent.

Participant background information. Participants' duration at the shelter had been of approximately 18 months. During this time, participants and their families were assisted by professionals in following a programme catered for all family members to acquire the necessary skills to lead an independent life and to successfully reintegrate back in the community. The type of violence they had been exposed to pertained to a wide spectrum of abuse perpetrated within a domestic context and included direct and / or indirect physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and financial violence, neglect or any sort of maltreatment. They are now all adults and living independently in the community.

Demographic details. The table below provides a brief description of the participants and their contextual background. For the sake of anonymity and confidentiality the participants have been given pseudonyms and identifying information has been changed.

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Details

Participant	Age	Nationality	Profession	Status	Type of abuse witnessed
David	18	Foreign	Student	Single	Physical, emotional, psychological, sexual
Matthew	30	Maltese	Skilled Worker	Married	Physical, emotional, psychological
Oliver	18	Maltese	Fast Food Server	Single	Physical, emotional, psychological, financial

Note. More details about the participants of this study can be found in their narratives

The data

Data collection. The data collection was done through the use of retrospective narrative interviews with every participant. Following every interview I engaged in process notes and reflective discussions with my supervisor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Narrative retrospective interviews. The act of telling stories helps one in their quest for meaning-making which further allows one in processing their trauma (van der Kolk & Fislser, 1996), while offering the researcher a framework from which to further understand the nature of the self in its identity and transformations (McAdams, 1993). For this reason, narrative retrospective interviews were deemed most suitable especially since the interview guide was based on the structure of McAdams's (2006) life-story interview model, which aims to bring out key aspects of one's life. Subsequently, this led to an interview guiding structure with minimal non-directive interviewing strategies (Silverman, 2016) using a semi-structured interview schedule designed using open-ended questions (Appendix D). The first

interview served as a pilot interview (Creswell, 2012). Given that no major changes were needed to the interview guide, it was also included in the final analysis.

Throughout the interviews I took an empathic stance, listened carefully and held an open attitude in order to make participants feel comfortable while reconstructing their narration of their experiences (Creswell, 2012). I used reflective statements to underline the validity of their experiences while prudently asking questions directed at getting more detail about certain events in order to gather further clarification. The participants were also encouraged to bring any objects that would help them tell their stories. However, none of them did.

Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, participants were offered the option to meet at a known location, the same second stage shelter at which they resided in the past. Although it could elicit many memories and emotions, possibly distressing ones, all participants chose to meet at this location and I was aware that they could associate it with a safe context.

Organising data. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim. I worked on a single interview at a time, which gave me a deeper understanding of the participants' emotional experience of the researcher-participant relationship which could have impacted in the way they told their stories (McCormack, 2000a). Initially I organised episodes into chronology and formed an understanding of the stories within the larger story of every interview (Frank, 2012). The dialogical components of every participants' story i.e. the stories that helped shape their individual larger story, will be presented separately. I left the structure of the narrative in its original form. A lot of attention was given to how different stories unfolded and I felt that leaving the language verbatim helped in conveying to the

reader the context which was at times central to the events being told and helped in remaining as faithful as possible to the research interview.

Data analysis. I initially contacted six prospective participants with the aim to have an interview with each. Following, there were several cancellations, refusals and change of mind of participation. Thus, given the circumstances I interviewed three participants twice. While six interviews would have led to a larger data sample, interviewing the same three participants twice served for more detailed narratives.

I approached analysis primarily from the standpoint of a story analyst (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). From this position I put the ‘narrative-under-analysis’ by analysing and producing an analytical account of the participants narratives in the form of a realist tale (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). However, in adopting a strict story analyst approach to data, the researcher ends up with an abstract tale of narratives rather than a story itself and for this reason at times during the analysis I shifted my standpoint to that of a storyteller in order to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted narrative being analysed. This was done in the retelling of the participants’ stories in order to present important segments and aspects of their experiences (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). As suggested by Polkinghorne (1995) NA aims at uncovering common themes, which Riessman (2008) refers to as the process of coding (Appendix E). This helped identify and name the underlying assumptions in each account, through which I could compare and contrast participants’ experiences across cases (Lyons & Coyle, 2016).

Although I was aware of my own personal biases as the researcher, which I will go into more detail in the self-reflexivity section, the data was also analysed and interpreted through my own theoretical assumptions (Frank, 2012). Therefore, the interpretation of the life stories was influenced by prior theory, the purpose of the research and the data itself. This

led to another level of re-construction of the stories, even though I was vigilant to remain faithful to the original stories reported by the participants (Willig, 2013). In view of this, another level of re-construction will also occur as the readers read through the stories (McCormack, 2004). Nonetheless, it is important to note that such constructions are not conclusive as the narratives are in a continuous state of flux as the participants proceed with their lives (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In the analysis I attempted to reflect raw emotions, difficulties, similarities and differences that surfaced during interviews (Riessman, 2008; Willig, 2013). Through the presentation of the findings I seek to engage the reader's interest to reflect further on the hidden realities that these men have experienced while growing up in a DV context and the impact on their adult lives. This is especially because, it would possibly offer further awareness about this under-researched topic.

Self-reflexivity in the research process

By engaging in self-reflexivity I was able to unveil and acknowledge the impact of my beliefs, assumptions, and expectations in relation to the topic under study (Creswell, 2012). Throughout the research process I kept a diary in which I recorded my reflections, thoughts and feelings, which helped me become more aware of my own personal biases. These were brought up and discussed with my supervisor throughout the research process, which process was key in supporting me to expand my understanding of my position as a person and as a researcher and of their impact on the research. Such discussions along with the processing notes following every interview helped me to remain faithful to the participants' stories throughout.

Having worked for the past 3 years in a shelter for women and children who suffered DV, I had developed an understanding of these families' realities, particularly the barriers

they face when seeking help and the impact of their traumatic experiences. Nonetheless, I still held some beliefs which were based on assumptions accounted for by a larger social belief, mainly in relation to the fact that boys who witness DV are thought to turn out to be perpetrators in adulthood, due to their externalised behaviour during childhood. I was able to reflect on the values I was taught in a predominantly patriarchal society and the social attitudes and dominant discourses which would impact my perspective from which I made sense of the behaviours I would witness as a worker (Naudi et al., 2018). This supported me in taking a more open and empathic stance to the emerging stories during the research process.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that any type of violence should be condemned. Reflecting on such values was important as it supported me not to get carried away by my own countertransference reactions in view of the injustices within the participants' narrative. All this helped to foster an ethical interactive research practice (Etherington, 2007) and also opened up opportunities for personal transformations for me as a person and a professional, and hopefully also for the participants and the reader (Etherington, 2004; Dallos & Vetere, 2005; Riessman, 2004).

Methods of verification

The methods of verification in qualitative research are discussed through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Creswell, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A thick description of the complex specificities and circumstantiality of the participants' stories has been provided to achieve a higher standard of credibility and transferability (Tracy, 2010). In this respect, contextual influences were explicitly elaborated upon at different points in the research and most specifically reflected in the data gathered to

provide a solid understanding of the contextual frame and the research boundaries (Holloway, 1997).

My supervisor acted as a peer reviewer throughout the process of my dissertation. The analytical probing served as a debriefing process that allowed me to reflect on the implicit assumptions that formed my position towards the topic under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During my research, the two-way reflexive meetings with my supervisor helped me to become aware of my own personal biases and to engage in an ongoing critical reflection of my predispositions and thought processes during data analysis and interpretation (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, my process notes following every interview and the subsequent discussions with my supervisor supported me to take a systemic viewpoint to the data, ensuring dependability and conformability through a loyal work ethic (Dallos & Vetere, 2005).

Ethical considerations

In order to keep an optimal ethical standard in my research study, I abided by the ethical procedures known to maintain ethical sensitivity.

Following approval of my dissertation proposal by the MPSY Dissertation Board I sought approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee, ensuring ethical competence in my study.

In view of the sensitive topic being researched, participants' wellbeing was central. In protecting my participants from any form of harm, at the initial stage of my research I sought the assistance of the Head of Home who acted as intermediary. In the recruitment phase, the Head of Home ensured that all prospective participants were not going through any crisis, that the violence had stopped, and that there were no safety issues which would potentially

cause any distress to any participant who agreed to take part. Through the intermediary all participants could clarify any of their queries and get all the information they deemed necessary, alongside being provided with the information sheet before accepting to participate in my research.

Full responsibility was assumed in relation to the effects that my research could have on my participants. Thus following their informed consent which was sought before the inquiry process began, payment of up to three psychological sessions was offered to each participant should any of them have required further support (Willig, 2013). However, none of them made use of the service. Although consent was signed by all participants they were free to withdraw at any time without giving any specific reason. Participants were also offered a choice of location to feel as comfortable as possible.

Throughout my research I was very careful of confidentiality and anonymity issues. I assured all participants that as explained in the signed consent form I would handle all personal information acquired in writing and audio-recordings in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation. I was vigilant in modifying and adjusting the portrayal of their identities in a way to eliminate any possibility to their recognisability (Willig, 2013).

I was sensitive to my participants' position and the issues of power, gender and culture (Hyden, 2013). I engaged with my participants with an empathic attitude that helped them feel confident during the interviewing process. Debriefing questions at the end of every interview allowed the encounter to be therapeutic (Etherington, 2007). The Head of Home was also willing to support the participants should they have experienced any difficulties following the interviews.

Moreover, follow up meetings with the Head of Home were held to give feedback following the study's results. Meetings were intended to give rise to a reflexive process about the impact of the service providers' help on participants' experiences and the impact on their outcomes in life, since they were previous residents of this particular shelter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the rationale for choosing a qualitative methodology, the ontological and epistemological stance that underlie this research, the method used, the participant selection process, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The methods of verification and ethical considerations were also delineated. The following chapter presents the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Before presenting the results, I would like to start by expressing that I feel honoured to have met my participants who have trusted me with their stories and I dedicate this quote to them.

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.” (Khalil Gibran)

This chapter presents the findings of this research¹ in stories which are an interweaving of my reflections and of my participants’ verbatim quotes (in bold text). Each story presents the dialogical components shaping how the participants’ stories unfold. I will be elaborating each story utilising ‘analytical bracketing’ (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009), which allows me to produce a complex picture of the participants’ narrative by alternating my focus between structure and content to bring the stories together (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). In shedding light on my process and interpretation of the participants’ narratives, I tried to remain faithful to the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this study, i.e. social constructionism and critical realism framed within an attachment and resilience perspective.

David’s story

Reflection on first interview 22nd March

*David comes in for the interview seeming very self-assured. As I ask him the first question to the interview he asks, ‘**In what sense?**’ with a strong tone which seems to reflect a guarded attitude. As the interview proceeds I see a sensitive side to him especially when he speaks about his mother.*

¹ The Maltese version of the stories are presented in the Appendices.

David is an 18 year old student. He is the only child from his parents' marriage, but has 5 half-siblings from his mother's side and 2 half-brothers from his father's side, as his parents were previously married to other partners. His family came to Malta from an Eastern European country when he was 2 years old and has been living here ever since.

Reflection on second interview 18th May

*This time David seems more friendly and approachable. He gives me a detailed narration, yet again seems to minimise the emotions felt. Through his narration it becomes clearer that his strong and confident attitude may be a cultural feature rather than the result of his traumatic experiences. His narration seems to take into account his mother's experiences of the abuse in line with his, throughout the whole story. **'He [the father] never showed that respect and that love towards my mum, he only wanted to do with her as he pleased'**.*

A beginning of violence and disarray

David remembers it starting when he was 5 years old, remembering his father always drinking and treating his mother badly. **He used to beat her or not give her money. He used to be unfaithful. [...] He thinks he can do whatever he wants with whoever he wants. If things don't go the way he wants them to, he would start beating.** There were also other shocking events which his mother told him about when he grew up, but which he does not remember very well due to his young age at the time. **The one that struck me the most which my mother had told me was when he had drunk too much and he grabbed his gun and pointed it towards her. Then he started shooting in air. I was 5 or 6 years old...I remember only flashbacks of it.**

Every year they would go back to their homeland and spend the summer there before coming back just before school starts. His father owned agricultural land and David had lots of fun as a child running around the fields. He narrated that his father loved him a lot. **He would tell me I'm his favourite.** However, David despised him for how he treated his mother. **For me he'd rather not love me as much as he loved me. The most important thing was that he respects my mother.** While abroad the violence would continue. **One time we were travelling by car and he had asked my mum whether she brought the laptop. Upon telling him that she forgot he hit her in the face. He turned the car and told us that we were not going. When we arrived back my mother and I were very angry at him and we went to sleep. Then he woke us at 1am and told us "let's go".**

The beginning of David's story is structured through a narrative of decline as apart from witnessing his father's harsh violence towards his mother, at times he would be the direct victim of his father's abuse. **He used to beat me in my head, always in my head.** His tone of voice in recalling the violence and dominance that his father exerted became heavy reflecting heightened frustration. He seemed quite comfortable narrating his story and giving details, yet through his bodily expressions I felt that what at first seemed to appear as a conceited attitude, was indeed his way of protecting himself while recalling distressing memories.

The storyline immediately reflects the close alliance in the mother-son relationship, mirroring family systems triangulation (Minuchin, 1974) of David and his mother against his father. **Countless times we have caught him with texts, we would find that he would be talking to other women.**

A turbulent childhood

David's childhood was filled with drastic and distressing incidents. In the same household used to live his half-brother from his father's side. At times there would also be his half-sister from his mother's side, and another woman. **He used to be unfaithful to my mum with this woman, we had found out.** David used to love spending time at his friend's house and sleeping over. However, he recalls always feeling that something would be going on at home. **I would go home and see mum with bruises the next day.** Living daily in such an abusive and controlling environment made him feel overwhelmed. One time he was so angry upon finding his parents lying in bed next to each other that he angrily asked his mother, **'You're still with him?'** My father got up and told me **'Yes, she's still with me, so?'** **I went into the kitchen, grabbed a knife and tried to aim at his neck, but my half-brother held me back.** He remembers seeking answers as to why she would not leave. **She would tell me that it was because she did not want to leave me with him or for me to grow without my father.** At this point David's narration reflected feelings of guilt and anger as he felt responsible for his mother's situation, yet he could not understand why she still remained with him after he had told her multiple times that he did not want to be in his father's presence.

David narrates that at the age of 12 he felt something inside him change. **I was somewhat grown up and I started to make sense of everything in my head. I started to realise what is right and what is wrong.** David started to urge his mother to leave. He recalls that he and his mother called his mother's eldest son to come to Malta and help them move from his father's house. It all happened while his father was at home unaware of what was going on. **As we were climbing the stairs home with my half-brother and sister, my father was happy to see my brother, but insulted my sister. My brother and father started to fight. My sister got in between as well. I pushed my father and he smashed his**

face against a glass panel. He grabbed a knife and we took our mother and ran down the stairs. Then we went to the police.

This story brings out the close relationship with his mother as it seems that he was the one who made the decision to leave home. David's daily exposure to violence seems to have impacted his behaviour as he too became aggressive towards his father. This seems to frame how the different aspects to his identity developed:- On one hand, through the rather triangulated relationship with his mother, and on the other in giving rise to his aggressive reactions which although they may reflect an aggressive behaviour, at the time served as reactive coping in the dangerous context he was in.

While David and his mother were living at an emergency shelter, his parents came to a casual arrangement in which they decided that David would be spending weekends with his father. **One Friday I came out of school and I found him there waiting for me. He let me in the car and told me 'Today you're coming with me'.** Upon returning him back on Sunday he would instruct David to beat his mother, something which he never did. Unfortunately, this arrangement led to two highly devastating events in David's life. One Saturday, his father unexpectedly told him to get ready as they were going back to their homeland for the summer. He was 13 years old and had no time to tell his mother that he was leaving Malta and was only able to communicate with her once they were abroad.

The second time this happened David was 14 years old. His father was already abroad and told David to travel to their homeland to meet him. He had been telling him that he had changed and David got persuaded to go. His mother let him go, but once David went back his father told him that they were not coming back to Malta again. David contacted his mother and the lawyer without his father's knowledge and lied to his father by telling him that if they came back to Malta he would remain to live with him. In recalling such terrifying events

David continuously downplayed the emotions that emerged. However, I was able to capture the heaviness in his effort to hide behind his nonchalant expressions.

Deborah: I can imagine how scary that might have been.

David: Not that much. I used to have fun going around with the bike and staying up till early morning in the streets with my friends.

According to David, in their homeland his father had the reputation of a bully and had many acquaintances. He was feared by many and this somewhat impacted on David's behaviour. One time while illegally riding his motorbike which his father had bought him as a present at the age of 14, he was stopped by a policeman who upon realising whose son he was had let him go without any consequences.

It seems that the dominant Eastern European cultural values together with his father's display of social power and aggressive behaviour, played a significant role in his identity formation. It appears that his identity from a young age took on certain stereotypical traits that show male dominance and superiority, which formed the basis of his sense of being in adulthood. At times this identity seems to provide him with a powerful façade that protects him and helps him connect with a world out there, apart from that of his family.

While these stories of a chaotic childhood maintain the narrative structure of decline, there are other aspects to David's story which reflect a structure of stability. Amidst all the turmoil he was going through between 8 to 12 years, he used to practice jujitsu. His coach played a major role in his life as he was able to offer him a safe place where he could feel a sense of belonging. **He knew that there were problems, but I think he loved me more than my father...He had taught me all the things so that I could teach the beginners.** Such a narrative seems to generate hope and connection, giving David a sense of purpose

which appears to have impacted his ability to adapt through overwhelming situations. Furthermore, being given the opportunity to act as a superior figure in teaching beginners, seems to have generated in him a sense of power.

Although not explicitly articulated, power is a component within his story that gives him a sense of meaning. It seems that for that moment he is not the victim, but the one exerting control and his bodily expressions in narrating this story reflected a sense of ownership.

Family: It's me and my mother

Family does not centre much in David's story. When asked how he would describe his family, he instantly replied, **it's me and my mother, only**. Due to his close relationship with his mother he witnessed most of the violence and was many times involved in taking his mother's side, highlighting the triangulation in trying to protect her. In fact, what was prominent throughout his story was his mother's safety and wellbeing, with his worst nightmare being that of losing her. **If I lose her I lose a big part of my heart for sure and no one can replace her that's for sure. I literally love her with all my heart and there are no other people that I love this much not even my family.**

In relation to his father, David seems to exhibit a love-hate relationship that generates ambiguity. He approves of his father's behaviour unless it is not directed towards his mother or himself. He narrated an event in which he was 12 years old and witnessed his father heavily beating one family friend as a warning. **I was not scared. I would only feel bad if my father got hit as then I would need to beat who hit him.** However, when it came to his direct relationship with his father, the story does not exhibit any type of connection. **I hate my father. I would love to beat him. But I have reason why I want to beat him.** Yet, he admits that his father will always be his father, even though he hates him.

David seems to tell a story that circulates different meanings and might not be understood by an audience that does not conceptualise how violence can be context based. His father's figure and actions as told throughout the story, act on and for him. They influenced his sense of being by providing him with a sense of independence as he is not enticed by his father's attempts to engage in negative behaviour, yet at the same time witnessing his father's violence led him down risky roads, particularly as he still struggles to control his temper. Apart from the jujitsu coach who seems to have helped him nurture his positive aspects within his personality, his father was a significant adult figure of the same gender with whom he could identify. However, in being still a young adult, David might not have had enough experiences and thus at present his story lacks resources that could support him shape his identity away from violence.

Adulthood and relationships: Wanting connection yet fearing commitment

The stories that helped shape David's life impacted the formation of his identity, relationships and the way in which he makes sense of his story in adulthood. According to him, his life experiences hindered him from finding connection within relationships. **I am weird. My friends tell me I'm weird as at school I talk to them, but when I see them outside I just say 'Hi!' and keep walking.** This contradiction in his identity of being connected with his friends depending on the context appears also in his intimate relationships. **Relationships are not good for me.** Whilst he wishes to be in a relationship, he admits to struggling with commitment.

This paradoxical behaviour in relationships of initially wanting to have intimate contact, but at the same time fearing commitment is further intensified by another contradictory behaviour. It seems that his story is being told through two opposing narrative resources:- On one hand he affirms that he would never be violent in a relationship, but on

the other he talks of having brutally beaten his ex-girlfriend for having insulted his mother. The meaning that he gives to violence throughout his narration maintains this contradiction.

Deborah: You have stated that you would never use violence on your girlfriend, however you have narrated a situation in which you have used violence with your past girlfriend. How do you make sense of this?

David: No, but that is different. She insulted my mother even when I continued to challenge her to repeat what she said. You don't do that. She asked for it!

Apart from violence, another major theme in his story is that of money. The narrative structure seems to progress when the plot is around making money or utilising violence to exert power. **I would invest in two blocks of flats. I would sell one block and rent the other. I would make a lot of money and I would stay home playing the PlayStation.** The story seems to serve the function of providing David with purpose for his conduct and future prospects.

Over all David's story may find connection with an audience who thinks that his behaviour may be detrimental in the long term. However, the aspect of unfinalizability of his story in having a life ahead of him, may take the audience on an endless reflective process of how his future experiences may shape and impact his life story.

The resilient component within his story in adulthood is music. He recently started playing music in parties and making music with his DJ set. **Techno is my life. It has a great impact on me. I spend two hours playing music everyday as soon as I arrive home, even if I arrive at 10pm I spend till midnight playing music.** Music helps him forget about his troubles and gives him a sense of belonging. The empowered voice and the confident expressions he uses in narrating his experiences of playing music in front of big crowds

reflect the meaning that such a story generates for his sense of self. **I'd die for these things. All those people shouting my name.** At this stage his narration seems to reflect a structure of progress that was also present in the narration of his jujitsu coach in childhood. The same feeling of power seems to help him feel "normal" and good about himself as it counteracts the overwhelming negative feelings that he has been burdened with due to his traumatic childhood.

David seems to find meaning in his childhood experiences of violence through the analogy of an arrow. **The harder you pull it backwards the more force it has to move forward...Life keeps kicking you, but you have to be like an arrow...then you come out stronger. [...] I cannot say I had a beautiful past, but I am happy of how I came out of it. Thank God I had that past and I've become this person.** The resources through which he narrates how he makes sense of his life and the impact of violence seem to work for him in his formation of a stronger identity. Such a story may generate meaning to an audience that shares the belief that the harsher life beats you, the stronger you become. Hence, it helps him connect even with those who are unaware of a life impacted by violence, but who had to go through their own personal struggles to gain control of their life.

Matthew's story

Reflection on first interview 26th March

Matthew initially seems nervous, yet he sits comfortably and listens attentively as I explain how the interview will proceed. I ask him whether he would like to ask any questions and through a light-hearted attitude he replies 'No, now we'll see as we go along'.

Matthew is 35 years old, the eldest and only male of 4 siblings. He is married with 2 young children and works as a skilled worker. He comes across as mature and considerate with a cheerful attitude.

Reflection on second interview 15th May

*He is once again very willing to answer my questions. He narrates his story with a serious yet light tone of voice and albeit this time he is expressing his emotions more, he still resorts to logical explanations for the emotions felt. **'Even when you're grown up, fights and the like scare you, let alone when you're a child'.***

A childhood of chaos and violence

Matthew was 6 years old when he started to notice that the reality he was living was somewhat "not normal". The chaos he was living at home was leaving him feeling overwhelmed. **You see screaming, loud noises and the like. It's not normal is it?! Things start to scare you. More so when you are not understanding why and what is happening.** He remembers his father arriving home drunk and purposely falling on his mother's ornaments, which would then lead to a fight between his parents. **He would come home really drunk [...] my mum had big statues, he would fall and break them. I suspect he used to break them on purpose because it was not a one-time thing...eventually he broke them all.** The fights would become violent as his father would beat his mother, but his mother would retaliate and hit him back. **He used to get it as well.**

When Matthew and his sisters were young they would be in their rooms listening to their parents fight. When they started growing older they would be present, at times also getting physically in between their parents to stop the fighting, consequently being mistakenly hit.

Although Matthew openly explains the events that happened, initially his narration is very factual. Indeed the resources utilised to tell his story do not frame his childhood experiences within a context of great emotional turmoil and when emotions surface he utilises other characters such as his sisters or takes on a general outlook to explain the extent of the emotions felt (McIsaac & Eich, 2004). **Like they say, it is the children who suffer in these situations.**

It seems as if Matthew restrains himself for some reason which could be attributed to how he views his masculine identity and / or how he keeps himself together whilst narrating traumatic memories. It was hard to read into his emotive state however, stories are told and understood using our bodies and as he fretfully rushed through his narration in trying to find the best words to help him express himself without emphasizing too much on the negative, I could feel his distress.

Matthew's story seems to be structured by an initial narrative of decline. His narration of the chaos he lived through childhood seems to signify a life engulfed by hopelessness. He recalls that attending school was the only time he could live a normal childhood, even though it took time before he was able to detach from anxiety-provoking thoughts. **By time it is like you don't think about it. While at school, [my mind would be on] what is happening at school. I would still play and joke around...I wouldn't think much.** However, as soon as his mother would pick him up from school, overwhelming fear would resurface. **The first thing I would do is ask my mother whether my father is asleep or still at the shop [drinking].**

Other resources he utilises in telling his childhood stories seemed to reflect cultural and social dynamics that are traditional, for example authoritarian parenting, which seemed to help him justify his father's actions. **He used to beat us, not as violence, but as an old way**

of discipline. In living through such chaos he learnt how to tap onto different parts of his identity depending on the context. He learnt to adapt as a child by suppressing his emotions. Matthew speaks of his mother as the most important figure in his life and he seems to understand his resilience as a function of his relationship with her.

Deborah: Who are the most significant people in your life?

Matthew: My mother obviously, she still is and at that time she was even more.

A reality of domination and love and abuse

Matthew narrates a childhood where physical and psychological domination and contradictory behaviour were the order of the day. Upon returning home drunk, his father would demand their attention. If Matthew and his sisters were not around him, he would seek revenge. **He would come home and expect us to go near him. One time I was watching football and because I did not go next to him he switched off the main power supply. Even if I were going out and he gets home just before, he would expect me not to go out. He was this sleazy! So at times we would hide on the roof so that if he came, it would be as if we had already left so that he wouldn't keep us home.** Following fights with his mother, Matthew's father would try to make amends by buying something for Matthew or his sisters that his mother would have liked to buy for them. **They used to argue and my mother used to leave and go to her brother. Then in order to win her back, he would buy it for me.**

Matthew recalled that when he was 12 years old his father got involved in usury which led him to drink more. Nonetheless, throughout his narration, Matthew speaks about his father with love and admiration, especially when he recalls his father's love for fishing and hunting. These were hobbies that he passed on to Matthew. In fact, Matthew is very fond

of having shared this aspect of life with his father. However, there were times when they would be hunting and his father would lie about having to meet some people who owed him money in order to cover up for his urge to drink. **It used to happen a lot and it would really anger me as he started to put alcohol before the things he loved. Then I stopped accommodating him. I used to tell him to leave and I would stay there with a friend.**

It is a story that connects him to an audience that understands the harsh reality of living the impact of violence, as well as to others who like him have grown into understanding the importance of the Maltese heritage. These narrations are also what held the function of Matthew's repressed emotionality. Although he expresses feeling hurt and angry, up until this point he does not act out any of his emotions. Things changed as a young adult.

Matthew's life seems to have always been centred around a paradox of love and violence. Although contradictory, Matthew grew up having great love and respect towards his father. This does not mean that he did not believe that his actions were wrong, or that he dismissed feeling hurt by his father, but he tried to find ways in which to justify him. This seems to result from his loyalty towards his father even if in a context of abuse. In fact, Matthew downplays his father's problems from the beginning of his narration. **My dad had a bit of a problem. He was a bit alcoholic, he had a bit of an addiction.** Interestingly, the only time that he is seemingly emotional is when he is admiringly speaking of his father's abilities. **My father used to work and strive. He was more intelligent than my mum and was able to make money easily. Even simple things like natural things such as capers. He had the patience to do business.**

Another contradiction in Matthew's narrative was his father's values in relation to providing for the family while at the same time abusing his family by neglected them love and respect.

Matthew: We never had anything to complain about.

Deborah: He used to provide for the family?

Matthew: Yes, that came first and foremost. Even before leaving, the majority of times he used to cook, then go out.

Although he loves his mother, it seems that his love for his father still remains irrespective of the pain and fear endured. **Of course I was afraid of him...There are many things of those days that remain within you. It becomes part of you...Obviously he was my father, I loved my father. I still love him.**

Being that it is a story that touches on his father's perpetration of violence and since he draws upon his father's good qualities in forming his male identity, Matthew needs to hold his own into underlining the positive loving aspects of his father.

Getting in between

As Matthew grew older his mother started to seek help at emergency shelters. Matthew would at times remain at home as his mother ended up going back and forth multiple times before finally proceeding with the separation. When Matthew would remain home, his father would urge him to plead his mother to go back. **He used to tell me to call her to come back and she would come. But there were times where I told him 'But you're not fit for purpose!' [...] I would say I preferred it that way. Because once my mother would be home, I would be out with my friends having fun and she would call me telling me "Your father is acting up" and I would have to go back.**

It seems that his identity has been formed through these moments of great emotional turmoil. On one hand, he was being put in between his parents by both of them for different

reasons and on the other, even though he would be angry at them he still felt that it was his responsibility to intervene (Minuchin, 1976).

Deborah: So you used to get involved a lot.

Matthew: I had to as the eldest. It happens automatically doesn't it?

Once again the resources used to tell his story hold values traditionally attributed to male gender role of being the defender and taking responsibility, which in turn help him define his sense of identity in being the eldest and only male sibling. Later these seem to have provided the basis that helped him shape his new identity as a husband and father.

The storyline seems to circulate a sense of adaptability throughout as Matthew manages to find his way of being through any event, delineating his resilience. Apart from getting in between his parents, he was sometimes the direct victim of his father's violence. The most shocking event that Matthew described was when following a simple argument with his father at the age of 19, his father crashed his car into Matthew's car to provoke him to react. Indeed, Matthew recalls **It was the last straw.**

It ended up a bit bad. I had been controlling myself...I am not someone who likes to fight, but that day we ended up fighting really bad. My father ended up in hospital. As he narrated this event, he seemed remorseful as he recalled that they had gone to court and the case eventually was withdrawn as both him and his father did not want to continue with the proceedings.

Matthew's story line seems to be structured by a narrative of decline that reaches stability through his resilience, yet once it does is again followed by another decline due to other devastating events. The storyline started to incorporate a side to his personality that

opposes the passive and avoidant behaviour as Matthew acknowledges externalising the repressed frustration through aggressive behaviour.

The father's suicide

A major story that bore great impact on Matthew's life and in shaping his identity is his father's suicide. It was around the time Matthew's mother moved to a second stage shelter after choosing to proceed with the separation. Matthew went to live with his mother and siblings at the shelter. He was 22 years old and being that the shelter's curfew was at half past nine, on weekends he would stay with his father to be able to stay out late. **But once, my father had committed suicide. I went home and found him.** As I listened to him narrate the traumatizing event, his narration did not exhibit any particular emotional heaviness but the expression in his eyes reflected his pain. This story of great loss allows his personal identity to form part of a collective identity since loss centres in everyone's life irrespective of one's background or the ways in which it happens.

It was a challenging time for Matthew. However, he found in himself the strength to push through and keep going. It seems that this story worked on him in ways that enabled him to explore his resilience and made him increasingly aware of his possibilities in living a productive and meaningful life. **But then I started fighting it back. I fought as it is useless staying...not everyone is like me. My doctor told me the vast majority do not end up so well, but I was lucky. There are moments in which you fall, but in the sense that...being that I have managed, the advice I give is not to be submerged by such situations...I always think about his (father's) good things.**

The narrative structure, being fragmented due to lack of sentence completion and thought continuity, reflects the pain in narrating the devastating event. However, it also underscores the meaning he attributes in connecting with others through his story as he deems

it a powerful and important message to share with those who experience such tormented injustices.

Adulthood: Dealing with continual irritability and resilience

Deborah: What do you tell yourself when you look back?

Matthew: Don't get born.

The impact of his childhood experiences is very present even though his story worked for him, since it enabled him through his resilience to create a successful life for himself in adulthood. **You take what you can from the bad. When I was young others created my life, now that I grew up it's how I make it.** Although he tries his utmost to be the best he can in his adult life as a husband and a father, he acknowledges the powerful impact that his childhood experiences have on him. **I am very irritable...I'm a bit short tempered as well. It's not that bad, but I am a bit short tempered.**

He describes himself as passive. However, when he experiences challenges and feels that he cannot take it any longer, such as extensively trying to avoid an argument with his wife, he engages in a reaction through which flows all of the frustration he would have been trying to push down. **Let's make it clear, it's not that I beat my wife...but I smash things, shout and swear as well.** It seems that his story prevented him from regulating his emotions as he learnt how to adapt through avoidance till he bursts in anger. It seems that it was the only way he could cope with the overwhelming feelings of heaviness throughout. Such a narration may be misinterpreted by an audience that does not understand the underlying realities of being raised within a context of DV. It is where I believe such reactivity generates the idea whereby such an audience attributes the violence witnessed during childhood to the

perpetration of violence in adulthood, rather than as a normal reaction to having been continuously overburdened by aversive events.

Moreover, Matthew's story helps him express his capacity to transcend the hardships he has been through without ever denying their impact. **I believe that if you do not experience certain things in life, you end up swept away by the currents of life.** He seems to have taken on all he has been through and formed a sense of self that represents a solid and mature presence able of perspective taking. His family and social background and the fact that he was able to experience his father as a good man when not drunk served as cultural structures through which he constructed his identity and that continue to sustain his role of a stereotypical male who provides for his family and aims for material success. His story helps him share the extent to which he feels scarred irrespective of how much he tries to maintain a positive outlook. **The cup no matter which way you turn it, you will always see where it is cracked.**

Oliver's story

Reflection on first interview 19th April

Oliver sits tensely upright, glancing outside the window as I explain to him how the interview will proceed. I ask him whether he would like to clarify anything and through a sarcastic smile through which transpires his anguish, he says no.

Oliver is 19 years old and works at a fast food restaurant. His father is North-African while his mother is Maltese. He is the second born out of 6 siblings, and is the eldest male.

Reflection on second interview 17th May

His voice although heavy is less lifeless this time and there is a slim appearance of certain emotions, even if he is still somewhat cautious about what to tell me. I begin

by asking him what it felt like to live with a continuous lack of basic necessities which was the first aspect he mentioned in the first interview. There is a long pause, then he starts 'As with emotions it was really... terrible!'

A beginning of deprivation and violence

Oliver was 5 years old when he realised something was not quite right at home. He would see his father drunk every day and things started lacking at home. **When he [father] became addicted to alcohol, problems started to emerge due to lack of money, lack of this, lack of that...and we couldn't cope. Obviously my mother did not quite agree with this and my dad started to rebel by becoming violent.** On several occasions Oliver witnessed his father threatening his mother with a knife. He would see him hitting his older sister and sometimes he would get beaten as well. However, the violence was more directed towards the female members **my father is foreign, he has that old mentality where he was violent more with women rather than with his male child.**

Oliver started realising that his family was different than that of his classmates. **How many times are you going to see the same thing and not understand?!** His classmates' parents seemed very loving and supportive, but he never seemed to get that from his family. Instead, he would witness arguments and chaos. **The moment was really terrible...It was torture, the worst thing you can imagine because at night, you would get startled due to the fights always the same story, it was very irritating. I would not be able to get back to sleep. It was like I was in the situation, but not being there at the same time. It wasn't panic, but it was very stressful, the heaviness in that moment.** He was going through all of this while also trying to adapt to all the deprivations that his father's alcohol abuse brought them. **Life became more difficult than it already was as they [parents] couldn't keep up**

with home bills... You get used to it to a certain extent, but the anger remains especially when you cannot do anything about it, being still a child.

This beginning to Oliver's story seems to be structured by a narrative of decline. He lacked the basic necessities and the presence of a solid-holding family as he not only witnessed his father's violence, but had no one to turn to. **With every-day-things, there was no support.** This made him feel confused and he lost the ability to control his feelings. **I had difficulty controlling my anger...One time when I was 8 years old I smashed the window pane and injured my hand to the point that I needed stitches.** Throughout childhood he was overcome by his feelings and suffered a lot in this regard. In telling his story he immediately refers to the cultural dynamics involved. Oliver explains that his father in being Arabic and Muslim, holds traditional male stereotypical values which he seems to resort to as an explanation for his father's violence (Macey, 1999).

A troubled childhood

Oliver narrates a childhood greatly impacted by the violence witnessed. His suffering led to the accumulation of a lot of negative emotions. He used to have a lot of anger outbursts which resulted in behavioural problems particularly at school. **When I was younger, these problems would create problems for me at school. I would walk out of the classroom in the middle of a lesson, lock girls in the bathroom...**Living through this emotional turmoil what framed his social self was the identity of a troubled child, an identity maintained by the stories surrounding him, which at the time held a function to his overwhelming emotions and lack of guidance and security from a supportive figure. **I had no support at home so to a certain point, they couldn't keep me on the good track. I didn't have anyone to correct me to some extent. There were more people who gave me bad examples.**

The dynamics surrounding him robbed him of his childhood. His story revealed his capacity to recognise the relational patterns that were being enacted around him and the lack of connection that happened as a result, since his childhood problems were met by isolation and relational difficulties. In fact, his childhood story is surrounded by continuous losses. **I cut off many friends, family as well.** The story line seemed to be held by an endless recurrence of circumstances that left him struggling on his own while causing him anguish.

The shelter story

At the age of 13, he suddenly found himself living in a shelter, following a devastating event at home involving his sister. **...at that time she was 17, she had started working and mum didn't tell my father as he would not have been pleased. Once he realised, he beat my sister [...]** Then the morning after we left, mum prepared **everything on Sunday and we went to Dar Merhba Bik.**

Throughout his narration it felt as if he continuously minimised emerging emotions, also when describing the move to the shelter. This indeed was a challenging life transition on many different levels. However, he does not express any major emotional or cognitive turmoil. He simply puts it, **it was a bit strange at the beginning especially.**

Oliver found himself living at an emergency shelter surrounded by women who were victims of DV. This was a turning point within his story which led him onto a new narrative direction. The narrative resources there differed from those who helped form his story in childhood. His identity changed from that of a troubled child to a child with a reserved character. This is how he then describes himself. Oliver expressed becoming more isolated living in a context predominated by women, both as victims and staff. **There is where I ended up literally isolated.** In fact this story highlights a heightened degree of loss of connection that resulted in him engaging in an in-depth reflection on his previous actions that

were driven mostly by his anger. **Look, spend three years on your own all the time...The only person you have to talk to is yourself. Once you speak to yourself all the time, you start observing a lot of different probabilities of what could be, what could have not [...]** **You'll end up eroded from within.** It was at this point that he became introverted. Thus the story as an actor in Oliver's life, while supporting him to have a more effective social self due to a decrease in externalising behaviour, made him suffer in isolation.

Oliver's transformation was intensified by his reflection about his gender identity. Being a male teenager growing up and finding his own sense of being while living in a shelter with other victims of DV, made him think about the fact that men were the ones who caused the violence that led women to reside in shelters. The fact that he falls within the same gender category of the men who perpetrated violence made him fear that he would end up engaging in the same abusive behaviour like his father. **It left me feeling really bad as they were all victims of males and I am male [...]** **I was scared, I didn't want to grow up like them.**

In part, this realisation about his identity seems to give Oliver the opportunity to perform an identity that differentiates him from his father. Thus, Oliver's story narrates an identity transformation that happened due to a change in context and a higher perception of the social and cultural dynamics he wants to separate from.

From the emergency shelter, Oliver together with his mother and siblings were then placed into a second stage shelter where they were aided to reintegrate back into the community. At this stage throughout his narration it is the first time that his story line cultivates connection. He speaks of a boy his age with whom he immediately established a good relationship. **A brotherly relationship. It was a very strong relationship, still is to this very day. We literally talk about everything.** It was a time when he could enjoy life

and be himself, engaging in an identity that in part could integrate aspects of a teenage boy.

At least it was an entertaining moment for me. Being together while going through similar hardships seemed to offer Oliver a sense of belonging, trust and mutual friendship which he had lacked his entire life. It seems that although living in shelters was hard, Oliver's story during such periods was structured by a progressive narrative.

He remembers turning 16 as the best time of his life as together with his mother and siblings they went to live in a place on their own. **It was really nice. It was peaceful for a while...for once it was normal!** However, his father was still present in their lives as his mother kept contact with him throughout and once out of the shelter his mother eventually told his father where they were staying. This led to the beginning of multiple harassments. **He knew where we lived, so he would come over all the time, always creating chaos and the police coming.** The capacity of these stories highlights the structural pattern throughout. There seems to be a story line that starts with a decline and once it takes a progressive turn from which it starts to ascend, it is immediately followed by another significant decline especially by his father's presence.

Family: "If it can be called so"

Oliver's story centres around the family, a central topic through which all other stories take form. The family acts as a narrative resource which shapes the starting point of Oliver's story line. Through general social and cultural resources, family offers the idea of collectivity. However in Oliver's story it is the point from which everything shatters.

Deborah: How would you describe your family?

Oliver: You cannot!

Oliver's family seems to be represented as a body where all members share the DV experiences, yet at the same time everyone experiences the reality and consequences of DV separately within their own individuality. In fact, Oliver's story does not make particular references to having any strong connections with his siblings or parents. He even struggles to call it a family. **It is hardly a family. It is broken from all sides. There are still my siblings, and there's my mother and my father but not a family.** He sees his parents as very selfish. **I wished my mother and father would love me more than that.**

The family story seems to be the basis that holds a general narrative of decline throughout. Following the positive event when he was living in a new home with his mother and siblings, his mother introduced his father back into their lives. **The thing that caused us most harm returns? You let it return?!** Once his father was living with them again, his sister was kicked out of the house leaving him frustrated and confused. **My sister no longer lives at home...as she has been kicked out.** This story made him question his family's relational dynamics as he viewed his sister and mother as having a strong bond. The emotional heaviness with which he experienced this situation and the lack of understanding around it is reflected in the structure of the storytelling, as at this point the narration became fragmented. **It was really disrespectful to my sister as in my mum and sister were closer... both being women...I don't know how my sister felt, but man she couldn't do worse...after all that had happened she [my mother] chose him over her. How does my mother manage to live every day and not think about this?**

Oliver's story serves the function of his rational self, whereby it gives him purpose to not allow connection and to hold a strong exterior that protects him from ever being betrayed again. His story embraces his inaccessible self through which he keeps everyone at a distance. This seems to reflect a certain level of fragility that is embedded beneath his solid

exterior, which he uses to protect himself from his surrounding world by repressing his feelings. **I became passive.**

Making sense of his father's attitude: "My respect for my father diminished"

His father's actions and the lack of responsibility towards the family particularly in refusing to work would leave Oliver feeling confused and angry. **It was terrible because we were living in havoc...then he would drink and things would get worse. But it was terrible.** These events would leave him feeling powerless and helpless. **I couldn't do anything while I wish I could and he could do something and didn't want to.** What would anger him most is the fact that his father would not feel guilty.

Despite all that he has been through because of his father, at times during his story he opens about still not hating him. It was challenging to understand how he manages to control himself from such pain, as he recollected witnessing events that made him go down a destructive road during childhood. The same emotions are still present yet there is a constant battle within him to eliminate them. **To a certain point if you do not eliminate them they consume you.** His childhood experiences seem to have helped him as an adult to have a more socially acceptable conduct than that which he witnessed. It seems as if his adult behaviour is a by-product of all he has been through and this appears to represent an antithetical story to his life before reaching adulthood.

Adult relationships: "I am the wound"

Oliver's story seems to have worked on him by preventing him to live a happy connected life as he views himself as very individualistic. **Complicated is the word as I am simple and complicated...But I adapt quickly as I have adapted to so many things that I ended up like a virus.** (He explained how a virus continually adapts to changing

circumstances). He believes that nothing can be taken away from him as he has lost all that he longed for and his story in adulthood continues to circulate his loneliness and avoidance. **I try not to look back. As in it's still there on a daily basis...but if you look back it won't make any difference and so it's a waste of time.**

The resources available to Oliver in making sense of his adult life are those around his self-control as it is the only thing that does not damage his identity and his relating self. His story has worked for him by giving him a sense of higher maturity at his age. **It's not nice, but I feel I understand more than others because I can use my mind much more.**

As an adult, Oliver carries all the pain that his experiences of DV led him to. What appears to be an important theme is his conviction of his inability to connect and his need to control his emotions. They are both aspects that support his personal identity and relating self in adulthood as he strongly believes that the impact of what he has been through will continue to affect the rest of his life when it comes to relationships. **It's like speaking a different language...I don't trust anyone.** Although he would love to have a family, he knows he will suffer in the long term as he believes he will never be able to. **It will remain forever.**

Oliver's voice seems to be implicitly made up of two voices contesting each other. There is a firm voice that holds strongly the storyteller's independence. However, behind it lies a voice that is being continuously shut down, which represents the storyteller's need to connect. Indeed, in his stories there is a constant distinction between the heart and mind to the extent that he does not let himself easily immerse in future plans that might shed a light of hope.

Oliver: I wish to have a family in future...depends. I really like something like that.

Deborah: So even though maybe you don't let yourself think and go there in your thoughts, there is still that wish to have a family.

Oliver: That's my heart.

Deborah: How much do you let this transpire in your life?

Oliver: (nervous laugh) As much as needed. Depends on the situation.

Oliver's story seems to be reflecting on a future where he appears to be cautious because as he said life can break it for you.

Isolation and power

Isolation and power also come through as dominant components throughout his story. Both have undergone transformation serving different functions from childhood to adulthood. Isolation has been present throughout his life, yet in adulthood it seems to have become more exacerbated due to his repressed emotionality which in turn has its negative impact on his life as he has shut down completely. **It's as if everything went back, first it came out then it went back in.** Even in the relationship he formed with a resident at the same shelter, he feels that the other resident will never understand him fully as his situation was not as bad as his. Oliver would not tell his story to anyone as he feels that he will never be understood. Thus, he feels that his story does not connect him to any type of audience. **Get them so that I talk to them,** was his firm reply when I asked him whether he believes there are others who have been through the same experiences who could understand him. **Everybody makes part of 'everyone', but me.**

Conversely, power took a different turn since as he reached adulthood he acquired more power with taking action and direction, giving him more authority, which he sees as having a positive impact in his life. It gives him autonomy and is also intertwined with his

sense of control. While both power and isolation help him control himself from externalising his behaviour, they also seem to be hindering him from allowing himself to indulge emotionally in life. The power issues are also present in his stories that concern other family members, like that of his sister being kicked out of the house, **as in she [mother] had greater power.** Cultural dynamics also seem to be central around the topic of power as it appears that he has taken responsibility for a lot of things that happened out of his control, especially since he is the eldest male sibling. Moreover, the lack of ability to act as a young boy is being compensated for in adulthood. From this there seems to emerge the triangulation in the guilt of not having done anything.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the narratives of the three males who participated in my study. Their life experiences will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the stories constructed in the previous chapter by linking them to the extant literature. In response to my research question, the main themes that emerged out of the dialogical components that shaped each story are discussed collectively from the participants' childhood experiences to their present lives in adulthood.

Childhood awareness of the contextual reality and implications of violence

David, Matthew and Oliver were all between 5 and 6 years old when they realised that what they were being exposed to at home did not coincide with the reality of a "normal" family. Congruent with the studies by Graham-Bermann et al. (2008) and Hamby et al. (2010), they did not only witness physical assault by their father on their mother, but at such a tender age were direct victims of violence and were also aware of the underlying dynamics within the family and inraparental relationship. Indeed they could acknowledge many tell-tale signs as well as the challenges and risks interlaced in the everyday dynamics at home. It is interesting that while they were all raised with different cultural values due to their parents' different nationalities, their intrinsic emotional and psychological experience of violence was quite similar.

Variations were mainly determinant on their perception and understanding of certain values about family, relationships, and gender roles. While this supports the social constructionist view that diverse social and cultural backgrounds may yield different meanings (Mann & Takyi, 2009), it also reflects a critical realist perspective. This is being that, as presented in Geldard and Geldard's study (2010), the cycle of abuse which incorporates the behavioural dynamics in violent relationships that elicit emotional and psychological distress retain significance irrespective of the context in which the violence happens.

Consistent with most studies in the literature, in witnessing DV David, Matthew and Oliver encountered various behavioural, cognitive, emotional, psychosocial and academic problems which were also carried on to adolescence (Evans et al., 2008, Kitzmann et al., 2003; Vu et al., 2016). David would constantly fear something would happen to his mother when he would be sleeping over at a friend; Matthew would need some time before being able to avert his thoughts at school and once it would be time to go home his concerns and fears would arise again in thinking whether his father would be home; Oliver was overwhelmed by his feelings and struggled to regulate his emotions, particularly his anger, resulting in a troubled childhood impacting his social and academic life. Coinciding also with Cooper and Vetere's (2005) study, being overburdened by their suffering in witnessing such a traumatic reality also affected their emotional and psychosocial development.

Although very young, in their awareness of their realities they learnt to adapt quickly to the varying circumstances. However, this awareness had several implications on their wellbeing in everyday life as it influenced their understanding of themselves and of their roles within the family. Being the eldest or only male child they all felt responsible for certain happenings within the family. David and Matthew felt responsible to intervene in the fights between their parents, whereas Oliver felt responsible for being unable to control what was happening around him. Thus, triangulation was prominent throughout their childhood, both in their actions of intervention and in the guilt of not being able to change their family environment (Minuchin, 1974).

Their narratives are all structured by a childhood story of decline which is not only reflected by witnessing DV, but is also the result of other contextual factors. Indeed, all three participants besides having experienced their father as the perpetrator of abuse, they each tell a story of having lived through diverse circumstances due to their fathers' alcohol abuse. This was exacerbated in David's case by a turbulent childhood of being taken away by his father

to their homeland and for Oliver by living through great deprivation of the basic necessities due to his father's refusal to work. This shows the beginning through which their identities started to form.

Lack of family connection and care

The stories continue by unfolding the participants' quest to be loved. Their family context failed to provide them with stability and connection. Indeed their everyday life was interspersed with feelings of loneliness. However, the loneliness they narrated about is not due to the social dynamics of being othered or shamed for coming from a chaotic or damaged family, as one might assume of a Maltese context:- Given that a Maltese context in being a small face-to-face community with strong Catholic values might easily generate judgments and discrimination against that which differs from the usual norm (Abela, 2016). Their loneliness was prominent due to feeling that they were not understood and cared for by their own families.

All participants at different points felt that they were on their own in facing certain aspects of their reality. David and Matthew had strong relationships with their mother which reflected in a process of triangulation whereby they both intervened in their parents' marital conflict by taking their mother's side (Minuchin, 1974). This brought about family dynamics and processes which left the participants feeling isolated, misunderstood and at times guilty in seeming responsible for their mother's abuse. There was no collective emotional support within the family, indeed all participants developed a very independent identity, also reflecting the stereotypical view of males. The context of abuse led to family experiences that were very individualistic. Consistent with Cooper and Vetere's (2005) study, the loneliness of having no one to turn to made them fight what seemed to be a losing battle with their

emotions, which impacted every aspect of their life particularly their identity and relationships.

Siblings as distant individuals. Even though the participants came from large families, none of the stories represented strong sibling relationships or emotional bonds in which they sought solace. Although they were not detached in that they would still feel for their siblings, their relationships with them were somewhat lived at a distance. Oliver would not share his thoughts and feelings with his older sister, even though they were closely living through the circumstances at home. Matthew, although seemingly having the closest sibling connection out of all three males, still narrates an individualistic experience of his past. Furthermore, David had only experienced siblinghood through his half-brother from his father's side who lived with them for lengthy periods and was only able to connect with his half-siblings from his mother's side when on vacation to their homeland. However, he never had any connection with them and seems to have witnessed the violence as an only child.

A research study by Sammut Scerri (2015) shows that siblings raised witnessing DV may externalise anger and frustration onto each other. However, the participants' narrative shows that while all siblings lived through the same reality, their experience of each other as well as of the violence were lived in isolation. Consistent with Kitzmann et al.'s (2003) study, the impact of living through such distressing events on one's own without sharing the burden or having an adult figure on whom to rely on from early childhood has had its impact on their development. This is seen in their stories of how their exposure to DV has left them navigating their way through their behavioural, emotional and psychological difficulties in dealing with the mundane challenges at home.

The behavioural repercussions of witnessing violence

While David and Matthew both had a better relationship with their mother than Oliver did, they still lacked support and were dragged into their parents' fights by their own mothers, producing unhealthy dynamics that impacted their wellbeing. The narrative across all three stories gave a sense of utter helplessness, confusion and betrayal which gave rise to intense anger, frustration and sadness. Experiencing such intense emotions while living in constant alertness for threats without the support of a trusting figure, had consequences on the participants' behaviour. Oliver sees his childhood as characterised by a great inability to regulate his anger which resulted in great externalising behaviour difficulties (Evans et al., 2008). In line with Zarling et al.'s (2013) study which findings show a correlation between intimate partner violence and externalising problems, Oliver narrated that up until early adolescence he was unable to control his overwhelming anger which led to outbursts of hyperactivity and oppositional behaviour. His emotion dysregulation seemed to be motivated by behavioural patterns that served as an immediate coping mechanism (Thompson, 2019). However, his behaviour maladaptation took an entirely different form in early adolescence since he shut down completely as his behaviour became excessively internalised (Watson MacDonnell, 2012).

Matthew did not narrate of a troubled childhood, yet his story reflected great irritability. To an extent he seems to regulate his emotions well, yet what may seem as emotion regulation may indeed be internalising behaviour that when met with overwhelming irritability leads to aggressive outbursts. He recounted moments in which after trying to hold everything in, he gets aggressive. Furthermore, in adulthood he narrates of excessive worries which is reflexive of anxious behaviour i.e. an internalising behaviour (Evans et al., 2008; Paterson et al., 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003). Matthew seems to resort to internalised and

externalised behaviour interchangeably depending on the circumstances and his emotional capacity at the time. Interestingly, this same pattern seems to reflect the inconsistent relationship he had with his parents. This concurs with the literature that behavioural issues go beyond the experience of exposure to DV (Jouriles et al., 2008).

David's story was interspersed with moments of aggressive behaviour led by instances of great frustration and contempt. His aggression and the triangulation with his mother through which he took on certain responsibilities in terms of his mother's wellbeing can be interpreted as coping strategies that helped him find some sort of security amidst the hardships he was living through. Moreover, David holds strong patriarchal values. Thus, as shown in the literature, when coupled with the violent context he was raised in, at times his narrative showed a belief of entitlement to violence as a means of exerting control (James, 1996).

The participants' storyline in view of their traumatic exposure to violence during childhood maintained the initial narrative structure of decline in relation to both their experiences of significant figures in their lives and the resultant behaviour. Indeed their traumatic exposure to DV impacted their attachment style which led to gaps in their social and emotional development, bringing about certain behavioural implications. Interestingly, while from a critical realist perspective their stories hold the same plot, a social constructionist view underlines the significant features that helped shape their reality. This is being that through the different cultural and social constructs that they utilise in telling their stories, the narrative's impact varies for each of them. When David tells of events in which he would resort to aggressive behaviour, narrating such events gave him a sense of power and control. Contrastingly, when Oliver recalls his troubled childhood characterised by externalised behaviour, the narrative structure reflects his behaviour as faulty.

Negotiating the male identity in the context of DV

Growing up in a context of violence perpetrated by an adult male figure impacted how participants made sense of their identity. Their stories reveal the ways in which they negotiated their male identity throughout their traumatic experiences while being raised in a predominantly male-dominated society (Naudi, 2004). All three males held values of dominance that are associated with the male gender. Through the interviews I experienced a tough attitude, ambition, strength and a drive for material success. This not only reflected the socialisation of their gender role, but also the impact of witnessing abuse. In fact, literature shows that socialisation is a process that incorporates both gender and context (Campbell, Muncer & Gorman, 1993; Davies & Lindsay, 2004).

Consistent with Davies and Lindsay's (2004) study, being that males, unlike females are not socialised into a gender role that expects them to keep good social connections, none of the participants encountered adjustment problems. They were indeed able to adapt quickly to the changing circumstances which also points to their resilient capacity being present from early childhood. The stories reveal that from early childhood, all males were raised within a context where violence was used in order to exert control. Their role model of the adult male was primarily their father who resorted to aggression in maintaining power and according to an attachment perspective, their fathers were the first male figures with whom they identified and from whom they learned about their gendered identity (Bowlby, 1969).

Even though their fathers were the cause for their devastating life experiences, they still represented a figure of attachment who to a certain extent also provided for them. This contradiction confronted them with a dilemma of a parent who is supportive, yet abusive. Their identity has been shaped by this contradiction in which they found themselves caught between love and abuse. David, Matthew and Oliver were engulfed by this reality.

Interestingly however, all three of them negotiated a different identity out of the seemingly similar circumstances they were raised into. Although all of them resort to masculine values as representative of their identity through values of power and material success, Oliver is more introverted than David who comes across as arrogant, whereas Matthew is more approachable. Their differences may be attributed to a number of variables amongst which predominates the fact that David's parents and Oliver's father are foreign. Thus, unlike Matthew they had to make sense of both the Maltese and foreign contexts which while reflecting similar patriarchal values, hold cultural differences such as religion, family structure and stricter misogynistic values amongst other contextual factors.

Nonetheless, they all seem to have conceptualised their identity through dissociation (Blizard, 1997), developing an identity in childhood through which they separate different aspects of their personality. According to Putnam's (1997) study, this is used as a defense that helps one cope with different forms of abuse by containing intolerable affects and performing necessary life functions. Being that to varying degrees all of them gave importance to having a good relationship with their father, this seems to have helped them compartmentalise the memories of abuse, which supports them to make sense of such a contradiction in loving yet hating their father.

Their stories reveal that their identity formation from boyhood to manhood has been impacted by the violence witnessed. Even though they did not want to be associated with their fathers' violence, it still seemed to affect their identity as they still engaged in aggressive behaviour. They do not see themselves as violent or perpetrators of abuse, even though they acknowledge having resorted to aggressive behaviour at different times in their lives. In fact, they developed ways in which to make sense of their identity to resolve this paradox of being violent, yet not wanting themselves to be identified as such. Oliver became extremely isolated as he conceptualised his externalised behaviour as detrimental to his

personhood as an adult. This was due to fearing the capacity of his anger in adulthood and it also served in helping him distance himself as much as possible from his father's identity. Conversely, David has resorted to harsh violence in different occasions, yet seems to make sense of violence depending on the context and justifies it when it happens as a result to provocative behaviour (Islam et al., 2017).

Matthew understands that his aggressive outbursts reflect unacceptable violent behaviour, but it seems that his identity is made up of different states according to circumstances. This helps him cope with overwhelming feelings for a long time before engaging in any aggressive outbursts. From a social learning framework their violent behaviour may seem as the repetition of violence (Bandura, 1973), which leads to a heightened risk of becoming perpetrators in intimate relationships (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 2003). However, the emotional security theory proposes that their behaviour may be due to their disrupted emotion regulation as a result to the distressing reality witnessed (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Hence, deeming that it is more of a coping mechanism rather than a trait.

Another important factor in their identity formation was that they ended up living in shelters. Research suggests that when children end up in shelters they are at an elevated risk of behaviour problems and social competence difficulties, suffer in forming a sense of self and adjustment difficulties (Stagg et al., 1989; Hughes & Barad, 1983). However, this does not reflect totally the participants' shelter experience. While living in a shelter was tough and got them to reflect thoroughly on certain life aspects, especially their identity and outlook on life, none of the males' shelter experiences seem to have worsened their behaviour.

Participants were concerned about preserving their social image with their friends, particularly Matthew who was 22 years old when he entered the shelter. However, Oliver's

shelter story shows great implications on his identity. Finding himself living at a shelter surrounded by women victims of abuse led him to reflect on who he is within a wider social context and it seems to have helped him realise more the impact of having a male identity in the community. This was the point at which his male identity took a totally different turn, from aggressive behaviour outbursts to extremely internalising behaviour.

Resilience as their only way to cope through adversity

The participants' stories are interwoven with moments that reflect their ability to adapt and recover from recurring distressing situations, showing a great capacity in overcoming hardships. This has been also shown in the literature, revealing children's high endurance in complex destructive environments with astounding strength in exposure to intimate partner violence (Jenkins, 2011). Literature also shows that when resilience is expressed more often, it is strengthened and this may be one explanation for the males' high level of adaptability (Crane, Searle, Kangas & Nwiran, 2019).

However, their resilience may be due to a lack of options on how to tackle their traumatic experiences, leaving them with nothing other than to push through circumstances. It seems as if in time it has become a natural reaction which forms part of their identity, as they struggle to find a reasonable explanation for having always recovered. This is where resilience for the participants may seem to have become an added value to their personality other than just a skill. The participants have learnt how to be resilient so early in their lives that it has become an implicit adaptive style which can only be inferred from their actions (Eisold, 2005).

Consistent with other research, the participants protected themselves through emotion-focused strategies rather than problem-focused solutions (Kimball, 2016). It seems that the males have coped with their devastating realities by avoiding conceptualising the

violence, rather than by running away from it, reaffirming their ability to push through. Their stories tell of many hardships not only in witnessing DV, but also of living in deprivation, chaos and deceit with one of the harshest events narrated being Matthew's story of his father's suicide. These moments were all overcome by a great sense of control. It seems that in lacking control over their surroundings made them grow a strong capacity to control that which they were able to. It seems that the 'tough' attitude they formed from childhood enables them to exert it in their favour at times when self-control and discipline are needed extensively.

Moreover, another aspect of their resilience was the presence of significant figures. Matthew and David's narrative acknowledges a strong mother-son relationship which although at times it may have been the source of pain, they admit it was of great importance in overcoming certain adversities. Research shows that good trusting relationships with the maternal figure offer better outcomes in relation to emotion regulation, a reflective communication style, and higher self-worth and self-competence (Graham-Bermann et al., 2009; Vetere, 2013). Additionally, David found solace in his jujitsu coach while Oliver found it in a very good friend- a boy living at the shelter. The sense of safety and belonging, and the ability to be understood without uttering a word seems to have helped them develop a side to their identity that helped them counter their hardships, a side which they still resort to in adulthood in fighting the lasting impact of their traumatic past (Jouriles et al., 2014). These significant figures in their lives confirmed their flexibility in reacting and their ability in promoting change to their emotive states.

Their moments of resilience give the narrative a structure of progression and / or stability which is usually followed by another decline, but is immediately superseded by other moments of resilience through which the stories' pattern rises and falls (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). The moments of resilience are delineated by the use of metaphors that reflect the way

in which they make sense of their journey from which they have risen stronger. Indeed they all make sense of their past experiences as a means through which they formed their identity and are grateful for having become able to endure the harshest of events. One metaphor which reflects in all of the participants' experiences and the way in which they conceptualise their resilience is that of an arrow, as told by David; **The harder you pull it backwards the more force it has to move forward.** In fact, they all identify as survivors and not as victims. While their circumstances were unavoidable, they still focused on a positive outcome.

The implications of childhood DV on the quality of adult life and relationships

The males' childhood experiences of DV have left various lasting effects on their adult life. However, it is important to note the social and cultural context within which they experienced such devastating traumatic realities (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). This is due to the fact that, different contexts generate different values and meanings to one's lived experiences, even though they have been experienced by others before them and form part of a bigger reality (Burr, 2015; Parker, 2005).

The participants' stories in adulthood reflect the impact of the violence witnessed, but concurrently, each aim at finding their own ways of being and improving their quality of life. For such reason the stories in adulthood seem to be structured by a narrative pattern of interchangeable decline and stability (Lyons & Coyle, 2016). David's adulthood is characterised by a wish to connect, particularly to be in an intimate relationship, yet his past experiences seem to leave him fearing commitment. His understanding of masculinity is that of seeming powerful, leaving him struggling to connect as he is not willing to appear weak by getting emotionally involved.

Matthew is a husband and a father. His adult life is a constant balancing between moments of irritability and resilience, which also impact his marital relationship especially

when his irritability gets expressed through aggressive outbursts. This behavioural pattern seems to point at a lasting impact of excessive worry. However, he has never been violent towards his wife and children, and is constantly present and dedicated to his family.

Contrastingly, Oliver in adulthood is very socially withdrawn and isolated. The impact of his traumatic past on his present self is very tangible as he constantly controls himself in his emotive expressions and makes sense of the world as a place in which he does not belong, reflecting his inability to identify with others.

Consistent with Watson MacDonnell's (2012) study, the impact of witnessing abuse persists in adulthood and as reflected in the participants' stories, it has certain negative outcomes on their functioning, psychological wellbeing and relationships which varies in severity for each. Coinciding with Vu et al.'s (2016) study, their narratives reveal adjustment problems in relation to their interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation and internal processes of how they make sense of the world around them.

Although not entirely, the males' stories may reflect Fagan and Wright's (2011) research. The participants' adult outcomes do not correlate with the emergence of risk behaviours, but show post-traumatic stress symptoms that include distress when remembering traumatic events, upsetting memories, emotional detachment, and avoidance of thoughts and feelings which were all visible during the interviewing process. A common aspect in their narration was that of trying to keep everything together by minimizing and controlling the feelings that emerged while downplaying the devastating events witnessed. However, this could also be linked to how they learnt to negotiate their sense of identity as males in a male-dominated society, as masculinity is primarily defined by emotional stoicism (Affleck et al., 2013). This seems to correlate with their experience in relationships as they tend to close off and are unable to communicate their emotions, at times dismissing them completely.

Certain traumatic events were narrated in the third person that led to participants taking a vantage point. According to McIsaac and Eich (2004), this allows the person to take the perspective of a detached spectator. It allows one to experience less emotions and create a narrative that is more informative of the actions taken and the layout of the traumatic scene, rather than being more affect-based providing richer accounts of sensation and psychological states (McIsaac & Eich, 2004). This seems to be reflective of the lack of therapeutic support in overcoming their traumatic past as none of the males had been to therapy. However, from a resilience perspective it may also indicate their ability to adapt to varying circumstances with the limited resources that are available to them.

Participants' relationship to their use of violence. The narratives support the notion suggested by recent longitudinal and systemic literature that a history of violence in the family of origin is a risk factor, but not a predictor of DV in adult relationships (Ehrensaft & Cohen, 2012; Fong, et al., 2017; Heise & Garcia-Moreno's, 2002; Pingley, 2017). Thus, in view of the participants' experiences in relationships, their externalised behaviour could be an inability to contain the impact of trauma rather than "impaired masculinity" which results from having acquired only a limited understanding of resolving conflict (Pickup et al., 2001). None of the males see violence as the way of being and all try to dissociate themselves from their father's image of the perpetrator. However, in view of the participants' experiences, it seems important to understand the context, particularly their cultural values which centre on the issue of power in identity, the way in which they make sense of relationships and their contradictory behaviour.

Power has centred a lot in the narrative in view of the males' adult identity. Having a sense of power meant having the possibility to act from one's own position and not being carried away by the decisions others made for them. For David, the sense of power made him feel connected and gave him a sense of meaning, whereas for Oliver power meant having

acquired autonomy. Thus, power seems to have the function of control and compensation for the harsh events witnessed due to the lack of authority they held as children. This side to their identity in adulthood seems to impact their relationships especially since in a patriarchal society power is tied to masculinity (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2005; Naudi, 2004).

Conclusion

By delving into their experiences throughout, it seems that the participants' life outcomes have been supported by their childhood understanding of their experiences in witnessing DV, and their new perspectives as adults of what they have been through. While the social and cultural constructs of their experiences vary in their experiences of their upbringing, their values, and the DV witnessed, the same social and cultural constructs are what ultimately brought them in their experiences of a shared reality (Burr, 2015; Parker, 2005). From a Maltese context perspective, their experiences of their adult male identity and of themselves in relationships are very much in line with the stereotypical gender role of a male-dominated society (Abela, 2016; Naudi, 2004).

In this chapter I have discussed the males' experiences in witnessing DV by relating it to the extant literature. It is important to acknowledge that this discussion does not presume finalizability to the participants' stories as they continue to live their lives with new experiences impacting and changing their narrative (Frank, 2006). However, a certain level of finalizability to their stories was made for the purpose of analysis and discussion for this study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter presents the salient findings of this study, and recommendations for practice and service development. It also looks into the limitations of the study and presents suggestions for future research.

Summary of salient findings

This study presents three stories of male survivors of childhood DV by delving into their childhood experiences and the impact of such traumatic events on their identity and relationships in adulthood. Findings reveal that males who witness DV while growing up are aware of the dynamics and devastating happenings from a very young age. Their awareness of violence suggests greater adaptability to their environment and this impacts their view of themselves having implications on identity formation. It is evident that being a male child and growing up witnessing DV perpetrated by the adult male figure in the family, while also living in a male-dominated society, suggests a heightened emphasis of the male stereotypical gender role. Indeed, all participants identified with traits of courage, responsibility and strength which are traditionally attributed to the male gender role. This was done in primarily taking care of their mother, leading to family systems of triangulation (Minuchin, 1974).

Another important finding revealed that growing up in a context of abuse hinders the possibility of family connection and stability. DV impacted the males' family relationships and left them feeling isolated. Although their emotional connections with their family remained irrespective of the hardships endured, their experiences suggested a lack of collective emotional support. This left repercussions on the males' identity formation which led to the development of a self-sufficient personality, impacting their relationships outside the family and even in adulthood. It is evident that such emotional detachment in the presence

of constant traumatic events anticipated the development of certain behavioural, emotional and psychological difficulties through every phase in their life (Kitzmann et al., 2003).

It appears that the traumatic experiences of witnessing DV as well as being the direct victim of abuse, left implications on the attachment style the males developed, having several behavioural repercussions. A lack of a secure attachment formation and a repetitive cycle of abuse suggest difficulties with emotional regulation (Vetere, 2013). It is evident that the participants' inability to regulate their emotions impacted their lives through various behavioural, cognitive, emotional and psychosocial difficulties. The lack of a grounding figure left them dealing with their traumas alone through varying degrees of both internalising and externalising behaviours at different points in their lives. The males resort to different internalising and externalising behaviours depending on the varying contexts and circumstances which are further impacted by how they make sense of their gender identity and relationships.

Another prominent finding was that of the participants' negotiation of their male identity within the context of abuse. It is evident that they conceptualised their male identity through their understanding of the masculinity traits they gathered from diverse contexts and cultural values they were socialised into while witnessing various forms of abuse. Furthermore, their understanding of their fathers' image of dominance, control and power impacted them in forming their masculine identity, as their fathers were the only prominent adult male figures with whom they could identify in early childhood.

Their stories reveal that they were able to make sense of their realities and their traumatic childhood experiences through dissociation (Blizard, 1997). It is evident that dissociation helped them cope with the contradictions they lived through, highlighting their sense of loyalty towards their fathers while at the same time despising them for the harsh

experiences witnessed (Putnam, 1997). Moreover, dissociation have supported their identity formation in how they understood their own violent behaviour.

The findings also illustrate the participants' resilience. Their distinctive ability to push through is what supported them to overcome their continuous hardships which points to an implicit adaptive style (Eisold, 2005). Their stories reveal great chaos and their resilience is a testament of their ability to resort to protective strategies that enable them to thrive in their self-control through such devastating life events. Another aspect to their resilience was their relationship with their mothers and other significant figures. Thus, the stories show the beneficial impact of some sort of support in fostering flexibility in reacting to multiple circumstances (Jouriles et al., 2014). This adaptability reflects in their adult identity and relationships, while also acknowledging themselves as survivors and not as victims of their past experiences.

The findings reveal a common lack of emotional expression among all participants which could be reflective of a tough male attitude that helps them identify with the stronger male gender identity. This had repercussions on their relationships in which they struggle to connect or express their emotions. Findings also reveal that their stories were at times narrated in third person which confirms further the emotional detachment sought (McIsaac and Eich, 2004). This is reflective of the males' seeming inability to regulate their emotional triggers. It is also evident of their overlooked need to process their traumas in therapy. However, all of them said they were not interested in therapy.

Limitations of the study

The findings of this study should be viewed in light of several limitations. In view of the chosen methodology it is important to understand that the participants' interviews were dependent on that which the males' could recall at the time. This poses certain limitations as

memory reconfigures events over time and stories are reassembled depending on the needs of storytelling (Frank, 2010a). Additionally, the interpretation of data leads the stories into another level of re-construction that is impacted by the interviewing process.

Furthermore, the participants being ex-residents of a second stage shelter of DV, posed certain limitations on the research findings as it was challenging to find participants who were willing to take part in this study, which led to a small sample size. A larger scale community sample in which participants would have been recruited from a variety of places may have led to different findings. Thus, this study may have not captured the reality of other males who have not been in a shelter or who sought further help and processed their traumatic past in therapy.

Additionally, the gender of the researcher in being a female may have posed certain limitations through the interviewing process as participants in being males may have held back from narrating certain events more in detail or from showing certain emotions. Thus, the interviewing process might have been hindered by the participants' inability to disclose certain information due to gender social constructs of masculinity (Hofstede et al., 2005; Naudi, 2004). Furthermore, it might have led the participants to be more careful in narrating violent events due to fear of judgement.

Implications for practice and service development

The findings of this study underline the need for more services aimed at preventing violence. This is particularly evident in the participants' stories of the long-term impact of childhood exposure to violence on their current adult lives. This points towards important practice implications, particularly more integrative work in which professionals from different disciplines work together to develop more awareness and interventions aimed at healthier relationships within the family system.

In my experience of working in a DV shelter, the main focus is mainly on the mother as the direct victim of abuse. However, in doing this study I learnt more about the importance that professionals direct their focus also on the children and the relationships between the children, their parents and siblings. The findings illustrate the need not to overlook or misinterpret any of the children's internalising and externalising behaviour, but to understand it in line with their exposure to DV and its traumatic impact. Furthermore, service provision needs to be aimed at providing individual support, where mother and child are supported separately, while also working with both mother and child simultaneously, leading to better outcomes especially in improving their relationship.

In the context of intraparental violence, children need to be looked at as primary service users as they are not simply bystanders who can just proceed with their lives following the cessation of abuse. It is important that all professionals in contact with the victims are trained about the different types of violence as well as the short and long-term impact on the victims and the children who witness the abuse. It is very important to have a deeper awareness of the dynamics involved especially of the contradictions that the children are faced with as they find themselves between love and abuse in the context of violence in their family.

As a counselling psychology trainee, I have come to realise the need to take on a systemic perspective. It is fundamental that professionals work systemically with the whole family, including the perpetrators who still retain the role of fathers. While not all children would want to remain in contact, the findings illustrate that love and loyalty prevail even in the context of abuse. Thus, it would be recommended that children who show interest are supported in their wishes to maintain contact while assuring safety and wellbeing.

It is evident that service provision needs to improve in lessening the barriers in relation to women seeking help. While prevention should be the primary aim, support for when women get the courage to leave an abusive relationship should encompass all legal and moral matters.

Suggestions for future research

Further research should focus on males who grew up witnessing DV as it would shed light on their traumatic experiences and how these impacted their lives in adulthood. This would support further the understanding of the intergenerational transmission of violence, particularly in view of the general assumption linking males' exposure to DV to their eventual perpetration of violence in intimate adult relationships (Bassuck et al., 2006; Jin et al., 2007).

More studies would also provide further knowledge and awareness about the males' perception of what they were exposed to which could give more insight into the family dynamics, contradictions and family systems triangulation. This would help the literature to acquire a more in-depth look into the implications following continuous exposure to abuse.

Further research on the resilience with which males overcome the challenges they encounter throughout their development would shed light on the positive qualities and skills in adapting to their lives. Such studies would also offer ground for what is needed in supporting wholly the children who experience such traumatic realities.

Conclusion

This study offers an in-depth look in the realities of male survivors of childhood DV and the various implications on their identity and adult relationships. It sheds light onto the males' great need for love and connection, enabling psychology practitioners and other

professionals to be more effective in their work with children who witnessed and / or were direct victims of abuse.

As this journey comes to an end, I hold closely all that has been part of it and will forever treasure the males' resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity as an inspiration to what lies ahead in my professional path, to effectively be of service to others who like them suffered great injustices. Hopefully, this study will inspire more professionals and policy makers who are truly invested in the wellbeing of victims of DV to work fully in developing and refining services aimed at supporting and improving the victims' quality of life.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Letter

**KUMMISSJONI EJJEW GHANDI**

Central Office
72A, Triq Villambrosa,
Hamrun

25th May, 2018

Dear Ms. Degabriele,

This letter is to confirm that I have received and reviewed your request in relation to your research study. On behalf of Kummissjoni Ejew Ghandi I approve for Ms Josette Stensen to contact ex-residents of Dar Qalb ta' Gesu' to enquire whether they are willing to participate in your research, as well as to access the respective data required for the purposes of your research, as indicated in the research proposal.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the office.

Yours faithfully,



Andrew Azzopardi

Director

Kummissjoni Ejew Ghandi

Appendix B: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

My name is Deborah Degabriele and I am currently reading for a Master Degree in Psychology at the University of Malta. In part-fulfilment of my studies I am carrying out a research study entitled: *Narratives of male survivors of childhood domestic violence*. You are invited to take part in this research.

In this regard, below please find information about the research project to assist you in your decision to take part in the study or otherwise. In the meantime, should you wish to acquire further information about the research study and to discuss any queries that you may have you are free to contact Ms. Josette Stensen, Gestalt Psychotherapist and Head of Home, so that she may forward your queries to myself and to my supervisor. Please make sure to read carefully the information presented below.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this research study is to focus on the perceived narratives of male survivors of childhood domestic violence in the family they grew up in and on understanding how these experiences have impacted them. It will attempt to delve into the complexities of their experiences and other aspects which they consider important in their experience from their present adult perspective.

Description of your participation

In order to conduct my study, I will be interviewing six to eight adult males who witnessed domestic violence while growing up. You are being invited to take part in this study because you meet the above inclusion criteria of the study. Your participation will involve taking part in a face-to-face interview of approximately 60 minutes, wherein you will be asked to narrate

your personal experience in witnessing domestic violence and the meaning made out of such experiences in relation to adult outcomes. The narratives can include verbal stories as well as any drawings, letters, poems, photos, diaries, etc., which describe your subjective experience. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The recordings of the interviews will be stored in a password protected file in my laptop which is also password-protected. The transcripts of the interviews will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri will only have access to the pseudonymised versions of the transcripts. Examiners may also have access to the pseudonymised versions of the transcripts where necessary for verification purposes.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without giving a reason. You will not be penalised in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study, even after you have agreed to participate. You may refuse to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to give your written consent by signing the enclosed Consent Form.

Protection of confidentiality

All the information that is provided by you during the course of the study will be kept strictly confidential and will be only used for the purpose of the study. Your name or any contact details will not be recorded in the interview transcript. Your name will be changed to a pseudonym to ensure that your involvement remains entirely confidential and anonymous. In addition, any details which could potentially identify you will be also removed or changed. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study; however, some anonymised quotes may be used in reports.

All the data collected will be erased upon the publication of my dissertation grade in Summer 2019. In circumstances in which you would wish to withdraw your participation from the research project, the data collected will be retained in anonymised form.

Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project. Should there be any questions which you find distressing or inadvertently inappropriate you are free to refuse to answer. Should you feel discomfort after the interview and the need to talk further about our interview, you may contact me so that I will be able to direct you to further help.

Potential benefits

Your participation will hopefully empower other males in the community who witnessed domestic violence while growing up. Thus, your participation will also educate the wider population as it would shed light on the males' perceived childhood experiences of domestic violence, especially since males are significantly underrepresented by research when compared to their female counterpart. Your participation will also hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge in this area of psychology.

Further queries

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time. If you kindly agree to participate in this research project, Ms. Josette Stensen will forward me your details. Should you require further clarification regarding this research, please do not hesitate to ask Ms. Josette Stensen to forward any queries which you might have. Should you wish you may also contact me on deborah.degabriele.09@um.edu.mt or on 7927 0091 or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri on clarissa.sammut-scerri@um.edu.mt or on 2340 3061 and we will be happy to answer your queries.

INFORMAZZJONI GHALL-PARTEĊIPANTI

Introduzzjoni

Jiena jisimni Deborah Degabriele u bhalissa qed nagħmel Master fil-Psikologija fl-Università ta' Malta. Fit-twettieq parzjali tal-istudji tiegħi qed nwettaq riċerka ta studju intitolata: *Narrativi ta' rġiel sopravvisuti għal vjolenza domestika fit-tfulija*. Inti mistieden tiegħu sehem f'din ir-riċerka.

F'dan ir-rigward, jekk jogħġbok sib hawn taht informazzjoni dwar il-proġett ta' riċerka biex tgħinek fid-deċiżjoni tiegħek tiegħux sehem f'dan l-istudju jew mod ieħor. Sadanittant, jekk tixtieq takkwista aktar informazzjoni dwar ir-riċerka u biex tiddiskuti kwalunkwe mistoqsija li jista' jkollok int tista' tikkuntattja lis-Sinj. Josette Stensen, psikoterapista (Gestalt) u Head of Home, sabiex tkun tista' tibgħat il-mistoqsijiet tiegħek lili u lis-supervizur tiegħi. Jekk jogħġbok kun ċert li taqra sew l-informazzjoni preżentata hawn taht.

Għan ta' l-istudju

L-għan ewlieni ta din ir-riċerka huwa li jiffoka fuq in-narrativi perċepiti ta' sopravvisuti maskili ta' vjolenza domestika fit-tfulija, fil-familja li kibru fiha u fuq l-għarfien ta' kif dawn l-esperjenzi kellhom impatt fuqhom. Din ir-riċerka ser tipprowa tidhol fil-kumplessitajiet tal-esperjenzi tagħhom u aspetti oħra li huma jqisu importanti fl-esperjenza tagħhom mill-perspettiva adulta preżenti tagħhom.

Deskrizzjoni tal-parteeċipazzjoni tiegħek

Sabiex inwettaq r-riċerka tiegħi, ser nintervista sitta sa tmien adulti rġiel li esperjenzaw vjolenza domestika huma u jikbru. Inti qed tiġi mistieden biex tiegħu sehem f'dan l-istudju għaliex tissodisfa l-kriterji ta' inkluzjoni msemija ta' dan l-istudju. Il-

parteċipazzjoni tiegħek tinvolvi li tiegħu sehem f'intervista ta madwar 60 minuta, fejn ser tiġi mistoqsi biex tirrakkonta l-esperjenza personali tiegħek bħala xhud ta vjolenza domestika u t-tifsira li tgħati lil dawn l-esperjenzi fir-rigward tal-esperjenzi adulti. In-narrattivi jistgħu jinkludu stejjer verbali kif ukoll tpeġġja, ittri, poeżiji, ritratti, djarji, eċċ., li jiddeskrivu l-esperjenza suġġettiva tiegħek. L-intervista ser tkun irrekordjata u wara traskratta. Ir-registrazzjonijiet tal-intervisti ser jinżammu f'fajl protett minn password fil-laptop tiegħi li huwa wkoll protett minn password. It-traskrizzjonijiet tal-intervisti ser ikunu aċċessibbli biss għar-riċerkatur u s-superviżur Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri ser jkollha biss aċċess għall-verżjonijiet psewdonimati tat-traskrizzjonijiet. L-eżaminaturi jista' jkollhom aċċess għall-verżjonijiet psewdonimati tat-traskrizzjonijiet fejn meħtieġ għal skopijiet ta' verifika.

Parteċipazzjoni volontarja

Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'din ir-riċerka hija volontarja. Tista' tagħzel li ma tipparteċipax u tista' tirtira l-kunsens tiegħek biex tipparteċipa fi kwalunkwe hin mingħajr ma tagħti ebda raġuni. M'intix se tkun penalizzat bl-ebda mod jekk inti tiddeċiedi li ma tipparteċipax jew li tirtira mill-istudju, anke wara li tkun qbilt li tipparteċipa. Inti tista' tirrifjuta li twieġeb xi mistoqsijiet li inti skomdu bihom. Jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem fl-istudju, inti tkun mitlub tagħti l-kunsens tiegħek bil-miktub billi tiffirma l-Formola ta' Kunsens hawnekk mehmuża.

Protezzjoni tal-kunfidenzjalità

L-informazzjoni kollha li tiġi pprovduta minnek matul l-istudju tinżamm strettament kunfidenzjali u tintuża biss għall-iskop ta' l-istudju. Ismek jew kwalunkwe dettalji ta' kuntatt mhux se jiġu rreġistrati fit-traskrizzjoni tal-intervista. L-isem tiegħek jinbidel għal psewdonimu biex jiġi żgurat li l-involviment tiegħek jibqa' kompletament kunfidenzjali u anonimu. Barra minn hekk, kwalunkwe dettalji li jistgħu potenzjalment jidentifikaw l-identità

tiegħek se jitneħhew jew jinbidlu wkoll. L-identità tiegħek ma tiġix żvelata fl-ebda pubblikazzjoni li tirriżulta minn dan l-istudju; madankollu, xi kwotazzjonijiet anonimizzati jistgħu jintużaw f'xi rapporti.

Id-data kollha miġbura se tithassar mal-pubblikazzjoni tal-marka tar-riċerka tiegħi fis-Sajf 2019. F'ċirkostanzi fejn tixtieq li tirtira l-partecipazzjoni tiegħek mir-riċerka, id-data miġbura tinzamm f'forma anonimizzata.

Riskji u skumditajiet

M'hemm l-ebda riskju magħruf assoċjat mal-partecipazzjoni f'dan il-proġett ta' riċerka. Jekk ikun hemm xi mistoqsijiet li ssib li jikkawżaw anzjeta` jew li huma involontarjament inadegwati inti liberu li tirrifjuta li twieġeb. Jekk tħoss skumdità wara l-intervista u l-ħtieġa li titkellem aktar dwar l-intervista tagħna, tkun tista` tikkuntattja lili sabiex inkun nista' niddireġik għal aktar għajnuna.

Benefiċċji potenzjali

Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek mistennija tagħti s-setgħa lill-irġiel l-oħra fil-komunità li esperjenzaw il-vjolenza domestika waqt li qed jikbru. Għalhekk, il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek ser teduka lill-popolazzjoni usa' hekk kif titfa' dawl fuq l-esperjenzi pperċepiti ta' l-irġiel fuq il-vjolenza domestika fit-tfulija, speċjalment meta l-irġiel huma sottorappreżentati b'mod sinifikanti mir-riċerka meta mqabbla mal-kontraparti femminili tagħhom. Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek tista' wkoll tikkontribwixxi għall-għarfien f'dan il-qasam tal-psikoloġija.

Aktar mistoqsijiet

Nixtieq nieħu din l-opportunita` biex niringrazzjak tal-ħin tiegħek. Jekk inti gentilment taqbel li tippartecipa f'dan il-proġett ta' riċerka, is-Sinj. Josette Stensen tibgħatli d-dettalji tiegħek. Jekk teħtieġ aktar kjarifika dwar din ir-riċerka, jekk jogħġbok, toqgħodx lura

milli titlob lis-Sinj. Josette Stensen biex tgħaddi kwalunkwe mistoqsija li jista' jkollok. Jekk tixtieq tista' wkoll tikkuntattjani fuq deborah.degabriele.09@um.edu.mt jew fuq 7927 0091 jew lis-supervizur tiegħi Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri fuq clarissa.sammut-scerri@um.edu.mt jew fuq 2340 3061 u nkunu kuntenti li nwiegħbu l-mistoqsijiet tiegħek.

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

I confirm that I have read the Information Sheet about this research study entitled: *Narratives of male survivors of childhood domestic violence* and understand my involvement in the study.

I have considered the information and clarified to my satisfaction all my concerns about my participation in the research.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any specific reason.

The information and personal data collected during this research study will only be used for the purpose of this research. I understand that all personal information will be treated with strict confidentiality and handled in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of the said regulation.

The recordings of the interviews will be stored in a password protected file in my laptop which is also password-protected. The transcripts of the interviews will only be accessible to the researcher and the supervisor Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri will only have access to the anonymised versions of the transcripts. Examiners may also have access to the pseudonymised versions of the transcripts where necessary for verification purposes.

A copy of the Information Sheet and a signed copy of the Consent Form will be provided to me.

I therefore agree to take part in this research study.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Supervisor

Signature

Date

FORMOLA TA' KUNSENS

Jiena nikkonferma li qrajt l-informazzjoni dwar ir-riċerka ta' studju intitolata: *Narrativi ta' rġiel sopravvisuti għal vjolenza domestika fit-tfulija* u nifhem l-involvement tiegħi fl-istudju.

Jiena ikkunsidrajt l-informazzjoni u ċċarajt għas-sodisfazzjoni tiegħi t-tħassib dwar il-parteciċipazzjoni tiegħi fir-riċerka.

Jiena nifhem li l-parteciċipazzjoni tiegħi f'din ir-riċerka hija volontarja u li jiena hieles li ma nibqax nipparteciċipa fi kwalunkwe ħin, mingħajr ma nagħti raġuni speċifika.

L-informazzjoni u id-data personali li se tingabar magħtul din ir-riċerka ta' studju se tintuża biss għall-iskop ta' din ir-riċerka. Jiena nifhem li l-informazzjoni personali kollha se tiġi trattata b'kunfidenzjalità stretta u skond id-dispożizzjonijiet tar-Regolament Ġenerali tal-Protezzjoni tad-Data (GDPR) u legiżlazzjoni nazzjonali li timplimenta u tispeċifika id-dispożizzjonijiet rilevanti ta l-imsemmi regolament.

Ir-registrazzjonijiet ta' l-intervisti ser jinżammu f'fajl protett minn password f'laptop li huwa wkoll protett minn password. It-traskrizzjonijiet tal-intervisti ser ikunu aċċessibbli biss għar-riċerkatur u s-superviżur Dr. Clarissa Sammut Scerri ser jkollha biss aċċess għall-verżjonijiet anonimizzati tat-traskrizzjonijiet. L-eżaminaturi jista' jkollhom aċċess għall-verżjonijiet psewdonimati tat-traskrizzjonijiet fejn meħtieġ għal skopijiet ta' verifika.

Kopja tal-informazzjoni dwar ir-riċerka ta' studju u kopja ffirmata tal-Formola ta' Kunsens ser jiġu pprovduti lili.

Għal daqstant, jiena naqbel li nieħu sehem f'din ir-riċerka ta' studju.

Isem il-Partecipant

Firma

Data

Isem ir-Ricerkatur

Firma

Data

Isem is-Superviżur

Firma

Data

Appendix D: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Main question

Imagine your life is a book that has many different stories/chapters which are being written as you live your life and you are to tell me your story in relation to your experiences of living in a family where there was domestic violence. Where would you like to start?

Prompts

1. Key events:

At the time of the domestic abuse, when did you first realise what was happening?

How old were you at the time?

What happened afterwards?

Do you have any photos, videos, drawings, poems, letters or diaries related to the time?

Would you be willing to share them? What can you tell me about them?

What were your worries and fears as a child?

2. Significant people:

Who were the significant people in your life?

If you had to tell me who were the important people in your life at the time of the domestic violence, who do you think they were? What kind of relationship did you have with them?

Have they helped you? And how?

How would you describe your family?

What kind of interactions occurred?

How do you feel in being part of this family?

3. Main themes in your life:

Are you in a relationship? What is it like for you?

If you think about your relationship, is there any impact of your childhood experience on your relationship? If yes, how?

How do you make sense of what happened?

What do you say to yourself when you look back?

How does that make you feel?

Was there anything that you wished was different but which could not happen as a result of these childhood experiences?

How would you describe yourself in your daily life?

4. Work, school and professional context:

How have you lived through the challenges of witnessing domestic violence through your life e.g. at work, at school etc.?

How have the services of support helped or hindered you?

How was your relationship with the professionals concerned?

5. Life in the future:

Do you think about the future?

What are your plans for the future?

What dreams do you have?

6. Debriefing

Was there anything which you would have liked to say which we still have not talked about?

Has there been anything you were hoping I would ask you that I haven't asked you?

Was there anything which you found difficult to talk about?

GWIDA TA' L-INTERVISTA

Mistoqsija Ewlenija

Immagina li l-ħajja tiegħek hija ktieb li għandu bosta stejjer/kapitoli differenti li qed jiġu miktuba waqt li inti tgħix ħajtek u kieku jkollok tgħidli l-istorja tiegħek fir-rigward tal-esperjenzi li għext f'familja fejn kien hemm vjolenza domestika. Minn fejn tibda?

Mistoqsijiet segwenti

1. Avvenimenti ewlenin:

Fiz-żmien ta' l-abbuż domestiku, meta kienet l-ewwel darba li rrealizzajt dak li kien qed jiġri?

Kemm kellek żmien?

X'gara wara?

Għandek xi ritratti, vidjows, tpingijiet, poeziji, ittri jew djarji relatati ma' dak iż-żmien?

Tixtieq taqsamhom? X'tista' tgħidli dwarhom?

X'kienu l-inkwiet u l-biżgħat tiegħek bħala tfal?

2. Nies sinifikanti:

Min kienu in-nies sinifikanti f'ħajtek?

Kieku kellek tgħidli min kienu in-nies importanti f'ħajtek f'dak iż-żmien tal-vjolenza domestika, min taħseb li kienu? X'tip ta' relazzjoni kellek magħhom?

Għenuk? Kif?

Kif tiddekrivi l-familja tiegħek?

X'tip ta 'interazzjonijiet kienu jsehhu?

Kif thossok li inti parti minn din il-familja?

3. Temi ewlenin fil-hajja tieghek:

Qiegħed f'relazzjoni? Kif inhi r-relazzjoni tagħkom ghalik?

Jekk taħseb dwar ir-relazzjoni tieghek, hemm xi impatt mill-esperjenza tat-tfulija tieghek fuq ir-relazzjoni? Jekk iva, kif?

Kif tagħmel sens minn dak li ġara?

X'tgħid lilek innifsek meta tħares lura?

Kif thossok?

Kien hemm xi haġa li xtaqt li kienet differenti imma li ma setgħetx issehh minhabba dawn l-esperjenzi tat-tfulija?

Kif tiddekrivi lilek innifsek fil-hajja ta' kuljum tieghek?

4. Xogħol, skola u kuntest professjonali:

Kif għext l-isfidi tal-esperjenza tal-vjolenza domestika magħtul il-hajja tieghek eż. fuq ix-xogħol, fl-iskola eċċ.?

Kif għenuk jew telfuk is-servizzi ta appogg?

Kif kienet ir-relazzjoni tieghek mal-professjonisti kkoncernati?

5. Il-hajja fil-futur:

Taħseb dwar il-futur?

X'inhuma l-pjanijiet tiegħek għall-futur?

X'holm għandek?

6. Mistoqsijiet riflessivi

Kien hemm xi haġa li kieku xtaqt li tghid li għadna ma tkellimniex dwarha?

Kien hemm xi haġa li kont qed tittama li nsaqsik u li jien ma staqsejtekx?

Kien hemm xi haġa li sibt diffiċli biex titkellem fuqa?

Appendix E: Excerpt from Oliver's story analysis

	Transcript	Coding	Dialogical components
100	D: Meta qisu nbidlu l-affarijiet x'gara?		Turning point within story – The shelter story
101	Għax intom imbagħad hriġtu mid-dar.		
102	O: Eżatt		
103	D: Qisu kif graw l-affarijiet?		
104	O: <u>Kif għedtlek, missieri kellu mentalita' antika u speċi għaliegħ il-mara dejjem id-dar sewwa...</u>	Issue of culture	
105			
106			
107	D: U l-mama Maltija?		
108	O: Iva, il-mummy Maltija...issa oħti	Content showing challenging family dynamics	Chaos and violence - Structure of decline
109	ovvjament kellha... dak iż-żmien kellha		
110	sbatax jekk m'inhix sejjer żball, xi haġa		
111	sbatax jew sittax u kienet ħarġet taħdem u		
112	ovvjament il-mummy ma qalitx lil		
113	<u>missieri għax missieri ma jhux gost.</u>	Issue of culture	
114	U...eżatt ma jhux gost, u just darba ġie as		
115	in induna u kien refa' jdejh fuq oħti u nejk		
116	u hekk. Imbagħad l-għada filghodu tlaqna		
117	'l barra, as in il-mummy preparat kollox		
118	mill-Ħadd u tlaqna Merħba Bik.		
119	D: Is-sitt aħwa li intom ukoll iġifieri?		
120	O: Eżatt		
121	D: Nimmagina li ma kinitx xi haġa sabiħa		
122	li titlaq mid-dar.		
123	O: Ovvjament hux kont għadni...kelli		
124	tlettax dak iż-żmien.		
125	D: Illaħwa kont għadek żgħir		
126	O: (Small pause) Ovvjament imbagħad		Isolation and lack of support
127	minn Merħba Bik bdejna mmexxu minn		
128	hemm hu. As in toqgħod hemm u		
129	timmuvja, fl-istess hin trid tmur l-iskola.		
130	<u>Kienet naqra stramba għal bidu speċjalment.</u>	Minimizing / downplaying emotions	
131	D: Diffiċli hux		
132	O: Ta' bilfors	Pain and distressing circumstances	Lack of power to control events
133	D: Mhux ta b'xejn imbagħad qisu l-		
134	emozzjonijiet li għedt bħar-rabja li kien		
135	ikollok		
136	(Small pause)	Avoiding touching on feelings reflecting self-control	
137	D: Kien hemm nies li sibt sapport fihom?		
138	O: Mhm		
139	D: Min kienu?		
140	O: Wiehed biss (smiling) Iltqajt miegħu	Issue around trust	Connection – reflecting structure of stability
141	hawn.		

Appendix F: David's story interspersed with direct quotes in Maltese

David's story

Reflection on first interview 22nd March

David comes in for the interview seeming very self-assured. As I ask him the first question to the interview he asks, 'F'liema sens?' with a strong tone which seems to reflect a guarded attitude. As the interview proceeds I see a sensitive side to him especially when he speaks about his mother.

David is an 18 year old student. He is the only child from his parents' marriage, but has 5 half-siblings from his mother's side and 2 half-brothers from his father's side, as his parents were previously married to other partners. His family came to Malta from an Eastern European country when he was 2 years old and has been living here ever since.

Reflection on second interview 18th May

This time David seems more friendly and approachable. He gives me a detailed narration, yet again seems to minimise the emotions being felt. Through his narration it becomes clearer that his strong and confident attitude may be a cultural feature rather than the result of his traumatic experiences. His narration seems to take into account his mother's experiences of the abuse in line with his, throughout the whole story. 'Qatt ma kien juri dak ir-rispett u dik l-imhabba lejn ommi, dejjem xtaq li speçi jaghmel li jrid biha.'

A beginning of violence and disarray

David remembers it starting when he was 5 years old, remembering his father always drinking and treating his mother badly. **Kien isawwatha jew ma jtihiex flus. Kien jeqlibielha. [...] Jahseb li jista' jaghmel li jrid ma' min irid. Jekk l-affarijiet ma jmorru kif irid hu, jaqbad isawwat.** There were also other shocking events which his mother told him about when he grew up, but which he does not remember very well due to

his young age at the time. **L-iktar wahda li laqtitni li kienet qalitiheli omni kienet meta missieri kien xorob naqra sew u kien qabad il-pistola u kien qabad jippuntaha lejha. Imbaghad kien qaghad jispara fl-arja. Jien kelli xi five jew six...Niftakar qisu flashbacks taghha.**

Every year they would go back to their homeland and spend the summer there before coming back just before school starts. His father owned agricultural land and David had lots of fun as a child running around the fields. He narrated that his father loved him a lot. **Kien jghidli li jien il-favorit tieghu.** However, David despised him for how he treated his mother. **Jien jista' ma jhobbnix daqs kemm kien ihobbni. L-aqwa li jirrispetta lil omni.** While abroad the violence would continue. **Darba konna qed nivjagġaw bil-karozza u kien saqsa lil omni jekk ġabitx il-laptop. Malli qaltu li nsietu taha daqqa f'wiċċha. Dawwar il-karozza u qal mhux sejrin. Meta wasalna jien u omni t-tnejn inhraqna u ntfajna norqdu. Imbaghad fis-siegha ta' filghodu qajjimna u qalilna "ejja ha mmorru".**

The beginning of David's story is structured through a narrative of decline as apart from witnessed his father's harsh violence towards his mother, at times he would be the direct victim of his father's abuse. **Ġo rasi kien itini lili, dejjem ġo rasi.** His tone of voice in recalling the violence and dominance that his father exerted became heavy reflecting heightened frustration. He seemed quite comfortable narrating his story and giving details, yet through his bodily expressions I felt that what at first seemed to appear as a conceited attitude, was indeed his way of protecting himself while recalling distressing memories.

The storyline immediately reflects the close alliance in the mother-son relationship, mirroring family systems triangulation (Minuchin, 1974) of David and his mother against his father. **Kemm-il darba qbadnieh texts u hekk, insibulu li jkellem nisa ohra.**

A turbulent childhood

David's childhood was filled with drastic and distressing incidents. In the same household used to live his half-brother from his father's side. At times there would also be his half-sister from his mother's side, and another woman. **Kien jeqlibielha lil ommi ma' din il-mara, konna qbadnieh.** David used to love spending time at his friend's house and sleeping over. However, he recalls always feeling that something would be going on at home. **Kont immur id-dar u nsib xi daqqiet fuq ommi l-ghada.** Living daily in such an abusive and controlling environment made him feel overwhelmed. One time he was so angry upon finding his parents lying in bed next to each other that he angrily asked his mother, **'Ghadek mieghu?'** U missieri qam u qalli **'Eh, ghadha mieghi, u?'** **Mort fil-kċina, qbadt sikkina u mort se nippona ghal għonqu, imma hija zammni.** He remembers seeking answers as to why she would not leave. **Kienet tghidli li ghax ma riditx thallini mieghu jew li jien nikber minghajr missieri.** At this point David's narration reflected his feelings of guilt and anger as he felt responsible for his mother's situation, yet he could not understand why she still remained with him after he had told her multiple times that he did not want to be in his father's presence.

David narrates that at the age of 12 he felt something inside him started to change. **Kont qisni kbirt u bdejt naghmel sens minn kollox f'mohhi. Bdejt ninduna x'inh u t-tajjeb u l-hażin.** David started to urge his mother to leave. He recalls that he and his mother called his mother's eldest son to come to Malta and help them move from his father's house. It all happened while his father was at home unaware of what was going on. **X'hin tilghin it-taraġ ghad-dar ma' hija u ohti, missieri ha pjaċir li ra lil hija, imma lill-ohti offendiha. It-tifel ta' ommi u hu ġew fl-idejn. Ohti ndahlet ukoll. Jiena mbuttajt u faqa' wiċċu ma' hġieġa. Mar għal sikkina u qbadna 'l ommi u nżilna 'l isfel. Imbagħad morna l-ghassa.**

This story brings out the close relationship with his mother as it seems that he was the one who made the decision to leave home. David's daily exposure to violence seems to have impacted his behaviour as he too became aggressive towards his father. This seems to frame how the different aspects to his identity developed:- On one hand, through the rather triangulated relationship with his mother, and on the other in giving rise to his aggressive reactions which although they may reflect an aggressive behaviour, at the time served as reactive coping in the dangerous context he was in.

While David and his mother were living at an emergency shelter, his parents came to a casual arrangement in which they decided that David would be spending weekends with his father. **Darba kien il-Ġimgha u kif hriġt mill-iskola nsibu hekk quddiem. Dahhalni fil-karozza u qalli 'illum ghal ghandi'**. Upon returning him back on Sunday he would instruct David to beat his mother, something which he never did. Unfortunately, this arrangement led to two highly devastating events in David's life. One Saturday, his father unexpectedly told him to get ready as they were going back to their homeland for the summer. He was 13 years old and had no time to tell his mother that he was leaving Malta and was only able to communicate with her once they were abroad.

The second time this happened David was 14 years old. His father was already abroad and told David to travel to their homeland to meet him. He had been telling him that he had changed and David got persuaded to go. His mother let him go, but once David went back his father told him that they were not coming back to Malta again. David contacted his mother and the lawyer without his father's knowledge and lied to his father by telling him that if they came back to Malta he would remain to live with him. In recalling such terrifying events David continuously downplayed the emotions that emerged. However, I was able to capture the heaviness in his effort to hide behind his nonchalant expressions.

Deborah: Nista' nimmagina kemm kienet tal- biza'.

David: Mhux hafna. Kont niehu gost indur bir-rota u ndum imqajjem sa' filghodu kmieni ndur mal-hbieb fit-toroq.

According to David, in their homeland his father had the reputation of a bully and had many acquaintances. He was feared by many and this somewhat impacted on David's behaviour. One time while illegally riding his motorbike which his father had bought him as a present at the age of 14, he was stopped by a policeman who upon realising whose son he was had let him go without any consequences.

It seems that the dominant Eastern European cultural values together with his father's display of social power and aggressive behaviour, played a significant role in his identity formation. It appears that his identity from a young age took on certain stereotypical traits that show male dominance and superiority, which formed the basis of his sense of being in adulthood. At times this identity seems to provide him with a powerful façade that protects him and helps him connect with a world out there, apart from that of his family.

While these stories of a chaotic childhood maintain the narrative structure of decline, there are other aspects to David's story which reflect a structure of stability. Amidst all the turmoil he was going through between 8 to 12 years, he used to practice jujitsu. His coach played a major role in his life as he was able to offer him a safe place where he could feel a sense of belonging. **Kien jaf li kien hemm problemi, imma nahseb kien ihobbni aktar minn missieri...kien ghallimni l-affarijiet kollha biex noqghod nghallem lill-beginners.**

Such a narrative seems to generate hope and connection, giving David a sense of purpose which appears to have impacted his ability to adapt through overwhelming situations.

Furthermore, being given the opportunity to act as a superior figure in teaching beginners, seems to have generated in him a sense of power.

Although not explicitly articulated, power is a component within his story that gives him a sense of meaning. It seems that for that moment he is not the victim, but the one exerting control and his bodily expressions in narrating this story reflected a sense of ownership.

Family: It's me and my mother

Family does not centre much in David's story. When asked how he would describe his family, he instantly replied, **jien u ommi, biss**. Due to his close relationship with his mother he witnessed most of the violence and was many times involved in taking his mother's side, highlighting the triangulation in trying to protect her. In fact, what was prominent throughout his story was his mother's safety and wellbeing, with his worst nightmare being that of losing her. **Jekk nitlef lilha nitlef biċċa kbira minn qalbi żgur u hadd ma jihdilha postha żgur. Litteralment nhobbha b'qalbi kollha u m'hemmx nies ohra li nhobhom hekk lanqas familti.**

In relation to his father, David seems to exhibit a love-hate relationship that generates ambiguity. He approves of his father's behaviour unless it is not directed towards his mother or himself. He narrated an event in which he was 12 years old and witnessed his father heavily beating one family friend as a warning. **Ma bżajtx. Kont inhossni hażin kieku missieri jaqlaghha ghax imbaghad ikolli naghti lil min tahlilu.** However, when it came to his direct relationship with his father, the story does not exhibit any type of connection. **Jien nobghodu lil missieri. Nixtieq intieh. Imma ghandi r-raġunijiet għalfejn.** Yet, he admits that his father will always be his father, even though he hates him.

David seems to tell a story that circulates different meanings and might not be understood by an audience that does not conceptualise how violence can be context based. His father's figure and actions as told throughout the story, act on and for him. They

influenced his sense of being by providing him with a sense of independence as he is not enticed by his father's attempts to engage in negative behaviour, yet at the same time witnessing his father's violence led him down risky roads, particularly as he still struggles to control his temper. Apart from the jujitsu coach who seems to have helped him nurture his positive aspects within his personality, his father was a significant adult figure of the same gender with whom he could identify. However, in being still a young adult, David might not have had enough experiences and thus at present his story lacks resources that could support him shape his identity away from violence.

Adulthood and relationships: Wanting connection yet fearing commitment

The stories that helped shape David's life, all impacted the formation of his identity, relationships and the way in which he makes sense of his story in adulthood. According to him, his life experiences hindered him from finding connection within relationships. **Jiena tifel stramb. Jien shabi jghiduli li jien stramb ghax l-iskola nkellimhom imbaghad barra narahom nghidilhom 'Orrajt!' u nibqa' miexi.** This contradiction in his identity of being connected with his friends depending on the context appears also in his intimate relationships. **Relazzjonijiet mhux tajbin ghalija.** Whilst he wishes to be in a relationship, he admits to struggling with commitment.

This paradoxical behaviour in relationships of initially wanting to have intimate contact, but at the same time fearing commitment is further intensified by another contradictory behaviour. It seems that his story is being told through two opposing narrative resources:- On one hand he affirms that he would never be violent in a relationship, but on the other he talks of having brutally beaten his ex-girlfriend for having insulted his mother. The meaning that he gives to violence throughout his narration maintains this contradiction.

Deborah: Ghedt li qatt ma tasal tuża vjolenza fuq it-tfajla, pero` rrakuntajt sitwazzjoni fejn użajt il-vjolenza mat-tfajla li kellek fil-passat. Kif taghmel sens minnha?

David: Le, imma dik differenti. Hi offendiet lill-ommi anke meta sfidajtha terġa' tirrepeti x'kienet qalet. Dik ma taghmilhiex. Saqsiet ghaluha!

Apart from violence, another major theme in his story is that of money. The narrative structure seems to progress when the plot is around making money or utilising violence to exert power **Ninvesti f'żewġ blokkijiet flats. Blokkja minnhom inbiegha kollha u l-oħra inżommha ghal kiri. Naghmel hafna flus u jien noqghod id-dar nilghab il-PlayStation.** The story seems to serve the function of providing David with purpose for his conduct and future prospects.

Over all David's story may find connection with an audience who thinks that his behaviour may be detrimental in the long term. However, the aspect of unfinalizability of his story in having a life ahead of him, may take the audience on an endless reflective process of how his future experiences may shape and impact his life story.

The resilient component within his story in adulthood is music. He recently started playing music in parties and making music with his DJ set. **It-techno hajti. Jaghmel impatt kbir fuqi. Naghmel saghtejn indoqq kuljum x'hin nasal id-dar, anke jekk nasal fl-ghaxra ta' filghaxija naghmel sa nofsillejl indoqq.** Music helps him forget about his troubles and gives him a sense of belonging. The empowered voice and the confident expressions he uses in narrating his experiences of playing music in front of big crowds reflect the meaning that such a story generates for his sense of self. **Mejjet ghal dawn l-affarijiet. Dawk in-nies kollha jghajtu ismi.** At this stage his narration seems to reflect a structure of progress that was also present in the narration of his jujitsu coach in childhood.

The same feeling of power seems to help him feel “normal” and good about himself as it counteracts the overwhelming negative feelings that he has been burdened with due to his traumatic childhood.

David seems to find meaning in his childhood experiences of violence through the analogy of an arrow. **Iktar ma tiġbidha lura, iktar ghandha sahha tibqa' ghaddejja...Il-hajja tibqa' ttik, imma int trid tkun bhal vlegġa...imbaghad tohrog aktar b'sahhitek. [...]** **Ma nistgħax nghid li kelli passat sabih, pero` happy kif hriġt. Imn'Alla kelli dak il-passat u hriġt dil-persuna.** The resources through which he narrates how he makes sense of his life and the impact of violence seem to work for him in his formation of a stronger identity. Such a story may generate meaning to an audience that shares the belief that the harsher life beats you, the stronger you become. Hence, it helps him connect even with those who are unaware of a life impacted by violence, but who had to go through their own personal struggles to gain control of their life.

Appendix G: Matthew's story interspersed with direct quotes in Maltese

Matthew's story***Reflection on first interview 26th March***

*Matthew initially seems nervous, yet he sits comfortably and listens attentively as I explain how the interview will proceed. I ask him whether he would like to ask any questions and through a light-hearted attitude he replies ‘**Le, issa naraw ahna u serjin**’.*

Matthew is 35 years old, the eldest and only male of 4 siblings. He is married with 2 young children and works as a skilled worker. He comes across as mature and considerate with a cheerful attitude.

Reflection on second interview 15th May

*He is once again very willing to answer my questions. He narrates his story with a serious yet light tone of voice and albeit this time he is expressing his emotions more, he still resorts to logical explanations for the emotions felt. ‘**Anke tkun kbir il-ġlied u hekk ibezżghek, ahseb u ara tkun iżghir**’.*

A childhood of chaos and violence

Matthew was 6 years old when he started to notice that the reality he was living was somewhat “not normal”. The chaos he was living at home was leaving him feeling overwhelmed. **Tara għajjat, storbu u hekk. Mhux normali hux?! Jibdew ibezżghuk l-affarijiet. Iktar u iktar meta ma tkunx qed tifhem għalxiex u x’inhu jiġri.** He remembers his father arriving home drunk and purposely falling on his mother’s ornaments, which would then lead to a fight between his parents. **Kien jiġi xurban sew hekk [...] ommi kellha statwi kbar, kien jaqa’ u jkissirhom. Jien nissuspetta li kien ikissirhomlha apposta għax mhux darba...kollha darhom eventwalment.** The fights would become violent as his father

would beat his mother, but his mother would retaliate and hit him back. **Kien jaqlaghha wkoll.**

When Matthew and his sisters were young they would be in their rooms listening to their parents fight. When they started growing older they would be present, at times also getting physically in between their parents to stop the fighting, consequently being mistakenly hit.

Although Matthew openly explains the events that happened, initially his narration is very factual. Indeed the resources utilised to tell his story do not frame his childhood experiences within a context of great emotional turmoil and when emotions surface he utilises other characters such as his sisters or takes on a general outlook to explain the extent of the emotions felt (McIsaac & Eich, 2004). **Kif jghidu t-tfal ibghatu f'dawn l-affarijiet.**

It seems as if Matthew restrains himself for some reason which could be attributed to how he views his masculine identity and / or how he keeps himself together whilst narrating traumatic memories. It was hard to read into his emotive state however, stories are told and understood using our bodies and as he fretfully rushed through his narration in trying to find the best words to help him express himself without emphasizing too much on the negative, I could feel his distress.

Matthew's story seems to be structured by an initial narrative of decline. His narration of the chaos he lived through childhood seems to signify a life engulfed by hopelessness. He recalls that attending school was the only time he could live a normal childhood, even though it took time before he was able to detach from anxiety-provoking thoughts. **Qisu mbaghad ma tibqax taghti kasha. Waqt li tkun l-iskola, li qed jigri l-iskola. Xorta kont nilghab u niċċajta u hekk...ma naghtix kas.** However, as soon as his mother would pick him up from

school, overwhelming fear would resurface. **L-ewwel haga li kont naghmel insaqsi 'l ommi jekk missieri hux rieqed jew qieghed il-hanut [jixrob].**

Other resources he utilises in telling his childhood stories seemed to reflect cultural and social dynamics that are traditional, for example authoritarian parenting, which seemed to help him justify his father's actions. **Kien isawwatna, imma ma kienx imissna bhala vjolenza, bhala dixxiplina antika.** In living through such chaos he learnt how to tap onto different parts of his identity depending on the context. He learnt to adapt as a child by suppressing his emotions. Matthew speaks of his mother as the most important figure in his life and he seems to understand his resilience as a function of his relationship with her.

Deborah: Min huma l-iktar nies sinjifikanti f'hajtek?

Matthew: Omni ovvjament, ghadha u dak iż-żmien kienet iktar.

A reality of domination and love and abuse

Matthew narrates a childhood where physical and psychological domination and contradictory behaviour were the order of the day. Upon returning home drunk, his father would demand their attention. If Matthew and his sisters were not around him, he would seek revenge. **Kien jiġi d-dar u jippretendi li mmorru hdejh. Darba minnhom kont qed nara loghba futbol u ghax ma mortx hdejh tffieli l-main. Anke jekk inkun hierieg u jilhaq jiġi hu jippretendi li ma nohroġx. Kien daqsekk pastaż! Allura ġieli konna nitilghu fuq il-bejt, biex jekk jiġi ahna taparsi diġa tlaqna u ma jzommiex.** Following fights with his mother, Matthew's father would try to make amends by buying something for Matthew or his sisters that his mother would have liked to buy for them. **Kienu jargumentaw u omni titlaq tmur ghand huha. Imbaghad biex izieghel biha, jixtriheli.**

Matthew recalled that when he was 12 years old his father got involved in usury which led him to drink more. Nonetheless, throughout his narration, Matthew speaks about his father with love and admiration, especially when he recalls his father's love for fishing and hunting. These were hobbies that he passed on to Matthew. In fact, Matthew is very fond of having shared this aspect of life with his father. However, there were times when they would be hunting and his father would lie about having to meet some people who owed him money in order to cover up for his urge to drink. **Kienet tigr̃i hafna u kienet tirrabjani ghax beda jgib l-alkoħol qabel l-affarijiet li jhobb. Imbagħad waqaft nakkomodah. Kont nghidlu jiltaq u kont nibqa' ma' siehbi.**

It is a story that connects him to an audience that understands the harsh reality of living the impact of violence, as well as to others who like him have grown into understanding the importance of the Maltese heritage. These narrations are also what held the function of Matthew's repressed emotionality. Although he expresses feeling hurt and angry, up until this point he does not act out any of his emotions. Things changed as a young adult.

Matthew's life seems to have always been centred around a paradox of love and violence. Although contradictory, Matthew grew up having great love and respect towards his father. This does not mean that he did not believe that his actions were wrong, or that he dismissed feeling hurt by his father, but he tried to find ways in which to justify him. This seems to result from his loyalty towards his father even if in a context of abuse. In fact, Matthew downplays his father's problems from the beginning of his narration **Il-papa` tieghi kellu daqsxejn ta' problema. Kien daqsxejn alkoħoliku, kellu daqsxejn vizzju.**

Interestingly, the only time that he is seemingly emotional is when he is admiringly speaking of his father's abilities. **Missieri kien jahdem u jistinka. Kien bravu iktar minn omni u kien kapaċi kull oġġett jagħmlu flus. Sempliċiment anke affarijiet naturali bħal kappar. Kellu paċenzja biex jagħmel business.**

Another contradiction in Matthew's narrative was his father's values in relation to providing for the family while at the same time abusing his family by neglected them love and respect.

Matthew: Qatt ma kelna x'ingergru xejn igifieri.

Deborah: Kien jipprovdi ghal-familja?

Matthew: Iva, dak l-ewwel u qabel kollox. Anke qabel jitlaq, il-bičča l-kbira kien isajjar, imbaghad johroġ.

Although he loves his mother, it seems that his love for his father still remains irrespective of the pain and fear endured. **Ovvjament kont nibża minnu...hemm hafna affarijiet igifieri ta'dak iż-żmien li jkollok ġo fik. Issir parti minnek...Ovvjament kien missieri, kont inhobbu lil missieri. Għadni s'issa nhobbu.**

Being that it is a story that touches on his father's perpetration of violence and since he draws upon his father's good qualities in forming his male identity, Matthew needs to hold his own into underlining the positive loving aspects of his father.

Getting in between

As Matthew grew older his mother started to seek help at emergency shelters. Matthew would at times remain at home as his mother ended up going back and forth multiple times before finally proceeding with the separation. When Matthew would remain home, his father would urge him to plead his mother to go back. **Kien joqghod jghidli biex nghid lil omni tiġi lura u dejjem terġa' tiġi lura. Imma kien hemm drabi fejn għedtlu 'Imma inti m'intix nies!' [...] Kont nghid speċi, nippreferi kważi hekk. Għax xorta b'ommi d-dar, kont inkun qed niehu pjaċir mal-hbieb, iċċempilli u tghidli 'Missierek qiegħed jikkumiedja' u kien ikolli mmur.**

It seems that his identity has been formed through these moments of great emotional turmoil. On one hand, he was being put in between his parents by both of them for different reasons and on the other, even though he would be angry at them he still felt that it was his responsibility to intervene (Minuchin, 1976).

Deborah: Jigifieri kont tidhol naqra bejniethom.

Matthew: Bilfors hu bhala l-kbir. Awtomatikament hux vera?

Once again the resources used to tell his story hold values traditionally attributed to male gender role of being the defender and taking responsibility, which in turn help him define his sense of identity in being the eldest and only male sibling. Later these seem to have provided the basis that helped him shape his new identity as a husband and father.

The storyline seems to circulate a sense of adaptability throughout as Matthew manages to find his way of being through any event, delineating his resilience. Apart from getting in between his parents, he was sometimes the direct victim of his father's violence. The most shocking event that Matthew described was when following a simple argument with his father at the age of 19, his father crashed his car into Matthew's car to provoke him to react. Indeed, Matthew recalls **Dakinhar qabeż il-limit!**

Spiċċat daqsxejn hażin. Kont ilni nissaporti...Minix xi wiehed li nhobb niġġieled...imma dakinhar spiċċajna bl-idejn sew, fejn missieri kien spiċċa l-isptar. As he narrated this event, he seemed remorseful as he recalled that they had gone to court and the case eventually was withdrawn as both him and his father did not want to continue with the proceedings.

Matthew's story line seems to be structured by a narrative of decline that reaches stability through his resilience, yet once it does is again followed by another decline due to

other devastating events. The storyline started to incorporate a side to his personality that opposes the passive and avoidant behaviour as Matthew acknowledges externalising the repressed frustration through aggressive behaviour.

The father's suicide

A major story that bore great impact on Matthew's life and in shaping his identity is his father's suicide. It was around the time Matthew's mother moved to a second stage shelter after choosing to proceed with the separation. Matthew went to live with his mother and siblings at the shelter. He was 22 years old and being that the shelter's curfew was at half past nine, on weekends he would stay with his father to be able to stay out late. **Imma darba fost l-ohrajn, missieri kien ikkommetta suicide. Jien mort id-dar u sibtu.** As I listened to him narrate the traumatizing event, his narration did not exhibit any particular emotional heaviness but the expression in his eyes reflected his pain. This story of great loss allows his personal identity to form part of a collective identity since loss centres in everyone's life irrespective of one's background or the ways in which it happens.

It was a challenging time for Matthew. However, he found in himself the strength to push through and keep going. It seems that this story worked on him in ways that enabled him to explore his resilience and made him increasingly aware of his possibilities in living a productive and meaningful life. **Imma mbaghad speçi bdejt niġġildilha. Bdejt niġġildilha ghax inutli toqghod...mhux kulhadd bhali. It-tabib qalli l-biċċa l-kbira jispiċċaw hazin, imma jien kont lucky. Ikun hemm mumentu fejn taqa', dan bhal speçi...pero jien li rnexxieli, il-parir li naghti li inti ma taqax fis-sitwazzjoni...Dejjem nahseb l-affarijiet tajbin tieghu.**

The narrative structure, being fragmented due to lack of sentence completion and thought continuity, reflects the pain in narrating the devastating event. However, it also

underscores the meaning he attributes in connecting with others through his story as he deems it a powerful and important message to share with those who experience such tormented injustices.

Adulthood: Dealing with continual irritability and resilience

Deborah: X'tghid lilek innifsek meta thares lura?

Matthew: Titwilidx.

The impact of his childhood experiences is very present even though his story worked for him, since it enabled him through his resilience to create a successful life for himself in adulthood. **Inti mill-hazin tiehu li tista'. Meta kont zghir kif ghamluhieli (hajti), issa li kbirt kif naghmilha.** Although he tries his utmost to be the best he can in his adult life as a husband and a father, he acknowledges the powerful impact that his childhood experiences have on him. **Nervuz hafna...taqbizli daqsxejn ukoll. Mhux gravi imma taqbizli daqsxejn hekk.**

He describes himself as passive. However, when he experiences challenges and feels that he cannot take it any longer, such as extensively trying to avoid an argument with his wife, he engages in a reaction through which flows all of the frustration he would have been trying to push down. **Ha naghmluha cara, mhux li noqghod insawwat lill-mara...imma nsabbat xi haga, nghajjat u nitkellem hazin ukoll.** It seems that his story prevented him from regulating his emotions as he learnt how to adapt through avoidance till he bursts in anger. It seems that it was the only way he could cope with the overwhelming feelings of heaviness throughout. Such a narration may be misinterpreted by an audience that does not understand the underlying realities of being raised within a context of DV. It is where I believe such reactivity generates the idea whereby such an audience attributes the violence

witnessed during childhood to the perpetration of violence in adulthood, rather than as a normal reaction to having been continuously overburdened by aversive events.

Moreover, Matthew's story helps him express his capacity to transcend the hardships he has been through without ever denying their impact. **Jiena nemmen li jekk ma tghaddix minn ċertu episodji fil-hajja tixxejjer mar-rih imbaghad.** He seems to have taken on all he has been through and formed a sense of self that represents a solid and mature presence able of perspective taking. His family and social background and the fact that he was able to experience his father as a good man when not drunk, all served as cultural structures through which he constructed his identity and that continue to sustain his role of a stereotypical male who provides for his family and aims for material success. His story helps him share the extent to which he feels scarred irrespective of how much he tries to maintain a positive outlook. **Il-kikkra ddawwarha kif iddawwarha dejjem ha tara fejn hi mxaqqa.**

Appendix H: Oliver's story interspersed with direct quotes in Maltese

Oliver's story***Reflection on first interview 19th April***

Oliver sits tensely upright, glancing outside the window as I explain to him how the interview will proceed. I ask him whether he would like to clarify anything and through a sarcastic smile through which transpires his anguish, he says no.

Oliver is 19 years old and works at a fast food restaurant. His father is North-African while his mother is Maltese. He is the second born out of 6 siblings, and is the eldest male.

Reflection on second interview 17th May

His voice although heavy is less lifeless this time and there is a slim appearance of certain emotions, even if he is still somewhat cautious about what to tell me. I begin by asking him what it felt like to live with a continuous lack of basic necessities which was the first aspect he mentioned in the first interview. There is a long pause, then he starts 'As in emozjonalment kienet vera...kerha!'

A beginning of deprivation and violence

Oliver was 5 years old when he realised something was not quite right at home. He would see his father drunk every day and things started lacking at home. **Meta missieri qabad il-vizzju tal-alkohol bdew gejjin il-problemi ghax in-nuqqas ta' flus, nuqqas hekk, nuqqas hekk...ma stjaniex inlahqu. Ovvjament omni ma tantx qablet imbaghad missieri beda jirribella lura, imbaghad beda jidhol iktar fuq vjolenza.** On several occasions Oliver witnessed his father threatening his mother with a knife. He would see him hitting his older sister and sometimes he would get beaten as well. However, the violence was more directed towards the female members **missieri barrani, ghandu dik il-mentalita' naqra zghira antika allura kien iktar (vjolenti) fuq il-mara milli fuq it-tifel.**

Oliver started realising that his family was different than that of his classmates.

Kemm ha ddu tara l-istess haġa u ma tifhimx hu?! His classmates' parents seemed very loving and supportive, but he never seemed to get that from his family. Instead, he would witness arguments and chaos. Il-mument kien vera ikrah... Kienet tortura, kienet l-aghhar haġa li tista' timmagine għax bil-lejl tinhasad u tqum, u bil-ġlied dejjem l-istess storja, kienet irritanti hafna. Żgur ma kienx jirnexxieli nerġa' norqod ha nġhid hekk. Kont qisni qieghed fis-sitwazzjoni imma mhux qieghed fl-istess hin. Ma kienx panic imma kien wisq stressanti, it-toqol dak il-hin. He was going through all of this while also trying to adapt to all the deprivations that his father's alcohol abuse brought them. **Kienet titqal iktar il-hajja milli hi, għax ma setghux zommu il-kera, ma setghux iżommu mal-kontijiet...tidhra sa ċertu punt, imma r-rabja hemm tibqa' speċjalment meta ma tista' tagħmel xejn għax tkun għadek tifel.**

This beginning to Oliver's story seems to be structured by a narrative of decline. He lacked the basic necessities and the presence of a solid-holding family as he not only witnessed his father's violence, but had no one to turn to. **F'affarijiet ta' kuljum ma kienx hemm sapport.** This made him feel confused and he lost the ability to control his feelings. **Kienet diffiċli nikkontrolla r-rabja...Darba meta kelli tmien snin fqajt il-hgiega ta' tieqa u wegġajt idi kelli nagħmel tlett punti.** Throughout childhood he was overcome by his feelings and suffered a lot in this regard. In telling his story he immediately refers to the cultural dynamics involved. Oliver explains that his father in being Arabic and Muslim, holds traditional male stereotypical values which he seems to resort to as an explanation for his father's violence (Macey, 1999).

A troubled childhood

Oliver narrates a childhood greatly impacted by the violence witnessed. His suffering led to the accumulation of a lot of negative emotions. He used to have a lot of anger outbursts which resulted in behavioural problems particularly at school. **Meta kont iżghar, dawn il-problemi kienu jgibuli anke problemi l-iskola. Il-hin kollu nitlaq mill-klassi, naghlaq in-nisa fit-toilet...** Living through this emotional turmoil what framed his social self was the identity of a troubled child, an identity maintained by the stories surrounding him, which at the time held a function to his overwhelming emotions and lack of guidance and security from a supportive figure. **Ma kellix sapport id-dar allura sa ċertu punt, ma setghux iżommuni fuq linja wahda. Kien hemm iktar nies minn fejn niehu l-hażin.**

The dynamics he found himself into robbed him of his childhood. His story revealed his capacity to recognise the relational patterns that were being enacted around him and the lack of connection that happened as a result, since his childhood problems were met by isolation and relational difficulties. In fact, his childhood story is surrounded by continuous losses. **Qtajt hafna hbieb, familja l-istess.** The story line seemed to be held by an endless recurrence of circumstances that left him struggling on his own while causing him anguish.

The shelter story

At the age of 13, he suddenly found himself living in a shelter, following a devastating event at home involving his sister. **...dak iż-żmien kellha sbatax u kienet harġet taħdem u l-mummy ma qalitx lil missieri ghax missieri ma jhux gost. U just darba ġie nduna u kien refa' jdejh fuq ohti [...] Imbagħad l-ghada filghodu tlaqna 'l barra, as in il-mummy preparat kollox mill-Ħadd u tlaqna Merħba Bik.**

Throughout his narration it felt as if he continuously minimised emerging emotions, also when describing the move to the shelter. This indeed was a challenging life transition on many different levels. However, he does not express any major emotional or cognitive turmoil. He simply puts it, **kienet naqra stramba għall-bidu speċjalment.**

Oliver found himself living at an emergency shelter surrounded by women who were victims of DV. This was a turning point within his story which led him onto a new narrative direction. The narrative resources there differed from those who helped form his story in childhood. His identity changed from that of a troubled child to a child with a reserved character. This is how he then describes himself. Oliver expressed becoming more isolated living in a context predominated by women, both as victims and staff. **Hemmhekk fejn spiċċajt letteralment isolat.** In fact this story highlights a heightened degree of loss of connection that resulted in him engaging in an in-depth reflection on his previous actions that were driven mostly by his anger. **Ara, intefa tlett snin wahdek il-hin kollhu...l-unika persuna li għandek ma' min titkellem, miegħek innifsek. Once li titkellem il-hin kollu miegħek innifsek, tibda tosserva hafna l-probabbilitajiet differenti ta' x'jista' jkun, x'ma setghax [...] Tispiċċa tittiekel fik innifsek.** It was at this point that he became introverted. Thus the story as an actor in Oliver's life, while supporting him to have a more effective social self due to a decrease in externalising behaviour, made him suffer in isolation.

Oliver's transformation was intensified by his reflection about his gender identity. Being a male teenager growing up and finding his own sense of being while living in a shelter with other victims of DV, made him think about the fact that men were the ones who caused the violence that led women to reside in shelters. The fact that he falls within the same gender category of the men who perpetrated violence made him fear that he would end up engaging in the same abusive behaviour like his father. **Kien ihossni hazin għax jien maskil**

u kollha huma vittimi ta' maskil [...] kien ikolli dik in-naqra biza', ma ridtx nikber bhalhom.

In part, this realisation about his identity seems to give Oliver the opportunity to perform an identity that differentiates him from his father. Thus, Oliver's story narrates an identity transformation that happened due to a change in context and a higher perception of the social and cultural dynamics he wants to separate from.

From the emergency shelter, Oliver together with his mother and siblings were then placed into a second stage shelter where they were aided to reintegrate back into the community. At this stage throughout his narration it is the first time that his story line cultivates connection. He speaks of a boy his age with whom he immediately established a good relationship. **Relazzjoni ta hija hu. Kienet relazzjoni b'sahhita, ghadha sal-lum b'sahhita u soda. Fejn letteralment nitkelmu fuq kollox.** It was a time when he could enjoy life and be himself, engaging in an identity that in part could integrate aspects of a teenage boy. **Almenu kien naqra mument divertenti ghalija.** Being together while going through similar hardships seemed to offer Oliver a sense of belonging, trust and mutual friendship which he had lacked his entire life. It seems that although living in shelters was hard, Oliver's story during such periods was structured by a progressive narrative.

He remembers turning 16 as the best time of his life as together with his mother and siblings they went to live in a place on their own. **Kien sabih, vera kien sabih. Kien naqra peaceful ghal naqra...ghal darba normali!** However, his father was still present in their lives as his mother kept contact with him throughout and once out of the shelter his mother eventually told his father where they were staying. This led to the beginning of multiple harassments. **Hu kien jaf fejn noqghodu, allura l-hin kollu jigi, dejjem bil-paroli u dejjem bil-pulizija.** The capacity of these stories highlights the structural pattern throughout.

There seems to be a story line that starts with a decline and once it takes a progressive turn from which it starts to ascend, it is immediately followed by another significant decline especially by his father's presence.

Family: "Jekk tista' tissejjah hekk"

Oliver's story centres around the family, a central topic through which all other stories take form. The family acts as a narrative resource which shapes the starting point of Oliver's story line. Through general social and cultural resources, family offers the idea of collectivity. However in Oliver's story it is the point from which everything shatters.

Deborah: Kif tiddeskrivi l-familja tieghek?

Oliver: Qas tista'!

Oliver's family seems to be represented as a body where all members share the DV experiences, yet at the same time everyone experiences the reality and consequences of DV separately within their own individuality. In fact, Oliver's story does not make particular references to having any strong connections with his siblings or parents. He even struggles to call it a family. **Ma tantx hija familja. Hija mkissra minn kull naha. As in xorta ghandi l-ahwa, u hemm l-omm u hemm il-missier imma mhux familja.** He sees his parents as very selfish. **Xtaqt li ommi u missieri jhobbuni hafna iktar minn hekk!**

The family story seems to be the basis that holds a general narrative of decline throughout. Following the positive event when he was living in a new home with his mother and siblings, his mother introduced him back into their lives. **L-iktar haġa li ghamlilna hsara terġa' tiġi? Terġa' thalliha?!** Once his father was living with them again, his sister was kicked out of the house leaving him frustrated and confused. **Ovvjament ohti m'ghadhiex toqghod id-dar...ghax kienet tkeċċiet.** This story made him question his

family's relational dynamics as he viewed his sister and mother as having a strong bond. The emotional heaviness with which he experienced this situation and the lack of understanding around it is reflected in the structure of the storytelling, as at this point the narration became fragmented. **Kien vera disrispett ghal ohti as in il-mummy u ohti kienu naqra iktar close...it-tnejn nisa...ma nafx kif hassitha ohti imma man, [ommi] ma setghetx taghmel aghar...wara dak kollu li ġara għażlet lilu minn fuqha. Kif jirnexxiela ommi tgħix kuljum u ma taħsibx fuq dan?**

Oliver's story serves the function of his rational self, whereby it gives him purpose to not allow connection and to hold a strong exterior that protects him from ever being betrayed again. His story embraces his inaccessible self through which he keeps everyone at a distance. This seems to reflect a certain level of fragility that is embedded beneath his solid exterior, which he uses to protect himself from his surrounding world by repressing his feelings. **Waqajt passiv.**

Making sense of his father's attitude: "Ir-rispett lejn missieri naqas"

His father's actions and the lack of responsibility towards the family particularly in refusing to work would leave Oliver feeling confused and angry. **Kienet kehra hux għax qed ngħixu fi straġi...imbagħad jixrob u iktar jagħmilha aghar imma kienet kehra.** These events would leave him feeling powerless and helpless. **Jien ma nista' nagħmel xejn u nixtieq nagħmel xi haga u hu li jista' jagħmel xi haga ma jrid jagħmel xejn.** What would anger him most is the fact that his father would not feel guilty.

Despite all that he has been through because of his father, at times during his story he opens about still not hating him. It was challenging to understand how he manages to control himself from such pain, as he recollected witnessing events that made him go down a destructive road during childhood. The same emotions are still present yet there is a constant

battle within him to eliminate them. **Sa ċertu punt jekk ma teliminahomx dak iż-żmien jiklukk.** The same experiences seem to have helped him as an adult to have a more socially acceptable conduct than that which he witnessed. It seems as if his adult behaviour is a by-product of all he has been through and this appears to represent an antithetical story to his life before reaching adulthood.

Adult relationships: “Jien il-ferita”

Oliver’s story seems to have worked on him by preventing him to live a happy connected life as he views himself as very individualistic. **Ikkumplikat il-kelma ghax jien sempliċi u kkumplikat...Imma naddatta hafna malajr, tant addattajt ghal affarijiet qisni virus spiċċajt.** (He explained how a virus continually adapts to changing circumstances). He believes that nothing can be taken away from him as he has lost all that he longed for and his story in adulthood continues to circulate his loneliness and avoidance. **Niprova ma nharisx lura. As in xorta hemm qieghed kuljum hux...imma jekk thares lura ma nahsibx li taghmel differenza u allura hela ta’ hin.**

The resources available to Oliver in making sense of his adult life are those around his self-control as it is the only thing that does not damage his identity and his relating self. His story has worked for him by giving him a sense of higher maturity at his age. **Mhux xi haga sabiha imma hija xi haga illi nhossni nifhem hafna iktar mill-ohrajn ghax nista’ nuża mohhi hafna iktar.**

As an adult, Oliver carries all the pain that his experiences of DV led him to. What appears to be an important theme is his conviction of his inability to connect and his need to control his emotions. They are both aspects that support his personal identity and relating self in adulthood as he strongly believes that the impact of what he has been through will continue to affect the rest of his life when it comes to relationships. **Qisek titkellem lingwa**

differenti...Ma nafda lil hadd. Although he would love to have a family, he knows he will suffer in the long term as he believes he will never be able to. **Ha tibqa' ghal dejjem.**

Oliver's voice seems to be implicitly made up of two voices contesting each other. There is a firm voice that holds strongly the storyteller's independence. However, behind it lies a voice that is being continuously shut down, which represents the storyteller's need to connect. Indeed, in his stories there is a constant distinction between the heart and mind to the extent that he does not let himself easily immerse in future plans that might shed a light of hope.

Oliver: 'Il quddiem kieku nixtieq familja...skond. Xi haga hekk vera toghgobni.

Deborah: Jigifieri ghalkemm ma tantx thalli lilek innifsek tahseb u tmur hemm bi hsibijietek, xorta hemm ix-xewqa li jkollok familja.

Oliver: Dik qalbi.

Deborah: Kemm thalliha tohrog f'hajtek?

Oliver: (dahka nervuza) Kemm ikun hemm bzonn. Skond xi tkun is-sitwazzjoni.

Oliver's story seems to be reflecting on a future where he appears to be cautious because as he said life can break it for you.

Isolation and power

Isolation and power also come through as dominant components throughout his story. Both have undergone transformation serving different functions from childhood to adulthood. Isolation has been present throughout his life, yet in adulthood it seems to have become more exacerbated due to his repressed emotionality which in turn has its negative impact on his life as he has shut down completely. **Qisu mar kollox lura, l-ewwel hareg imbaghda dahal.**

Even in the relationship he formed with a resident at the same shelter, he feels that the other resident will never understand him fully as his situation was not as bad as his. Oliver would not tell his story to anyone as he feels that he will never be understood. Thus, he feels that his story does not connect him to any type of audience. **Ġibhom ha nitkellem naqra magghom**, was his firm reply when I asked him whether he believes there are others who have been through the same experiences who could understand him. **Kulhadd jaghmel ma 'kulhadd', barra jien.**

Conversely, power took a different turn since as he reached adulthood he acquired more power with taking action and direction, giving him more authority, which he sees as having a positive impact in his life. It gives him autonomy and is also intertwined with his sense of control. While both power and isolation help him control himself from externalising his behaviour, they also seem to be hindering him from allowing himself to indulge emotionally in life. The power issues are also present in his stories that concern other family members, like that of his sister being kicked out of the house, **as in il-poter taghha [t'ommi] kien iktar.** Cultural dynamics also seem to be central around the topic of power as it appears that he has taken responsibility for a lot of things that happened out of his control, especially since he is the eldest male sibling. Moreover, the lack of ability to act as a young boy is being compensated for in adulthood. From this there seems to emerge the triangulation in the guilt of not having done anything.