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**Social Perceptions of Gender Violence in Corozal, Belize.
Public Responsibility or Private Matter?**

TESIS
Para obtener el grado de
**MAESTRA EN CIENCIAS SOCIALES APLICADAS A
LOS ESTUDIOS REGIONALES**

Presenta
Nancy Darleni Leiva Cansino

Directora de Tesis

MC. Natalia Armijo Canto

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COMITÉ DE TESIS

Directora:_____
MC. Natalia Armijo Canto

Sinodal:_____
Dr. Carlos Barrachina Lisón

Sinodal:_____
Dra. Eliana Cárdenas Méndez

Chetumal, Quintana Roo, México, Mayo de 2010.

Dedicated to:

This thesis investigation is dedicated to my mom, Amira Leiva, my aunt, Ciela Cansino and my sister, Diana Leiva. They have been inspirational women in my life and much of my formation, I owe to them.

I also dedicate this work to the Belizean women and men who have suffered or are suffering as a result of gender discrimination; this thesis is another study that can produce more solutions for the eradication of violence in the Belizean Society.

Just as the struggle and success of many has inspired me, my hope is that this work inspires others to excel.

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SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE IN COROZAL, BELIZE
PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY OR PRIVATE MATTER?

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION- STRONG BEGINNINGS

This thesis investigation, entitled "Social Perceptions of Gender Violence in Corozal, Belize. Public Responsibility or Private Matter?" presents information about gender violence at an international level and at the national level of the country of Belize, culminating in an analysis that describes social perceptions of certain women and men in the Corozal District about gender violence. The qualitative research that radiates around social perceptions of Belizean citizens in this investigation gives a potent voice to unrevealed thoughts, opinions and ideas of individuals from many contexts and walks of life. The knowledge and perception of these individuals with respect to the information, laws and institutional mechanisms about gender violence in Belize, uncover fundamental material for new solutions to this social issue.

Undoubtedly, quantitative and qualitative research, institutional mechanisms, preventative and awareness campaigns and the unmatched efforts of men and women throughout the country of Belize in relation to human rights issues such as gender violence have not gone unnoticed. Their hard work has opened the eyes of recent researchers to look closely at many issues that contribute to the inescapable demoralization of the Belizean society. Therefore, the technical characteristics of the investigation including its principal terminology, research methods, core objectives, underlying motives and general significance give a strong outline to the central structure of the thesis.

The three most essential concepts explored in this investigation are "violence", "gender" and "gender violence." To fully understand all of the factors innate to gender violence, it is necessary to analyze each concept individually in order to give an ample depiction of the problem in question.

Violence is a historical problem that manifests itself in a multitude of forms and social spaces. This major social problem has been at the forefront of many discussions. Many international organizations have

provided valuable information and research to the solution of problems that stem from violent acts. As a result, many governments have established public policies that attempt to treat and prevent all forms of violence. In terms of studies that concentrate on violence,

> Para la sociedad actual, el análisis de la violencia en cualquiera de sus definiciones es un imperativo, dada la complejidad que la caracteriza, su peso en la estructura y comportamiento del proceso de salud, de la enfermedad, de la atención, partiendo, desde luego, de que la violencia como producto de las complejas relaciones sociales y humanas es aprendida y, por tanto, puede ser reconstruida, ya que es enteramente evitable. [Fernández, 2006: 44]

However, because of the many ways in which violence manifests itself, there are many definitions of violence depending on its context. While it is considered a social problem, many fail to see that violence is indeed a public health issue. In many instances, it is reduced to criminal activity that violates human rights.

The premise of this investigation puts emphasis on violence as a public health issue, not only as one of human rights and certainly not as a private problem. Hence, every human being has the basic right to good health free from violence that should be guaranteed by government.

The gender perspective has also been a top priority in recent times. This perspective covers a wide array of issues that focus on the concept of gender as a relational category of analysis in many academic disciplines.

The study of violence from a gender perspective touches base with phenomena that affect all societies. Gender violence, a form of violence that, by its nature, affects everyone to a greater or lesser degree, has come to exist in large part by the social and cultural inequalities prevalent in the world. Essentially, "gender violence infringes the rights of individuals; it prevents their personal development and the achievement of their goals and expectations." [Fernández, 2006: 44] While gender violence occurs in many social spaces, for this

investigation, the study centralizes around gender violence that occurs in the domestic environment within heterosexual partners.

The passing of time has shown that many governments with the simultaneous support of international organizations have formulated mechanisms that are designed to reduce or eliminate all forms of gender violence in the world; further efforts and especially new solutions to social issues are always in high demand. Hence, the objectives and motives of this thesis are strongly geared toward the fight against social ills that severely affect the happiness and basic right of freedom and well being of women and men.

The objectives of this thesis have been completed through three comprehensive chapters, each concentrating on a certain set of objectives. Subsequently, these chapters are followed by a section entitled "General Conclusions- Linking the three chapters." This final section contains a theoretical analysis of the results of the investigation reconciling the findings with the hypotheses of the research.

The general objective of the investigation is to analyze whether certain men and women of Corozal, Belize perceive gender violence as a private matter or as a problem of public responsibility. Consequently, the primary guide question of the investigation is: What are the perceptions of women and men of Corozal in relation to the phenomenon of gender violence?

Because the information about gender violence is extensive, the particular objectives of the investigation are divided amongst the three chapters to provide an organized and efficient analysis.
The focus of the first chapter is to:

1. Analyze documented data about gender violence at an international level
2. Describe working definitions for the vital theoretical concepts of the investigation including violence, gender and gender violence

The focus of the second chapter is to:

3. Describe relevant historical and contemporary data on the attention given to gender violence by the Belizean Society at an international and national level

4. Identify and describe the governmental institutions and civil society organizations that specialize in issues of gender violence in Belize

5. Provide demographic and statistical data in relation to gender violence in the country of Belize and the district of Corozal

The focus of the third chapter is to:

6. Describe the professional perspective of personnel that are employed in the main institutions of Belize that deal with gender violence

7. Describe and analyze the perception and knowledge of women and men in Corozal in relation to:

a. the definition of gender violence

b. causes, effects and other factors of gender violence

c. laws, Institutions and the information disseminated by these institutions about gender violence

d. experience in reporting gender violence; how they relate gender violence with gender roles

e. how they relate gender violence to age, civil status, socioeconomic status, ethnic group and level of education

f. gender violence as a private matter or a problem of public responsibility

In concordance with the objectives, this investigation is based on the sound application of qualitative research methods that are common and invaluable to the study of any social issue. While the first and second chapters rely heavily on documented data sources, the third chapter provides an investigation that actively utilizes the theoretical components of the thesis to gather data through qualitative methodology in the form of semi structured interviews. As is pertinent to

qualitative investigations, the research maintains a strict adherence to the regulations and expectations of qualitative analysis.

The objectives as well as all of the other vital parts of this research have been shaped through the academic and personal motives that justify the thesis.

The academic motive for this study is to discover new information that can be an additional stepping stone to the reduction of gender violence in Belize. Contributions of knowledge to what is already known about gender violence can help generate new ways of preventing and treating this social problem. This study concentrates on social perceptions of this problem; a new perspective is analyzed that goes beyond the legally reported cases since it is understood that there is a large number of cases that go unreported and unnoticed because of reasons and obstacles that prevent reporting such as social and cultural expectations, lack of information, fear, shame, loyalty to the partner and the fear of losing economic support just to name a few.

Apart from contributing a rich and valid qualitative document that addresses gender violence in Belize, this thesis also adds to the growth of the social sciences. The research respects the principles and ethics of this concrete academic discipline. Many investigations radiate around the social sciences in an attempt to analyze and understand real issues. Ultimately, these studies are directed toward constructing solid responses to problems that prevent the fruitful development of many societies.

This study is intended to be an informative and developmental tool about gender violence for the Caribbean and Central American Region. Researchers from other parts of the world have managed to expand the knowledge base of different factors in their societies by the great works they have created. The Central American and Caribbean region cannot afford to stay behind. Hence, this qualitative research embraces the ability to study society in order to not only highlight the weaknesses in the social structure of this region but also to suggest ways in which these weaknesses can be reduced.

On a more subjective note, the personal motives of the investigation stem from a profound need to contribute in a humble but very insightful way to the national and human development of Belize. Because I am a citizen of Corozal, I feel that it is my civic right and responsibility as a young woman, to have a profound understanding of the factors and implications of gender violence and its negative impact on my society. Because I am tired of hearing through the media that many women are being killed by their partners because of domestic violence, because I am tired of the fear that someone I know or that even I may fall victim of gender violence, because I want to live in an environment where I can have the respect I deserve as a human being, my personal motives for this investigation focus on the hope for a societal change that convinces the people that gender violence is ultimately a matter of public responsibility rather than a private matter.

Belizeans need to be more active in the fight against this social phenomenon; actively involved means being informed and willing to help fellow Belizeans who suffer gender violence in their home but find it very difficult to leave the relationship for many reasons. Gender Violence has collective repercussions and it should not be tolerated. In light of this, gender violence is, "a form of violence that is socially recognized and inserted in daily practices and habits. It is not an isolated act as seen from social contexts." [Fernández, 2006: 41] A collective cultural conscience has to be fostered in order for gender violence to be eradicated from society. With a clear idea of what aspects and factors need to be considered when dealing with these issues, society increases its possibilities of weakening the stereotypes, myths and forms of discrimination against gender that have been perpetuated in past generations resulting in a frightening and exhausting manifestation of inequality. In an attempt to foster a strong mentality toward the elimination of gender violence in Belize, this investigation provides basic information for any individual interested in acquiring more knowledge

about gender violence in order to help themselves or help others to end violence in their relationships.

This investigation that determines clear connections between gender violence and social perceptions is a rich source of ideas to develop new studies that can reveal interesting and valuable information for the elimination of these violence acts. It is one more step in the fight against gender violence in the world and more than anything it is a significant source of awareness for the Central American and Caribbean region of this phenomenon as a problem of great proportions.

Moreover, the findings of the investigation emphasize that family upbringing, socialization and schooling are crucial areas that either prevent or foster gender violence in homes and communities. Previous studies have furthered the cause of gender equality, and this study caters especially to the people of Corozal and the wider region of Belize in that it is another building block by which the goals of equality may be achieved in this part of the world.

Great effort has been invested in the completion of this thesis. The researcher hopes that readers appreciate its strength as a social investigation. Apart from the fact that this investigation plays a great academic role in the development of the Social Sciences, the researcher has faith that the information provided in the entirety of this thesis will be an inspiration for other Belizeans to take up the challenge of carrying out new studies that formulate solutions to the social issues that affect not only the people of Belize but humanity on a whole.

CHAPTER I - DEFINING VITAL CONCEPTS

Introductory Notes

This chapter is dedicated to establishing definitions for the concepts: violence, gender and gender violence. In essence, the concepts need to be clearly explained in order for their application to be precise. Moreover, the Private and Public Dichotomy is viewed with a focus on gender relations and gender violence in order to establish the deep connections with the vital concepts of the research and all social spaces.

The concept of violence is discussed as a world problem of public health. Violence has been a dismal yet predominant phenomenon in all societies and due to its multidimensional nature, it is important to highlight the form of violence that fits best within the context of this study.

This chapter is divided into four sections: "Violence- An attempt at understanding this multi-dimensional problem" (1.1), "The Gender Perspective" (1.2), "Gender Violence" (1.3) and Gender Violence and the Private and Public Dichotomy (1.4). Each section of this chapter categorizes similar information so that the concepts of the investigation are explained thoroughly.

In the first section of the chapter, different ideas are recollected in reference to how violence has been recognized as a social reality. The concept of violence is defined with an emphasis on its negative nature and impact through the eyes of Phillipe Bourgois, a contemporary scholar in the area of violence. Furthermore, it is analyzed through the public health approach. Essentially, the section is divided into "Defining the phenomenon of Violence", "Violent acts- types and social contexts" and "Violence as seen from the Public Health Approach".

The gender perspective is analyzed in three parts: "Historical Context", "Defining Gender" and "Gender and Socialization." Evidently, the information regarding this concept is very broad so it is important to categorize this information into these sections for clarity and precision.

In the "Historical Context", the evolution of the focus on the gender perspective as a topic of interest at an international level is discussed. Although, the concept of gender is relatively new, its history and development are theoretically rich and dynamic. The initial studies about this perspective were regarded as descriptive investigations. However, the gender perspective has claimed a serious position as a very important relational category of analysis that is applicable to various disciplines and contexts. Its insertion and use in the political, economic and social spheres has demonstrated that the gender perspective affects everything and everyone and requires special attention.

In "Defining Gender", the concepts of gender, sex and gender roles are defined through reference to authors and specialists of gender studies and the like. What is more is that concept of gender is not isolated from the broader area of gender relations which is also emphasized in this section. While the concepts within the gender studies are analyzed in isolation at times, it is necessary to highlight that the gender perspective invokes a social reality of both women and men, as both genders share a social, political, religious, economic and historical reality.

In "Gender and Socialization", a clear link is defined between how gender roles are learned through upbringing, socialization and education. At one point in time the assimilation of gender values and behaviour was thought to be through genetic inheritance but further studies showed that culture and society shape how people behave and think. These and similar ideas are discussed here.

In the last section of this chapter, the concept of gender and violence are united, giving way to gender violence in which violence is viewed through a perspective of gender. Throughout this section, gender violence is considered a problem of public health and the international contributions are highlighted for their incredible impact on the world and on the studies of gender, women, violence and related

issues. This phenomenon has been nurtured by the historical gender and power relations that many human conflicts have been based on as a result of inequality and discrimination, primarily toward the female gender.

The concept of gender violence is defined and the focus is centered on "Gender Violence in the Domestic Environment". Gender violence can manifest itself in many forms and contexts that require exhaustive analysis. Since this investigation concentrates on gender violence in the family and specifically between adult heterosexual partners, it is important to clarify from the beginning that the study is limited around this focal point. The forms of gender violence in the domestic environment are defined including physical, sexual, psychological/emotional and economic gender violence.

The causes and the impact of gender violence are explained. The main causes of domestic violence are categorized into three sections; namely, "Inequalities in the relations of power", "History of family violence and other individual factors" and "Situational factors." Although other factors contribute to gender violence, most of these are mentioned under these categories.

On the other hand, the impact of gender violence in the domestic environment is categorized into: "Reproduction of inequalities between partners" and "Damaging Effects on the health of individuals."

The chapter concludes with a discussion of Gender Violence and the Private and Public Dichotomy in the last section. In the first part of the last section, the discussion of the social evolution of the differences in private and public life are explained. In essence, this final section draws one's attention on how gender violence has become a reality as a result of the historical divisions of society. The situation of social divisions in the patriarchal societies is emphasized here; the type of society characterizes the social context of the research as well as links gender inequality and discrimination with the social ruptures as direct ramifications of the private and public dichotomy.

1.1 VIOLENCE- AN ATTEMPT AT UNDERSTANDING THIS MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PROBLEM

Defining the phenomenon of violence

The phenomenon of violence has always existed in the world in many contexts, forms and intensities. This multifaceted phenomenon has been described, defined and studied in many ways and according to many different purposes. As a result, its definitions vary. However, what remains constant is that this phenomenon has a negative impact on individuals, families, communities and society in general. At one point in time, it was considered as a "natural" part of life but with the rise in awareness of high incidence of violent acts during the twentieth century, violence has come to be known as an issue of public health that needs to be prevented and treated by the medical, justice and other social service authorities in different countries.

The presence of violence in its many forms unleashes like a terrible epidemic, diminishing the possibilities of happiness and peace in the world. According to the "World Report on Violence and Health" published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002,

> Each year, more than 1.6 million people worldwide lose their lives to violence…For everyone who dies as a result of violence, many more are injured and suffer from a range of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health problems. [Krug et al, 2002: 3]

Violence infects communities across the globe causing a chain reaction of hate and pain that eliminates the smallest shred of tranquility. Like Guiseppe Amara (1998: 11) says, it is evident from the repercussions that can be caused, that violence "is the dark side of humanity."

Historically, violence has been studied, interpreted and described in various ways according to a wide array of biologists, psychologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, politicians, economists, physicians and many other experts from related disciplines. Although many individuals have witnessed or experienced violence, "each generation

has a different experience with assimilating its origin, enigma and fatality." [Amara, 1998: 11]

There is no time period that can define when violent acts began; this phenomenon has always been a part of the human condition. Nonetheless, each society and generation has a distinct experience with violence and as a result tackles the phenomenon in different ways. How each individual interprets violence depends on her or his relation with it. The distribution, intensity and frequency of violent acts are interpreted in many ways depending on their context and time period. However, what is clear according to Amara (1998: 13) is that the manifestation of violence affects everyone because when they least expect it, "the authentic contact with violence is produced by the act of exercising or suffering it."

Through several studies, many individuals conclude that violence has many faces. Whilst the theoretical material about violence is acknowledged in abundance, its practical reality is actually endured by many others. The "multi-faced" aspect of violence stems from its historical, cultural, political and social interpretation and reproduction making it the fuel for social inequality.

Within the context of this study, the type of violence that is focused on is that of daily or habitual violence, defined as "daily practices and expressions of violence at the micro-interaction level: which can be interpersonal, domestic or delinquent." [Bourgois, 2005: 14] In other words, this is a basic form of violence that starts in small spaces focusing on individually lived experiences that create a "common" way of living that normalizes over a period of time. Violence exerted on the street, in the home, in the classroom and against oneself begins to affect one person and then covers collective victims forming what Bourgois refers to as a "culture of terror." [Bourgois, 2005: 13]

While some may view violence as an inevitable part of life, others attempt to find ways of preventing violent acts. The interpretation that different social departments have toward violence and its

multidimensional nature makes it difficult to come up with an internationally accepted definition of this phenomenon. However, with the research carried out by individuals in the health, judicial, religious and human rights institutions world wide along with other individuals of various disciplines and backgrounds, the phenomenon of violence is given more substance as it relates to people and social structures.

The World Health Organization has carried out many investigations in reference to violence and its related issues and has formulated a working definition for violence that states that it is

> The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. [Krug et al, 2002: 5]

This definition highlights who is affected, how they are affected and in what context people are affected by violence. Violence occurs everywhere such as is the case of domestic violence and harassment in the workplace (that take place in intimate situations of the family and business establishments) which hinders individuals at a micro interaction level. Violent acts such as wars, acts of terrorism, homicide and other physical or emotional attacks against groups of people for different reasons are witnessed through the many known means of communication like the internet, television and radio waves. These are also lived experiences by people in large amounts at a time. Notwithstanding, any form of violence is a public or social concern.

Another strong point of the definition is that violence does not only result in physical injury but the psychological health of individuals can also be severely damaged. Therefore, the faces of violence are diverse and so is its impact.

A key term that stands out in the definition of violence is that of "power". Based on many interdisciplinary studies, experts reveal that there is a clear link between power and violence. The tactics that have been used by authority figures in different societies around the globe

have sometimes been defined on violent terms with negative influence in order to maintain control and power over the masses. The act of having control or power by an individual or group over another individual or group implies that violence may be used to have command over others. The concept of power gets a negative connotation when individuals are forcefully submitted through bodily and mental harm to do what others want them to do or not to do.

By considering all of the factors inherent in the phenomenon of violence, one can conclude that the nature of this world problem is complicated as well as rampant. In light of this, the following section classifies some of the categories by which violent acts are classified. This task helps in identifying and touching base with the form of violence that is studied herein.

Violent Acts- Types and Social Contexts

From daily or habitual violence all other forms of violence are founded. This is so because what is learnt by humans in the basic circles of life contributes to the general make up of society. The complex types or forms of violence can be expounded through a comparison of the types highlighted by Philippe Bourgois and the World Health Organization.

In order to understand the interrelated network of violence, it is vital to bring to light the view of Phillipe Bourgois on the multidimensional nature of the concept. Bourgois classifies four major types of violence; namely they are: political, structural, symbolic and daily or habitual violence. These forms of violence sustain each other in any society.

On the other hand, the WHO typifies violence in three main categories including self-directed, interpersonal and collective violence. These types of violence distinguish the phenomenon in terms of "violence a person inflicts upon herself or himself, violence inflicted by another individual or by a small group of individuals and violence inflicted by larger groups." [Krug et al, 2002: 6]

Based on Bourgois' perspective, **Political violence** is the type that is exerted by authority figures over individuals or groups of people through military force. In many cases, political violence abuses the individual rights of freedom of expression as well as the right to freedom from all forms of discrimination; it is exerted for various reasons with a basis on political affiliations and movements. Undoubtedly, violence brought about by corrupt officials comes with powerful force and affects the masses arbitrarily. Bourgois points out that examples of this form of violence can be

> La represión física de la disidencia, a manos del ejército o la policía, así como su opuesto, la lucha armada popular en contra de un régimen represivo. [Bourgois, 2005: 12]

Similarly, **Collective violence**, as posed by the WHO, occurs for social, political or economic reasons toward large groups of people for the personal interest of some individuals. These individuals usually belong to groups with corrupted agendas for their personal gain and are willing to go through great lengths to maintain control over societies through violence even if it means brutalizing, torturing and killing large sums of people.

Much like political and collective violence, **Structural violence** affects many people at a time. However, structural violence has historical roots embedded in the economic systems of production as well as the social stratifications that have resulted through the oppressive forces of colonialism and slavery. This form of violence has been so historically engraved in the social structures of society imposing sufferance that is not only physical but emotional also.

Bourgois explains that some manifestations of structural violence include "commercial contracts or agreements for international economic exploitation; harsh and abusive working conditions and high infant mortality rate." [Bourgois, 2005: 14] Undeniably, structural violence can be seen in many forms of discrimination, inequality and exploitation

that are inherent in the patriarchal systems that continue to govern authoritative sectors of society.

While these forms of violence alone are quite destructive, Bourgois distinguishes yet another form of violence known as **Symbolic violence**. This form of violence was first brought to light by the investigations of Pierre Bourdieu in his studies of violence and society. This violence is obviously a result of the collective experience shared by many societies in reference to political and structural violence. While these forms are exercised by authority figures, symbolic violence is internalized by the victims of said types in such a way that the victims eventually tolerate the behaviors that they first reject. In other words, whilst the victims of collective, structural or political violence may be opposed to these brutalities, they ultimately reach a stage where they unconsciously justify and accept the violence.

While this may seem absurd at first, it is plain to see that symbolic violence is deeply rooted in social problems such as racism, sexism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Various individuals have reacted to the presence of violence by simply imitating it either consciously or unconsciously. Take for example, the case of the colonizer versus the colonized. The colonizer has the dominating capacity to take control over an individual for a given amount of reasons that have to do with status, race and gender; instead of revolting, many individuals accept their apparent "inferior" position. Hence, the colonized legitimize the action of the colonizers and maintain this cycle because of their willing submission. Later on, the colonized find that in order for them to raise themselves from the inferior position they have helped to maintain, they must feel superior by imitating the very same forms of violence that were imposed on them.

Undeniably, symbolic violence plays a role in shaping the mentality of the present societies into upholding violence that has been historically passed on from generation to generation. Because so many social problems that have to do with gender inequalities have been

reproduced through internalized symbolic violence, it is very clear that past and present generations repeat behaviors that have been socialized as being natural everyday occurrences. Therefore, the social relationships between men and women have developed certain gender characteristics that are a result of assimilated and accepted symbolic violence.

Once violence has been culturally or symbolically tolerated or accepted as a daily part of life, the context of the phenomenon is expanded to the basic spaces of society. In collective, political and structural violence, many people are victims of violence at once whether it is as a result of wars, genocide or other violent situations.

On the other hand, there are other forms of violence that are lived continuously in the domestic environment or in particular communities. Regardless of how many people these forms victimize at a time, all forms of violence are carried out to maintain control or power over individuals.

In the case of **Interpersonal** and **Daily or Habitual Violence** described by the WHO and Bourgois respectively, these are the violent acts that seem to propel mass violent acts.

Interpersonal violence is characterized as community violence and family or intimate partner violence. In the case of community violence, this type is exerted upon communities where people may or may not be related to each other and it occurs outside the home environment. This can be violence that takes place in the workplace and other public places that can be characterized as sexual harassment, rape, hate crimes and other felonies punishable by law.

On the other hand, family or intimate partner violence generally occurs but is not restricted to the domestic environment. In this case, violence is exerted upon a member of the family whether it is between the spouses or partners, parents against children, children against parents and other interactions between other family members.

The form of violence that best fits the category being investigated in this thesis stems from that of daily, habitual, family or intimate violence

in the domestic environment. Essentially, these forms concentrate on individually lived experiences that normalize the many violent manifestations creating a common culture of violence. Notwithstanding, all the other forms of violence discussed are interlaced with domestic violence; in particular, symbolic violence is very instrumental in the prevalence of gender violence. The disparities between women and men through out the evolution of time have characterized masculine and feminine behavior on a continuum of a constant power struggle. As a result, to talk about gender relations implies a discussion of power relations that have been identified and analyzed through the malignant symbolic violence in the world.

Finally the last form of violence is **Self-directed violence** described as the physical harm caused by an individual on his or her own body. Evidently, this form involves psychological, emotional and sexual factors that push individuals to deliberately hurt themselves. Individuals are said to engage in self-directed violence when they abuse their body through mutilation or when they attempt suicide in one or more occasions.

Through the categorization of the forms and contexts of violence, an appreciation for the complex system of ideas that radiate around this phenomenon is established.

Violence as seen from the Public Health Approach

The complexity of the phenomenon of violence has given rise to a series of disciplines employed for its analysis. In this particular case, violence is discussed through the public health approach. Many studies have demonstrated that violence is a problem of public health. While many institutions such as the police force, justice system and other social services deal with the control and treatment of violent acts, it is urgent to create strategies that can prevent violence. The public health approach is effective in prevention and treatment of violence because its strategies and programs are not only rigorous but they can benefit

people in large numbers. This approach is geared toward collective impact since

> by definition, public health is not about individual patients. Its focus is on dealing with diseases and with conditions and problems affecting health and it aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest sum of people. This does not mean that public health ignores the care of individuals. Rather, the concern is to prevent health problems and to extend better care and safety to entire populations. [Krug et al, 2002: 3]

The Public Health Sector views any act of violence as a serious threat to the physical, psychological, economic and sexual health of communities. While many programs are established to treat people who are affected, these programs are also designed to prevent violent acts from occurring. Although many claim that violent acts are inevitable, the public health approach has produced evidence showing that acts of violence can be prevented through action of the public health sector in conjunction with the activities, objectives and programs of international, regional and national non governmental institutions.

Based on the WHO study,

> the public health approach to any problem is interdisciplinary and science based. It draws upon knowledge from many disciplines, including medicine, epidemiology, sociology, psychology, criminology, education and economics. [Krug et al, 2002: 3]

Because of the multidisciplinary aspect of the public health approach, its implementation is very reliable in the prevention and treatment of violence. This approach involves all sectors of society each with vital and specific roles in a united front to combat violence in society.

The structure of the public health approach in the fight against violence is well organized, well researched and "it is based on the rigorous requirements of the scientific method." [Krug et al, 2002: 4] There are four steps that are followed in any problem based on this discipline.

The first of these comprises exhaustive research including statistical and documented data about the problem in order to have a full

understanding of its significance and characteristics. The second step includes research to define the causes and effects of the problem and other factors that are related with its manifestation. After all the research is collected, the third step is concerned with developing ways of preventing the problem through the design of programs. Finally, the fourth step involves the implementation and evaluation of the programs to determine its effectiveness and cost.

This approach has shed light on the fact that instead of just accepting or reacting to acts of violence, these acts need to be prohibited so that the vicious cycle of violence is put to an end. The many factors and contexts involved in acts of violence make it a complicated and delicate phenomenon to analyze. However, the public health approach highlights that violence is everyone's problem and that individuals, families and communities need to work in conjunction so that "violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented." [Krug et al, 2002: 5]

1.2 THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Historical Context

In order to fully absorb the concept of gender and its social significance, one must reflect on the historical aspect that highlights the interest of many into the inner workings of this concept. Although the main purpose of this work is not to give a detailed chronological account of the studies about gender, it is very pertinent to explain how the gender perspective has claimed serious interest in all areas of academic study. Gender based studies were once considered merely descriptive and unimportant to the more serious sciences but the evolution of the gender perspective proves that the issues that radiate around this viewpoint have influenced the way people of all societies think, act and essentially live.

The concept of gender has gained an incredible and much deserved amount of analysis in recent years. The reason for this interest is probably for the obvious fact that questions, situations and conflicts concerning the concept of gender along with other terms that coincide with its significance such as sex, gender roles, femininity and masculinity exist in all facets of life. Nowadays it is pertinent to approach situations that are gender related with utmost care and value because the relations between men and women are of paramount significance for the development and improvement of societies.

Before the endless bibliography that has been developed in recent times in reference to the gender perspective and any related topic of this nature, the sexual differences and by extension the behaviour and attributes of men and women were explained through biological and economic reasons. In years to come these reasons would be questioned; but for those generations that existed in the years before the social movements that put weight on human rights and the need to end discrimination, violence and inequality against gender, class, age and race, these biological and economic reasons for the sexual differences between men and women were accepted as the norm.

Famous social thinkers of the earlier parts of the nineteenth century and even before that (predominantly male) justified the natural and acceptable roles of men and women using biological, economic and religious explanations. The ideas fostered in these beliefs caused the great divide between men and women; while men were qualified as the gender responsible for public activities, the women were restricted to the private spheres. Hence, the men had access to the powerful political and economic spaces where the major decision making processes and public interest issues were discussed and established. The women on the other hand, were regarded as the housewives whose main responsibilities were limited to matters of the home and the upbringing of the children.

One of the social thinkers that upheld these ideas was Talcott Parsons who firmly believed that the harmony between family and marriage rested in the complimentary and normal responsibilities of men and women since his ideas stated that

> the capacity of the man for instrumental work (public, productive or managerial) was complemented with the ability of the woman to manage the expressive aspects of family life and the upbringing of children. [Conway et al, 1996: 22]

The repercussion that this mentality inflicted was highly regarded; it became an unquestioned idea. As a result, men and women in all societies seemed to foster the notion that men are the ones that should take part in the public sphere while women should be the key players in the private spaces. It was easy to reinforce these ideas because the authority figures in the political, economic, social and religious institutions were always men. Consequently, women and men were attributed qualities as is stated in the following excerpt

> Las mujeres y las características asociadas a la feminidad son irracionales, emocionales, dependientes y privadas, y más cercanas a la naturaleza que a la cultura; mientras que los atributos masculinos se presentan como racionales, científicos, independientes, públicos y cultivados. Las mujeres, según suele afirmarse, se hallan a merced del cuerpo y las emociones; los hombres, en cambio, representan la superación de esos aspectos básicos; ellos son a la mente lo que las mujeres al cuerpo. [McDowell, 2000: 26]

Once this biological explanation for sexual differences, attitudes and behaviours of men and women was propagated and inculcated in society, it became effortless to reproduce these views in the powerful systems by which societies are governed and controlled. Undeniably, these systems, because of their widespread influence, had all the capacity to mold the perception and ideas of how men and women should behave as is stated that

> La producción de formas culturalmente apropiadas respecto al comportamiento de los hombres y las mujeres es una función central de la autoridad social y está mediada por la compleja interacción de un amplio espectro de instituciones económicas, sociales, políticas y religiosas. [Conway et al, 1996: 23]

All attributes of women according to these views defined them as the weaker humans and because of their anatomy and ability to have children they were immediately branded as the ones responsible for the care of the children. This maternal capability has been a major and overused point in arguments by individuals that defend the secondary position of women stating that if women can have children then their obligation is to tend to them. The patriarchal systems that have always controlled the means of production, public and religious institutions and mass media have disseminated the idea that women are subordinate to men.

What appeared to be the natural and complex order and interactions of life was soon to be questioned by women across the world that refused to be subjected to the private circles only. These women began to gain fame primarily in the western world and later in other regions based on various literary works, studies and other forms of prose that questioned the position of women in the world.

Women like Margaret Mead were the first ones on the scene to carry out studies that impelled the questioning nature of gender and gender roles. In 1935, Mead, carried out an interesting study based on the conduct and temperament of women in New Guinea and concluded that feminine behaviour is a result of "cultural creations and that human nature is incredibly malleable." [Lamas, 1996: 99] This study was only one of the many studies that began to notice the sexual differences and divisions between men and women and the androcentric mentality that pervaded the social systems of power and dominance.

It is inevitable to make reference to one of the most essential movements that attracted a great deal of attention on the significance of gender and how it applies to the public and private arena. Feminism, a social and political movement of the seventies pioneered by women, demanded that the world recognize all women as free individuals that

deserve respect and equal rights to participate socio-politically without being submitted to men. Although many women were indulging in studies that questioned the roles of women and men in different contexts, these studies were not given their credit until the formation of societal movements that focused on these issues. As Lamas states

> La mayoría de las mujeres que conformaban este movimiento social, a diferencia de sus antecesores de principios del siglo, tenían un bagaje ideológico y una militancia política que les permitió un análisis más radical. Estas nuevas feministas, al reflexionar sobre el origen de la opresión femenina, analizaban la relación entre el capitalismo y la dominación patriarcal, descartando la supuesta 'naturalidad' de ciertos aspectos de la subordinación de las mujeres. [Lamas, 1996:103]

Feminism means many things to many people in different contexts and time periods; in general this movement was forged by women who demonstrated that they were tired of the discrimination that they experienced for the simple biological fact of being women. Evidently, the ideas, theories and changes that were propelled by the feminist movement were only the beginning of a process that continues to gain potency as the perspective of gender becomes more and more involved in investigations of social sciences.

Many feminists, women who were the spearheads of this social movement, explained that one of the main purposes of feminism was to produce serious theoretical studies that would ultimately change the principal mentality that societies had toward the position of women in the world. In 1976, a French sociologist and feminist, Evelyne Sullerot, with the help of two Nobel Prize winners of Medicine, Jacques Monod and later André Lwoff, carried out a study of the "feminine essence" from a biological, psychological and sociological perspective concluding that,

> Es perfectamente plausible que existan diferencias sexuales de comportamiento asociado con un programa genético de diferenciación sexual, estas diferencias son mínimas y no implican superioridad de un sexo sobre otro. Se debe aceptar el origen biológico de algunas diferencias entre hombres y mujeres, sin perder de vista que la predisposición biológica no es suficiente por sí misma para provocar un comportamiento. No hay comportamientos o

characteristicas de personalidad exclusivas de un sexo. [Lamas, 1996:107]

Sociologists, anthropologists, historians and psychologists just to name a few have produced an astounding bibliographical contribution to gender studies and it is clear that feminist prose in relation to these sciences has shown that "studies about women would not only illuminate new issues, but would also forge a critical reconsideration of the norms and ideas of the present academic discipline." [Scott, 1996: 267] Therefore, while there were many issues that were questioned with regards to the position of women, the feminist movement recollected the diversity of ideas and added theoretical sustenance to the feminist views. Amongst the many motives for this movement, the central ones were to recuperate the history that women were denied as well as to question and highlight the subservient position of women.

While the feminist movement shed light on very important aspects of human nature that had gone unnoticed for far too long, the numerous studies that had been created in relation to gender studies and women's studies were in danger of falling into a descriptive discipline that would reduce the gender perspective to studies and investigations that merely describe the situation of women without putting emphasis on the need to change the social order of the world that maintained control and power over the social structures from the family to the community.

The initial studies about gender depicted various contexts and situations that women were faced with and soon feminism was reduced to ideas and thoughts that defined women, their roles and what was unjust about the different scenarios. Ultimately, gender studies and the like were not given serious consideration but as the years passed this mentality started to take another form.

Feminist prose of all types, levels and audiences attacked feminine subordination through investigations, case studies and literary works; a predominant role of this type of discourse was to reclaim the lost history

of women. This meant that there needed to be a complete revamping of all the historical data told through masculine eyes. Clearly, because this was virtually impossible, many feminist writers created works that told the history and life of women. The greatest authors, writers, screenplay writers and artists of Europe, North America, Central America, the Caribbean, India and Africa amongst others have produced great works that have influenced and continue to influence both developed countries and those that are in development processes. However, these types of works although very emotive, were lacking theoretical and practical substance.

With the passing of time, the gender perspective found new spaces in the more serious academic disciplines. From drama, literature and the like, new studies began to develop in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and later in political science and economics. Mere descriptive studies were converted into studies that "substantially modified and enriched the many theoretical works and anthropological information available." [Lamas, 1996:104] In each of these disciplines, experts in the fields developed studies and academic works that focused on defining the terms inherent in the concept of gender, determining whether the concept of "gender" was a biological or cultural aspect and eventually questioning the invisibility of women in public positions of influence and power.

Anthropological research proves to be one of the most heavily concentrated disciplines of gender studies that give the gender perspective credibility and strength in the academic field. Gender studies began to take on a more refined position in the scholastic world and more far-reaching emphasis was placed in this area.

In particular, the area of feminist anthropology gave more shape to the gender perspective by defining the term in reference to men and women. While the initial definitions of the concept focused on the position of women, other contemporary definitions highlight that although gender studies started with a focus on women, these studies

involve both genders with equal significance. Under this new form of anthropology, new concepts, categories and analytical tools and strategies were developed in line with sexual roles, gender roles and gender relations in different societies. Moreover, "the gender perspectiva has demonstrated evidence of the absence of women not only in various social and political spaces but also in theory." [Tarrés, 1998: 14]

The term "gender" came to be known not just as a differential title in the grammatical sense but it gained a social and cultural interpretation of a biological aspect. This biological aspect was narrowed down to sexual differences and how this human quality distinguishes the social expectations of women and men. Many anthropological studies with an emphasis on the gender perspective attempt to as Tarrés explains (1998: 14), "offer possibilities for the transformation of power relations between men and women; it also propels a firm obligation to review the intellectual tradition that identifies the human experience through a masculine perspective."

It is in recent years that the concept of gender is gaining integrity as a relational category of analysis. Gender based investigations have increased so much since the feminist movement and the contributions and activities of the international organizations, that the world has realized the distinct relation between gender, identity and power.

Hence, the gender perspective that was developed as a result of a struggle of women has gained popularity as a phenomenon of both genders. Investigations that rely on the gender perspective have the potential to relate this category with social aspects such as violence, discrimination, inequality, political participation, economic development and human development. In other words, this approach to research has revealed a significant, invisible but very potent barrier that has been preventing the participation of women causing them to be considered the weaker members of society.

The consideration of the gender perspective in these areas is inevitable because this vision explains many of the conflicts and divisions manifested in society that have caused an undying rupture between men and women. Moreover, the social and cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity in all societies have influenced the acquisition of identity for both genders. It is very true as Lamas (2000: 16) signals that, "women have been reduced to private spaces, as if that was our natural space-the 'decent' space for women."

Feminism and similar theories set the pace for the need to inspire equilibrium between women and men rooted in respect and appreciation for one another. Feminist writers like Martinez (2000: 53) would agree that,

> El feminismo es un movimiento que plantea la resistencia a la invisibilidad y al silencio; es el reconocimiento de la resistencia ante relaciones de poder emanadas de asunciones culturales y que forma parte de otras resistencias contra la injusticia global. El feminismo reconoce las disparidades de género como la existencia de poderes universales no naturales, como un proceso estructural que afecta a hombres y mujeres, proceso que puede ser reconstruido mediante la construcción de la conciencia y el cambio social.

Regrettably, this equilibrium has not been attained and women still find themselves in situations where they suffer discrimination in the public and private circles. Men as well find themselves in difficult situations in which their identity is questioned and not willingly accepted based on social and cultural expectations.

As long as patriarchal and androcentric mentalities are tolerated and propagated, the change that is required for radical transformation of society becomes very difficult. The patriarchal system has transcended the tests of time, and as a result great conflicts still remain ingrained in society between the relations of men and women. These conflicts have nurtured a series of social phenomena that highlight inequality in social and private spheres. This one sided power has given

rise to blatant male domination over women- domination that over time has become a seemingly natural part of any patriarchal society.

Thanks to the multitude that have made it their responsibility to study and analyze gender relations, negative characteristics of inequality and discrimination are being investigated and brought to the public eye so that individuals can see how these factors have adversely marked today's societies. International organizations that specialize in human rights, feminist groups and other non-governmental as well as governmental associations across the globe have placed gender related issues as a top priority on their list of objectives. Essentially, these organizations show that, to the world's disadvantage,

> La diferencia biológica,...., se interpreta culturalmente como una diferencia sustantiva que marca el destino de las personas con una moral diferenciada y es el problema político que subyace a toda la discusión académica sobre las diferencias entre hombres y mujeres. These social institutions have demonstrated through their interests and actions that gender related conflicts are a serious obstacle to equality and development in all societies. [Lamas, 1996: 102]

Amidst the misconception that men and women are defined by a battle of power and control, these social groups are propagating the notion that instead of being at war with each other, men and women need to unite and stand on equal ground in order for life to improve. Women and men need to be recognized based on their potential to succeed as human beings, regardless of their sexual anatomy, so that they have equal opportunity to participate both in private and public positions.

Defining Gender[1]

As has been mentioned before, gender studies, also known as gender based studies, have increased drastically in recent years because of the manifestation of gender conflicts. While gender related issues vary considerably in form, type and context, the terms gender, sex and gender roles remain constant in these issues. Also, scholars are constantly highlighting that gender studies should involve well rounded studies of both genders in terms of gender relations. Gender based studies confront a long winded and complicated history of inequality and injustice between the sexes that have led to an ongoing battle world wide. As a result, internationally accepted definitions of the term gender and the concepts and factors related with it are open to discussion. The concept has evolved throughout the years and different meanings have been constructed in order to understand gender in different contexts. In light of this fact, it is important to establish the working definitions for the concepts that define gender related issues.

Many authors have adapted and defined their perspective of gender and by the wide array of opinions and contributions on this matter it is very clear that many individuals have a great interest in

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[1] The concept of gender has gone from having a grammatical definition in the linguistic sense where gender refers to the classification of persons and objects through the terms: he, she and it to having a cultural and social definition. The concept has been adapted as a term that refers to an academic perspective that studies and analyzes issues, situations and phenomena that affect the "gender" of people. There has been a tendency to use the term "gender" interchangeably with the term "sex". However, sex defines whether someone is biologically born male or female while gender refers to the social and cultural makeup of a person. The concept of gender and by extension the gender perspective has been adapted and developed in reference to women's issues and studies and is recognized as studies that affect only women. Yet, many authors have explained that the gender perspective deals with issues that affect both men and women. These studies and statistics show that women suffer much more than men in society because of their sex (that is being female) and because of their gender (that is the social and cultural expectations of their roles and behaviour). Consequently, the gender perspective in its trajectory has focused more on women than on men.

Evidently, because the term and the perspective are rather recent concepts, there is much confusion that radiates around its origin, definition, influence and application. In light of this, it must be noted that the development of the concept has had less confusion in the English speaking countries rather than in the Spanish speaking countries simply because the Castilian tradition adapted this concept and translated it into Spanish as "género". In this case, the meaning in the Spanish sense becomes confused and it may have taken a little more time and effort for Spanish speakers to understand this concept as a valid and recognized analytical term used in serious academic disciplines and studies. Notwithstanding, today this concept is recognized both in the Spanish and English languages and any other language for that matter, as a valid theoretical term and perspective.

developing new knowledge about the concept and the conflicts that it has created. While some authors consider gender issues as matters that pertain to only women, others involve both sexes in questions of gender. In spite of the variety of definitions and the factors involved in gender studies, what remains clear is that the thoughts and contributions of key actors that study and specialize in gender studies are vital and undeniably significant to the development and dissemination of information pertaining to this topic. Having established the importance of all definitions coined for the term gender, some of the definitions used by authors and international organizations are inevitably referred to for their relevant role in the emphasis on directing attention to gender related studies.

A. Gender and Sex

Discussions about the concept of gender, establish that the definitions given to the concept are in one way or another social constructions with a cultural base in reference to social expectations of men and women. However, many terms that are involved in gender related matters, bear distinct meanings that link them. Two of the main concepts that need to be clearly defined are the terms gender and sex. Although they are used interchangeably in many respects there is a clear distinction between the two.

The term "sex" refers to whether a person is born a male or a female. In other words what distinguishes the sex of a person in most people is whether they are born with a penis (male) or a vagina (female). Inevitably, there are many exceptions to this rule since some people are born with special variants of their sexual organs that affect how they define themselves and how others view them. Whatever the case may be, while "sex" gives biological aspects to men and women, "gender" ascribes social and cultural aspects.

Hence, gender is a concept that is, "socially constructed as a result of the conjunction of ideas, beliefs and representations that each culture

has generated because of the sexual differences between men and women. [Rosales, 2004: 20] Similarly, Ramirez (2002: 24) states that it is "the conjunction of practices, symbols, representations, norms and values that societies reproduce because of sexual differences."

Essentially, the concept of gender designates specific definitions, concepts and expectations for what it is to be a "man" and what it is to be a "woman". It is expected that each gender should behave according to how society dictates with regards to the traditionally and socially accepted behaviour of men and women. These social constructions that have been consistently reproduced as norms have been the foundation of the social inequalities based on sexual differences.

Because of the many points of view and studies of gender, there have been authors that consider gender studies as studies focused on women only. Indisputably, their motives for doing so are quite logical given that gender studies began as a result of the discrimination that women have always been subjected to. In a male dominated world, many women find that their greatest enemy is the opposite sex.

However, many conflicts that involve gender issues are increasingly being suffered by women as well as men when it comes to the pressures and expectations of society on the identity of individuals. Notwithstanding, expert statistics and facts prove that women are by far more negatively affected than men in gender related situations. Yet, experts also attest that the concept of gender

> afecta tanto a hombres como a mujeres, que la definición de feminidad implica también una de masculinidad, por lo no podemos pensar sólo en mujeres cuando hablamos de género, pues este concepto implica las relaciones entre ambos sexos."
> [Rosales, 2004: 14-15]

Gender studies, although heavily focused on women, are studies that involve both sexes. It is undeniable that the gender studies resulted through studies focused on women. As active social thinkers and women realized how the female gender has always been judged more harshly

than men by all social institutions, the situation of women has had much to do with the establishment of the area of gender studies. As gender studies have evolved since their inception, many scholars have shifted the focus of gender studies from analyzing only the situation of women to analyzing the situation of the relationship of men and women. This shift is definitely a good one because it gives social scientists a broader spectrum of gender studies through a relational approach in order to arrive at more plausible and concrete solutions to the problems of power and inequalities in gender relations.

B. Gender Roles

Because gender studies involve both sexes, each has certain patterns of behaviour that he or she is expected to follow in order to be considered as male or female. Social constructions with regards to gender are known as gender roles which are,

> Conjunto de expectativas acerca de los comportamientos sociales considerados apropiados para las personas que poseen un sexo determinado, formado por el conjunto de normas, principios y representaciones culturales que dicta la sociedad sobre el comportamiento masculino y femenino, conductas y actitudes que se esperan tanto de las mujeres como de los hombres [Comisión Nacional de la Mujer, 1994: 22]

Another way of describing gender roles, according to Irma McClaurin (1996: 6), is that these are "tasks and activities that a culture assigns to the sexes." These tasks and activities are culturally constructed and accepted mannerisms and aspects of behaviour. Johnnetta Cole (1997: 8) signals that "concepts of 'womanness' and 'manness' vary considerably by race and ethnic group, by class, by region of the country and by sexual preference." Clearly, the many definitions of this concept coincide in many respects and although all of them touch on particular aspects, they all connect when they are analyzed as a whole- with gender-based assignation of tasks come gender-based social

expectations. In many studies, the results vary with respect to how men and women should behave and live. However, what always remains constant is, "the difference between what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine." [Lamas, 1996: 108]

Gender and Socialization

Human beings are not born with certain instincts to follow a specific set of rules that pertain to their behaviour or roles in life. On the contrary, this behaviour manifested as gender roles is learned through various sources and processes. Although sexual and gender roles were explained as genetically or biologically ascribed qualities by some scholars in the past, the arguments against these ideas are very powerful as Lamas explains here,

> La existencia de distinciones socialmente aceptadas entre hombres y mujeres es justamente lo que da fuerza y coherencia a la identidad de género, pero hay que tener en cuenta que si el género es una distinción significativa en gran cantidad de situaciones, es porque se trata de un hecho social, no biológico. Si bien las diferencias sexuales son la base sobre la cual se asienta una determinada distribución de papeles sociales, esta asignación no se desprende "naturalmente" de la biología, sino que es un hecho social. Para poner un ejemplo pedestre pero ilustrativo: la maternidad sin duda juega un papel importante en la asignación de tareas, pero no por parir hijos las mujeres nacen sabiendo planchar y coser. [Lamas, 1996:114]

Moreover,

> Gender changes over time and place... [and] gender is shaped by cultural and social variables which include historical, political, educational, religious, racial and ethnic considerations as well as biological and psychological determinants. [Nicholson, 2002: 368]

Humans learn how to behave through two main sources: Primary Education (family environment) and Formal Education (Classroom environment). For the most part, what humans learn in these spaces molds their way of thinking and behaving.

The processes of upbringing and socialization for the majority of societies have inculcated that individuals have specific roles that they

need to follow based on their gender. To recognize this designation of gender roles and unequal distribution of power between the sexes, it is essential to consider that

> en primer término, niñas y niños desde la socialización primaria, interiorizan modelos ideales de hombres y mujeres que, entre otras cosas, comprenden la aprehensión de pautas características o facilitadoras del ejercicio del poder por parte de los hombres y la aceptación y adecuación por parte de las mujeres." [Torres, 2004:17]

One simple but important example of how gender dictates socially accepted behaviour is that in childhood, little girls are expected to wear pink clothing and play with dolls while little boys should dress in blue and play with cars. Although this example is rather simple, the reality behind it is that these unquestioned details and teachings are what shape human adults. Any factor of human behaviour that deviates what is socially accepted from men and women inevitably puts at risk the identity of the individual in the society that he or she is in. Constructions such as these and others that insist that women are supposed to be humble and submissive while men are supposed to be strong and aggressive are the ideas that have created and nurtured inequality and by extension gender violence.

Whether gender roles are learnt at home or in school, the fact remains that humans will reproduce what they learn. Regrettably, not everything that they learn is good. The majority of people do not have the positive information filtered from the bad information so that they only learn the good things in life. Humans absorb all types of information and accept or reject it based on the learnt behaviour that they acquire in their upbringing and socialization. For the vast majority, information by which one is socialized and brought up is, without exception, considered 'correct' information.

Similarly, humans learn how to socialize with people of either gender based on what is socially accepted behavior for the interaction of both genders. For example, because the norm in all societies is for

heterosexual partnerships to be fostered amongst people, parents automatically expect their children to socialize with children of the opposite sex in order to establish infantile heterosexual partnerships teaching what is socially accepted. Moreover, the behavior that men and women should manifest in terms of courtship and relationships is also predetermined through processes of socialization.

Evidently, primary and secondary socialization play a significant role in shaping the gender relations amongst humans and in many cases what is socially accepted as the norm is not the reality of all situations. In spite of socially accepted norms and behaviors, the realm of gender studies in terms of human interaction has shed light on curious situations that are breaking away from traditional patriarchal mentality.

1.3 GENDER VIOLENCE

Defining Gender Violence

Gender violence is the blatant abuse of the basic right of liberty of individuals. This form of violence or abuse

> encuentra sus raíces en la desigualdad de sexos, es decir, en cómo se construyen los modelos de masculinidad y feminidad y las relaciones sociales entre hombres y mujeres, que implica la subordinación de las últimas." [Torres, 2004:17]

Nobody deserves to be a victim of gender violence but the sad truth is that this type of violence exists whether we like it or not. The complete elimination of cruel manifestations of violence is way beyond the world's control but awareness and prevention of gender violence are more plausible endeavors. However, the use and meaning of this concept is yet to become a reality in the mental lexicon of people since "the use of the expression 'gender violence' is so recent like the proper recognition of the reality of violence against women" [Maqueda, 2006: 2]

Because the cultural and social myths and stereotypes about gender related issues have been allowed to reproduce for so long, it is hard for people to move away from the erroneous belief that gender violence is "normal". Gender violence is a phenomenon that has been

considered "a private problem, at an embarrassing frequency, but at the same time as a 'normal' part of conjugal relationships." [Heise et al, 1994:6] Before feminism, women's studies and gender studies, Maqueda (2006:1) signals that there was a "social resistance to admit a persistent and alarming reality [of gender violence]." Clearly, the world has moved into a new era where gender violence is something that is now considered intolerable.

In 1948, governments across the world put in place the Universal Declaration for Human Rights which was the foundation for laws and rights against human injustice. The processes that publicly declared gender violence as a serious killer of human happiness are of great significance in the history of humanity. As a result of this public declaration,

> el tema ha pasado de ser una preocupación casi exclusiva de los grupos y organizaciones de mujeres, a ocupar un espacio en el debate político para lograr arraigo en la academia y generar acciones concretas por parte de los gobiernos y organismos internacionales. [Torres, 2004:21]

In 1979, the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified and has since been reinforcing the elimination of gender violence. This global instrument, commonly known as the "bill of rights" for women, set the pace for the laws against gender violence in many countries when it became internationally recognized in 1981.

Through constant education of gender violence, it becomes easier to concentrate on and understand cases of this phenomenon in the domestic environment. By means of events such as the World Conference of Human Rights in Vienna (1993), United Nations Declaration of Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women- Convention of Belem do Para (1994) and the World Conference of Women in Beijing (1995) the world has become acquainted with the severity of gender related issues and how these are

being treated. The definition of gender violence put forward by the United Nations extracted from the Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women is internationally known and expresses clearly what is meant by this phenomenon. Gender violence is

> todo acto de violencia basado en la pertenencia al sexo femenino que tenga o pueda tener como resultado un daño o sufrimiento físico, sexual o psicológico para la mujer, así como las amenazas de tales actos, la coacción o la privación arbitraria de la libertad, tanto si se producen en la vida pública como en la vida privada. [United Nations, 1993]

Another definition that is equally effective is

> a pattern of abusive behavior that one person uses to maintain power and control over their partner. Some of these controlling behaviors include physical abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse and verbal abuse. [Ganger, 2005: 8]

The acts of abusing or battering a person are terms that are commonly used to refer to the concept of gender violence or domestic violence. As mentioned before, in most cases women are the ones that are the victims of gender violence but this does not exclude the probability of men as victims of this type of violence.

As part of the public health sector in many countries, gender violence is considered as one of the main public health problems affecting our societies. Although it is classified as interpersonal violence, the public health approach takes into consideration that gender violence can affect a collective number of individuals in different contexts and positions in life. Therefore, this problem is treated as a phenomenon that can have a collective impact on society and as such is regarded as a public health issue. While the health sector in various societies is the main sector that deals with this problem, it is very important to stress that other public services have a great role to play when it comes to preventing, treating, controlling and eventually eliminating this phenomenon. Education, justice and human development sectors along with the public health sector have great

responsibility in raising awareness on this problem by letting the public know that this phenomenon is far from being a normal part of life.

Consequently, to talk about gender violence means highlighting some of the many forms through which people are discriminated against because of sexual and cultural constructions. To add to the previous United Nations definition of gender violence, this form of discrimination includes,

> La violencia física, sexual y psicológica en la familia, incluidos los golpes, el abuso sexual de las niñas en el hogar, la violencia relacionada con la dote, la violación por el marido, la mutilación genital y otras prácticas tradicionales que atentan contra la mujer, la violencia ejercida por personas distintas del marido y la violencia relacionada con la explotación; la violencia física, sexual y psicológica al nivel de la comunidad en general, incluidas las violaciones, los abusos sexuales, el hostigamiento y la intimidación sexual en el trabajo, en instituciones educacionales y en otros ámbitos, el tráfico de mujeres y la prostitución forzada; y la violencia física, sexual y psicológica perpetrada o tolerada por el estado, dondequiera que ocurra [United Nations, 1993]

There may very well be many more ways by which people can be discriminated against gender but this particular definition stresses the violation that women at a global level have endured as a result of their socially established positions as women. In fact, the way that gender violence is defined has been discussed by the UN serves as a reference point for many investigations, conferences, books and other verbal and written publications.

Hence, its viability to be used as a reference point in this investigation has to do with its international recognition as a serious social problem. By social problem, it is clear that gender violence is "a social phenomenon that has a negative impact on the lives of a considerable segment of a particular population." [Kohn, 1976: 94] This has been proven by the many people that have taken an interest in gender issues specifically with the feminist movement that has propelled the gender discourse at political, economic and social levels.

As authors, Bosch and Ferrer (2000) explain, "…gender violence is not an absolutely new phenomenon but its visibility and the step from it being considered a private issue to a social problem are relatively new." In line with this, the ones that have been responsible for making gender violence visible to the world are the social advocates that have promoted gender issues as possible reasons for social inequality. As such Blumer (1971) explains that, social problems such as gender violence,

> no tienen existencia por sí mismos si no que son producto de un proceso de definición colectiva que ocurre cuando un número significativo de personas consideran ciertas situaciones sociales como no deseadas y tienen el suficiente poder como para transmitir esa percepción a otros sectores.

Amidst the patriarchal institutions that did not recognize gender violence as a social problem it is now readily distinguished as a serious social problem that was dormant in the past. Although many traditional customs continue to permeate restrictive and sexist behaviors, it is clear that as far as the visibility of gender violence goes it is seen as something wrong in society and it is seen as this by a majority social group of influence that has a say in public debate and social politics. In addition, social awareness about this issue strengthens the idea that it is a social problem that negatively affects the social values of equality and freedom for men and women. Furthermore, it has been fully recognized as a social problem that affects many people and can possibly be mitigated through collective solutions.

Gender violence is at its peak in public debate and many can attest to the fact that it has gradually evolved from being interpreted as an inevitable and normal part of life, to being considered a serious public problem. According to Clemente (1997), "social problems, by definition, are public issues, not personal or private issues."

Gender Violence in the Domestic Environment

Gender violence can occur in many contexts such as in the workplace, in the political spheres and in the home. Although any

situation of gender violence reckons immediate attention and analysis for its negative social repercussions, gender violence that occurs in the home between intimate partners clearly establishes a distinct mark on society and requires special consideration.

The family unit is the most important and fundamental unit of any society because it is in the family environment that the primary forms of learning take place. The family unit provides the first form of education where generations acquire concepts, ideas, beliefs, personality, behaviour and identity, usually on a permanent basis. The family unit can be described as:

> un grupo de parientes que conviven y establecen relaciones que socializan valores, experiencias y pautas de comportamiento. Es la unidad básica de reproducción de la sociedad; un espacio de comunicación e interacción en el que se adquieren identidad y sentido de pertenencia y se manifiestan intereses comunes, prioridades, solidaridades y **conflictos**. [Villagómez, 2005: 23]

The occurrences in the domestic environment define factors that have a great impact in the social environment. Undoubtedly, "the family continues to be a vital element in the social structure." [Anderson, 1980: 7] The family interactions mold the beliefs of people and these beliefs take form in different ways through social behaviour.

Violence that manifests itself in the home is interchangeably known as family, domestic or interfamilial violence. Family violence is "the systematic and deliberate aggression and damage that is committed in the home against a member of the family by another member of the family." [Ramirez, 2000: 3] Concurrently, it can also be defined as,

> Toda acción u omisión cometida en el seno de la familia por uno de sus miembros, que menoscaba la vida o la integridad física o psicológica o incluso la libertad de otro de los miembros de la misma familia y que causa un serio daño al desarrollo de la personalidad. Es un modelo de conductas aprendidas, coercitivas, que involucran abuso físico o la amenaza de abuso físico. Es el empleo deliberado de la fuerza para manipular a la pareja o al ambiente familiar. [Martos, 2003: 171]

Clearly, the family unit is the context with the most responsibility for learned behaviour. It is in this environment that gender roles are learned and reproduced. The way spouses or partners treat each other affects the well being of all the family members. The positive examples should be shown by the adults in the family unit but if they do not treat each other with respect and equality then the relationship and the family suffer. In essence, violence is nurtured between the genders because of the lack of value that one or both partners feel toward each other.

Based on social constructions, men and women have been taught to see each other as competitors in all facets of life. Traditionally, the "social norm" is that men have always been the ones to hold positions in the political and corporate circles while women have been restricted to excel only in the domestic environment. It is quite obvious that this accepted social order has nurtured considerable pressure on men to maintain order and control in their lives. Although not all men think this way, most value very much how they are seen by society and so they are forced to uphold behaviour that makes them look like the stronger gender; this strength is what should define the "true man" and so they have to control their lives publicly and privately.

Although history shows that men have been considered the stronger gender, present day trends have managed to change that belief. Experts of gender studies, both male and female, acknowledge the need to show the world that women and men must respect each other in order for improvement of societies and countries. While these experts enforce their priorities by studying and proving the importance of both males and females, individuals everywhere are rejecting the social constructions that expect them to behave a certain way based on their sex. This rejection is manifested in the way they choose to live their lives as free and independent HUMANS regardless of their gender. Through primary and formal education these individuals discover the fallacy in the myths and stereotypes that restrict their behaviour and opportunities.

Observably, the primary education of the domestic environment brands long lasting imprints on human beings; imprints that are reproduced from generation to generation. Hence, the family dynamics play an indispensable role in gender studies. The conflicts of the family are the basic epitome of unnatural human relations that should not be tolerated. In all of the forms that it manifests itself, violence in the family between partners contravene s human rights.

Forms of Gender Violence in the Domestic Environment

While gender violence occurs in different contexts, it also takes many forms. The four major forms of violence are physical, sexual, psychological/emotional and economic abuse or violence. They can occur individually or together depending on the circumstances of the situation of violence. The various forms of abuse affect many aspects of the human being but what remains constant for all of these forms is that they occur as a vicious cycle overpowered by control and selfishness that intensifies gradually until the effects are in many cases, fatal. Many authors and social institutions have their own definitions for these forms of abuse and they all maintain that it is behaviour that is used to manipulate and overpower an individual by their spouse or intimate partner. Also, some authors may describe abusive behaviour against the women only since these cases are more common. However, although some of the examples referred to define the individual being abused as a woman, this does not exclude men from being possible victims of gender violence.

A. Physical Gender Violence

This form of violence ultimately brutalizes the corporeal aspect of a human being because the person that is violent exerts physical force to intentionally hurt his or her partner. Physical abuse or violence is manifested in many ways, which include but are not restricted to pushing, kicking, punching, slapping, mutilating, choking and burning.

Individuals that exert physical force to maintain control over their partner can practically do anything to hurt them. The evidence of many cases involving gender violence is what reveals to experts of gender issues in governmental and non-governmental institutions the many ways that a man or woman use physical aggression to have power over his or her partner.

In a study carried out in several countries by the World Health Organization, the criteria that were established to distinguish cases of physical gender violence in female victims encompasses the common ways by which an individual is physically abused by his or her partner. The following list of activities that describe physical violence adapted from the WHO study highlights common ways that physical violence manifests itself in domestic settings. Based on the study, a woman has been a victim of physical violence if her partner had:

- slapped her, or thrown something at her that could hurt her;
- pushed or shoved her;
- hit her with a fist or with something else that could hurt
- kicked, dragged or beaten her up;
- choked or burnt her on purpose;
- threatened her with, or actually used a gun, knife or other weapon against her. [WHO, 2005: 5]

B. Sexual Gender Violence

Another way in which an individual can abuse his or her partner is through sexual abuse. This form of gender violence invades the core of human privacy and intimacy because the aggressive individual forces his or her partner to engage in sexual activity that may prove to be harmful to the victim's physical and emotional health. Experts that investigate this form of abuse believe that this is another way in which an individual can physically hurt someone but the pain and damage makes sexual abuse a category all in itself.

The WHO study also investigated sexual abuse on female victims and the list that follows describes how the investigators classified sexual

gender violence. Based on the study, a woman has been sexually abused when she is:

- being physically forced to have sexual intercourse against her will
- having sexual intercourse because she was afraid of what her partner might do;
- being forced to do something sexual she found to be degrading or humiliating [WHO, 2005: 5]

In accordance to this list, other ways in which individuals can sexually assault their partners are by:

- comparing her to other women and degrading her sexuality
- forcing her to watch pornographic material or act it out
- deliberately giving partner a sexually transmitted infection
- taking sexual pictures of partner and threatening to use them against her
- accusing her of having sex with someone else and demanding to "examine" her private areas. [Ganger, 2005:13]

C. Psychological/Emotional Gender Violence

In this type of violence, the abuser focuses on the human psyche of his or her partner. Through verbal aggression, the abusive person controls the emotions of his or her partner by degrading and disrespecting his or her existence. Hence, the victims of this type of abuse end up psychologically affected because the control is so strong that it intimidates them and instills immense fear of their partner. Although the aggressive partner may or may not physically harm the abused partner, the psychological damage that they impose is equally painful as it escalates.

An individual can psychologically abuse his or her partner by humiliating, degrading and insulting the physical appearance and behaviour of the victim. In this way, the abuser hurts the feelings of the victim making them feel low and stupid. Abuse of this kind markedly lowers the self esteem of the victims and weakens their abilities to shield themselves from the verbal assault.

This form of gender abuse is also known as verbal or emotional abuse. Based on the WHO study, some ways in which an individual can be psychologically or emotionally abused is when the individual is:

- being insulted or made to feel bad about oneself
- being humiliated or belittled in front others
- being intimidated or scared on purpose (for example, by a partner yelling and smashing things)
- being threatened with harm (directly or indirectly in the form of a threat to hurt someone the respondent cared about)
  [WHO, 2005: 9]

Another way in which someone can emotionally abuse his or her partner is by ignoring, abandoning or neglecting them to an extent where the person is left in a distressed position. In the past, psychological or emotional abuse was not considered as gender abuse or violence per se, but studies have proven that this is a form of abuse that has even more intense ramifications than physical abuse. While some bruises and other injuries of physical abuse may heal, the damage caused on an individual's self esteem can have long term negative effects and may never heal completely if special treatment is not provided.

D. Economic Gender Violence

Economic gender violence is yet another way by which an individual can abuse his or her partner. In this form of gender violence or abuse, an individual controls the amount of money that his or her partner receives by giving them some or none at all or by not allowing that person to work. By doing so the abuser denies his or her partner the freedom to earn money and to live an autonomous life. The individual makes his or her partner financially dependent on them so that they have no choice but to obey the demands of the abuser. The abuser may have his/her partner working excessively without providing him or her with money for their own upkeep and the maintenance of their surroundings and other family members. This outright denial of financial freedom is classified as abuse because the victim is controlled and affected negatively by this restrictive behaviour.

Causes and Impact of Gender Violence in the Domestic Environment

Many studies radiate around the causes and impact of gender violence. Because gender violence is so broad, it is really difficult to list and explain all of the possible causes and the impact that this problem has on not only individuals but also families and communities. For this reason, this section touches and discusses the main causes and impact of this phenomenon as it pertains to the domestic environment.

A. Main Causes of Gender Violence

The causes or factors that reproduce gender violence in the domestic environment are very complex. They vary based on the partners involved and the society they live in; gender violence can occur when there are different factors that instigate it such as different substances like alcohol and drugs and violence can manifest itself in a relationship as a way of control and power. Moreover, gender violence in the home has been proven to exist when abusers show a history of violence in their childhood or in previous experiences. However, each case of gender violence in the home is different; each case has particular traits that are exclusive to that situation and so it is difficult to pin point exactly what causes gender violence. The following aspects describe some of the many reasons or motives for the existence of this phenomenon.

Inequalities in the relations of power

The causes or factors that encourage gender violence vary depending on age, context, family situation, sex and other variables of both the victims and the abusers; what remains clear is that violence is often present when there is an obvious unequal distribution of power in a relationship. In terms of gender violence within partners, one partner (the abusive one) takes on the role of the dominant individual and controls the behaviour, feelings and actions of his or her partner. Evidently, this unequal distribution has been nurtured by the social and cultural

constructions present in our societies that designate roles for men and women.

Men are more likely to be abusers than women because they are socially and culturally expected to be the dominant gender and since patriarchal societies tolerate dominant male behaviour, more men are the abusers in relationships. According to the WHO study,

> one of the commonest forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband or intimate male partner. This is in stark contrast to the situation for men, who in general are much more likely to be attacked by a stranger or acquaintance than by someone within their close circle of relationships. [Krug et al, 2002: 89]

Research in the medical disciplines has found many reasons why some males or females exert violence upon others to control them and it is evident that these aggressive traits are linked with different factors in their environment. In many cases, there is a power struggle between the partners based on male and female cultural attributes. Through a societal perspective, traditional male dominance over women has been fostered historically by certain laws and religious codes that condone gender violence in the domestic environment. Many women are economically dependent on their partners and this increases the risk that they will be in abusive situations. Men are more likely to be the ones in power because tradition considers them as the forceful counterpart.

On the other hand, women who are abusive towards their male partners are in a way excused by some societies because as the "tables turn" so to speak, the woman is considered to be fighting back and demonstrating the same brutal courtesy that many men bestow upon their female partners. However, violence, by males or females is harmful to not only their relationship but also to the health of other family members

History of family violence and individual factors

Many cases of domestic violence result from a recurring cycle of abuse within the family. There is a higher chance for individuals to be abusive if they have also been victims of abuse or if they have been raised to believe that violence is a tolerable form of punishment or behaviour. Experts in the medical field have found that people, especially children, imitate what they see. Children that are brought up in violent homes have a greater tendency to develop abusive traits along with other characteristics such as low self esteem, depression, anxiety and aggression. If they are not treated then these traits may shape them into abusive adults.

Other personality traits or psychological disorders may also be another cause why individuals are abusive. Abusive individuals have the tendency of being very jealous and possessive. They may also exhibit abusive behaviour in relation with high levels of stress, low self esteem and self worth and extreme feelings of anger. While these may be considered normal human characteristics, abusive individuals feel exaggerated or intense forms of these human traits that are equivalent to some psychological pathologies and clinical imbalances. These disorders may trigger abusive behaviour because the person exerts angry actions through verbal or physical force intended to hurt someone else. Moreover, aggressors are very insecure and dependent on the powerful feeling they get when they control their partner.

Situational Factors

Coupled with individual traits, other factors specific to different family settings may be possible variables liable to cause violence in the domestic environment. Partners that live in impoverished situations with possible low income employment may be more likely to experience domestic violence. However, not all families or partners living in these situations have abusive relationships. Many investigations show evidence that gender violence in the domestic environment is not always as a

result of these conditions but because of the high stress levels and less than good living conditions, some individuals cope with the pressure by exerting force on others to attain a sense of control in their own chaotic minds.

Another factor that may contribute to the existence of violence in relationships is that they may lack the support and counsel required to prevent or treat domestic violence. Victims as well as abusers may be unaware of a problem because they lack knowledge enough to be able to solve the family or spousal conflicts. Statistics show that families in rural areas are more likely to experience domestic violence than families in urban areas because they are usually the ones that do not have access to information on gender and family violence. Nonetheless, statistics also show that violence does occur in urban as well as rural families.

Drug and/or alcohol abuse have also been common factors present in violent or abusive relationships. These substances can be possible variables that can cause abusive individuals to be more aggressive. Drugs and alcohol have not been scientifically proven to cause aggression but studies do show that many violent individuals have drug or alcohol abuse habits. According to the WHO study, in the case of alcohol, "Many researchers believe that alcohol operates as a situational factor, increasing the likelihood of violence by reducing inhibitions, clouding judgment and impairing an individual's ability to interpret cues." [Krug et al, 2002: 98]

B. Impact of Gender Violence

The impact of this phenomenon varies based on the form and intensity of the violence. The types of gender violence can be isolated or occur all at once and this also influences how great the impact of the violent behaviour is. While physical gender violence is believed to be the form that causes the most severe effects, studies have shown that psychological, sexual and economic abuse have devastating effects as

well. The health of victims of gender violence can be affected for short or long term periods.

Reproduction of inequalities between intimate partners

One general and quite obvious impact of gender violence between spouses is that it reproduces the unequal distribution of power between couples that leads to disrespect and abuse of partners. Undeniably, this recurring form of violence degrades the threads that keep family values intact. Without the support and aid that can be provided by public health facilities, violence in the home continues to occur.

Violence manifests itself between the spouses and is in most cases viewed by the children of that family. Many children that witness and suffer violence in their home grow up reproducing this behaviour especially if they are not given therapy for their trauma. Home should be a place of warmth and comfort but if children are raised in a violent environment they may believe that this is normal behaviour and may imitate this same behaviour when they have their families. Essentially, "If the idea of 'home' implies physical and psychological safety and security as well as shelter, then a child, adult or older person affected by domestic violence experiences a hidden 'homelessness'." [Burke, 1998: 165]

Damaging effects on the health of individuals

Obviously, domestic gender violence drastically affects the well being of individuals in terms of their health and happiness. The effects on the health vary depending on the case of gender violence. The following table adapted from the WHO study shows the common effects on victims of gender violence within intimate partners.

Table 1.3 Health Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence[2]

Physical	Sexual & Reproductive	Psychological & Behavioral	Fatal Health Consequences
-abdominal thoracic injuries -bruises and welts -chronic pain syndromes -disability -fibromyalgia -fractures -gastrointestinal disorders -irritable bowel syndrome -lacerations and abrasions -ocular damage -reduced physical functioning	-gynaecological disorders -infertility -pelvic inflammatory disease -pregnancy complications/ miscarriage -sexual dysfunction -sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS -unsafe abortion -unwanted pregnancy	-alcohol and drug abuse -depression and anxiety -eating and sleep disorders -feelings of shame and guilt -phobias and panic disorder -physical inactivity -poor self-esteem -post-tramautic stress disorder -psychosomatic disorders -smoking -self harm	-AIDS-related mortality -maternal mortality -homicide -suicide

This table shows only some ways that domestic gender violence can impact individuals; there are many more ways that people can be affected. The impact of economic gender violence is also worth mentioning because this form of violence denies individuals their civil right to live freely in terms of their financial status. Abusers limit the potential for their partners to be economically stable enough to take care of themselves and the family. While some victims of gender violence are unable to keep jobs for long term periods because of the instability they suffer at home, others are so controlled by their partners that they are not allowed to work.

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[2] World Health Organization, 2002: 101 (Table 4.6)

Undeniably, the impact of gender violence is widespread. All members of a family are affected when violence is present. Because the cases of gender violence vary, the limits of this investigation only concentrate on the impact of gender violence between intimate partners. However, it must be stated that children in particular are greatly affected by gender violence whether they witness or experience these situations. They are the ones that internalize what they see and they are the ones who will choose whether or not to reproduce this type of aggressive behaviour.

1.4 GENDER VIOLENCE AND THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC DICHOTOMY

Social Evolution of Private and Public Life

Many contemporary societies are undoubtedly made up of several divisive forces. This has originated as a result of decades of historical changes at the control of political, economic and social theories and movements. These changes have taken place for reasons that have divided the life of many people in various social spaces based on the realities of different social and cultural realities.

To maintain stability and control in society, governmental leaders, social stakeholders and other persons that have the power to decide how society will be shaped have greatly influenced the organization of social institutions in relation to the family, religion, education, medicine, psychology, psychiatry and politics just to name a few spheres. Rules, regulations and laws have been put in place to ascertain a sense of order in these institutions based on their significance as part of society. Upon close reflection of social institutions and social constructions, a common categorization of these relates to whether they are considered "private" or "public" in nature. Whilst this may seen a harmful task, the baggage that goes along with this distinction can have paramount ramifications that are taken for granted if the true nature of a private or public distinction is not brought to light.

Hence, the purpose of this section is to expound on what is best known as the Private and Public Dichotomy (PPD) and how this dichotomy relates to the category of gender. A continuous school of thought has radiated around this social theory and many scholars have chosen to explain how this discordant force influences a myriad of social phenomena. It is always important to define the social context of any investigation because there is always controversial thought that defines a social space or concern as being one that should be dealt with in "private" or in "public." Clarifying how the PPD relates to gender issues and gender relations in this section coincides with Weintraub (1997:1) in saying that,

> The distinction between public and private has been a central and characteristic preoccupation of thought since classical antiquity, and has long served as a point of entry into many of the key issues of social and political analysis, of moral and political debate and of the ordering of everyday life.

The structure of sociopolitical systems has been greatly nurtured by the PPD. For this reason many specialists in varying disciplines have studied the origins of the dichotomy, its impact and its continuity. Through the years, research on this social aspect has shown that while the dichotomy has established order in terms of politics and economics and their relation to society, there are many social factors that have not been nurtured in order for the dichotomy to be beneficial to all people.

The history of patriarchal societies has structured life by defining private and public life. Since patriarchal societies established everything from a male perspective, "private life" was considered as the home life of the man; he was the owner of his property including his wife. This was acceptable as the natural order and this mentality was reproduced to maintain control in society. A blatant reality of the PPD is that it is very one sided- it favors the powerful masculine opinion in deciding how societies should be structured.

The private space allowed men to control their wives, animals, children and slaves and in many cases it meant that violence could be

used to exert power and force. Men were the superior beings in the household with the authority to do and undo anything without question. No one else had any right to interfere in what happened in the man's house. Thus, according to traditional, patriarchal discourse, private life was separate from public life and it consisted of domestic and personal affairs which were trivial matters as opposed to public affairs.

Public life, on the other hand, was considered the space where the men or equals discussed political and economic matters. The public matters in which men participated formed what was considered a "fraternal assembly." [Baños, 2007: 1] In other words, in this particular assembly there was no room for women; women were creatures for the private circles only. In democratic patriarchal archaic societies the political life was equivalent to public life where the law was applicable completely. It was clear that in the public spheres,

> la ciudad se funda en la libertad por lo que excluye las relaciones… del marido sobre la mujer, del amo sobre el esclavo que son relaciones exclusivas de la vida privada. En la ciudad se vive la democracia, pero recordemos que no es democracia de mayorías y en ese contexto precisamente los hijos no tienen derechos. [Baños, 2007: 2]

The PPD is a clear result of patriarchal thoughts that has categorized social and human behaviour based on masculine and feminine expectations through the overpowering male vision. The private and public dichotomy continues to be a subject of extensive controversy because of the critiques it has received. Significant to this investigation is the feminist critique of the PPD since this school of thought clearly delineates the inequality manifested in the practice of the distinction between what is public or private. Because the PPD is based on a staunch concept of liberalism that finds its root on reason and practicality of the political arena (spearheaded by men of course), feminist scholars believe that discrimination continues to exist in social structures that divide men and women. Whilst the founders of the

supposed liberal theory of the PPD claim that equality is an aim of the dichotomy, the reality is that its foundation is one sided.

Some of the fundamental conflictive characteristics of the theory of liberalism in relation to the PPD can be summarized as Turégano (2001: 320) signals that the dichotomy is criticized based on the following arguements,

> La identificación del ámbito público con el ejercicio de la política desde el punto de vista de la razón normativa imparcial y universal; la concepción patriarcal de lo público y de la familia que encubre la anterior perspectiva; el carácter natural, y no cultural o histórico, de las desigualdades entre hombres y mujeres; el derecho a la intimidad como límite infranqueable a la acción estatal; la pretendida igualdad y ausencia de restricciones que caracterizan el contexto en el que las mujeres adoptan libremente sus decisiones; y finalmente, la concepción excluyente de la política.

Evidently, there is plenty of material that can substantiate the feminist critique to the dichotomy. Based on the above citation and upon further bibliographic research, any true scholar can identify that the PPD has fomented the subordination of women to men.

Whilst social theories such as this one describe the universal right of equality in quite an eloquent manner to be applicable to all people, it really means that it is equality based on a male paradigm- a paradigm that in many cases continues to significantly exclude women. The restrictions faced by many women have been brought to light through the various waves of feminism and the social critiques of the PPD signaling that

> La distinction liberal entre público y privado subyace una pretensión de homogeneidad que excluye la consideración política de las diferencias. Las desigualdades que subsisten en el ámbito provado quedan ocultos bajo la artificial unidad de lo público. [Turégano, 2001: 321]

In few words, the PPD does not offer sufficient space for women to excel as independent citizens of their corresponding society and culture. In patriarchal societies this distinction is significant because it designates authority to men but women across the globe have expressed great

dissatisfaction with this system and are refusing the role that they are being forced to abide by. Adhering to the PPD based on the male perception is an obvious obstacle for the democracy that is known in contemporary lifestyles. Baños (2007) contemplates that, "today the experience of private life no longer exists, the step from a community life to society has changed the relationship between private and public life." Simply put, the PPD and its extensive baggage of social order and influence are archaic.

Although the private and public dichotomy has had a marked modification in its influence on the social structure of many societies, its glaring presence continues to persist in social institutions. Salgado (2005: 5) sums up that

> El imaginario escinde la sociedad en dos ámbitos: la sociedad política (el estado como expresión de los intereses públicos) y la sociedad civil (ámbito de los intereses particulares.) La primera constituye la esfera de lo público, del poder; la segunda la esfera de lo privado, de la libertad.

Based on Salgado's analysis of how the private and public sector have come to be interpreted, it is clear that her words have much truth in them. The disparity between these two social spheres continues to receive criticism from political and social stakeholders that consider it as a deterrent from equal and just systems of good governance. Many stakeholders may argue that the division caused by the private and public spaces is a main reason for the systems of social and sexual division of oppressive and unequal labor that reign today.

Moreover, the disparities produced in the private and public spaces have led many to the assumption that women are the ones that suffer the most in society. Many perspectives paint the feminine gender as the weaker one, the one restricted to the private space, because of her incapacity to make decisions on a political and public level. Even if women are subjected to the private circles, interpreted as their "natural habitat", they are still no allowed to have control according to the PPD

train of thought. Evidently, the liberal distinction of the dichotomy emphasizes that,

> Las desigualitarias relaciones familiares limitan en gran medida la plena participación de la mujer en lo público, sino también porque en muchos casos la intimidad de la familia sirve para encubrir la violación de derechos esenciales del individuo. [Turégano, 2001: 325]

Weintraub (1997:2) explains that, "The PPD in short is not unitary, but protean…they rest on different underlying images of the social world, are driven by different concerns, generate different problematics and raise very different issues." For this reason, they have to manifest objective realities of the world that should not exclude the participation of women. In many ways, the PPD foundation of political and economic systems has downgraded the role of women in society, has neglected family and gender relations, and has been based on empty assumptions on the severity of issues that take place in public and private contexts. As a result, the PPD has conveniently been constructed on a male paradigm that hides all the unimportant happenings in the private spheres leaving more room for the supposed significant events in the public sphere.

The public sphere continues to be associated with a sense of autonomy, independence and justice that somehow does not characterize the private sphere; the latter is downgraded as the basic social structure where the nurturing, bonding and caring take place. Unfortunately, the private and public dichotomy has left much disparity when it comes to the family, the relationships between men and women and the general makeup of society. The following section will look at the PPD and its relation with gender violence as a deep rooted consequence of the inequality and discrimination perpetuated by the dichotomy.

Gender Violence: From a Private issue to a Public problem

Gender violence in all its forms is a clear consequence of the power struggle between the genders generated through the private and public dichotomy that has divided the world. The separation of the private and public spaces has brought about serious ramifications that have hindered the development of equal nations. Whilst this dichotomy rests on the concept of liberalism that in itself should mean freedom, the reality is quite different when getting down to the freedom of gender.

As a result of the dichotomy in question, the history of women has been one of repression, resistance, subordination and exclusion. Evidently, the feminist critique in line with gender studies highlights the blatant bias of the private and public sectors. The feminist movement contributed greatly to viewing gender violence as a public rather than a private problem. Salgado (2005:5) signals that

> Uno de los principales aportes del feminismo ha sido cuestionar la tajante separación de la esfera de lo público y lo privado en la conformación de los Estados modernos, demostrando de una parte que se trata de una división ficticia pues en la práctica estos espacios se encuentran interconectados, evidenciando que en la esfera de lo privado se ejercen relaciones de poder/dominación que han subordinado de manera particular a las mujeres.

Based on this quote, Salgado shows that the private and public sectors should work hand in hand; evidently, it should be a question of differences between the two social spheres because history has shown that the division instigates the reproduction of the unequal distribution of power between women and men. This could be a probable explanation as to why women are hesitant to be politicians, architects, mechanics, engineers and to a lesser degree even doctors; the reason behind their hesitance is that the powerful heads of society whoever they may be have managed to convincingly consider these professions as masculine roles that women are unable to accomplish. An ingrained legacy of the PPD is that men and women continue to adhere to the divisive nature of social structures that uphold certain social expectations set out for the intimate and public spheres.

The presence of gender violence in the world has undergone great transformation. As previously mentioned, the feminist critique of the private/public dichotomy has revealed and established gender violence as a public concern. However, it is clear that forms of gender violence such as domestic violence were once considered private problems that did not require any intervention from authorities because of the PPD. In fact, violence in the family was considered, "the right of the man and something normal that sometimes occurred between spouses." [Bosch, Ferrer, 2000]

Concurrently, Salgado (2005:5) agrees, in her retaliation against the dichotomy when she signals that,

> De hecho la violencia intrafamiliar, una de las formas más sistemáticas de violación de los derechos humanos de las mujeres permaneció hasta hace una década en el silencio, la impunidad y la completa desprotección, por considerarse un asunto privado irrelevante políticamente.

Essentially, gender violence as a public problem has been a perspective that has developed only in recent years even if it has always existed. As women and men shed light on the irregularities of the patriarchal systems that rule over many countries today, it is clear that the interpretation of gender violence as a private issue has reproduced many of the social problems that humans are struggling with. Worth mentioning are the words of liberal feminist, Susan Moller Okin (1996: 191), that criticizes the liberal theories of the private/public dichotomy as she expounds that,

> En las teorías de justicia ha dominado hasta hace bien poco una notable falta de atención a los aspectos de género y especialmente a las desigualdades sistemáticas entre los sexos...porque se consideró válida la dicotomía entre lo público (lo político y lo económico) y lo privado (lo doméstico y lo personal) y únicamente se tuvo en cuenta lo público como la esfera idónea a la que debían prestar atención las teorías de justicia.

While feminist thought as well as post modern, post colonial, gender oriented and psychological perspectives continuously point out the blatant bias of the private/public dichotomy, there seems at times an urgent need to bring a stronger sense of democracy to private life (in

particular to that life that happens in a home between spouses). The glaring reality continues to show through that there is not true autonomy shared in both private and public spaces. Gender roles in accordance with social structures under the dictates of the PPD maintain a significant imbalance in gender relations as far as social expectations are involved.

Much progress and research has been developed to reveal that gender violence is a public problem; international organizations have taken a massive stance against social phenomena like this one. Yet, discrimination on a whole and in this case discrimination by reason of gender is still a menacing force that threatens the lives of many.

Bearing this in mind, one cannot help but question the status of gender violence in private and public spaces. While many individuals both women and men reject gender violence, it still persists in many households, work places and the majority of communities world wide. In a quickly developing, civilized and globalized world, many people question whether gender violence is considered a public problem by the way it has been presented in recent years or is its perception as a private issue prevalent. The answer to this can only be sought by questioning the people that experience the daily social issues that they have inherited from years of struggle and inequality. This thesis attempts to question individuals on their perceptions of gender violence- a perception that has been shaped by many social factors. However, as a last thought to this question it is imperative to add that gender violence is a crime and undoubtedly a social problem; it is something that is wrong and unacceptable. This isn't just what one person thinks; this is the shared knowledge of millions-women and men alike.

Concluding Notes

Although there are many more things that can be said about the vital concepts of this investigation, for precision and clarity, only particular information has been selected.

The phenomenon of violence is so complex that it is pertinent to include appropriate information that is aligned with the questions at hand. Therefore, while the data, both documented and statistical, about violence is extensive, this investigation concentrates on certain aspects of this phenomenon and as such explains these points in a sequence and form that respects the limits of the thesis.

The recollection of information on the Gender Perspective is very significant when it comes to recognizing the importance that this perspective has earned in the academic fields as a viable element in many studies. Moreover, its employment in this investigation serves to highlight problems that radiate around the concept of gender.

Gender violence is evidently the main concept in question. The thorough description of this phenomenon presented in this chapter is the theoretical substance that establishes the severity of this public health issue as a social rather than private problem.

This chapter has explored and discussed the concepts significant to this research at an international level, which sets the background for new information with a more specific nature in the second chapter. While this first chapter presents theoretical information for the investigation, the following chapters apply the development of the gender perspective as well as the concept of gender violence to a concrete reality in which their importance and presence can be identified and analyzed. Hence, the theoretical research covered here is put into practice in the next chapter. The material in this chapter complements the second chapter because while the first chapter gives information at a broad level, the second chapter defines the focus of the investigation in the country of Belize.

CHAPTER 11 -GENDER VIOLENCE IN THE BELIZEAN SOCIETY

Introductory Notes

The purpose of this chapter is to define as precisely as possible the national perspective of gender violence in Belize including how it is confronted by the public and private institutions. Having established that the phenomenon of gender violence is an international problem, it is important to establish how the Belizeans assimilate it in daily life and how the experts in human rights generate ways of fighting this negative social phenomenon.

This chapter is divided into three sections entitled, "The attention given to gender violence by the Belizean Society" (2.1), "Social Institutions that specialize in Gender Violence" (2.2) and "Demographic and Statistical Data about Gender Violence in Belize" (2.3).

Each section explains information about Belize and how the phenomenon of gender violence has gained great concern in the Belizean society. How the phenomenon manifests itself, social actors involved in its prevention and what mechanisms are in place to treat it are all acknowledged in this chapter. This is done to have a clear vision of what the Belizean Society has been doing over the past years in the fight against gender violence.

The section related to the attention given to gender violence by the Belizean Society, is divided into two parts. They are "Belize's Participation in the international agenda against gender violence" and "The National Perspective for the attention of Gender Violence in Belize". The information provided here shows how Belize has formulated a national perspective with regards to gender violence by adopting information and strategies put forward by international organizations and implementing laws, institutions and mechanisms for the national fight against this phenomenon.

In the second section, "Social Institutions that specialize in Gender Violence", information is given in reference to governmental and non governmental institutions in Belize that deal with human rights issues especially gender violence.

The third section, Demographic and Statistical Data about Gender Violence in Belize, presents quantitative information from the governmental archives regarding social and cultural facts about the country and about the Corozal District. Moreover, statistical information gathered about gender violence is also highlighted in order to give an idea of the predominance of this phenomenon in the country. The statistical data taken into consideration ranges from the period 2000-2007 since it is the most recently documented information.

2.1 THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO GENDER VIOLENCE BY THE BELIZEAN SOCIETY

Belize's Participation in the International Agenda against Gender Violence

All societies have developed constructions based on the phenomenon of gender violence that describe the expectations and values that each culture ascribes to women and men. Moreover, there are social perceptions dispersed through out the world that vary between the indifference, criticism and solutions in reference to gender violence and most of the time these perceptions are not based on objective knowledge about this phenomenon. Therefore, the international human rights organizations have focused on this phenomenon in order to learn more about its presence and how it is defined in many contexts. These international organizations have formulated many ways in which this social problem can be treated and prevented.

In the case of Belize, gender violence is a sad reality that is present in many relationships. Statistics and the media clearly show that gender violence is a major social problem in this country. Over the past years,

the phenomenon of gender violence has claimed a great amount of alarm at an international level and it is quite evident that with all the research, forums, documented information and other activities that have been carried out and created world wide, this social issue is at the forefront of discussions regarding the well being of many societies.

History shows that problems that arose from gender conflicts both privately and publicly needed to be addressed in order to promote true democratic practices where all human beings regardless of gender had the constitutional right to participate in public life without restrictions. Hence, the potent international human rights organizations have embarked on a worldwide task to increase public awareness about human rights issues that affect mainly women and children. Although men are not excluded from the issues, history shows that women and children are the ones that suffer in the majority of gender disparity conflicts.

In particular, alarming and intolerable cases of women that were suffering in situations that violated their rights to live free and independent lives, inspired women in powerful countries like the United States and Europe during the 1970's to take action and agitate change in the society at that time. Social movements that highlighted how people were discriminated against because of their color, social standing and gender began to raise awareness that something was seriously wrong with the relations between men and women. Without a doubt, gender inequality and discrimination proved to be the main elements that brought unrest in many homes and communities in patriarchal societies. As a result of these social movements, a strong perception began to filter across nations that women did not have to succumb to the patriarchal practices that have always been the driving force of social, economic and political control mechanisms in most societies from the beginning of time.

The social movements began to gain momentum in the Central American and Caribbean region probably in the 1980's when the

importance of human rights issues and the well being and health of individuals and communities had been established by the movements of the more developed countries.

The United Nations Organization, one of the most prominent human rights institutions, is recognized worldwide. This institution has made great contributions to the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of many social problems stemming from the violation of human rights including discrimination against gender.

With the social movements of the 70's and 80's, new ideas, concepts and problems were brought to light and many individuals saw the need to describe and explain the main social problems and solutions that could be implemented to minimize the manifestation of the social ills that were present in many societies. After years of discussions about social problems that plagued women, in particular, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on the 18 of December, 1979. Clearly, this convention marked a new era that would give recognition and value to the role of women in the political, social and economic arena. It became known as an international treaty on September 3, 1981. Its contents of 30 articles clearly establish what is meant by discrimination against women and give a detailed agenda to eliminate this discrimination. Undoubtedly, "the convention takes an important place in bringing the female half of humanity into the focus of human rights concerns." [CEDAW, 1981]

Belize ratified this convention in May of 1990. Along with the wide array of countries that are signatories to this international treaty, Belize has agreed to:

- incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in the legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women
- establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, institutions and enterprises. [CEDAW, 1981]

Apart from abiding by these three regulations, in being members of the United Nations, each country and corresponding government is legally bound to make a lifetime commitment to put the convention into practice by addressing gender disparities in the society in order to ultimately establish gender equality and equity in private and public circles.

This convention set the pace for the creation of new international treaties that focused on different forms and ways that women were being discriminated against. For example, on June 25, 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which is an international mechanism to reinforce the main points of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In reference to gender inequality, this treaty

> urges governments, institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts for the protection and promotion of human rights of women and the girl child. [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action: 1993]

Moreover, article 18 of the conference explains that:

> The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civic, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community. [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action: 1993]

By attending the international conventions and ratifying the various treaties, the Belizean Government throughout the years has shown an interest in promoting and establishing gender equality in order to ensure national as well as human development. In September 1995, the Government of Belize pledged a commitment to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the United Nations World Conference for Women. Another convention already ratified by Belize is the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of

Belem do Para) adopted by the Organization of American States and brought into effect in Belize as of the year 1996.

Belize has also followed up on the United Nations Treaties in continuation with CEDAW such as the Optional Protocol Document of CEDAW implemented in the year 1999 as well as the United Nations Millennium Declaration implemented in the year 2000. The country of Belize is signatory to other conventions including the Commonwealth Plan of Action and the Caricom Regional Plan of Action.

Through these conventions, the governmental institutions that deal with human rights issues in Belize have implemented different mechanisms in order to raise awareness about gender issues. Belize has focused on violence against women and the position of women in decision making processes through the principles of the international pacts in order to bring about legislative changes, policy development, service delivery and gender mainstreaming amongst other things to establish equilibrium in the gender relations of the society.

Over the years, the governmental institutions in Belize along with the non governmental organizations have created a national perspective in relation to the concept of gender. Additionally, the government and its member organizations have focused their interests on social problems such as discrimination and violence against gender. The Belizean society has experienced different stages in the development of the national perspective of gender violence. Drastic changes have been carried out in the past two decades in the Human Development Department of the Belizean Government that put more emphasis on the sensitization of the society in reference to this issue as well as to other social problems.

The National Perspective for the treatment of Gender Violence

Undoubtedly, the international and regional treaties, forums and academic documents have contributed greatly to the Belizean perspective of gender violence as a serious issue that affects the

physical, sexual, psychological and economic well being of many Belizean women and men. In general, gender violence is known as a social problem; because of its potency to infiltrate different aspects of life it is being treated as a multidimensional issue by the government. Along with the information imparted about gender violence, major social actors that specialize in these problems have established the need to make the public aware of the gender perspective.

The national concern to fight social issues that affect the progression of the Belizean society in reference to gender violence probably gained momentum in the eighties and nineties when groups of women across the country started the Women against Violence Movement (WAV). The long history of British control in Belize before its independence in September 21, 1981, clearly tainted the society that exists in Belize today.

For a great period of time, Belize was ruled by English Laws that, as analyzed today, show clear evidence that they were very discriminatory against women. In many ways, the laws justified and encouraged that husbands were allowed to punish their wives as they saw fit since women were considered a man's property at that time. Because these rules were made and enforced by men, the women did not disagree because they did not have the political, economic, cultural and social means to do so.

However, because of the strong women that wanted social change in Belize, issues that affected women, found their way in many governmental discussions. As a result of these many discussions and the need to re-evaluate the role of women in public positions, the Belizean government published and passed the Domestic Violence Act in 1992 which considered gender violence in the home as a clear concern in the well being of the society.

In Belize, gender violence is known not only as gender based violence but also as domestic violence. This law was created and

specified for Belize as an extension to the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women. This act was created to

> provide better protection, especially to women and children, in cases involving domestic violence; to empower the court to make protection orders and occupation orders in favour of victims of such violence; and to provide for matters that connect therewith or incidental thereto. [Domestic Violence Act, 1992]

Although there are other laws that are taken into consideration during the legal processes involving gender violence such as The Families and Children Act, The Married Persons Act; and The Criminal Code of Belize, the Domestic Violence Act is the piece of legislation with greatest significance in these situations. The Criminal Code of Belize has also been amended to modernize and strengthen the laws that deal with domestic violence.

The Domestic Violence Act is a powerful tool by which victims of domestic violence can seek help and recuperate a life free from violence. Although this law was created in 1992, many discussions in reference to making amendments to various parts of the law have ensued since the year 2000 so that the law has more force and harsher punishments when the terms of its enforcement have been violated. Hence, a revised version of the law exists as of the year 2007.

When the law is enforced correctly and properly, persons that suffer gender violence in their homes can get protection from their aggressors. The Domestic Violence Act defines clearly what is meant by domestic violence or gender based violence and it also states who is liable to be a victim of this form of violence.

According to the Act, Domestic Violence is:

> **Physical Abuse**: this covers anything that causes a physical injury
> **Sexual Abuse**: meaning any sexual activity brought about by force, or the threat of force
> **Emotional/Psychological Abuse**: behaviour which is intended to undermine the emotional or mental well-being of the person
> **Financial Abuse**: a pattern of behaviour intended to make sure that the victim of the abuse is financially dependent on the abuser. [Domestic Violence Act, 2007]

This Belizean law also states that victims of domestic violence can be "a spouse, a partner, a child or any other person living with a potential victim of domestic violence, or with a person who has committed, or threatened to commit domestic violence (an 'abuser')" [Domestic Violence Act, 2007] Moreover, several members of the family and professionals that deal with domestic violence cases can apply for the enforcement of the law in particular cases. This section is of particular importance because in some cases, the direct victims of gender violence are apprehensive to report the abuse and someone else can do it on their behalf. Therefore, people that have the potential to apply for this law to take effect in a given case of gender or domestic violence are:

- The spouse of the abuser ('spouse' includes a former spouse and a partner, whether or not such abuser and partner live together or have a child together)
- A member of the abuser's household
- A child who usually or sometimes lives with the abuser or a child who is a family member of the abuser or the spouse
- A person over the age of 18 with a mental or physical disability that makes him or her dependent on the care of the abuser or a person applying for an order
- A parent or guardian
- A person who has a child in common with the abuser
- A police officer
- A social worker
- An officer of the Women's Department

[Domestic Violence Act, 2007]

Evidently, there are many persons that can apply for an order to be passed in a given case so that victims have more options as to how they can help themselves to get out of a domestic violence situation.

The person applying for an order that can prevent further violence from occurring also has several options as to what kind of order is necessary. Amongst the orders that this act can enforce are the protection, occupation, tenancy, counseling, pay financial compensation and interim orders. Each order is passed after a court in Belize such as the Family Court in Belize City and the Magistrate's Court in

the other districts has analyzed the history of abuse and other factors and variables inherent in a particular case. If victims in an abusive relationship have sufficient knowledge about the law then they are better prepared in using it to their benefit. If the orders passed are breached, then there are harsh punishments for violators that may include large fines or prison time.

Through out the years that followed the passing of the Domestic Violence Act, many pamphlets, advertisements and articles were published to distribute information about gender violence. It was quite evident that many social groups were becoming conscious of the fact that gender violence in the domestic environment was escalating. The majority of the victims of this form of violence were women and it caused an increase in the inequality prevalent in the Belizean society. The work of the Ministry of Human Development in Belize (The Women's Department), the non-governmental organizations and individuals from the six districts of Belize has shown that the phenomenon of gender violence is a thriving problem.

In recent years, radio and television programs have been developed that speak about this issue in Belize. Various reunions, seminars, conferences, rallies and candle light vigils for the diffusion of information about this issue have been organized in schools and other public locations. A Domestic Violence Women's Handbook as well as a Women's Rights Handbook have been published and offered free of charge to the public so that they have the information they should know about these issues. In 2006, a documentary of women who have suffered as victims of domestic violence was introduced.

The work carried out by major actors that specialize in human rights issues has produced significant advancements. The efforts of the governmental institutions and non governmental partner organizations have had great impact in the formulation of public policies that prevent or treat cases of domestic violence.

Apart from the Domestic Violence Act, other mechanisms and social instruments have also been set in place in various sectors of society to enlighten the country about the gender perspective and all of the social problems inherent in it. These problems include not only domestic violence but also other forms of gender violence and discrimination that may occur in various places with the common purpose to undermine the roles, positions and capabilities of Belizean women.

As has been mentioned before, the gender perspective as seen through Belizean eyes does not exclude men, but because of the patriarchal structure of society, the focus is mostly on women because they have a harder time defining and affirming their value and roles in the development of the country. Hence, an overview of the government's role in instilling the gender perspective in the society along with concepts of equality and empowerment of women is given herein.

In 1998, the Belizean government devised a Strategic Plan for Gender Equity and Equality in Belize that is considered a valuable contribution to the sensitization about the gender perspective. It is a useful mechanism for the creation of a new vision, one more aware of the gender perspective and the importance of its recognition. It is important to signal here that

> Before the 1980's, women's organizations revolved around church and charity organizations. Issues related to health, housing and wages were addressed through labour unions and political parties. This work sought to address women's needs and not her position of subordination in the home and workplace. [Women's Department, 2005: 2]

However, because of the influence of the international conventions and organizations against discrimination and violence against women, the Women's Department (2005: 2) gives priority to five main areas in this Strategic Plan including

> violence against women, legislation seeking to eliminate violence against women, supporting services to address domestic violence, training in non-traditional areas, and a move toward gender mainstreaming at the policy and program implementation level.

Another valuable public policy that has been formulated is the National Gender Policy, introduced in 2003. Through a series of projects, programs and mechanisms, this public policy

> sets out to identify the inequalities experienced by both men and women and suggests action for the correction of gender disparities as well as giving direction for the coordination and implementation of the policy. [Women's Department, 2005: 2]

Additionally,

> This policy is based on the Gender and Development approach which produces a shift in the way in which public policy is formulated to be specifically conscious and aware of issues of gender. This transition of thought and action has ensured that the rights and needs of women and men are more likely to be treated equally, to be central to the core machinery of government and its decision-making processes and to become a permanent and sustainable feature of social and economic relations within the nation, to the mutual benefit of all. [National Gender Policy, 2003]

The National Gender Policy gives attention to several areas. Namely, they are "Health", "Wealth and Employment Generation", "Violence Producing Conditions" and "Education and Skills Training." Essentially, this policy addresses the place of gender in these areas. In other words, the role of women in these aspects, the challenges they face and the ways in which they can overcome them are discussed. The many topics presented in this policy are a foundation for the creation of projects, programs and other mechanisms to be implemented in various public institutions for the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men.

Another public policy that has been written and introduced in reference to the gender perspective and all of the problems discussed under this topic is the Women's Agenda 2003-2008. As its title states, this is another piece of legislation that has been formulated to focus on the needs of women and their participation in the public agenda of national development and social well being.

The multi-sector approach of gender awareness that has been employed in the Belizean society is gaining strength and value each

year. The work and contribution of the relevant institutions have managed to integrate the gender perspective in the society. Their efforts in addressing the social areas that should be considered in the gender perspective have highlighted legislative policies that have been implemented, established mechanisms to provide public services to fulfill the needs of men and women, created contemporary ways of correcting behaviour and traditions that generate gender inequality and finally have introduced the system of gender mainstreaming where all public institutions should abide by a code that promotes equity in the relations between men and women.

2.2 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS THAT SPECIALIZE IN GENDER VIOLENCE[3]

GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

Through the participation of the Belizean Government in the international agenda against gender violence, there was a particular need to create and enforce public institutions in Belize in order to give continuity and sustenance to the elimination of violence and discrimination against gender in the society. Hence, governmental institutions were either modified or created to cater to human rights issues in the country. These human rights institutions would serve the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the presence of social problems in order to produce solutions through awareness, treatment and prevention mechanisms.

The development of public institutions that specialize in human rights issues started off through small groups formed by women and men who wanted a drastic change in the gender relations of the Belizean people. The years have shown that many people have now joined in

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[3] The majority of information for this section especially the bibliography cited that applies to the description for the National Women's Commission of Belize, The Women's Department, Women's Issues Network of Belize, Human Rights Commission of Belize, Belize Family Life Association and Haven House was adapted from the WIN-Belize website. This network comprises all of the governmental and non governmental institutions in Belize that are dedicated to the advocacy of human rights.

with a common purpose devoting their lives to the advocacy of human rights. They have contributed greatly to the strengthening of public entities that treat these issues.

A. National Women's Commission of Belize

One of the most successful outcomes of CEDAW in Belize was the formation of the National Women's Commission (NWC) of Belize. This entity was created to work hand in hand with government and the key purpose of this establishment is to review and make valid advice and suggestions about proposals pertinent to decisions that affect women and their roles in society. After its formation in 1982, NWC was granted annual governmental funds for its development and maintenance. Essentially, the NWC made a firm commitment to the people of Belize that it would influence as much as possible in the advancement and empowerment of Belizean women.

The National Women's Commission of Belize has five main goals and they are to:

- Advocate for issues related to the advancement of women
- Monitor the implementation of CEDAW and appropriately advise the Minister on the relevant issues
- Create public awareness on policy concerns for women
- Spearhead data collection and analysis to determine emerging needs of women
- Promote the networking and coordination of women's groups
- Serve as guardian to ensure women's involvement in national processes [National Women's Commission, 1982]

The NWC also relies on data acquired from the Beijing Platform and Programme of Action and prioritizes five main aspects of the Belizean Society including poverty, domestic violence, legal reform, health and education. All of these issues are taken into consideration through a gender perspective and this is done through the NWC strategy tools of coordination, networking, advocacy and participation.

Their well structured plan of action along with their determination in the promotion of gender equity and equality has made them a very valuable entity in Belize. Apart from the public funding that they receive,

they also acquire funding from other means in order to carry out special projects. In spite of the challenges that they have met, the NWC has managed to make of itself a prominent and instrumental institution with a clear interest in inculcating the gender perspective in the Belizean communities.

B. Ministry of Human Development- The Women's Department (WD)

The main government institution that deals with gender violence is The Women's Department under the umbrella of the Ministry of Human Development. Belize's participation in the United Nations Conferences also led to the creation of WD. In 1979, a Women in Development Unit was formed which was an institution that marked the earliest focus on the roles and position of Belizean women. Eight years later, the Women's Department was formally established on advice from the National Women's Commission. This institution works with problems of gender both in adults and children. As the institution's title implies, the main focus is on problems that women are faced with since they have been the ones that suffer the most in cases of gender violence in the family and social arenas. However, in order for the department to fulfill all inclusive roles in society, it offers services to women and men.

While the mission statement of WD is "to promote gender equality and equity thereby enabling women to be actively involved in and enjoy all benefits of development," the vision of this department is "to envision a society where each woman, man and child realizes his or her full potential and plays a meaningful and active role in development and enjoys all benefits. [The Women's Department, 1986] In order to fulfill these objectives, WD has adopted different strategies, models and information from international organizations and has integrated it into the Belizean lifestyle so that it can have an impact on societal change.

The main goals of the Women's Department are to:
- Achieve gender equality by continuing to raise gender awareness through education and public awareness campaigns

- Lobby for more women to be placed in key leadership positions in the public service and other public bodies so that they can participate in decision-making processes
- Develop and increase measures to promote women in non traditional vocations
- Form a closer working relationship with NGO's and other ministries so that we can maximize the use of our resources and network with each other to accomplish common goals and objectives
- Continue the process of amending and revising outdated and inappropriate laws so that they reflect the changing times and ensure that women have equal legal status
- Ensure that women become economically empowered in terms of accessibility to loans and involvement in commerce
- Raise awareness about gender based violence, rape, sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy
- Launch support groups within our department, which will enable women through out the country the opportunity to meet with other women who have experienced similar forms of abuse
- Lobby to ensure that mandatory counseling, which is already stated in the Domestic Violence Act, for perpetrators of domestic violence be adhered to in all cases
- Get more professional and technical resource persons to become actively involved in the activities of our department to ensure that there is constant and open communication between our department and those who can create opportunities for women. [The Women's Department, 1986]

Evidently, The Women's Department has embarked on a wide scope of goals that they fervently uphold. Following the Beijing Platform and Programme of Action, the WD develops programs that apply the gender perspective to different aspects of society including poverty, domestic violence, legal reform, health and education. All of these areas are analyzed and discussed so that women are granted more opportunities to participate in public spaces as well as to have equal treatment and rights in public institutions.

This institution has played a vital role in the solutions to the problems of gender based violence in Belize through the dissemination of information to the general public; advice on the legal process and other ways in which victims of gender violence can get out of a violent environment; and follow up treatment that includes shelter services, training programs and counseling services.

C. Police Department- Domestic Violence Unit

Undoubtedly, the problems of gender violence are also confronted through the police officers of the various Police Departments in the districts of Belize. This Department works in conjunction with the Women's Department so much so that "Domestic Violence Units" have been established in all of the Police Quarters through out the country. This was seen as a necessity due to the reporting of many domestic violence cases in this institution. In order to accelerate the process for the treatment of victims of gender violence, this unit is managed by police officers that receive special training to treat persons that report any given case of violence in the home.

Moreover, because of the increased awareness of the gender perspective, training and special workshops are imparted for all police officers who deal with domestic issues. All police officers are obligated to attend to all reports of gender violence each time that a report is filed. In order for the efficiency of the police department to be accomplished, the police officers should provide follow up treatment to victims of gender violence as well as proper handling of aggressors or abusers. The responsibilities of the police officers are a vital part of the reporting, treatment and legal process of those persons that report any given case of violence.

D. Other affiliated governmental institutions- Ministries of Education and Health

The contributions of the Women's Department and other individuals and institutions toward the recognition of gender violence are stepping stones to the decrease of this phenomenon in the Belizean society. It must be highlighted that the educational and health systems are considered vital areas through which the circulation of information based of gender violence can occur.

Next to the primary education in the home, the formal education acquired also molds the perception of individuals. The educational

system should be a resource through which humans can be taught from an early age that gender violence is intolerable and unacceptable.

Although there is no official subject area that teaches about the gender perspective at all levels, teachers and other educational professionals are trained in this area so that they can strengthen gender equality in the classroom. In this way students can learn from preschool that the dynamics of their home education may sometimes be harmful to their development.

The teachings of these issues tend to be complicated and delicate; it is important to surpass these obstacles and be honest and real in the classroom in order to be able to reach out to students who may be victims or witnesses of violence. Manuals and workshops have been created through the interlaced work of the Ministry of Education, Health and Human Development to promote the gender perspective in the classroom and in the home.

The Ministry of Health is also a very important entity that deals with the treatment of gender violence in all its forms. This means that nurses and doctors in public hospitals are aware of the severity of this issue not only as a problem of human rights but also as one of public health. The victims of gender violence have to come in contact with medical personnel at some point during the abuse and these public officers need to be able to identify the signs of gender violence and provide adequate assistance. As epidemiologist, Marlene Francis, states in a presentation on the Gender Based Violence Surveillance Module implemented as part of the National Health Information System,

> The Ministry of Health, Belize, recognizes gender based violence as an important public health issue, which is preventable. The health sector is an important entry point for women and others affected by gender based violence.[4]

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[4] This information was adapted from the presentation of epidemiologist, Marlene Francis, entitled Gender Based Violence Surveillance: The Belize Experience, The Health Sector Response, CAREC, Trinidad, September 7, 2006.

Although the phenomenon of gender violence is managed by the Ministry of Human Development, it is still seen as a problem of public health. The well being of Belizeans is not only hampered by diseases or injuries that are caused by criminal or accidental means; instead, the health of people living in Belize can also be negatively affected by gender violence.

The public health approach is integrated in the national agenda of Belizean governmental institutions through the close communication that is fostered between the government offices of education, health, human development, the judicial bodies and the law enforcement services.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

In order for people to learn about gender violence, what it is, how to prevent it and the treatment required to solve this social ill, there must be input given by not only governmental institutions but also by the participation of organizations created by the civil society. All sectors of societies have special roles that they need to play in order for the society to gain knowledge about issues that radiate in the field of human rights. Hence, the following information describes some of the predominant private organizations in Belize that specialize in human rights issues.

In spite of the fact that civil society organizations face problems in terms of funding and maintaining the facilities and services as well as establishing themselves as qualified organizations, many individuals from Belize have come together in different occasions and have created recognized organizations that work together in the network of institutions advocating for human rights.

A. Women's Issues Network of Belize (WIN BELIZE)

One of the main organizations that has been instrumental in the participation of civil society toward the prevention and treatment of gender violence was established in 1993. However, because of obstacles

within the organization, they were able to have their official establishment opened until 1998 when they received funding from the Canadian Gender Equity Fund (CIDA). The Women's Issues Network of Belize was created by women who were concerned with different issues that affected women in the home as well as in public spaces. Their mission statement is that

> WIN-Belize, a network of service-oriented organizations, coordinates, facilitates and advocates for policies, mechanisms and services aimed at promoting the empowerment of women in Belize. [WIN-Belize, 1993]

Essentially, this network links various private organizations with a common goal to strengthen a system of people and services that can work together to find solutions for many social problems that particularly affect women. To this end, the organization aims at promulgating strong and independent women through their main goal which is

> To strengthen the network of women's organizations, and its member organizations, so that they can more effectively implement activities which improve the status and situation of women in Belize, and work towards gender equity. [WIN-Belize, 1993]

Because of the long term plans and programs that are in place through this network, WIN-Belize (through its vision statement) expects that

> By 2025, women are proactive leaders and participants in national development, are working in solidarity, and are enjoying an equitable balance of respect, education, human rights and access to services, allowing for freedom to live full and productive lives. [WIN-Belize, 1993]

This organization was motivated as a result of the need to establish a private organization that had potential to work along with governmental institutions as well as other private entities in the decisions taken that affect women and their development as citizens of Belize. In light of this, the main reasons for the establishment of WIN-Belize are:

- To monitor national and international policies impacting the lives of Women that they cannot on their own address
- To share information and exchange experiences on the work they Are doing to improve the position and condition of women in Belize

- To support the efforts of members of the Network to raise funds for
  Their work [WIN-Belize, 1993]

Although the network has faced many challenges in its establishment and recognition, it has managed to surpass these and make of itself a well known private institution in Belize that has great influence in the political decisions that affect the well being of women in Belize. Amongst the major topics that WIN-Belize focuses on are gender awareness and advocacy. Through its efforts along with the collaboration of its member agencies, the gender perspective has gained interest in many discussions.

B. Human Rights Commission of Belize (HRCB)

The Human Rights Commission of Belize can best be described as:

> An independent, non-partisan, non-profit, humanitarian non-governmental organization made up of Belizean men, women and young people committed to the promotion and defense of human rights. Its goals are to increase knowledge of and respect for the equal, universal and indivisible human rights of everyone in Belize by education, awareness building, casework, research, action, publicity, advocacy and lobbying. [HRCB]

As a member agency of WIN-Belize, HRCB deals with issues that violate human rights especially those of gender violence. As a leading non governmental institution that advocates the conventional rights of Belizeans, HRCB sets out to:

- Promote and defend human rights in Belize
- Establish and maintain the institution and mechanism necessary for
  their promotion and defense
- Ensure ratification and adherence by the Government of Belize of
  the international covenants of human rights
- Promote awareness of human rights within the curriculum of the
  educational system in Belize
- Establish affiliation with national and international organizations
  engaged in the promotion and defense of human rights in
  the world and our region in particular. [HRCB]

The previous tasks are central to the efficiency of this organization

with the vision statement, "To improve the quality of life through

continuous education and changes in public policies in order to create a culture of human rights in Belize." [HRCB]

C. Belize Family Life Association (BFLA)

In 1985, individuals from the Stann Creek District of Belize saw the need to create an organization that would focus on the needs of family life in the country. With the help of a regional Caribbean organization known as the Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation, BFLA came into being.

Although it is a small non-governmental organization that faces many obstacles, it is gaining recognition in the country as the only institution that offers family life information and planning which includes the dynamics of family life, sexual education and healthy reproductive methods. Its funding agent is primarily the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) along with the aid of the business community in Belize. The mission statement of BFLA states that,

> The association will continue to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services countrywide. It will assist communities to devise plans of action to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of community members. It will also develop its resource capacity to sustain its current services with a focus on gender equity and quality of care. [BFLA: 1985]

The organization offers many services to the public that are for the most part free of charge. Amongst these services are various medical tests such as pap smears, pregnancy tests, colposcopy, breast exams and STI-syndromic diagnosis and treatment as well as medical consultations and psychological counseling. Additionally, BFLA provides several programs for AIDS education, community outreach, adolescent programs, nutritional counseling, group and individual counseling, family planning and sexuality education at the request of schools, business establishments and other social institutions.

This organization works in close relation with public health facilities through out the country and its mission includes not only providing access to medical services for various individuals in society but also

offering important information based on the family and dynamics of this domestic environment for individuals to implement in their daily lives. Through its pamphlets, workshops, programs and other services BFLA has gained an important position in the fight against gender related problems in society.

D. Haven House

On the 29 of January, 1993, the first shelter for abused or battered victims of domestic violence was opened; these victims were predominantly women. The Belizean Government realized that women in these situations did not have a place of refuge where they could seek professional help as well as a safe place for themselves and their children. Funding for this shelter was granted by the Belize City Council, the Ministry of Finance, the National Women's Commission, USAID British High Commission and other private organizations. Evidently, the efforts for the establishment of Haven House were shown by both governmental as well as civil society organizations.

The mission statement of this shelter is, "To provide shelter and support services for women who are victims of domestic violence in collaboration with other related agencies." [Haven House, 1993] Haven House works closely with the various agencies and organizations in Belize that are involved in cases of domestic violence and they work, "to provide an opportunity for women to rebuild a positive self-image necessary for them to regain control over their life." [Haven House, 1993] Amongst the many services that this shelter offers are emergency shelter services for women and their children for a period of 21 days, counseling, referral and advocacy, child care and educational and skills assessment. Essentially, these services are provided to women that have sought the help of authorities in their struggle.

The time spent at the shelter should be a period of empowerment and freedom in which women learn more about the solutions to their conflicts and recognize their self worth. Haven House is located only in

Belize City and up to this point remains the only known shelter in the country.

2.3 DEMOGRAPHIC AND STATISTICAL DATA IN RELATION TO GENDER VIOLENCE

THE COUNTRY OF BELIZE

A. General Demographic Data

Nestled between Mexico, Guatemala and the Caribbean Sea, the Central American country of Belize is no stranger to the phenomenon of gender violence. Belize, with a population of approximately 301,300[5] citizens, is the only English speaking country in the region although many other languages are spoken including Spanish and Creole. This country is relatively small in comparison with its neighbouring countries, with a land area of approximately 22,700 square kilometers or 8,867 square miles. [6]

In terms of its political situation, Belize is governed by a parliamentary democracy founded on the British System. The long and dynamic Spanish and English colonial periods that comprise Belize's history, have left a lineage that is very distinctive to the country. The political arena of Belize is primarily based on British laws and practices that have been or are being modified to suit the needs of the Belizean society. As a post colonial autonomous entity, Belize's political issues are closely connected with its British and Spanish past. Yet, Belize is an independent nation and is recognized as such internationally. There has been a recent change of government when the elections were won on February 7, 2008 by the United Democratic Party making Honourable Dean Barrow the Prime Minister of Belize. The political capital of the country is Belmopan where most of the governmental institutions are located.

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[5] The statistical data is adapted from the Statistical Institute of Belize, Ministry of Finance, Belize, Mid year population estimates for 2006

[6] This information was adapted from a document found on the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) website entitled Health in the Americas: Belize- General Situation and Trends, 1998, pg. 77, Vol. 11.

Belizean territory is divided into six districts; they are Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo from north to south. The population for each district fluctuates between 30,000 to 90,000 people. The district of Belize has the largest population and it is considered the center of commercial activities. The economy of Belize is based on the tourism and agricultural industries.

In spite of its size, Belize is a country marked by its great diversity. Its history shows an influx of different cultures from many other countries that have settled in Belize and consider it their home. The population is divided almost in the middle with 149,800 men and 151,500 women[7]. According to the 2006 mid year population estimates, the country is made up of a relatively young community since more than half of the population is under the age of 44.[8] The ethnic groups and the percentage of the total population that each makes up are shown in the following table.

Table 2.3: Ethnic Groups of Belize and their percentage of the total population[9]

Ethnic Group	Percentage of total population
Mestizo	48.7%
Creole	24.9%
Maya	10.6%
Garifuna	6.1%
Category "Other" that includes Asians, Arabs and East Indians	9.7%

Because of the multicultural society, many social constructions form different perspectives concerning the family unit, relationships within

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[7] The statistical data is adapted from the Statistical Institute of Belize, Ministry of Finance, Belize, Mid year population estimates for 2006
[8] According to the third and fourth periodic report prepared by the Belizean Government for the implementation of CEDAW, 44.6% of the total population is under the age of 18.
[9] The statistical data is adapted from The World Factbook (2006)

partners and the roles of men and women. Historically, women have been the victims of gender violence because the social inequalities in Belize have placed them in an inferior position economically and socially. In reference to this, it is safe to say that in Belize, "the man that rapes, hits, insults or offends in whichever form, a woman, does this because he does not consider her as a person that he can relate to equally." [Torres, 2004:19] However, statistics show that men are also victims of gender violence, principally in Belize City. Yet this increase does not surpass the rate at which women still find themselves as the victims of this vicious phenomenon.

In the combined third and fourth periodic report to the United Nations committee that monitors the implementation of CEDAW, the Belizean Government, represented by the previous Minister of Human Development, Honourable Sylvia Flores, provided valuable statistical data on the situation of women in particular that is worth mentioning. According to this report, Hon. Sylvia Flores related that,

> the percentage of women heads of households had decreased somewhat, from 39.3 per cent in 2003 to 28.8 per cent in 2006. Unemployment rates for women had also decreased from 20.7 per cent in 2003 to 12 per cent in 2007. However, it still remained twice as high as that of men.[10]

An important point to highlight here is that many Belizean households are headed by women in spite of the fact that the country is founded on a patriarchal church based system. Additionally, the fact that the unemployment rate of women is higher than that of men signals that more obstacles are faced by women in keeping stable and decent employment.

The majority of Belizean women do not hold high levels of education nor do they have opportunities of quality employment and so they have to depend on men economically. Generally, Belizean men are expected to be the workers and providers in the family unit whether

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[10] This excerpt is taken from the third and fourth combined periodic report to the treaty body that monitors the implementation of the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW).

it is as married couples or as common law partners. However, many of the families in the country are considered single parent families where the parent is the mother. In these situations, although the mother takes on the role of the sole provider for her children, some of the women in these single parent units still become victims of gender violence.

Sadly, as a result of these gender dynamics, "violent conduct is exercised over those that are in an inferior position in social hierarchy and because of this, their vulnerability is reinforced." [Torres, 2004: 20] In other words, since there are more Belizean women at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy than there are Belizean men, these women suffer to a greater degree as victims of gender violence in their private and public life.

B. Statistical Data of Gender Violence

One of the most pertinent ways in which gender violence in any country can be monitored is through statistical data. Through this medium, experts in the field can monitor the number of cases along with particular trends and fluctuations.

In Belize, victims of gender violence are asked to fill out a special form that is used to create statistical records of the cases. These records consider information on both victims and aggressors or abusers measuring and monitoring several factors such as age, sex, ethnicity, civil status, educational status, distribution of cases amongst districts and types of abuse suffered. Other data such as institutions to which the abuse was reported to, follow up treatment provided and background information of the abuse is also recorded. The following table shows statistical data from 2000-2008 of the documented cases of domestic gender violence of female and male victims. This period was specifically chosen because of the evident professional and well organized statistical records available.

Table 2.3.2: Documented Cases of Gender Violence in Belize for the period 2000-2008[11]

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Documented Cases (total)	537	688	799	1,240	962	969	968	1148	1669
Female victims	460	616	707	1,050	840	848	858	987	1351
Male victims	77	72	92	190	122	121	116	161	315

In reference to Table 2.3.2, there has been a gradual increase in the number of cases reported over the time period. In the year 2003, with a record of 1,240 cases, there was a drastic increase of 441cases reported in comparison with 2002 that recorded 799 cases. Several reasons can account for this change including increased awareness leading to reporting of cases. The years that follow show that recorded cases per year are above 900 cases with gradual changes. The most recent yearly record of 2008 shows that the reported cases of gender violence are above the 1000's.

Other statistical facts that are worth mentioning refer to general characteristics such as the age, civil status, educational level, employment and ethnicity of the victims and aggressors of the cases that are recorded. The age of victims and the frequency of cases are measured in five or ten year intervals and the statistics show that most victims have ages ranging from 15-44 years. The highest concentration of violence is notably imparted on victims between the ages of 20 and 40. Similarly, the age of the majority of the aggressors also radiates in this range.

In terms of civil status, the statistics measure the status of individuals with the categories of married, divorced, single and widowed victims

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[11] These statistics were taken from the records compiled by the Ministry of Health-Belize, corresponding to the period 2000-2008

and abusers as well as those individuals in common law partnerships. While the statistics show that many of the victims are married with a total of 2,801 cases for the time period in question, the majority of the cases (a total of 3,792) reveal that victims are in common law unions. Hence, the common law union has been considered a legally binding partnership in which members of this arrangement have legal rights to report any incident of gender violence. Individuals that are single are the third leading category as victims of gender violence with a total of 1,631 cases. These individuals as well have rights.

The majority of victims and aggressors are registered as having primary level education. While the statistics show that victims and aggressors have up to tertiary level education, the fact that many of these persons have only primary level education shows that their educational status puts them at the lower end of the socio economic ladder. Nevertheless, most of the victims and aggressors reported that they were employed.

As has been mentioned before, Belize is comprised of many ethnic groups. Hence, statistics also monitor the distribution of gender violence cases with reference to ethnicity. The majority of the cases radiate around victims that are Mestizo and Creole. In the years 2000 and 2001, statistics show that most of the individuals involved in gender violence were Creole. However, notable trends of the statistical records show that the Mestizo culture has stepped up to the first place with the highest concentration of gender violence cases. From 2003 to 2008, the percentage of the cases where Mestizos are both victims and aggressors fluctuated between 30% and 50% of the total cases in the country.

In reference to the type of violence suffered, many cases reveal that victims suffered various forms of gender abuse simultaneously. However, the greater part of the cases shows that female victims suffered more physical abuse than the other forms. However, many victims suffered psychological, economic and sexual abuse along with physical violence. Many of the male victims report that they suffered

psychological abuse more than any other form. Similarly, many also suffered other forms of abuse along with the principal psychological gender violence.

The statistics analyzed also reveal that many of the victims turn to the Women's Department, Police Department and the Family or Magistrate's court for help. However, more women than men seek help from the Women's Department. The majority of victims have their cases heard through legal and court proceedings.

These are only some important statistical records that can allow for a comprehensive understanding of the situation in Belize in terms of numbers. Statistical data helps in identifying special trends in relation to gender violence but this information only takes into consideration the cases that are recorded. New and hidden information still exists in the society in the cases of gender violence that are not reported. Yet, the significance of statistical evidence is well recognized for its influence in the modification of laws and policies that can assist more victims of gender violence.

THE DISTRICT OF COROZAL

A. General Demographic Data

Gender violence in Corozal, Belize is a problem that has cast a wide net through out the district. Many a day, citizens of this district hear that a neighbor, friend, relative or stranger is suffering from some form of gender violence. Although these cases may seem wrong, those that can help do not take the initiative to do so because gender violence has been culturally accepted as a part of "every day" life or like a "natural" occurrence exclusively for the ones that are directly involved. In other words, if individuals are not directly involved in a given case of gender violence then they are very hesitant to go out of their way to help a stranger or friend who is suffering in this situation because it has been

socially instilled that gender violence is a delicate situation that can only be solved by those that are directly affected by the problem.

There are many that WANT to help relatives or friends and even strangers suffering in gender violence situations but are reluctant to do so because they have been taught that it is "none of their business." Therefore, the phenomenon of gender violence in the domestic environment is confronted in large part by the social institutions that specialize in human rights that have the power to inform and stimulate the society about these issues. The central goal of these institutions is to change the concepts, myths and the ignorance that the men and women of Corozal have culturally acquired about this social phenomenon.

The northern district of Belize, Corozal, has a population of 35,800 inhabitants, 12.2% of the total population of Belize. Like the other districts in Belize, Corozal is divided into the urban and the rural areas. The men comprise 50.1% of this population with 17,900 and the women, 49.9% with 17,900 inhabitants. The rural area of the district comprises 26,900 inhabitants while the urban area comprises 8,900 inhabitants[12]. The dominating ethnic group in this district is that of the Mestizo which also holds the dominant place in the country. However, most of the various ethnicities in Belize can be found in Corozal including the Garifuna, and Creole and other ethnic minorities like the Asians and East Indians.

B. Statistical Data of Gender Violence

The following table 2.3.3 demonstrates the documented domestic gender violence cases of female and male victims in Corozal for the period 2000-2008. The cases fluctuate between married couples and those in common law unions with ages of the victims falling in a range of 15-55 years similar to the general statistics of the entire country.

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[12] The statistical data is adapted from the Statistical Institute of Belize, Ministry of Finance, Mid year population estimates for 2006

Table 2.3.3: Documented Cases of Domestic Gender Violence in Corozal for the period 2000-2008[13]

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Documented Cases	5	95	209	210	166	142	174	191	364

Approximately 60% of the cases reported show that individuals from the Latin community in Corozal, that is, the Mestizo culture, report gender violence. Many have primary level education and are employed. Based on the table, there have been great fluctuations between the yearly reports from 2000 with a mere 5 cases to 2008 with 364 cases.

In comparison with the population of Corozal, this may be only a fraction of the population and although it may not seem like much, for a small district like Corozal this is a significant amount, if not too much! Another part of the society is also affected but for many reasons there are cases that are unreported. The trends evident in the table show that there have been increases of up to 100 cases each year which occurred, for example, from 2001 with 95 cases to 2002 with 209 cases. From that point forward, there have been slight fluctuations in the reported cases but the number of cases is above approximately 150 cases per year.

Of the total cases in the country for 2008, Corozal holds the second highest number of cases next to Belize City. Notably, the majority of the cases in Corozal (296 cases) report the female as the victim of the violence while 68 cases show that the male is the victim of the violence. Over the years, in the majority of the cases reported, the female is the victim but there is a clear trend that more men are reporting gender

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[13] These statistics were taken from the records compiled be the Ministry of Health-Belize, corresponding to the period 2000-2008.

violence. However, many times the victims may be unwilling to report cases because of the fear of being ridiculed or criticized by society.

Clearly, the body of statistical data gathered reveals many important points in relation to this phenomenon. The statistics in Belize are both well organized and readily available, which are qualities that are not always possible when it comes to this form of documentation. Because of the communication between the leading governmental bodies that collect this data, the ability to analyze this information is facilitated. The statistics in Corozal in reference to gender violence is presented to provide specific points to create a general context of the situation in this district.

Concluding Notes

Essentially, this chapter has explained and described the national perspective of gender violence in Belize. The international treaties of human rights for this phenomenon have had great impact in the formulation of political policies that treat and prevent gender violence. Moreover, the efforts that have been put into place by the governmental and non governmental organizations are recognized and vital to the advancement in the fight against violence in this country. This phenomenon is considered not only a human rights problem but also a serious public health issue and as the years go by the governmental system is being strengthened as the populace recognizes the negative impact that violence of this kind is having on the family and community life in the country.

The description of the theoretical concepts in the first chapter is definitely seen from a realistic angle in this chapter since the gender perspective and the problem of gender violence are analyzed in a real setting. In this case, like any other country, Belize has an ongoing battle with this social phenomenon. The government and civil society institutions have identified its presence and what can be done to treat and prevent the problem.

The first and second chapters have generally presented the theoretical aspects of gender violence. In the third chapter, a different angle is captured as the investigation takes on a more practical profile. The following chapter describes the importance of qualitative research in an investigation that identifies and describes the perception of members of the Belizean community in the Corozal District. While the perception of experts, scholars and other individuals that work and specialize in human rights and gender violence are taken into account, the perception and knowledge of various women and men in the district are central fountains of data in the last chapter. Through the employment of the vital concepts of the investigation in an actual setting, new and significant information can be revealed. This information can in turn be used to strengthen gender development processes and mechanisms in the country.

CHAPTER III- AN INVESTIGATION ON SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE IN COROZAL, BELIZE

Introductory Notes

This chapter describes the process undertaken in the qualitative investigation carried out for the completion of this study as well as the results that establish the relation between the social perceptions of various citizens of the Corozal District in Belize and gender violence. In order to fully appreciate the relation and significance of the statistical and documented information presented in the first and second chapters, this chapter reconciles this knowledge through an investigation that observes and analyzes testimonies, experiences, thoughts and perceptions of women and men in relation to a phenomenon that has swept the world over.

Three sections comprise this chapter. Namely, they are "Examining Daily Social Realities through Social Perceptions" (3.1), "Qualitative methods used in the Investigation" (3.2) and "Analysis of Results-Gender Violence and Social Perceptions" (3.3). These sections are also divided into other parts that concentrate on different stages of the investigation. In conjunction, this chapter presents vital information that highlights and emphasizes the importance of qualitative research in the exploration of new ways to deal with and eliminate social problems such as gender violence. Because very well documented statistical data already exists in Belize, the results of the investigation presented here contribute qualitative documented information that analyzes, evaluates and exposes certain aspects of society that cannot be revealed through quantitative studies alone.

The section entitled, "Examining Daily Social Realities through Social Perceptions", shows the significance of qualitative research not only to the development of the Social Sciences but also to the diffusion of information about different social issues. The qualitative methods employed in this research focus on the study of social realities through the analysis of social perceptions. Through the phenomenological

approach, the research focuses on the interpretation of various social actors in relation to gender violence. Moreover, this section emphasizes that the techniques, methods and other tools of qualitative investigations are valid and pertinent elements in the world of research and science.

The second section, "Qualitative methods and techniques used in the investigation", describes and explains the experience of gathering data through qualitative instruments from the refinement of the units of analysis to the elaboration and application of interviews during the field work carried out in the investigation. The interpretation of the researcher is vital for the authenticity of this section because it adds clarity and first hand experiences in the endeavor to discover and reveal new and accurate results.

In the last section, "Analysis of Results-Gender Violence and Social Perceptions", the findings of the research are presented in a descriptive analysis highlighting special similarities and differences as well as other factors that are worth mentioning. The information gathered in the interviews is rich; the descriptive analysis of the results is pertinent before a more theoretical analysis is given. In order to ensure a thorough analysis of the results, this section is divided into different parts based on the structure of the interviews carried out.

In essence, this chapter represents the practical application of the theoretical concepts and well known information about gender violence. The previous chapters are interlaced with this one because they present a solid foundation for the investigation. The experience of taking a closer look into the perception of the Belizean Society in Corozal has opened a door to latent thoughts, ideas, misconceptions, opinions, values and constructions of the people that make up the basic fiber of a society and that can somehow aid in the formulation or modification of public policies and preventative and awareness campaigns that can at the very least minimize this form of violence in Belize.

The quality of information that the participants of the investigation have willingly contributed is worthy of praise because they represent a

unique source of solutions to the problem of gender violence. While some may consider this investigation as a diminutive or magnanimous contribution to the fight against gender violence, the fact remains that this contribution is legitimate and irreplaceable.

3.1 EXAMINING DAILY SOCIAL REALITIES THROUGH SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

Social Realities under Investigation

The Social Sciences like any other academic discipline focus on specific areas of life that require investigation. In order to examine varying areas of study, there are a wide array of methods and techniques that can be used by social scientists to understand and explain social phenomena and a diversity of social realities. Essentially, this particular academic discipline delves into social concerns that are many times human creations that have become engraved in collective realities that are shared socially either by acceptance or tolerance. A common concern for social scholars rests in the procedure of how to understand social phenomena in order to recommend solutions to problematic situations. In order to boldly approach a social phenomenon, it is first fundamental to recognize the complex nature of social realities that radiate around the daily lives of people.

Each person experiences a world entirely of their own incomparable to any other. What is a reality for one person may be fantasy to another and what is possible for one may be impossible to the other. Social realities are very difficult to define because they are so assorted. Yet, what is much easier to do is to seek certain evidenced trends that have been examined through various angles and found to have congruence. By doing so, common answers to difficult research questions can be yielded and used to formulate plausible, result directed projects and programs to remedy social uncertainties and conflicts. Covey (2004: 28) is so right when he declares that, "Each of us tends to think we see things as they are, that we are objective. But this is not the

case. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are-or, as we are conditioned to see it." Philosophically and on so many other levels, Covey is saying quite a lot. When one believes that they have attained truth at last, they may find that what they think they know is nothing at all.

All this leads us to ask ourselves- What is a social reality? And how can one even begin to investigate this mysterious dimension that seems all too familiar to everyone. In an attempt to formulate a sound reply to these questions, it is imperative to refer to Berger and Luckman in regards to their insight on their version of the social construction of reality. This is necessary to shed light on the importance of considering the varying social realities that are highlighted through out this thesis and specifically in reference to the social perceptions and paradigms of the participants of the investigation in reference to the social phenomenon of gender violence.

The term "daily life" has been continuously taken for granted. When people refer to their daily life, they are usually referring to what they do habitually from day to day in a manner that reduces the daily habits to nothing more than expected chores that need to be finished in order to move on. However, what we fail to see is that our daily life is LIFE and what takes place in this daily life marks us for life! Naturally, the life that we lead is many times accepted as such, based on our upbringing and experiences. Nonetheless, as Berger and Luckman explain (1994: 36), "La vida cotidiana se presenta como una realidad interpretada por los hombres [y las mujeres] y que para ellos [y ellas] tiene el significado subjetivo de un mundo coherente." They continue by explaining that as social investigators we make this social reality the object of our social investigations.

By making it an objective reality, social investigators attempt to step out of their daily reality and look into a collection of social realities. Through this lens, an investigator understands that every social phenomenon, every social space and every person has been

objectified. Moreover, "it is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanely produced, constructed objectivity." [Berger, Luckman, 1994: 83] What humans have acquired through primary and secondary socialization are the characteristics of an institutionalized objective reality that "has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection. It was there before he [or she] was born, and it will be there after his [or her] death." [Berger, Luckman, 1994: 82]

Only after understanding that the social phenomena to be examined have been objectified and rectified through institutionalization, can social scientists attempt to understand the subjective realities of various social actors. Although the world that we live in is filled with shared realities in reference to the constant and apparent stability of world order and maintenance, it must be stated that we live in a shared world that cannot be seen from a completely objective level. As such,

> La realidad de la vida cotidiana se me presenta además como un mundo que comparto con otros. Esta intersubjetividad establece una señalada diferencia entre la vida cotidiana y otras realidades de las que tengo conciencia…, no puedo existir en la vida cotidiana sin interactuar y comunicarme continuamente con otros. [Berger, Luckman, 1994: 40]

For many people, it is difficult to understand social realities from an objective stance because the way they see the world represses their ingrained subjectivity. However, qualitative and quantitative studies have made this possible through proper methodology that allows for valid results and analysis.

In terms of the writing of Berger and Luckman another strong point to mention here is that social realities are constructed and passed on socioculturally and not biologically. In light of this, social realities and social order is based on the notion upheld by social scientists that, "social order is not biologically given or derived from any biological data in its

empirical manifestations...It exists only as a product of human activity."
[Berger, Luckman, 1994: 82]

Having established that the reproduction of humans is a social rather than biological endeavour, this gives way to explaining the externalization and internalization process of Berger and Luckman that foments how people nurture and transmit social realities that are objectified. According to their social theory, the process of externalization takes place as people perform their daily routines, speak their continuous discoveries and experiences and make habits of their life activities. This is carried out either directly or indirectly; Berger and Luckman (1994: 73) signal that, "the human being is impossible in a closed sphere of quiescent interiority. Human beings must ongoingly externalize themselves in activity."

In continuation, because people are social by nature constantly interacting in a shared social reality, they are also internalizing what appeals to their senses converting learned experiences and new observations from an objective reality to part of their own subjective structure. In reference to this,

> Lo que en la sociedad se da por establecido como conocimiento, llega a ser simultáneo con lo cognoscible, o en todo caso proporciona la armazón dentro de la cual todo lo que aún no se conoce llegará a conocerse en el futuro. Éste es el conocimiento que se aprende en el curso de la socialización y que mediatiza la internalización dentro de la conciencia individual de las estructuras objetivadas del mundo social. [Berger, Luckman, 1994: 89]

In conclusion, it can be said that humans are by nature social and although biology plays a great role in the physical attributes of people, society and culture also play interesting and significant roles in the shaping of thoughts, feelings, social roles, behaviour and perceptions. In concordance with Berger and Luckman, the human race goes through several generations of externalization and internalization that has allowed our continuous reproduction. As will be explained in this next section, the shaping of the perception in relation to gender violence is the main concern here as a result of social influence. Social paradigms

and perceptions play a major role in the continuation, transformation and creation of human culture and society.

The importance of Social Perceptions and Paradigms in this Qualitative Investigation of Gender Violence

Qualitative research has gained marked significance as an investigative instrument for its ability to ensure "validity and reliability" through structured and unbiased processes and regulations. [Tarrés, 2001: 29] The methods and techniques used in qualitative studies have allowed for phenomena to be explored and understood. In general, qualitative research "refers to…investigation that produces descriptive data: the very words of people, spoken or written, and observed conduct." [Pérez, 1998: 29] Moreover, instead of being considered opposite to quantitative investigation, qualitative research is known as a significant complement to quantitative analysis; what may not be clearly extracted in quantitative work can certainly be addressed in qualitative investigations.

The interpretation of the data collected in qualitative research is always a very significant part in ensuring accurate and projected outcomes of the investigation. The importance of considering social perceptions and paradigms in this investigation adds visibility to the influence of social and cultural processes of socialization in creating varying ways of how people view the world. Perceptions and paradigms are both terms that refer to how people see the world and making these the center of an investigation draws on the phenomenological approach that is concerned with learning the interpretative thought processes that bring about the internalization and externalization of perception and behaviour of various individuals in relation to social phenomena; moreover, in knowing what persons perceive in relation to a certain topic, makes investigators aware of what level of knowledge people have about various social issues and whether the information

they know is sufficient enough for them to be able to truly understand the problems at hand and try to remedy them.

Covey (2004: 32) explains that a social paradigm is a "model, theory, perception, assumption or frame of reference." This of course is manifested as a subjective reality and exists symbolically in the minds of people and is later legitimized through social and cultural actions that support the symbolic significance of social phenomena already internalized as correct or tolerated behaviour. The interpretations of people and their daily lives is based in a general sense in "how they 'see' the world, not in terms of the visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting." [Covey, 2004: 32] As humans are social beings, it is clear that social phenomena are socially constructed and reproduced by men and women. In the same light, social phenomena like gender violence are interpreted by people based on the knowledge that they have acquired over the years in reference to it.

Maintaining this same train of thought in terms of gender violence, people will interpret it as a private or public problem based on how and what they have learnt about this social phenomenon, how they have socially understood gender roles and how they have reacted to a direct or indirect situation of gender violence. Naturally, there are many things that have incidence in how people interpret social problems; some of the most influential factors have much to do with socialization, family and educational background, cultural and environmental factors and type of society just to mention a few.

Hence, this investigation, through the practical application of terms such as "trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility," has gathered qualitative data that complies with the objectives of the study. [Lincoln and Guba, 2000] To maintain the strict regulations of qualitative studies that require unbiased procedures for accurate responses, the subjectivity of the investigator, defined as, the personal opinions and individual prejudices in reference to the investigation, are silenced.

This study founds itself on the notion that, the analysis of reality consists in approaching it through valid methods in order to know, discover and learn new information with the ultimate goal to provide suggestions and solutions to improve it. As is stated by Pérez (1998: 16),

> La investigación de la realidad social ha de ser una actividad sistemática y planificada, cuyo propósito consiste en proporcionar información para la toma de decisiones con vistas a mejorar o transformar la realidad, facilitando los medios para llevarlo a cabo.

Although the findings of the research are told through the eyes of the investigator, the interpretation of data and the formulation of results and conclusions follow "systematic and descriptive observations of…the latent or underlying ideas, feelings, attitudes and perceptions…of the observed words or actions." [Tarrés, 2001: 19, 22] Therefore, the objectivity of the investigation rests in the unbiased compilation and interpretation of the honest opinions, beliefs and actual perception of the subjects that have willingly participated in the study. For the validity of the investigation, the omission of the investigator's subjectivity, "establishes the distance necessary between the subjects of the study in order to attain utmost objectivity." [Piaget, 1970:47]

While it is extremely important to study the very core of social phenomena, it is equally important to analyze the interpretation of social issues (i.e. the perception) by social actors. Gender violence is a social problem; therefore, it is a phenomenon that affects people in general in more ways than one. While a direct victim of gender violence suffers a great part of the pain and disrespect that goes along with this social problem, the members of the family of that victim, the friends and acquaintances and the general public all interpret the actions inherent in the aggressor/victim relationship of gender violence. As a result, they too are affected by gender violence in varying yet significant ways. The perception of those affected by social issues is the fountain of answers required to "fight fire with fire" against the social evil that is gender violence.

Social Science research and investigators highlight the great needs and areas to be investigated in order to interpret, understand and change social phenomena. In this investigation, the purpose for the methods and techniques being used was inspired by the great need to include the overall perception of people in the processes of analyzing and solving social problems. There are a myriad of research theories and techniques that can be used to study a single problem as is the case of gender violence. However, social scientists know that problems are not isolated from other factors. Everything in the social sphere is connected in some way. Social phenomena are socially created and transmitted from generation to generation. The way that people perceive social phenomena will inevitably have an impact on how they will behave and interact with others; hence, perception and behavior are connected.

As a final reflection, the information that has already been provided by the previous chapters as well as what is presented in the continuation of the present investigation draw rich information from various sources at a quantitative and qualitative level. Gender violence can be studies from many angles but the angle chosen here is to see it through the eyes of other that have assimilated it as part of their social realities. The study of the perception of the participants in this investigation provides the quality raw material that nurtures the authenticity of this social investigation.

Qualitative Research- The Phenomenological Approach

The focus on the subjectivity of the participants takes on a phenomenological orientation in which the very legitimacy of the investigation depends on the essential subjectivity that serves as a powerful field of knowledge as well as an important tool used in qualitative analysis. The strength of this investigation lies in the perceptions of people and how they interpret social phenomena that are complex and interactive. In other words, this investigation attempts

to understand the social reality of gender violence through, "the vision of the actors and the way in which they experiment the world." [Gutiérrez, 2009: 23]

The phenomenological approach of qualitative research relies on "qualitative methods that produce a high level of personal comprehension of the motives and beliefs that are behind the actions of people." [Pérez, 1998: 20] Moreover,

> La experiencia fenomenológica parte del supuesto de que 'lo subjetivo' no solo puede ser fuente de conocimiento, sino incluso presupuesto metodológico y objeto de la misma ciencia. Es la propia experiencia, a través de la intuición eidética, la principal fuente de conocimiento que utiliza el investigador para tratar de acercarse al estudio, análisis y conocimiento de la realidad. [Pérez, 1998: 19]

Through the phenomenological orientation, social phenomena are studied through interpretative investigation that analyzes the subjectivity of participants considering their sociocultural background. The interpretation of reality analyzes, uncovers and reveals many aspects of daily life that are taken for granted. Undoubtedly, as Gutiérrez (2009: 24) explains, "Las personas en la vida cotidiana, estamos constantemente interpretando la realidad y modificando nuestras acciones en relación con las diversas situaciones y personas con las que nos relacionamos." As such, the investigation considers that individuals are influenced by different experiences based on their daily context that significantly determine how they see the world.

Even the smallest details of what people say or do contribute greatly to the resolution of conflicts and problems that occur in social spaces. Therefore, in this investigation the spoken contributions of the participants are the core data that shed light on new realities and points of view never before reflected on. Reality takes many forms and many times qualitative investigations can only examine certain parts of this reality at a time because of its complexity. Pérez (1998: 27) states that,

> Esta realidad está constituida no solo por hechos observables y externos, sino también por significados, símbolos e interpretaciones

elaboradas por el propio sujeto a través de una interacción con los demás.

The studies of gender violence through qualitative research are essential for the development of Social Sciences because they play a major role in the well being of any society. The comprehension of situations of gender violence through the phenomenological approach of qualitative research uncovers information that is not usually captured through quantitative research. The findings gathered in this type of research can help increase the diffusion of information, the knowledge of an issue from a critical perspective and the progressive development of a new and well informed attitude of the society toward social problems such as gender violence.

Social Sciences are the avenue through which individuals can learn and analyze the situations that cause anxiety and chaos in societies through profound and objective tools. The employment of a qualitative research approach in this case is necessary since the main variables and concepts of the investigation are not readily measurable through quantitative analysis. In short, "the phenomenological approach seeks to understand and interpret social phenomena from diversified points of view, through qualitative research." [Gutiérrez, 2009: 24]

For a small and underdeveloped country like Belize, qualitative studies that analyze phenomena that negatively affect the society are indispensable because knowing what people suffer opens doors to ways in which the well being of individuals, families and societies can be achieved. Delving into the present social paradigms and perceptions of the Belizean Society through qualitative research in this investigation takes a closer look at not only what has influenced the thoughts, opinions, beliefs, values and traditions of the people but also what are the necessities of the people and how these can be resolved or mitigated. Through this knowledge, the investigation explores new ways of confronting social constructions that harm rather than help the

Belizean society in achieving unity, equilibrium, equity and equality in their daily life.

3.2 QUALITATIVE METHODS AND TECHNIQUES USED IN THE INVESTIGATION

In order to understand and appreciate the results of this investigation, it is pertinent to describe how these results were obtained. Hence, this section explains the stages of the investigative process including the selection of suitable social groups as units of analysis and the elaboration of appropriate qualitative techniques for the acquisition of data.

Establishing Units of Analysis

Two of the most essential aspects of the investigation included selecting units of analysis and creating fitting investigative techniques that would be applied to these groups in order to obtain qualitative data. The units of analysis were categorized into two main groups. After establishing the groups of participants that could contribute valid information, it was decided that semi-structured interviews would be the qualitative technique used to obtain data.

The units of analysis were chosen on the basis that each social group could contribute varying levels and types of data. The first group consists of individuals that have specialized knowledge about gender violence as well as experience working with these issues in governmental or non governmental institutions. The individuals in this group are localized in the northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk that specialize or are affiliated in some way with institutions that address issues of human rights or public health. No special personal characteristics or factors were delimited for these individuals because their particular qualities are not pertinent to the investigation. They were asked to participate on their ability to share their experiences, informed perspectives and visions in reference to gender violence in Belize and Corozal including the roles, obligations and contributions that make up

their responsibilities in their specialty area toward the elimination of gender violence in the society.

The second group consists of individuals from the Corozal District that were chosen through purposive sampling. Because the Mestizo and Creole ethnicities hold the dominant positions in terms of ethnic group in the country of Belize and in Corozal as well, the interviewees were chosen with this ethnic background. The educational status of the participants varies amongst primary, secondary and tertiary level education while the civil status of the interviewees includes the status of married, common law union and single. The participants have varying ages between the range of 20 and 40 years. Because the Corozal District is divided into urban and rural areas, the location of the participants is also considered as a characteristic that is recorded. Other characteristic traits that were recorded include family situation (number of family members), occupational status and sex.

This second group was selected through purposive sampling on the basis that they could share their experiences, knowledge, opinions, ideas and any other contributions in reference to gender violence. One limitation and at the same time one main strength of this method is that no two perceptions are identical. The findings of this investigation cannot be generalized to large populations because each individual has her or his own perspective on the issue at hand. However, the techniques of the investigation, that is, the interviews formulated and the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, were structured so that the data acquired could be presented in an orderly fashion recording interesting and significant trends in the perception of the participants.

Semi-structured Interviews

In any investigation, the efficiency of the research design requires the use of instruments to gather valuable and unique information from the society through a structured process in order to generate rational and precise conclusions. In qualitative research,

las técnicas de recolección es fundamentalmente la relación del investigador con el instrumento utilizado y con el objeto [o sujeto] que intenta estudiar por medio de ese instrumento [Tarrés, 2001:18]

The instruments that are used to collect the necessary information from the target population are semi structured interviews. As an indispensable part of the process, interview questions that cover different aspects of the perception people have toward gender violence were formulated. These interviews are considered "'access routes' to the aspects of human subjectivity." [Vela, 2001: 64] The interviews are the points of entry into the perception of the social groups chosen and for this investigation the term perception is known as, "the direct experience about [an issue]…and the indirect information that an individual receives through other individuals, science and mass media [Whyte, 1985:404]

The semi structured interviews were created with the premise that

an interview is a constructed situation created with a specific goal in which an individual (the interviewee) can express, at least in a conversation, certain essential parts about his or her past or present references as well as her or his future intentions and anticipations. [Kahn and Cannel, 1977]

The reasons why this form of interview was chosen as the most appropriate type for the investigation were because of time allocations for the research period as well as the ability of the interviewees to share as much information as they could with the time they had available. During semi structured interviews, the investigator has a guide of interview questions that serve as a directional tool to keep the open conversation focused on gender violence. In other words, since the interview does not follow a particular structure, some questions may be added, modified or omitted at the discretion of the investigator depending on the progress of the session. However, the benefit of this type of interview is that it allows sufficient liberty to share information in a systematic manner. The importance of this freedom is that the investigator-interviewee relationship unfolds in a comfortable setting.

Two forms of the semi structured interviews were designed and entitled: "Semi structured interviews for professionals that work with gender violence issues" and "Semi structured interviews for citizens of the Corozal District." Each design contains a series of questions that are categorized under different headings and they can be observed as annexed documents in the appendix. The categories shown on the interview designs make the documentation of information straightforward and accurate.

Field Work Description-the collection of data

The interviews[14] were carried out in a timely manner either spontaneously or with previous notification. The interview questions were an excellent guide for the conversation about gender violence to develop. All of the participants were more than willing to contribute their views and experiences in relation to the central issue.

For each interview, the participants were first briefed on the purpose of the interviews as well as the appreciation of their cooperation in the investigation. After establishing that their identity would remain confidential, they were asked if their spoken contributions could be documented in this investigation. They had no opposition to this request. Moreover, they were very receptive to the interviews and they shared information to the best of their ability with a clear sense of honesty.

Before proceeding with the interview questions, the participants were asked personal information that they willingly gave. The interviews were relatively short and very rich with information. At the end of the interviews, the participants were thanked once more.

The process of carrying out the interviews proved to be a valuable part of the investigation. This procedure allowed for information pertinent to the objectives to be discussed in an open and comfortable ambience. The following section summarizes and discusses the

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[14] All of the interviews presented in this chapter, whether they are for the professionals or the general populace of Corozal, were carried out in the month of March 2008.

information gathered through the use of the categories in the interview design.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS- GENDER VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

The purpose of this section is to, "document the vision of the participants." [Vela, 2001: 67] The analysis is as precise as possible in order to fulfill the objectives of the investigation. However, the interpretation of the investigator is very valuable for the analysis. As has been mentioned before, two forms of the semi structured interviews were elaborated and applied. The first form, "Semi structured interviews for professionals that work with gender violence issues", was applied to five professionals that work with issues of gender violence. The second form, "Semi structured interviews for citizens of the Corozal District", was applied to eight women and four men from the Corozal District.

The knowledge and perception gathered in these interviews is so rich and varied and is explained in terms of categories for different aspects of gender violence.

Analyzing the perception and knowledge of professionals that specialize in issues of gender violence

The information gathered through these interviews reveals some very interesting views voiced by honest people that are in some way or another employed in institutions that deal with gender violence issues amongst other social problems. While there is so much that can be said about all the social issues that plague the Belizean society, the interviewees were told that the interview would be focused on gender violence in Corozal. The interview is made up of five sections; namely, they are entitled, "Gender Violence", "Institutions", "Information generated for the public", "Reporting and Response of Authorities" and "Perception of the Society towards Gender Violence." Having established these categories, the interviewees were asked questions about gender violence in connection with each of the categories.

Because the study focuses on gender violence in Corozal, personnel from institutions in Corozal and the nearby Orange Walk District were specifically asked to cooperate in the interviews. Amongst the professionals interviewed in Corozal were the Women's Development Officer (WDO) of the Women's Department in this district and the Police Corporal (PC) in charge of the Domestic Violence Unit in the Corozal Police Department.

Because the Northern Regional Hospital in Orange Walk has specialized units that treat victims of social problems such as gender violence, child abuse, teenage pregnancy and other issues, both from Orange Walk and Corozal, personnel from this institution were also interviewed. In particular, the psychologist in this Public Health Department was interviewed.

Interviews with personnel from the Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) were also carried out especially with the Head Nurse and Youth Officer of the branch in Orange Walk. It would have been interesting to interview personnel of this organization as well as other non governmental organizations in Corozal but as far as this investigation is concerned, there is not an office in the Corozal District for this type of establishment on behalf of the non governmental community.

It is very evident from the information these individuals kindly contributed that they are intelligent people and are very well versed with the issues that they deal with every day. Notably, all of these professionals are women. It was not possible to carry out an interview with a male professional in reference to these issues. Although the knowledge gathered was of paramount importance, a significant weakness in the investigation is the lack of the male perspective in terms of gender violence at an expert level. However, this also points out a clear lack of male involvement in professions that come in direct contact with gender violence cases. Another possible reason for the lack of male participation in these spaces is probably because gender violence is still

seen as an issue that affects only women. Hence, more women than men have positions that treat gender violence issues.

The first and second category in the interview, "Gender Violence" and "Institutions" questioned the participants about their general diagnosis and familiarity of gender violence in Corozal as well as the roles and characteristics of the institutions in which they are employed. For example, upon being asked how the Women's Department defines gender violence, the Women's Development Officer gave a historical transformation of the use of terms from domestic violence to family violence and recently to gender violence. She stated that,

> Well in 1993 there was a study done in Orange Walk Town, I was working in that district at that time, and that was done just to see what people knew about gender violence. At the time it was known as domestic violence and then it became family violence but since the Domestic Violence Law was just passed there was confusion about the term domestic and family violence. People were confused because if it was considered domestic violence it was only for the women because they stay home and do domestic work; if it was family violence (a man is a part of the family)... but since people believe that family implies mother and the children, then the father was excluded so the department decided to use the term gender based violence so that it could be inclusive of any member of the family. [WDO]

This information alone highlights that the Belizeans have several views about the traditional roles of women in the domestic environment simply because domestic work is associated with women and for some reason the term "family" does not include a male counterpart in all cases. A probable explanation for this point is that many households in Belize are single parent families where the female is the sole wage earner.

The WDO also said that since the passing of the Domestic Violence Act, many changes have taken place within the Ministry of Human Development such as the fact that a National Gender Based Violence Committee was formed. This committee

> is committed to ensuring and integrating multifaceted response to all forms of gender based violence in Belize by addressing... personal

health, racial, education, housing and community advocacy. The multi sectoral response gives specific attention to protection and provision of services, justice and prevention. [WDO]

Upon being asked why the department that deals with gender violence has not been changed from the Women's Department to a Gender Department, the response of the WDO was

I can tell you that the committee has had several discussions about that. Since it is made up of different members of the community, we have said that it would be good to change [the title] but because of the long term issue of violence being associated with women, Belize is still not ready to recognize a gender department where men can fully embrace the help offered. However, we have always had this type of talk and it is in process. [WDO]

Evidently, men as abused individuals, is an idea that is not readily accepted by the Belizean Society and so the department provides services mostly but not limited to women. The psychologist from the Public Health Department related

I think ever since it has been men too, men are victims as well but because of the culture it has not been out. I think that who gets the most serious damage are the women, its good that they are beginning to talk about it because I think that men by nature have that physical ability to hurt and injure. When one thinks about domestic violence or gender based violence I think, he or she thinks about only physical abuse but that is not so. I think little by little they understand that yes one can be emotionally or sexually abused by his or her own spouse but because of that physical hurt it is more recognized. I also think that people are aware that gender violence can happen to anybody. [Psychologist]

The psychologist continued by saying that in her years of experience she has seen that gender violence is

a very serious and an ever increasing issue. Over the years I have heard that a lot of women died as a result of gender violence; just last year the statistics were extraordinary. A lot of women died; they were killed by their husbands. One of our own nurses was stabbed to death by her husband. [Psychologist]

In the interview with the Police Corporal in charge of the Domestic Violence Unit in the Police Department in Corozal, this pragmatic lady explained that in her experience she believes

Based on the domestic situation here in Corozal, people are coming out and realizing that it is nothing to be ashamed of and there is no need to live in fear. People are aware of gender violence as a crime and are reporting different cases as well as voicing their opinions and following up with the response of authorities. [PC]

As an official that works closely with gender violence cases, it was refreshing to note the optimism of the police corporal and the positive vision that she has towards the awareness that is being noted in the people.

The view of another public health official in the Belize Family Life Association was very interesting since she expressed that in terms of gender violence,

It is a problem but it's a problem that is not viewed as a problem by most Belizeans. Gender based violence is considered something natural, if it happens there is no big deal about it although it does not happen on a daily basis; it is expected to happen. [Nurse]

Notwithstanding, she went on to say that it should be seen as a serious problem but many of the obstacles that prevent this perception stem from the ignorance that is still very prevalent in the Belizean society. The youth officer, in charge of organizing public events especially for young people of the same institution also shared her view by saying that,

In the past, gender violence was seen as natural but because of the available information on this issue, they know that it is not right but they still do not have sufficient knowledge on how to deal with it. [Youth officer]

Very intriguing points to share are some views that these workers had in terms of traditional roles of women and the influence that these have on the presence of gender violence. The WDO shared her own experience with the concept and how it influenced her view of family dynamics when she honestly explained,

I grew up with a Catholic background and I grew up knowing that the boys and girls should behave a certain way; the boys should help the daddies and the girls should help the mommies. But as the years passed, I started high school… I was the first out of my family to go to high school. It was a plus for me. I always see my family as not a perfect family but I have never seen my parents fight…I can recall when I was growing up my brothers had to help in the house and my

mother taught them to clean up their space (like their beds). At that time there was nothing about gender roles, nobody knew and I remember that my mom once said to us 'I prefer to have all the boys, because the girls just bring shame.' That kind of thing, you know but prior to her death... she said, 'I wish I had all girls.' [laughs] We grew up that kind of way and the relation she had with my dad, I had never seen them fight, influenced my ideal for my life- getting married and having two children and going to church. However, when I had my daughter at age twenty I realized that my plan for life had changed. Moreover, I learnt about gender and gender roles and realized that it was much more than just 'he, she, it.' When I started working with the ministry I realized that there was much more than just being a woman. [WDO]

It was very generous of this amiable lady to share her personal experience and like her everyone has their own story and background. With these views alone, it is pertinent to point out that women have been devalued in many spaces because of their gender. Exceptional are the ones that recognize the value of females as a vital part of society and inculcate this view in the upbringing of their children both male and female. The youth officer of BFLA explained that,

In the home, the influence of 'machismo' is still strong. The woman's position is still not accepted as being equally important; women are still expected to follow traditional roles to serve and nurture. I think that traditional roles are a big issue and it may be a reason why it is hard to change their beliefs because of how people are raised. Even though women are more educated and have better jobs, they are still expected to take on the role of the female gender when they are not at work. [Youth officer]

The interviewees were also asked about their knowledge on causes and other factors that contribute to the presence of gender violence. The Women's Development Officer explicated that

I don't think that there is a cause of gender violence. However, alcohol abuse is a factor that contributes greatly to gender violence in Corozal and Belize. It is hard to put a description on why people are abusers but power and control are definite motives for someone to abuse someone else. From what I have heard over the years, the typical excuse is 'I was drunk, I don't know what I did.' Personally that is not an excuse; it is an intentional action that the person has always had in his head. This behaviour justifies his need to show that he is a man. In my opinion, that is not a man. Apart from alcoholism, our abusive men have also been abused themselves and they exert abuse in their relationship. The behaviour is cyclical. It is a cycle that is affecting people; we have to work with our children to change it.

That is why we started the Safe School Program and I started working in Orange Walk to impart information about gender and gender roles in schools. We taught that sex is something you can't change naturally about people but your behaviour in terms of your gender is something that you can change. This is something that we have taught because we know that children learn and imitate what they see. Being violent is a learned behaviour- 'I saw my mom and dad fight and I think this is the way it should be,' as some would say. Some children learn that 'to control you need to hit, this is what they did to control me so I do it too.' Most children do not get the counseling they need to understand that it is wrong. [WDO]

In concordance with what the WDO had shared, the Police Corporal also explained that she believes, based on her experience and knowledge of cases, that one of the main reasons for gender violence in the home is, "Finance, males or females are not providing the money. Alcohol[ism] is also a common problem. Violence becomes repetitious and escalates." [PC]

The main institutions in Corozal that have close contact with cases of gender violence are the Women's Department and the Police Department. Therefore, personnel interviewed from these governmental offices shared the responsibilities of the institution in addressing the phenomenon of gender violence. Moreover, there is a distinct connection established between the governmental organizations and the non governmental organizations. Yet, the significance of these institutions is not pronounced in the Corozal District due to the lack of representation in this part of Belize. In light of this, the Women's Development Officer explained that

Most of our agencies are not in Corozal but we have affiliations with the agencies in the other districts. Through the Women's Department, people try to reach out to other organizations. I believe that we need to have a representative office of governmental and non governmental agencies in all the districts. [WDO]

It can be deduced that being a woman with a lot of experience and years working in the Ministry of Human Development, the WDO shows her concern in the need to expand the presence of organizations that work with gender violence through out the country not only in Belize

City. Although there are many obstacles that are faced by institutions both public and private in terms of this goal, it is not an impossible task and more efforts need to be fostered toward making this feat a reality.

Both the employees interviewed from the non governmental institutions and the public health institutions explained that most of the cases of gender violence that they receive are usually referred to the main organizations that manage these cases. Yet, their roles as institutions are in the distribution of information and the availability of counseling for clients or victims of gender violence. For example, the psychologist listed ways in which she helps patients that have been affected by gender violence through

> counseling, how to deal with stressors, making right decisions, giving emotional or psychological support; help them solve their problems; I don't tell them what to do but together we bring solutions to the table and assess each decision so that they can make a healthy decision. [Psychologist]

In particular, what stood out was the need for shelters for victims of gender violence in Corozal and Orange Walk as well. The WDO explained that the only shelter in the country is located in Belize City known as "Haven House". She went on to say that the ministry is looking to have more shelters constructed and other possibilities for treatment facilities.

Another part of the interview entitled, "Information generated for the public," contained questions in reference to the information that is compiled and published on behalf of the organizations as part of awareness programs or campaigns. The main organization that creates information on gender violence is the Women's Department and to another degree the Police Department. In reference to this part of the interview, the interviewees explained that

> We made several pamphlets and other documents for the public. We try to make sure that people are aware of the law and that people need to use it. We go on the radio as much as we can to share information. In Corozal, the perception remains that this law is still only for women but it is not so. [WDO]

Notably, although plenty of documented, visual and aural information about gender violence has been created, many people still believe that this law is only for women. The Police Corporal explained that on behalf of the Police Department, brochures, radio programs and other projects are set up for several events where they explain that domestic violence is a crime and that people need to speak out against it. In line with this aspect, both the WDO and the PC explained that the personnel employed in these offices undergo training programs for them to handle and treat cases of gender violence.

However, the work carried out by public institutions is only part of the effort that is needed to really demonstrate that a society has no tolerance for gender violence. Many of the interviewees shared that they felt that society especially the business community need to show more interest in awareness projects, programs and campaigns that disperse information about gender violence. For example, one of the interviewees explained that

> I think there is still a lot of work to be done when it comes to public and business support. They are not too receptive to this situation rather than if it were something else like a football game, they would be more willing to support or sponsor these events. The media is a little more supportive in the sense that they do have coverage for health fairs and parades about these events. [Youth officer]

Naturally, in order for a significant change to occur, all of society has to contribute in some way towards it. Upon being asked about the distinct trends noted in the reporting of cases, the response of all of the interviewees coincided in that they have noted an increase in the reporting of cases to various authorities. Moreover, the response of the authorities has also undergone changes because police officers, social workers and other human rights personnel have demonstrated more sensitivity to these cases than in past years.

The response of the officials to the section entitled "Reporting and response of authorities" are worthy of mention because while they say

that gender violence has always existed in Belize, it is in recent times that people are reporting and speaking out against it. The WDO explained that she does not believe that gender violence is increasing; instead she feels that

> it has always been there but because it was not seen as a crime but rather as part of a lifestyle then people did not report it. However, because of the constant announcement and advocacy on behalf of the department I think that reporting has increased. [WDO]

Similar views were expressed by the Police Corporal when she said that

> People are showing that they are not afraid and they are reporting. We are very sensitive to the domestic violence cases and so people have confidence to report to the police and expect a favorable response and feedback. [PC]

In concordance, the Nurse, Youth Officer and psychologist explained almost the exact thoughts in different ways.

The last section of the interview questioned the interviewees on their opinions about whether they believe that the Belizean society is recognizing gender violence as a private matter or as a problem of social responsibility. They all agreed that this is a social problem and that in recent years more people are seeing it as a problem of social responsibility. Yet, there is still much to be done to really observe a societal change in this direction. In her experience, the police corporal said that, "people are opening up but there are still those that prefer to not do anything about it, but it is being spread across that people need to speak out and break the silence." Like this official, the other employees related similar sentiments.

Along with their opinions about whether gender violence is considered a private or public matter, the interviewees expressed a great need for the people to really analyze on a personal level how they contribute to gender violence. Undoubtedly, people can only realize their violent and incorrect behaviour if they are aware of how wrong it is. Moreover, men and women need to recognize that the lifestyle that they

lead, the traditions and beliefs that they follow and the way they raise their children may or may not contribute to gender violence. In times like these, citizens should not be afraid to say what is on their minds with relation to social problems, how they are propagated and how they can be prevented. The professionals lived up to this idea in these interviews. For example, the Women's Development Officer, was very honest and expressed that her intentions are good and honest. Her contributions in these interviews are profound especially when she related

> I know (and this might sound bad), that our government is saying that we need to work in line with CEDAW and other organizations, that there should not be discrimination against women but discrimination still exists within the government. Although the government has signed several agreements, we still need to implement it at many levels. For me the role of the woman should be whatever she wants; she should be given that chance to prove what she wants and can do. Our society is still behind; some men do not want to accept women in positions within the Belize Defence Force or police. Even some women want to use their position as women to attain certain things in society by degrading themselves. But I want to say this, (and this may be working against me again) I recall when a woman was the Minister of Defense but she did not stay that long…the women do not hold substantial roles in government. We recently discussed that all of our laws are made by men, so to me it's like government in a way is demonstrating that 'yes we signed up for these treaties but it is not practiced.' To me government signs on to different agreements, but the reality is that women are not treated equally. [WDO]

Change can happen but the good examples have to be shown at all social levels. Leaders, both men and women, need to give more priority to the gender based issues and they need to emphasize how important our culture is in the eradication of discrimination and violence against gender. The political participation of men and women needs to be enforced as a vital part of a true democracy. Like the psychologist related in her interview, "I believe more work is needed in terms of giving more value to equality of gender." The eradication of gender violence is the responsibility of everyone and the authority figures have an obligation to the people to foster this mentality not only in theory but also in practice.

Upon being asked how they believe that the systems that treat and prevent gender violence can be improved, they highlighted several weaknesses. Notwithstanding, they also highlighted the strengths of different institutions. In particular, some of the recommendations that were proposed by the interviewees are the need for more public awareness and sensitization about gender violence, preventative campaigns, more human and financial resources and more qualified counseling personnel and well equipped treatment facilities.

In terms of sensitization and campaigning, the nurse from the BFLA agency explained

> there is much work needed for information that can be understood by all social groups. Information needs to be diffused through outreach programs like visiting houses and having community clinics not only through documented information. It is necessary to give information especially in schools from primary school and eventually from preschool. [Nurse]

Similarly, the youth officer shared that she felt it necessary to make sure that police officers and other public service officers be trained to improve how they deal with these cases. She went on to say that

> Gender violence is the responsibility of the public and not a private matter. It is necessary to sensitize the community so we [human development employees] work with the community first rather than only workshops for victims. Public discussions are needed to inform and sensitize the public both men and women because we have all grown up with one mentality for many decades and centuries and it will be hard to change that tradition but one of our main goals is to try and get the people to open up and not be narrow-minded. [Youth officer]

From a psychological point of view, the psychologist expressed that

> I think that more can be done, people need to know what to do, where to go, the steps in a legal separation, answers to marital problems. In my experience, many people don't know and I think that by increasing public awareness people will realize that they are tired of living in a violent environment and do something about it. By human nature when we hear things repetitively we start to believe it and be convinced by it. [Psychologist]

Another recommendation proposed for the enforcement of the eradication of gender violence is that

> More human and financial resources need to be allocated for the Human Development Ministry. I believe that government has the capacity to grant more attention to these offices. [Psychologist]

Moreover, more treatment facilities are greatly needed such as shelter services in each district. The Police Corporal articulated that

> For Corozal, I believe we need a support group and another group that involves professionals who can strategize ways of solving gender violence problems. These are already in progress of being created. [PC]

Evidently, the perceptions presented and analyzed here reflect only the thoughts and knowledge of these participants about gender violence. Through this analysis, readers can appreciate that there are many similarities and differences that can be observed in the perceptions analyzed. While each perception is different, the points of view converge in different instances to show how perceptions are influenced and created. Considering that the perception of the professionals that specialize with gender violence issues analyzed here is classified as an informed perception, it is important to highlight that the professionals have thorough knowledge of the issues in question that allow them to critically comment on their experience and understanding of gender violence.

Analyzing the perception in reference to gender violence of some women and men from the general populace of the Corozal District

The second interview form, "Semi structured interviews for citizens of the Corozal District", was applied to eight women and four men from the Corozal District. Six Mestizo women and two Mestizo men were interviewed; two Creole Women and two Creole men were interviewed as well. In total twelve interviews were carried out with willing participants that were briefed on the reason for the interviews and the importance of their contributions. The following table lists the participants along with their corresponding characteristics. Each participant is given a corresponding number to safeguard his or her anonymity.

Table 3.3 Table showing the information compiled in reference to the personal information of eight female interviewees that participated in the study.

Participants or Interviewees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Sex[15]	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Age	25	28	39	31	40	21	30	27
Ethnicity[16]	C	M	M	M	M	M	M	C
Location[17]	U	R	R	U	R	U	U	U
Civil Status[18]	CL	S	Ma	Ma	Ma	S	S	S
Educational Status[19]	S	S	T	P	P	T	T	S
Family Situation	Husband, 2 children	1 child	husband	Husband, 6 children	husband	Living with her parents	1 child	I child
Occupational Status	U	E	E	U	U	E	E	E

Table 3.3.2 Table showing the information compiled in reference to the personal information of four male interviewees that participated in the study.

Participants or Interviewees	9	10	11	12
Sex[20]	M	M	M	M
Age	40	21	32	28
Ethnicity[21]	C	M	C	M
Location[22]	U	U	R	R
Civil Status[23]	Ma	Ma	S	CL
Educational Status[24]	P	T	S	S
Family Situation	Wife, 3 children	Wife, 1 child	Lives alone	Wife
Occupational Status	E	E	E	E

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[15] For the purposes of the table, the variables "male" and "female" are known as [M] and [F] respectively.

[16] The ethnic groups considered are "Creole" [C] and "Mestizo" [M]

[17] The variable "location" refers to whether the participants live in "urban" [U] or "rural" [R] areas of the Corozal District

[18] The variable "civil status" considers the status "married" [Ma], "single" [S] and "common law union" [CL].

[19] The variable "educational status" is categorized into "primary" [P], "secondary" [S] and "tertiary" [T] education.

[20] For the purposes of the table, the variables "male" and "female" are known as [M] and [F] respectively.

[21] The ethnic groups considered are "Creole" [C] and "Mestizo" [M]

[22] The variable "location" refers to whether the participants live in "urban" [U] or "rural" [R] areas of the Corozal District

[23] The variable "civil status" considers the status "married" [Ma], "single" [S] and "common law union" [CL].

[24] The variable "educational status" is categorized into "primary" [P], "secondary" [S] and "tertiary" [T] education.

Based on the information provided in the table, it is clear that the interviewees all come from various backgrounds and situations. Therefore, their perception and knowledge vary considerably. However, some of the responses they gave through out the interviews demonstrated similarities in the conjunction of thoughts of each individual. For clarity and precision, the analysis of the responses for these interviews is done through the use of categories that concentrate on important sub topics under the broad issue of gender violence.

The interview is categorized into different sections similar to the first set of interviews. In this case, the interviewees are not personnel employed in governmental or non-governmental organizations that specialize in gender violence and other human rights issues. As has been explained in previous sections, the second set of interviewees was chosen at random respecting the character traits mentioned in the tables 3.3 and 3.3.2. This second segment of society represents people that are possible receptors of the information transmitted by governmental departments and personnel that specialize in human rights issues. It is important to learn what they know and what they have yet to discover about gender violence in order to focus future programs and plans of action on providing people with information that they are unaware of through means that cover both urban and rural areas.

In the first section of the interview form, interview questions were created and grouped in such a way that the interviewees were questioned about their general knowledge towards gender violence. Essentially, the interviewees acquire a large part of their knowledge base in relation to gender violence from the information generated by public and private institutions that are in charge of transmitting this material to the public at large. Some ways in which this information is disseminated to the public are through pamphlets and informative booklets, television and radio programs, newspaper articles, books and public forums and conferences.

Therefore, the part of the interview entitled "Knowledge about gender violence" with the categories, "Defining gender violence", "Causes, effects and other factors of gender violence", and "Laws, Institutions and Information about gender violence", elicits knowledge from the interviewees that is in some way or another acquired through the information diffused by the media houses and the institutions both public and private including schools, hospitals and especially the institutions that are in charge of public awareness campaigns on this matter.

The second section entitled, "Perception about gender violence" consists of the categories, "Experience and Gender Roles", Reporting and Response of Authorities", and "Public Responsibility or Private Matter." This section concentrates on the perception of the interviewees that is comprised of their subjective ideas and opinions of and essentially their own experience with gender violence. In this section, the interviewees shared how they would handle or have handled a case of gender violence in which they may or may not have been directly involved. That is, the participants were asked where they would go for help or if they would attempt to resolve the matter on their own if they consider it a problem. Ultimately, the interview questions concluded when the participants were asked whether they consider gender violence as a private matter or public problem.

While the interview form was a mere guide for the session, many of the questions served as a major conversation starter while others simply elicited one word answers. The following analysis groups significant responses to comply with the objectives of the study and draw conclusive considerations. The analysis is divided into the sections corresponding to the divisions in the interview form.

A. General Knowledge[25] of some women and men in the Corozal District towards gender violence

In order to reconcile the information generated through awareness campaigns about gender violence in the country of Belize with its efficiency on the Belizean public, constant evaluation of the knowledge people have towards this issue is of paramount importance. Through these interviews, citizens have shared what they know about gender violence based on what they have heard, seen or experienced through their upbringing, schooling, individual learning processes and the exposure they have to information generated by public and private institutions to inform the society about gender violence and similar issues. The questions asked were relatively short and direct questions that extracted the very thoughts and ideas that people have formulated through their experiences.

The interviewees were asked to define gender violence. Most if not all of them know gender violence as domestic violence because that is how it is known in Belize by public institutions and the information generated by these governmental bodies. There have been many changes in the national perspective of this issue as the Belizean Government tries to update the information based on international conventions and new data that is revealed.

Many of the interviewees understand that gender violence is related to domestic or family violence. Some of the responses that stand out for the interpretation of gender violence are,

> Participant 1: Domestic violence I believe is something wrong; it's not something that we usually discuss, maybe most of us live with it but we don't say anything.

> Participant 2: I know it as domestic violence and I believe that it is when men beat their wives.

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[25] For this investigation, the term "general knowledge", refers to the basic familiarity that the participants interviewed have toward the issue of gender violence including what it means and the factors involved in it, the laws and institutions that treat, prevent or punish this problem and the information generated by social institutions for public awareness. It is a part of the perception of the participants but because it highlights acquired knowledge that is gotten through informative means, it is set apart from the personal perception in relation to gender violence such as the direct experience, opinions, thoughts and ideas of the individuals.

Participant 6: Gender violence to me is when somebody is taking advantage of the other person whether it is a male against a female or a female against a male. But in most cases I think it is the female that suffers. The abuse can be sexual, mental and physical.

Participant 8: Well I have never heard of violence in the home as gender violence. I know it as domestic violence and well it is when husbands beat their wives or children.

Participant 9: My first take is just that in terms of gender violence it is violence against women or men but readily my mind leads me towards violence against women and that is more prevalent in our community right now.

Participant 11: I know this kind of violence as domestic violence and it is when women are abused by their husbands or partners.

In order for the interviews to go in a steady direction, the interviewees were informed that the study concentrates on gender violence within heterosexual partners.

Upon being asked about the causes, effects and other factors related to gender violence, the participants express that there are many things that may account for the presence of gender violence. For example, in terms of causes or reasons why violence occurs in relationships, most of the participants believe that alcohol abuse by the abuser and economic dependence by the victims are very common in abusive relationships. Other causes or factors highlighted are jealousy, lack of communication, lack of trust, infidelity and lack of respect for one another. In terms of reasons why violence is very prevalent in many relationships, Participant 9 shared,

I think people have a lot of issues whether financial or spiritual and the like and people either don't seek help or help is not readily available or help is available but the confidentiality is not there. Speaking from my end working with the Ministry of Health, people would go there for help and as soon as the clients left the room the professionals would discuss their business. I think people catch on to that kind of behaviour and are reluctant to seek help from that kind of medium.

In terms of effects on the family, the majority of participants consider that children who witness violence between their parents or

guardians are severely affected because they are very vulnerable and easily troubled by what they see. For example, four of the responses that are worthy of mention are,

> Participant 2: The children suffer when they see violence between their parents; if they do not get treatment, they can become violent as well. I don't think that violence is the solution to any problem in the family; I think that people need to communicate and discuss their problems.

> Participant 3: I have known a couple with children that have been involved in this situation. It is not physical abuse but verbal and I feel so bad for the victim. I think that the damage of verbal abuse is just as bad as physical abuse. It lowers someone's self esteem; and the children are worse; they have low school productivity.

> Participant 4: My children saw everything and I knew that it was traumatizing them. After my husband was arrested, I spoke to my children and tried to talk to them about it because I noticed that my eldest son was very violent toward his sister. My second son worried about me, he could not sleep and he waited up for his father to come home because he knew that when my husband came home late, that was when the fighting began.

> Participant 5: Well apart from having a bad relationship, if there are children involved, they suffer a lot because they imitate what they see and they will learn to deal with others based on how their parents treat each other.

The participants believe that women or men as victims of violence have low self esteem and are very fearful or reluctant to report the abuse because of what society will say about them. Although many of the interviewees directly associate violence with physical or sexual violence, many understand that violence can be exerted through words that are intended to cause humiliation or offence. For example, in this particular interview, participant 4 explained that;

> I think that it is also mental. Up to now my husband has stopped abusing me mentally and physically as well but like I tell you it is because I decided to stop tolerating it. If you do not do anything to defend yourself, people will always take advantage. Many women allow themselves to be abused because of fear and that is why I used to pretend like there was not a problem. But now I am not afraid; my mother always used to say 'the strong one lives as long as the coward allows.'

Through several questions, the participants were asked if an individual's age, socioeconomic status, civil status, ethnicity and level of education directly determine whether that person will be a victim of gender violence. Of the twelve persons interviewed, eight of them believe that these factors do not directly determine whether someone will fall victim of abuse or not. The other four express that they believe that these factors sometimes determine whether someone has a greater chance of being abused. For example, because the Latin community in Belize still shows the traditional "macho" mentality of the males, then some of the interviewees claim that a Mestizo woman has greater chances of being abused. Notwithstanding, most of them also went on to say that being abused or not depends heavily on the partnership and if one partner allows the other to take advantage of them in an abusive sense. The responses listed here express some of the main thoughts of the participants in reference to relating the tendency of being a victim of gender violence based on personal traits. Two participants explained that,

> Participant 3: Depending on the relationship and background, these characteristics may play a role in whether someone will be a victim or not. However, I think that anyone can be a victim if they allow themselves. Family background, how someone is raised, has a lot to do with whether they will be in an abusive relationship.

> Participant 4: No I don't think that these factors decide whether someone will be a victim or not because each relationship is different and they have their own destiny. All women and men that suffer abuse allow this to happen; they don't deserve it but they do not defend themselves because they are fearful. If they allow their partners to take advantage of them, they will.

The interviewees were also questioned on the knowledge they have toward the laws In Belize that treat and punish gender violence in the domestic environment. Upon being asked about the name of the law and what it entails, no one could give an immediate answer. While ten participants said that they do not know the law and what it is about, the other two participants said that they had heard about rights of women. One male participant explained that he had heard about the

initiatives for gender mainstreaming by government and he thought that was a good move in the right direction. However, he as well could not state the Domestic Violence Act or any of the particulars contained in it.

In conjunction with knowledge about the legislation that treats gender violence, participants were also asked about what they know in reference to the public institutions that are responsible for generating information about gender violence as well as treating and preventing gender violence. Some of the institutions that are expected to be part of the general knowledge of the citizens of Corozal are the Ministry of Human Development-The Women's Department and/or the Police Department. Based on the responses given, nine of the twelve participants, the majority being women, know about the institution that is responsible for gender violence in Corozal. However, they do not know the institution as the Women's Department; they simply know it as "Social". Only two persons of these nine named the Domestic Violence Unit in the Police Department. Moreover, when asked if they know where the Human Development Office is located in Corozal, three people know where it is located. Some of the responses for the questions related to the laws and institutions about gender violence are,

> Participant 5: In terms of laws, I am not familiar with the laws, I don't even know if there are laws about this issue. The only institution I know is "Social." Apart from "Social", I know that people can go to the police station to report these kinds of cases.

> Participant 11: I am not sure about the laws against gender violence, but I guess that there are. I think that if a person is being abused then they can find out about the law if they want.

> Participant 12: Well I have never been involved in an abusive relationship so I am not familiar with the laws or authorities that I would go to for help but now that you mention it, I think I should be.

As has been mentioned before, the public institutions that specialize in the treatment and prevention of gender violence are responsible for the transmission of information to the public so that they can be aware of different problems that affect them. There are many

ways that can be used to transmit information whether it is in written, visual or aural.

Based on the responses of the participants, many of them have not had the privilege of learning about gender violence through public awareness. One person says that she had heard radio and television programs about gender violence while two participants state that they had read pamphlets handed out during health fairs. Participant 3 explained

> Pamphlets I haven't seen at all and I think that they are necessary especially for young people to start reading and becoming aware. I think that programs like mini series should be shown on the television so that people can know about different scenarios relating to violence against women. I think that more could be done when it comes to awareness. Many people still feel embarrassed and ashamed to speak out and they need to hear more advertising and more outreach so that they develop the strength to help themselves.

Like this participant, other participants share similar responses in relation to their lack of exposure to material generated by the institutions. In terms of programs, shelters or support groups, few of the participants have knowledge of these. For example, Participant 7 shared that,

> In Corozal, I am not familiar with any groups or shelters where people can seek help and counsel. I have heard about awareness campaigns where pamphlets are issued during special events held during the year.

Apart from receiving knowledge about gender violence through the radio and television, the participants that say that they have had some exposure to information, explain that they had gotten information during health fairs or other events. However, upon being asked if they learned about gender violence at any point during their schooling, none of them could recall being told about this issue by guest speakers in special forums or in a particular subject area at their schools.

B. Perception of some women and men in the Corozal District towards gender violence

Essentially, apart from the knowledge that individuals have about any issue, they also have their own points of view towards these issues.

The perception of people is in large part formed by beliefs, opinions and views they have subjectively constructed based on information they acquire through their interactions with other people, their experience with different issues, their upbringing and socialization and of course their schooling. The second section of the interviews for the general populace comprises of several questions differentiated into the categories: "Experience and Gender Roles", "Reporting and Response of Authorities", and "Public Responsibility or Private Matter."

The questions under the first category "Experience and Gender Roles" contain questions that were formulated to elicit personal experiences with gender violence which can be either direct or indirect experiences. Two of the participants shared their experience as follows:

> Participant 4: Well, I know domestic violence in the sense that I have lived it. I have lived it because my husband used to beat me a lot; my neighbors always advised me to report it but I didn't because of fear and I tolerated his bad treatment. However, as time passed I realized that my children were suffering and I decided on my own that I would have to end this behaviour; in my experience I allowed my husband to be violent. I allowed my husband to beat me and I knew I did not deserve the treatment. When my fourth child was born, I suffered a lot; there was a time when he pointed at me with a gun and my sisters came to spend time with me and they suffered along with me. Every time they called the police, I denied the abuse because I was a timid person that did not like when others knew my problems. I was also afraid of what my husband would do but I started to realize that I was the only one that could put an end to the violence so I started to defend myself. One time I had him arrested and he did not like it but from then on I knew that I had to continue to help myself. No one really helped me. I was the one that suffered; my body was feeling the pain. My neighbors were not really close to me and they as well feared their husbands. So one day I started to beat him as well, when he beat me I hit him back (of course my punches weren't as strong as his), when he shouted at me, I shouted back. So I started to rebel and I think that because I did this then the violence stopped. From then, we still have fights but what is different is that I defend myself now.

> Participant 7: The problem that I had was infidelity and verbal abuse and thank God I have a good education and immediately decided to get out of this relationship. Sometimes women have to defend themselves aside from the help that we get from others. I tried as best I could to help myself and as a result I got a legal separation and I do not depend on my ex-husband. He has also harmed my family; my son has no contact with him. He always tried to humiliate

me by telling me that other people were better than me but I just ignored him. Luckily, I don't feel like he has emotionally affected me on a long term basis because I had to really convince myself that I am better than him and I have moved on.

Many of the women related their experiences in terms of hearing about friends or neighbors that are or were in abusive relationships. In terms of the men, only one man has had experience in actively helping one of his male friends in an abusive relationship with his parent. The participant explained that

> Participant 10: Yes I have had some kind of experience with a friend that has been in an abusive environment. I was at my friend's house and we were sitting down watching television when his father came up to him and slapped him; that was evidence enough for me to know that he was being abused. His father was also abusing his mother. I helped my friend by calling the police and being a witness to the abuse. I don't regret helping him in this way because I feel that I was able to prevent further abuse in the family.

As has been mentioned before, in all of interviews, the men and women explain that in the majority of the cases that they have heard of, women are usually the victims of abuse. Yet, some interviewees say that they have heard about certain instances where men were being abused by their wives or partners. Upon being asked why they think that more women are being abused than men, the overall explanation was that men have more power in society and as a result they tend to believe that they have power over their spouses. Some of the responses included,

> Participant 1: More women are victims than men. I think it has to do with the power that men feel they have over their spouse. However, there is also violence against men but men are not expected to be abused so they do not want to report it because they feel that people will laugh at them.

> Participant 3: A woman is more likely to be a victim because women are more susceptible in all senses. She has so many responsibilities whether she is employed or not. Abusive men blame their wives for everything and if she allows him then he will become angry. Women have a big load to deal with in the house and because the men are strong then they take advantage. There are one or two cases where men are the victims. This is something very shameful because men

are supposed to be the leader of the house; he is the one that provides the light of the house. Our society still sees men as leaders so when men are abused it is an awkward or shameful situation.

Participant 6: In most cases, women are submissive to men. For example, in the Mestizo culture, we grow up knowing that we should submit to our husbands and we accept it as correct behaviour. I have not heard of cases where men are victims of violence. Society would consider him weak and effeminate.

Participant 8: Well I know a man that I think is being abused by his partner. I think that he is being abused because, well he is a very shy person, and his wife is always screaming at him and telling him that he is good for nothing. He has a humble job but his wife takes all the money. I have tried to explain to him that he should go to the police because he may have rights but he just says he will and has not gone. I think he is ashamed.

Particpant 9: It is not the normal trend for men to accept that they are being abused because it goes back to the whole macho thing where they are not expected to be victims. I know that traditionally we look at the man like the provider of the home; the people that go out and make it happen for the families are the men. However, more and more we see women in the work force; women are more educated and independent and I find that with that in mind some men are becoming threatened because women are equipping themselves with the greatest possible education and that gives men a level of fear because women can make their own money. The normal thing used to be that women should be dependent on men and with this new trend women are less dependent on men. I think that both of them should work together for a common cause.

In another interview, the participant also shared that while some women do become independent by acquiring education and a good job, sometimes their male partners are threatened by this and as a result subject them to abuse. Other participants that shared similar thoughts were Participants 11 and 12 that stated respectively,

Participant 11: How women and men are defined by culture and society may be part of the problem of why men are violent. Women are seen as the inferior ones and because of this, even if they have education and high ranks, men try to abuse them justifying their actions by saying that women are by nature weak. Of course, it is up to the woman to decide whether she will allow herself to be abused or not.

Participant 12: From what I have heard, more women than men are victims of domestic abuse because I think that they tolerate it. I don't

mean that they have the fault for being abused but if their partners are violent, if they tolerate it and don't seek help they are not remedying the situation. I guess that it has to do with a lot of things that are going on in their minds but well having lots of education or good work opportunities does not necessarily prevent them from being abused. Maybe they need inner strength.

In relation to the category entitled "Reporting and Response of Authorities", the interviewees were asked if they have had any experience in reporting a given case of gender violence to the authorities whether it is the Police Department or the Women's Department. Of the twelve participants, three individuals say that they had reported gender violence to the authorities. Of these three only one of them claims that she was not completely satisfied with the treatment that she received. She explained that,

> Participant 4: I did go to "Social" but I believe that I have resolved my problem on my own. When I went to social I explained my situation, I filled out forms but they did not attend to me the way I expected so I said to myself that I would rather deal with my problem alone. I used to call the police but sometimes they did not answer so instead of waiting for them, I had to find other ways to defend myself. To me they are not reliable. I have neighbors that sometimes when I see that they need help I get involved. Although they say that I am interfering, I don't care, I know what they are going through; they may not be asking me for help, but I know that they need it. I think that in Corozal it is preferable to help yourself alone because I think that going to social, in my experience, is a waste of time. The process is very slow, they tell you that you have to go back on different days; I didn't feel like the help was readily available.

On the other hand, the other two participants that stated they were satisfied with the response of the authorities explained that the officials called upon responded to the case in a timely manner and they demonstrated sensitivity in handling the matter.

Upon being asked whether they would willingly help a neighbour, friend, family member or even a stranger in reporting or getting out of a situation of gender violence, nine of the twelve participants responded affirmatively to this question. The remaining three would prefer not to interfere in the case.

The participants were also asked whether they believe that if they were in an abusive relationship or if they knew of someone that is being abused, if the matter had greater chances of being resolved through the intervention or aid of authorities. All but one responded affirmatively to this question. Some of the prominent opinions shared with respect to the reporting and response of authorities are,

> Participant 3: In my experience, I think that I would try to handle the situation on my own as far as I can but if I know and realize that we really have a major problem then I would seek help. People know when daily abuse is a problem but sometimes it takes time for people to accept it. To be sincere, in terms of my neighbours and family, I feel like that is part of my concern. I feel sorry and I put myself in their situation and I would not want that to be happening to me. I grew up without a father, and my mother taught me good values, to defend myself and to speak up and help others. I have intervened by talking to friends and family in trouble and I realize that they do not want to accept blame and sometimes talking about it makes them see how bad the situation is. I think it is important for people to open their eyes and see their problems rather that live in fear.

> Participant 6: I would try to settle it with my partner but before it gets too late I would seek help from authorities. I would go to the police department. If I could help someone else, I would try because if I let this happen it is my fault because if I know and do nothing then I would feel guilty.

> Participant 9: If I were a victim, oh yes I would step out and seek help from those institutions. In terms of friends or neighbors I would love to help; I would not turn a blind eye to them.

> Participant 10: Yes I would definitely help others. I believe that it is important for everyone to do their part in preventing abuse in the home especially for the sake of the children because if this trend isn't broken then the children will end up losing in the end.

> Participant 12: I would want to say that I would report any case to the authorities whether it is a direct or indirect experience but at this point it is hard to say because it depends on the situation.

Upon being asked whether they perceive gender violence as a private matter or as a matter of public responsibility, eleven of the twelve participants stated that they feel that gender violence is a social problem and that authorities should be allowed to intervene and try to help remedy a given situation of violence in the home. However, while

many agree that it is a problem of public responsibility, they would try to resolve the matter privately but if it gets worse then they feel that professional help is necessary. In reference to this question, some of the responses are,

> Participant 1: I think that authorities should be able to intervene because there is the help available. As far as I am concerned, I believe that the authorities are more than willing to help but one has to ask for that help first.

> Participant 2: I would say that while it begins as a private problem, it escalates and becomes a situation that requires the attention of authorities. There are certain things that can be resolved in the partnership but when the violent behaviour becomes recurrent and brings about damage then we need to seek professional help.

> Participant 4: I think many people are still silent because they don't have the confidence and because they are so afraid of their partner then they suffer in silence.

> Participant 5: I think it depends on the situation. If the problem is not big then it can be solved in private but if the violence really gets bad then I would think that they should seek professional help.

> Participant 6: I think that the government institutions should be allowed to intervene and that people should seek the help of these institutions. We have to be aware that we have rights and that violence in the home should not be tolerated.

> Participant 8: Gender violence is a social issue and victims of this kind of abuse need to embrace the services offered by social groups in order to end the problem.

> Participant 9: I believe that external help is necessary, many people say that it is only a family thing or it is only for the wife and husband but people need to get help from these institutions because that is what they are designed to do. What I think people don't like about these institutions is that they are afraid that the institutions will not be confidential about the private things that they relate to them.

Finally, the interviewees were asked for suggestions on how social institutions can improve the awareness of this issue. Many of them expressed a need for more advertising to be done in terms of where people can get help, who can help them and how they can help themselves. Others said that the services provided by the police department need to be consistent and the cases need to be treated

with utmost sensitivity and confidentiality. One participant explained that government has to provide more financial and human resources as well as transportation services for the Human Development office to work to its full potential. Some of the central thoughts shared are,

Participant 2: In my honest opinion, I think that more can be done. While there are some authority figures that are very passionate about helping others, the system is not consistent. Authorities have to have more public awareness and they need to get in touch with the people by having more groups and advertising ways in which people can come in and get help. People have to be willing to help others and really go the extra mile to help them.

Participant 4: I think that it would be good for them to have a place in Corozal where people can seek refuge like a women's shelter where they feel that they are given the adequate help needed. I think that more advertisements should be transmitted on the television in English and Spanish. Many women stay at home during the day and if they have a television then they can have the opportunity to have the information that can help.

Participant 5: I think that the institutions can do more to transmit information because many people are not aware of what to do when these things happen. Also there are no places to my knowledge where people can go for moral counsel to make decisions.

Participant 6: There should be more talk shows on the radio, pamphlets should be issued not only at the government departments but at other public places where people frequent and can pick up that information. I also think that more programs are needed for schools because the youths are the ones that need this information because they may possibly face these problems in the future and they need to be prepared so that they will know what to do.

Participant 9: I think the department can do more in stimulating the people to want to learn about the services and information they offer. I think that the domestic violence is decreasing because people are becoming more aware of it; I am optimistic that it is being reduced on a wider scale. The departments are doing a great job; they just have to reach out a little more. I think a lot more can be done, more sensitization is definitely needed in Corozal. The departments need more human resources, transportation and financial support so that they can carry out their obligations in a timely manner.

The perception and knowledge captured in this chapter come from the seventeen participants that willingly cooperated in the interviews. The investigation appreciates the fact that so many latent thoughts and views of people can highlight important data about social issues as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the systems that treat and prevent problems such as gender violence. The differences in perception can also signal ways in which people need to get informed and how social institutions can influence the system to provide quality services through confidentiality, efficiency and determination.

Concluding Notes

This chapter marks the final phase in the investigation- the phase that puts into practice the theoretical substance of the research. There are many ways of understanding and finding solutions to social problems and this concluding chapter demonstrates how qualitative research can extract raw material for a different interpretation of gender violence in the Belizean society. A better understanding of social problems leads to plausible ways of recognizing not only solutions to these but also to comprehending the factors inherent in the nature of the problem.

This investigation has employed qualitative techniques, methods, concepts and processes in an organized way to gather valuable information from the very subjects that make up a society that is bombarded by countless social issues. In this particular case, gender violence is the issue in question. The way in which it is perceived by society is very important in how it can be understood and minimizes. This research has concentrated on some of the social perceptions prevalent in the district of Corozal in relation to gender violence. While many things can be said about gender violence, the investigation is limited to the perception and knowledge gathered by seventeen members of the Belizean Society. In one way or another, the thoughts, views and ideas shared by these Belizeans have contributed in some way to the fight

against gender violence. Undoubtedly, how various social actors view and live a problem reflect what is the problem and how it can be mitigated.

In conjunction, the three chapters that comprise the investigation cannot exist without each other. The first chapter has captured the presence of gender violence through international vision and has grouped and explained the vital concepts of the investigation by highlighting how great scholars and researchers of many disciplines have defined violence, gender and gender violence. Also, the private and public dichotomy is described as a vital part of the investigation.

In the second chapter, the focus is narrowed down to the national perspective of gender violence in Belize. Gender violence can be studied in many ways but the choice of studying violence in the Belizean Society is of paramount significance in this investigation. Belize needs more social investigations that apply qualitative as well as quantitative methods to uncover new ways of viewing and solving social factors and issues that hamper the progress of the society.

Finally, in the third chapter, the process of carrying out a qualitative investigation and the analysis of the results are presented. There is a clear link between social perceptions and gender violence and through the results, the perception of members of the Corozal District has proven to be a vital component in the search for solutions to eliminate gender violence from society.

Although this present investigation focuses on gender violence within heterosexual partners in Belize, it is a rich source of ideas and ways of studying other situations where gender violence may be present such as the cases of violence against children, elderly people and violence within same sex partnerships. The descriptive analysis of the results in this chapter paves the way for a more theoretical analysis of the results in conjunction with the information provided in the first two chapters. This theoretical analysis of the findings and the conceptual aspects of the

research are presented in the "General Conclusions-Linking the three chapters."

The interpretation of the information presented in this work can be used for many purposes. The information can be used as background data for other studies, as well as a source of material to modify or create public policies, programs and projects for schools, hospitals and other public institutions that can promote gender awareness and zero tolerance for violent environments in all social spaces. Moreover, the active participation of citizens in Belize through this type of study can help to promote a cultural conscience of social issues that should be treated and prevented as much as possible.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS-LINKING THE THREE CHAPTERS

Carrying out a thesis investigation on a complex and prioritized subject matter such as gender violence has proven to be a passionate and arduous experience. While the area of study is so broad, specific details of what it is made up of, theoretically speaking, are very difficult to put into perspective as they touch on such a wide spectrum of topics. Yet, as an investigator pieces information together, the challenge of unifying the necessary theoretical and practical information is reached. The logical framework of gender violence in this investigation has been accomplished as it relates to the context of study and the objectives of the research.

The phenomenon of gender violence, its history, nature and manifestations are lived experiences both directly and indirectly by many people. However, a deep reflection of its impact on society is many times overlooked as solutions are sought for its eradication. A problem is inevitably expected to have corresponding solutions but these solutions are only reached when the problem is researched, analyzed and deconstructed.

Research analysis and deconstruction of a problem can be achieved in several ways. This thesis provides information of one way by which this process has been carried out.

Through the completion of this research, the data herein has explored a severe social problem from a descriptive and critical perspective highly intended to generate profound thought toward the existing issues that people are faced with as a result of gender violence. A clear goal is marked in the findings of the thesis which is to reaffirm the nature of gender violence as a problem of public responsibility. Equilibrium has been established through the unity of the three chapters since they address not only the academic discourse of gender violence but also show the practical application of the theoretical aspects of the factors that radiate around this problem.

This academic work has studied violence through a gender perspective that clearly links gender violence with gender relations and power relations. The results of the investigation serve as material to suggest ways in which gender awareness and equality can be improved in the Belizean community.

The cultural structures of patriarchal societies that define men and women and their respective roles distinctly influence the presence of violence against gender in society; consequently, the power relations between men and women have reproduced gender disparities in which power and control in the home and society are dominated by men. In other words, socially accepted norms with respect to femininity and masculinity are definite determinants that in many ways tolerate and perpetuate gender violence within partners. The structures that define society and culture are tightly linked with the private and public divisions that have emanated from the politics, economics and history of patriarchal societies.

In light of this, the data in this thesis demonstrates that the way in which men and women assimilate gender violence is primarily based on the information they acquire about it in their upbringing through primary socialization as well as through the knowledge they acquire in secondary socialization. Because of the way that postcolonial and patriarchal societies are structured, gender violence in the domestic environment has come to be known as a private issue. The late 20th century and early 21st century has introduced a new perspective as an entire academic discipline that radiates around gender related issues has emerged. As new information has been shared in relation to discrimination against gender, the world including the Belizean community has taken on a dedicated role in reducing gender violence in society.

Undeniably, the dismal truth remains that many men and women continue to accept and tolerate gender violence as a private issue; this is possibly as a result of their knowledge and perception of gender violence as an intimate matter or as a social problem. Apart from this,

they learn about gender violence through their family upbringing and socialization that may or may not provide them with the correct information on how to identify, define, prevent and treat it. The family and cultural inheritance of men and women of the Belizean society has shaped their perception and knowledge of gender violence. Moreover, what individuals and been taught in their development as human beings is coupled with what they live and understand that together make up their mental lexicon and experiences.

Gender equality will be achieved in phases as history has shown and the feat is not yet fully complete. Truth be told, it is a challenging quest to change years of inculcation in the perception of men and women that gender violence is a private matter but the task is being accomplished slowly but surely .Transmitting information and making people see that gender violence is a crime and a problem of public responsibility is not an overnight task. As a start, this work fully supports that men and women will learn to live in equality that will require the participation and effort of both parties for a smooth transition to take place.

One of the central focuses of this thesis is to emphasize that gender violence is both a human rights issue and a public health problem; ultimately, gender violence is a matter of public responsibility that requires constant public support. This study does not limit itself to a study that focuses only on women. However, because women are usually the ones that suffer the most in issues involving gender violence in comparison to men, much of the information presented in all of the chapters highlights that women with respect to their social standing have suffered for far too long as direct victims of gender violence. Notwithstanding, this study incorporates the gender perspective with a focus on the ways in which men, women and children absorb and are affected by gender violence.

Before presenting further thoughts on the findings of the research, it is important to first highlight the significance of the first two chapters.

Each with specific focus points, these chapters unify documented data from many sources in order to describe the state of the phenomenon of gender violence. The phenomenon of violence is a traumatizing and public concern the world over. Because violence exists in so many forms in the world today, it undeniably proves that in the right circumstances human beings are capable of extreme cruelties. Moreover, in a world where the public and private divisions of society have fostered inequality, individuals find that it is a challenging task to change social structures that have maintained control over human lives.

Yet, the existing academic disciplines that question the unequal distribution of power between men and women have highlighted that violence from the most intimate circles has a severe impact on the way that daily life is experienced by many people. Whilst violence is imposed for many reasons by many people, the focus of this thesis is on the type of violence that occurs within the home which is a place that is many times assumed to be the safest place to be for any individual. This thesis questions this assumption and reestablishes that many people live violence in their home and that this should be a concern for everyone not only for those in that particular home.

As it pertains to gender violence in the world, the extended definitions of violence, gender and gender violence in the first chapter establish how these concepts propel the present investigation. Theorists that have studied these concepts each have particular perspectives about them and by adapting certain ideas that they have postulated, an ample description is established for the vital concepts of the investigation.

The deconstruction of the term gender violence clearly marks an important exercise in showing how violent acts can be used to discriminate against the characteristic of gender. Hence, because of the social and cultural constructions ascribed to the characteristic of gender, violence is produced against women and in some cases against men primarily because of their social positions.

The first chapter presents global information about gender violence while the second chapter focuses directly on the national perspective of Belize toward this phenomenon. While there may be wide-ranging quantitative and qualitative data about gender violence in the country, many researchers find that this information is difficult to obtain through one available reserve. Hence, this investigation includes as much information as possible in one common source. Other investigators now have the opportunity to attain information assembled in this thesis ranging from the participation of Belize in the global agenda against gender violence, the public policies in Belize that treat, prevent and punish this social phenomenon, the governmental institutions and civil society organizations that specialize in this issue and quantitative information about gender violence in the country.

Chapters one and two have adapted existing data about gender violence at an international and national level; the final chapter unravels never before seen information about gender violence through qualitative research methods that have extracted valuable information from the Belizean Society. The analytical and theoretical approximation toward the perceptions of individuals in the Belizean Society has proven that one of the most feasible ways of devising solutions to problems that affect people is to actually know what is going on in the mental thoughts of the individuals that undergo these problems.

With respect to the theoretical information of the first chapter, the Belizean society is living a "culture of terror" as all forms of violence (political, collective, structural, symbolic, interpersonal, daily or habitual and self directed) are made manifest in the culture, history and society of Belize. The formal economic and political structures of the country are clear cut replicas of patriarchal societies where unequal distribution of power and wealth have prevailed as means of keeping people divided. In particular, gender discrimination and gender violence as a result of the unequal social structures continue to be social problems that Belizeans struggle with.

The history of men and women that call themselves Belizeans has been one of tremendous bloodshed, racism, sexism and oppression on so many levels. The beauty of the multilingual, multiracial and multiethnic Belizean Society is overshadowed by many problems that have resulted from its capture as a colony to its struggles with underdevelopment. Democracy in the private and public sectors seem like distant desires and many individuals fight for a cause that the violence in Belize will be eradicated.

The existing situation of gender violence in Belizeans is reconciled through an the investigation of social perceptions as it elucidates the fact that the common man and woman can provide knowledge that can ultimately lead to the comprehension and elimination of any social problem. Knowledge isn't only what we are taught but also what we live and understand. Science shows that anything from a thought to a behavior is very malleable and certainly can be changed. Therefore, it is imperative to mention that whilst gender violence is a lived daily reality in the world, searching for a deeper understanding of this social problem is also a daily reality.

The analysis of results in the third chapter provides a descriptive presentation of the findings. In order to reconcile the hypothesis of the investigation with the objectives put forward, a theoretical analysis of the results is presented here that links the descriptive findings with the academic concepts of the investigation.

First of all, the data presented in this work contributes to existing quantitative and qualitative information about gender violence and it is an effective foundation that can be used to enhance the existing mechanisms that treat and prevent this social problem. All of the components involved in the collection of data including the fieldwork procedures, the semi structured interviews and the choice of units of analysis were created to specifically suit the context of the Corozal District in Belize.

Secondly, before explaining the analytical perspective of the findings, as part of the qualitative procedures followed, it must be stated that the investigation was guided by a general objective and a corresponding hypothesis.

For any investigation, it is important for the investigator to formulate a logical and valid response to the objective of the study. The aspects of clarity, precision and cohesion of this response in relation to the general objective of the investigation help shape and focus the investigation. Hence, in response to the general objective of the investigation which is to analyze whether certain men and women of Corozal, Belize perceive gender violence as a private matter or as a problem of public responsibility, the predicted answer or hypothesis of the investigation is that: Women and men of Corozal, Belize that participated in the investigation perceive gender violence as a private problem rather than as a problem of public responsibility which prevents the effectiveness of political policies that treat this social phenomenon.

However, before proving or disproving the hypothesis, several factors discovered in the results need to be highlighted and examined. As has been mentioned before, two social groups were interviewed; namely, the professionals that specialize in issues of gender violence and the women and men of the general populace of the Corozal District.

Final notes on the Responses of the Professionals that specialize in issues of gender violence

The professionals provided an informed perception about gender violence which is obvious because of their experience and knowledge working with these issues. The knowledge they shared in terms of the institutional roles of the respective public health or human rights organizations, in which they are employed, their own perception about gender violence in the society of Corozal and the services offered by the social authorities is indispensable material vital to the effectiveness of

public policies and mechanisms for the treatment and prevention of violence in the country.

Yet, it is quite intriguing to note that although gender violence is considered a social problem by the personnel employed in these social institutions, this problem is still seen as an issue that primarily affects women. Evidence of this is shown throughout the responses of the interview questions when the interviewees continuously referred to the victims of gender violence as women. This is understandable but in order for gender violence to be seen as a public problem, it needs to be emphasized that women as well as men are affected by gender violence.

Although this study may seem to want to accommodate more male victims in the equation of gender violence this is not the case. The reality is that while more women than men are victims of gender violence, both men and women form part of a society that is collectively influenced by violence. Moreover, since there are more abusive men in the Belizean Society, more psychological services need to be offered for men not only as victims but as aggressors. A great part of gender violence stems from the fact that men grow up in abusive environments that reproduce this behaviour from generation to generation. Through strict and mandatory rehabilitation programs that cater to abusive men, more men can be able to curb this behaviour.

What is more, the professionals were asked about the cases where men are victims of gender violence and through their reactions and responses it is quite evident that society on a whole does not sympathize with the fact that men can be victims of physical abuse in particular. This perception is directly related with traditional gender roles of men and women and in order to break the stereotypes that depict women as the weak ones and men as the strong ones, the social institutions need to emphasize that the services rendered are for both women and men.

Evidently, the institutions are beginning to do this but some of the interviewees feel that Belize is not ready to accept men as victims of

violence. Again, this has to do with the fact that the Belizean society is deeply rooted in a patriarchy that is difficult to transform.

On the other hand, the efforts and knowledge of the professionals show that in many ways Belize is ready to break the socially tolerated stereotypes of women and men. The example needs to be shown from the highest governmental institutions so that this mentality filters down to all the crevices of society.

According to the findings, for gender development and awareness to undergo great advancements in society, the institutions that deal with these issues need to be inclusive of both genders. For example, social institutions that are in charge of gender awareness and equality need to be known as Gender Departments instead of Women's Departments. This does not in any way discredit the importance of the role of women in society; it only shows equitable ways of thinking in the relations between women and men. In this way both genders would feel comfortable enough to embrace the services offered by this institution. In effect, instead of perceiving the Women's Department as an institution that is "against men," more men will see it as an institution that is more than willing to help men and women in their problems.

In terms of other factors that reproduce the presence of gender violence in Corozal, alcoholism and drug abuse as well as economic dependence on partners (especially female to male dependency) continue to be glaring determinants of violence in the home. In order to create ways of reducing these social determinants of violence, more facilities need to be opened for the treatment of alcoholism and other forms of drug abuse. The organizations that deal with drug abuse are well aware of alcoholism and drug abuse and the clear link they have to gender violence. Hence, the efforts to fight this social problem have to be enhanced.

Many of the respondents said that financial dependency keeps many victims of gender violence from seeking help and leaving a violent relationship; therefore, well organized employment agencies need to be

established to provide economic assistance so that individuals can discover and value their independence. These agencies should cater especially to women or men that are in the process of leaving these relationships and need to become financially independent.

According to the professionals, there has been a great amount of awareness about gender violence throughout the years. Many activities have been carried out especially during special events in the year such as March 8 which is the day set for International Women's Day. Another important period in the calendar for human rights issues is during (16 days of activism) when several activities are organized to emphasize zero tolerance for violence.

However, the professionals also signaled that gender awareness is an ongoing process and more can be done to sensitize urban as well as rural areas of Belize. In particular, the media houses and the business community must be more receptive to supporting activities that promote gender consciousness.

Another observation worth highlighting is the need for more support groups or centers where women and men can get counseling or other forms of aid in Corozal. The professionals replied affirmatively upon being asked whether more shelter services are required for victims of gender violence in the country.

In reference to the professional perception acquired through the interviews, chapter three describes a thorough image of how professionals view gender violence in Corozal and the wider area of Belize. They have provided honest and credible opinions and ideas that show certain weaknesses and strengths in the social systems that deal with gender violence in society.

In this informed perception, there is a clear level of knowledge that the common citizen may not know because of the lack of experience or specialized training and education about these social matters. In many ways, the professional perception of gender violence is reliable information. For professionals that specialize in the treatment of gender

violence, this phenomenon is without a doubt a problem of public responsibility.

Final notes on the Responses of women and men from the general populace of the Corozal District

The perception of the men and women of Corozal reveals striking variations to the informed perception of the professionals. The perception and knowledge gathered and analyzed for this second group was taken into consideration to prove or disprove the general hypothesis of the investigation. Accordingly, the primary guide question of the investigation: "What are the perceptions of women and men of Corozal in relation to the phenomenon of gender violence?" was responded through this second perception.

In order to give a thorough analysis of the knowledge and perception of the citizens that participated in the study it is important to observe important points signaled throughout the interviews that in some way or another contribute to the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis. To begin, the characteristic traits considered for each individual such as sex, age, ethnicity, location, civil status, educational status, family situation and occupational status mark many similarities in the responses to the interview questions. The fact that the interviewees are from varying contexts within Corozal does not seem to drastically differentiate their general knowledge of gender violence.

For example, in spite of the fact that the characteristics of the participants vary, all of them readily defined domestic or gender violence as violence against women by their male partners. This can definitely be accounted for by the prevalent myths and stereotypes of the gender roles women and men are expected to adhere to and since women are seen as the weaker gender in many relationships in Belize, then it is likely for individuals to associate them as victims of gender violence. Moreover, many women in Belize are housewives and they

depend economically on their husbands; therefore, the historical dependence on men by women has made them more susceptible to becoming abused in their home. Upon further questioning, they said that men can also be victims but it is not common or expected.

Similar to the perception of the professionals, these participants also believe that common factors that propel violence in society are alcoholism and economic dependence. All of the participants in both social groups signaled that apart from the victim, children in the family are seriously affected by gender violence.

Alarming findings were uncovered in terms of the lack of knowledge of the participants in relation to laws, institutions and the information disseminated by these institutions about gender violence. Evidently, the participants have very limited knowledge about the social institutions, political policies and information disseminated concerning this phenomenon.

Several reasons may be related to this. For example, the participants may not consider the phenomenon as something important for them to have knowledge about. Another reason may be that while awareness campaigns are held for special periods each year, these may not be sufficient. Whatever the case may be, it is quite clear that if these twelve participants lack vital information about this phenomenon, it is probable that others may not know this information either.

Through the knowledge that women and men in Corozal have about gender violence, they also have varying perceptions toward this phenomenon. This perception is highly influenced by whether people have directly or indirectly experienced violence in their relationships. Furthermore, the social perception of women and men in Corozal gives an idea of the socially constructed thoughts of people bearing in mind that some of these thoughts are based on roles and stereotypes in association to gender.

Three of the participants shared their experiences and while only one claimed that she did not receive the adequate treatment, this is

evidence enough that the response of authorities may sometimes falter. In order for the authorities to carry out their responsibilities to the best of their ability, they should have high sensitivity to these cases and should always provide immediate response and follow up treatment. The installation of Domestic Violence Units in all police departments through out the country has definitely facilitated better treatment for victims of gender violence.

According to the participants, violent behaviour has a lot to do with the traditional gender roles that are expected of men and women in any society. They all explain that women and men are expected to behave in certain ways or should have certain characteristics and sometimes this may contribute to the reason why women are more likely to be victims than men. In concordance with the responses, the women and men interviewed explain that through their upbringing they were taught that women are expected to tend to domestic matters and that the men are the ones that work outside of the home to maintain the household economically. However, many of the interviewees have noted a new change in which more women are becoming educated and independent.

It is necessary to strengthen the characteristic that gender violence does not discriminate against age, civil status, socioeconomic status, ethnic group and level of education. Anyone can be liable to become a victim of gender violence. However, because of the patriarchal society in Belize, women are at a higher risk of being victims of gender violence. The men and women of Corozal are not entirely aware that gender violence does not discriminate against these characteristic traits. Hence, if they can imagine themselves or people they know as possible victims of violence, they may realize that it is important for them to have sound knowledge about gender violence, where to seek help and what laws they can refer to for protection and against this phenomenon.

In light of the observations made in reference to the responses of participants, it is clear that they have many relevant views toward gender violence in the society. While the hypothesis of the investigation is that the men and women interviewed would consider gender violence a private problem rather than a problem of public responsibility which prevents the efficacy of the political policies, this prediction has been rejected. Through the responses, the majority of the participants perceive gender violence as a social problem. Yet, the inefficiency of the laws, institutions and political policies is accounted for not because the participants do not view gender violence as a social problem, but because they do not have exposure to sufficient information that they can use to help others and themselves against gender violence.

In other words, new ways of disseminating information in terms of the laws, social institutions and other important preventative and treatment mechanisms need to be created. The ways of promoting gender awareness and equity has to be given top priority in government institutions by improving the multi-sectoral coordination against gender violence.

In reference to the suggestions for improvements of the social systems in Belize that treat gender violence, some possible recommendations to enhance gender equality are proposed. This investigation sheds light on the fact that the diffusion of information through the social institutions should be strengthened and that central government needs to allocate more funds for these institutions to have the resources that they require to permeate the reality that gender violence is a serious social problem; It destroys morals, happiness, productivity and the strength of a society. Moreover, the budget assigned for human development needs to consider more human and financial resources to carry out the obligations these institutions are designed for.

Also, studies such as this one emphasize that the educational system provides important information that nurtures the intellect of

individuals. Given that the primary and formal education of individuals shape their beliefs and thoughts in relation to the roles and definitions of what it is to be a "man" and what it is to be a "woman", the social institutions including those that are related to human development, health, public security, jurisprudence and education must focus the circulation of information through activities that inculcate gender equity. In so doing, the intolerance of gender violence and other related issues can be transmitted to a wider audience from an early age.

Special obligatory programs should be organized in reference to topics that are related to gender violence with the target audience being schools. These programs can have a great impact on the perception that young people have of gender violence and it may make them understand that this issue is destructive. Also, the subject entitled "Health and Family Life" should be made mandatory in all levels of the educational system from pre-school up to tertiary education.

Although, the human development institutions that specialize in gender violence are doing a great deal to remedy the problem, more public awareness can be generated through the help of other social institutions both governmental as well as those that are created by civil society. The importance of the diffusion of this information through a serious multi sectoral effort can strengthen the ability of more members of society to realize that they can be victims of gender violence and that they need to be well prepared in preventing that possibility. Moreover, men and women in society have to be willing to help their fellow citizens in any way they can because this problem is social not private. It is not just a spousal affair.

Finally, while the institutions that specialize in the phenomenon of gender violence transmit information at a national level, it is of paramount importance that the branches of the institutions be strengthened in the districts such as Corozal so that these branches have a great possibility of targeting the district cases efficiently.

The efforts to reduce gender violence in the Belizean Society start from central authorities and should have equal distribution through out the districts in urban and rural areas. Central Government has the capacity to provide optimum facilities for all of the districts so that victims of gender violence have the information and help immediately accessible to them. Citizens of Corozal and other areas of the country need to feel confidence in the laws and systems put in place for gender violence in order for these to be effective.

The final recommendation for the enhancement of gender awareness and equity is directed to the general populace of Corozal. Many social institutions and political policies such as the Ministry of Human Development and the Domestic Violence Act exist and are specialized to serve the people of Belize in order to treat and prevent human rights issues and public health problems. GENDER VIOLENCE IS A CRIME that affects the health and violates the basic right of freedom of PEOPLE. The only way that political policies and preventative campaigns can achieve definite effectiveness is if men and women in society make it their responsibility to BE INFORMED and to support the social systems that are designed to treat this problem.

Gender violence can be prevented and the only way that citizens of Corozal and the other areas of Belizean territory can minimize this phenomenon is if they play their role in its eradication. This role implies that they need to be culturally aware that gender violence can be reduced through community efforts. In concordance, the Women's Department, Police Department, Judicial Systems, Educational Systems and the Health System in Belize can only do so much. The general populace has to be supportive of the preventative campaigns for the reduction of gender violence in order for a collective solution to the problem of gender violence.

As a final thought, the investigator expects that other scholars, researchers and any other individual that is interested in learning more about this social issue acquire new information about gender violence

through this investigation. While this thesis has analyzed one form of gender violence, there are still many other ways in which violence in society can be studied. The recommendations highlighted in the conclusions may spark new ways of eradicating gender violence. Furthermore, this research can serve as a model for other investigators to study other issues or factors in society such as democracy and good governance, policy making, alcoholism and drug abuse, employment, public health issues and other phenomena that violate human rights through the gender perspective. Essentially, this research enhances the importance of the gender perspective as theoretical substance to study any topic related with the well being of society to attain gender equality in Belize.

APPENDIX 1

SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE IN COROZAL, BELIZE

PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY OR PRIVATE MATTER?

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS FOR PROFESSIONALS THAT WORK WITH
GENDER VIOLENCE ISSUES

POSITION
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

<u>Gender Violence</u>

Based on your experience as an advocate of human rights,

1. How would you define/describe the phenomenon of gender violence in Corozal?

2. What are the main causes and effects or factors that contribute to the presence of
gender violence in this district?

<u>Institutions</u>

1. What non governmental organizations work with gender violence issues in Belize?

2. What governmental institutions apart from this one work with gender violence issues
in Belize?

3. What foreign affiliations do the governmental institutions maintain in order to reduce
the presence of gender violence in the country?

<u>Information generated for the public</u>

1. What written information is generated for the public by the institutions? How often is
this information updated?

2. What programs, workshops and campaigns are offered to the public to enhance the
dispersion of information and the awareness of social issues such as this one? How
often are these events held?

3. How effective do you believe the information about gender violence offered to the
society is? What evidence proves this is so? (increase/decrease of reporting, reduction in
gender violence cases based on statistical data)

Reporting and Response of authorities

1. Has the rate of reporting increased in recent years? Have you noted any important fluctuation in the reporting rate that is vital to a breakthrough in the reduction of gender violence?

2. What is the protocol or process expected to be followed by the police authorities in the handling of these cases, the treatment of victims and the punishment of violators?

3. What would you consider as main obstacles in the reporting of gender violence cases and the process that ensues?

4. What treatment or follow up mechanisms are in place to help victims of gender violence before or after they report the case?

5. How effective are the laws against gender violence in Belize? Do you see any areas that need improvement?

Perception of Society towards Gender Violence

1. Based on the information generated for the Belizean society, do you think that the people of Corozal perceive gender violence as an issue of public responsibility or as a private matter?

2. What future strategies are being discussed for the dissemination of information and awareness of gender violence?

APPENDIX 11

SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE IN COROZAL, BELIZE

PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY OR PRIVATE MATTER?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FOR CITIZENS OF THE COROZAL DISTRICT

PERSONAL INFORMATION

SEX
AGE
ETHNICITY
LOCATION
CIVIL STATUS
EDUCATIONAL STATUS
FAMILY SITUATION
OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GENDER VIOLENCE

Defining gender violence
1. What does the term gender mean?
2. What does gender violence/domestic violence/family violence/domestic abuse mean?

Cause, effects and other factors of gender violence
3. What causes gender violence? Do you think that victims of gender violence allow it to happen? Does age determine whether someone is a victim of gender violence? Why or why not? Do you think that abusers are conscious of what they do or are they sick? Is it a natural part of a relationship? Why do you think people are violent? Does civil status determine whether someone is a victim of domestic violence?
4. How does gender violence affect family/couple? Is it a form of punishment for someone that does not want to live under their partner's control or does not want to follow traditional roles of men and women? Do you think that socioeconomic status determines whether someone is a victim of gender violence?

Laws, institutions and information about gender violence
5. Do you know any laws/legislation that relate to gender violence?
6. Are you familiar with the institutions that deal with gender violence? What do you think about these institutions? Shelters, groups
7. Do you know of anyone in your area that represents these institutions?
8. Have you ever read or heard of information, campaigns or advertisements provided by these institutions about gender violence? If yes, was the information, campaigns or advertisements useful to you in any way?

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT GENDER VIOLENCE

Experience and Gender Roles

9. Have you or anyone you know been involved in a situation of gender violence? What signs indicate that a person is a victim of gender violence? Any other forms?
10. Why do you think that women are more likely to be victims of gender violence? Have you heard of a case where a man is a victim of gender violence?
11. Do you think that ethnic group determines whether someone is a victim of gender violence? Why? In which ethnicity do you believe that there are more cases of gender violence?

Reporting and Response of Authorities

12. If you were directly involved in a situation of violence would you handle the situation on your own, privately with your partner? Would you seek help from authorities? Which authorities?
13. If you know of someone(friend, neighbour, relative or stranger) who is a victim of violence, would you help the person or let that person deal with his/her own problem?
14. Have you had any experience in reporting gender violence? If yes, what treatment were you given by the authority that you reported it to?

Public Responsibility or Private Matter

15. Do you think that gender violence is a situation that should be handled privately by the people that are directly affected? Does education determine whether someone is a victim of gender violence?
16. To find solutions to gender violence in Corozal, do you think that the authorities have a right to intervene in these cases?
17. Do you think that enough is being done in Corozal by social institutions and authorities? Why? What else can be done to prevent gender violence?

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