BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

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The research was done in a shelter for battered family members, a place where families can go, when they are unable to stay at home because of violence. The aim of the research was to find out the role of the shelter in breaking the cycle of family violence and to get an idea about how this violence affects the whole family.

The research was carried out using a qualitative method. The research material was collected from four interviews with workers in the shelter. The interviews were transcribed and analysed. Material was also collected through observation and an observation diary was kept throughout the process of the research.

The research showed that families seek help mostly because of emotional violence. The number of families coming to the shelter has not grown, but problems have become more complex, since people have seemed to have lost their life-control. Multicultural clientele has grown noticeably and workers are facing even more challenges mainly due to language barriers.

The research also showed that, in some cases, family violence is not taken seriously and people are avoiding having to talk about it, even professionals. The silence should be broken in order to break the cycle of family violence.

Keywords: shelter, family violence, violence, multiculturalism, qualitative research, interview, observation
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1. INTRODUCTION

Family violence is something we just do not talk about. It is a secret kept inside closed doors. It is something that we are ashamed of and often the victims tend to blame themselves. Victims think they are the only ones who are going through this and no one would ever understand them. Even though there is more talk about family violence these days, it is still a taboo amongst us all. For one thing, victims do not want to talk about it but even professionals try to avoid the issue.

People move to Finland from many different countries. Multiculturalism is a part of everyday life in Finland. No matter what country one comes from, the same problems exist in their culture as well. There is family violence in everywhere. Thinking about multicultural families and immigrants, there is often a language problem. This brings challenges to them and to those employees who they work with. Cultural differences have to be taken into account when working with multicultural clients.

No family is “picture perfect”, neither in Finland or anywhere else, but there are more families suffering from violence than is realised. Many times the cycle of violence continues through generations. It is important that we start to break this cycle. We should be more aware that the problem does not go away if we do not talk about it.

The shelter for battered family members is trying to tackle the problem. The shelter is a place where victims of family violence can go when they are not able to stay at home. I chose family violence as a topic for my research, to bring the issue closer to people’s awareness. I wanted to give people an inside view on what the process is like in the shelter and what is done in the shelter every day to help victims of violence. This way I describe the shelter’s role in breaking the family violence.

1.1 Area of the study

The research is a general study about family violence and what kind of effect violence has on families. The study describes the role of shelters for battered family members which are situated in many towns across Finland. All of them are a part of the Federation
mother and child homes and shelters. Shelter’s main idea and the goal is common amongst all of them.

A woman can come to the shelter of her free will and on her own, or through a social worker, police or other officials. One can stay in the shelter through the crisis period, from one day to a couple of months (Ojuri, 2006, 27.)

Each shelter focuses mainly on family violence victims. Families come from different situations, but they each share difficult conditions which prevent them from living at home at that point. At the shelter the clients get a chance to think about their situation in peace and to find out what needs to be done. Workers are there to help with various issues and empower the clients to take charge of their own life. Everyone has the right to feel safe.

1.2 Aim of the research

The aim of this research is to find out the shelter’s role in breaking the cycle of family violence and what the process is like for families who go there looking for a way to get out of a difficult situation. Matters get worse when there are children involved. Some children may have suffered from violence themselves, but many of them are witnesses. When a child is a witness of violence it is a serious issue and should not be put aside just because there is no physical evidence of violence. This way I want to focus on the whole family as a unit, which therefore involves the children.

1.3 Research questions

People may be unfamiliar with the facility called the shelter for battered family members. The aim of this research is to find out the shelter’s role in breaking the family violence. What is the process like for the families? How does the Shelter help the families to begin to live their lives without violence?

Family violence is a serious matter irrespective of where people come from. Automatically it becomes more acute when children are involved, whether as targets or witnesses.
In Finland there are many immigrants and multicultural families facing violence and seeking help from the shelter. The work methods may be somewhat different when dealing with multicultural families than with Finnish families. Many people do not know where to seek help, if they come from another country, if they do not speak the language and do not have social networks. Therefore, is the process different for multicultural families in the shelter compared with Finnish families?

2. UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON

Family is considered a hive of safety and love. Therefore it might be difficult to see, recognise and admit that in family relations there might be brutality and violence. Naturally, that should not be accepted (Forsberg, 2002, 11). In Finland, over 20 women die every year, killed by their husbands, boyfriends or ex-husbands. In the years between 2002-2007, of all women aged 15 years and over who were killed, roughly 70% of them were victims of family violence (Helsingin Sanomat, 3.8.2009)

“A 60 year old man called an ambulance to a private apartment in Hernemäki, after not succeeding to wake up his wife. Before he had pushed a pillow in his wife’s face, so that she became unconscious. The woman died in a hospital without regaining consciousness” (Savon sanomat 1.9.2009)

“Over 40 year old man hit his wife’s head multiple times with a hammer in Sipoo. The woman suffered serious injuries” (Helsingin Sanomat 15.3.2009).

“A man hit his wife in the face with a frying pan in Nurmijärvi. Abuse took place in their apartment. The man, born in 1964, took a hold of a frying pan, because they had an argument over food” (Helsingin Sanomat 22.2.2009.)

“30 year old male touched his spouse’s 8 year old daughter and tried to sexually abuse her. The child suffered injuries. During these incidents, the stepfather hit the child multiple times with his fist and threatened with harder violence” (Helsingin Sanomat 6.3.2009.)
The above examples of news from daily newspapers, brings violence which happens at home to everybody’s attention. Often there are children involved in these situations; being a witness or as a straight-off target, and even to the point that violence leads to death (Forsberg, 2000, 9.)

Kaitue, Noponen and Slåen (2007, 25-28) point out that Finnish citizens have recognised the fact that family violence has become a bigger problem. People can read about it in the newspapers and hear about it in the news on television. The police come across family violence through home-alerts. The police get around 15 000 alerts every year in Finland concerning family violence. There are roughly 3 500 police reports related to family violence and only approximately every tenth victim of family violence makes a police report about it. Therefore, most of the family violence cases are not seen in the statistics. Sometimes the reason for not reporting to the police is about having fear of the abuser or when the victim blames her/himself for what has happened, and therefore feels guilty about the situation. In many cases the victim feels that the incident was not serious enough to make a record about it. It is common to seek help from close family members or friends, but when violence occurs time and time again victims decide to seek help from outside and mainly from professionals.

2.1 Definition of family violence.

In my research I focus on family violence, where the context is the family and the violence which occurs within the family, (e.g. the violence is aimed at the parents or the children). There is domestic violence, which is violence between spouses or partners and the children are not necessarily involved. However, in family violence, the children are a part of it, in one way or another.

As Kaitue, Noponen and Slåen (2007, 15-16) point out, the most commonly known form of violence is physical violence. Which takes place when someone is beating, pulling hair or throwing objects at another person. Physical violence is not the only form of violence, some of the other forms being:

Emotional violence, which is directed straight to self-esteem, for example humiliating and making them feel that they are not worth anything. Many times, when a man works full time and the woman is at home with the children, the man can control the woman with money. A man can give the
woman a weekly allowance and make her bring the receipts back, so abuser can see what the money was exactly spent on; this is called **economic violence**. This control makes the woman more dependent on the abuser and makes it difficult to break away from him and seek help.

**Neglect of care** is also considered violence. This is mainly focused on children, elders and others who rely on other peoples care. Elders may suffer from economical violence or emotional violence, but also abuse and neglect of care. Violence can come from their adult children or their spouses by, for example, using prescribed medicines for their own use.

**Sexual violence** is when someone forces another to have sex or sexually assaults someone in any way. It also includes forcing someone to have sex with another person in front of them. Sexual violence can become a part of physical oppression when a man, for example, criticises his partner’s sexual features, makes comparisons to other women or is openly having sexual relations with other partners (Nyqvist 2001, 17.)

According to Söderholm, Halila, Kivitie-Kallio et al. (2004, 129), violence is fundamentally about power; ruling and controlling another human being by causing pain and suffering. According to researches, physical violence is commonly caused by males, women being the victims.

### 2.2 Family violence and children

According to Ruohonen (2006, 10) the concern for the children really started when the term “the battered child syndrome” was born. It was in the 1960’s when medicine defined the abuse of children as a unity of symptoms. Throughout the times there has always been abused children going to see doctors who have treated them. But the children were seen as a part of a family and the issue of violence was considered only “a matter of the family”. Back then there was not a clear line between “upbringing” and “abusing” for families and for child protection workers. People thought that they had the right to punish their own children physically and it was considered to be a part of upbringing of children.

Finnish legislation does forbid child’s physical punishment. Nevertheless, according to UNICEF, 61, 000 Finnish children live in a home, where he/she is a target of violence. Research, as knowledge points out, that domestic violence
and child abuse are often connected to each other. Violence between parents raises the risk of children suffering from violence as well. Whenever there is violence in a family, it always affects the children. (Kaitue, Noponen, Slåen 2007.)

Söderholm, Halila, Kivistie-Kallio et al. (2004, 128) explain that when there is violence at home and the victim and the abuser are adults, parents often think that children are the outsiders. Because children were not the victims they can be left unnoticed. The problem is, that even though they are not the victims, the violence they see at home affects them. Children are considered to be “invisible witnesses”.

A child grows and develops best in conditions where it receives love and affection and feels safe. A child needs a person or people to get attached to it. The first and the most meaningful relationship a child forms is with his/her own parents and family. This builds a foundation for future relationships. In a good and safe relationship, a child feels trust and learns to value itself as an important person. When a child is reciprocated in appropriate ways, the child feels that the world is a good and righteous place. A child brave enough to try, take chances and connect with people. Calm and stable surroundings with limits and attention given by the parents, encourage the child to take on new challenges and to learn new things. The parent’s job is to protect the child and be a safe refuge, from where a child can observe the surroundings and return to when it needs comfort and safety (Holmberg 2000, 9.)

2.2.1 Effects of violence on children

Ojanen, Söderholm, Halila et al. (2004 134-135) point out that effects of long-term violence expand much broader than consequences of the single abuse situation. Parts of the effects can be seen directly, some can be seen much later in life. Violence concerns all people; the victims, the one causing the violence and children who witness it. Experiences of trauma affect a child immediately. On the other hand, living in the middle of violence it influences the adults in the family and their capabilities to act as parents.

Witnessing family violence is a frightening thing. A child lives in an environment where a member of the family threatens or uses violence as a way to control other family members. A child senses the feeling of fear at home, which forces it to be alert and careful every moment. The noise from beating, screaming and breaking things, makes home feel unsafe. It is also sad and scary for a child to see a parent or sibling being hurt. A
child who lives in a violent home, watching this pain and misery, makes it feel afraid that maybe it is the next victim (Ojanen, Söderholm, Halila et al. 2004 134-135.)

When a child is the target of violence, it fights in the worst case, for its own life. To be afraid of getting hurt or dying is real. After parents lose their ability to control emotions and power, there is no clear thinking for the child. The child knows this and feels horror at its own weakness. Also, a child is afraid of the pain caused by violence and possible signs of it; bruises, broken bones or marks of burning. For a child, it is hard to believe the world is a good and righteous place, if it lives a completely different every-day life. Through experiences of violence, a child forms a picture of the world as a hostile and unpredictable place. In this world it doesn’t matter, who was right or did the right thing. The one who has the most power and strength wins (Holmberg 2000, 12-13.)

There are a lot of different symptoms of traumatisation; here are the main ones described by Oranen, Keränen (2006, 64-65) that can also be seen in the clientele of the shelter.

When a child is having continuous nightmares about a violent incident, it means that during night-time the child is experiencing everything all over again. The child is haunted by memories, feelings from violent incidents and he/she is not able to control memories, as for example when the child hears a bottle of beer opening or dropping, all the memories come rushing back. Sometimes a child reacts to violence by simply avoiding talking about it in every way possible. The child does not know how to react to violence and acts very neutrally towards the issue, therefore he/she thinks that it is normal in a way.

Hyperactivity is a common symptom for traumatised children. They can be very tense and react strongly even to little things. They have difficulties calming down and focusing on any kind of task. Problems with sleeping are common. Children are not passive when it comes to violence. They all have different ways of coping with difficult situations and experiences. Even though the child’s methods for dealing with everything may seem questionable or even harmful, they are the most effective from the child’s perspective. These methods used can become a problem if they are being used continuously and can, later on, hamper its development and ways to deal with difficult situations (Oranen, Keränen (2006, 64-65.)
3. SHELTER FOR BATTERED FAMILY MEMBERS

According to Söderholm et al. (2004, 128-129) the issue of “state of the children” was re-considered after the first shelters were formed at the end of 1970 in Finland. A research was conducted in the early 1980 where it stated that children who have been living in a violent home and therefore experienced family violence in some way, need help and support. It took some time before anything was put into action. It was only in 1997 when The Federation started Lapsen aika (Time of the child)-plan. The plan was nationwide and the aim was to evolve tools and methods in order to be able to help the children who have experienced family violence.

The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters opened its first shelter in 1979. Since then many more have been formed, there now being 14 Shelters in Finland. Shelter work is a part of co-operative network by authorities working with children and families. Co-operation with schools, nurseries, social offices and family-nurseries is important. From the financial aspect, the procedure depends on the financial obligation granted by municipalities. These financial obligations vary between different municipalities (Forsberg 2000, 31.)

Forsberg (2000, 30) states that work done in a shelter is mainly crisis work. Some clients come straight to the shelter after a violent incident has occurred, but clients can come after some weeks. Most commonly the client is a woman who has been the victim of her husband’s violent attack. At that time the client is usually still in shock, therefore it is an acute emergency situation. The mother is feeling emotional and needs comfort and help and sometimes this can cause the children to be left aside, their feelings and experiences not being taken into consideration. This way “the mother’s pain eats into the child’s pain”.

Coming to the shelter is not an easy thing to do. The first step is quite high and so is the feeling of shame. There are many people who live in a home, where they feel unsafe. Many people rely on family members to take care of them in their time of need, but sometimes, in order to help the situation,
additional help is required from outside. Aim of the work is to break the cycle of violence, taking care of the crisis that violence has caused and also to supporting survival after the crisis phase (Ojuri, 2006, 16).

3.1 Clientele

According to Forsberg (2000, 8), the client who seeks help from the shelter is usually a woman who has been abused by her husband or partner. Typically, mothers take their children with them to the shelter. Workers explain that the clients believe that their children have no idea about the violence, since they have been sleeping or staying in another room. Therefore mothers believe that violence does not affect the child in any way, from the child’s perspective.

To many people who have not lived with domestic violence, it seems obvious that a woman could, and even should, leave as soon as she is first attacked. This is a gross over-simplification of women’s lives and is also ironic, given how recently women were still being advised to ‘stay for the sake of the children’ (Mullender, Debbonaire 2000, 8.)

There have been cases when a man seeks help from shelters, because the woman has been violent and for a man to actually seek help is a bigger step than we might think. For a man to admit the violence can make him feel that he is weak and less of a man. Therefore, many men who are suffering from violence tend not to seek help.

3.2 Multiculturalism

Andrew & Hartikainen (1999, 9-10) explain that when describing immigrant clients in a shelter, they are families of two cultures, meaning that one of the spouses is an immigrant or both are from another country. In some shelters half of the clientele consist of immigrant families. Workers are concerned that the special needs of immigrant clients are not met. Immigrant clients are challenging the shelters traditional methods of working and bringing new challenges to everyday work. If the shelter cannot fulfill the needs, it can have fatal consequences to their lives. Immigrant families
rarely have any stable social network and are therefore left alone do deal with difficult situations.

Immigrant family, its family connection, is put through a test in another country. Basic values, norms and roles are questioned. Also the family faces a whole different society here in Finland, strange language, culture and organizing basic life conditions, like work, housing and livelihood. It is very crucial to find out what their life was like back home. The ones that come to the shelter had most likely, already experienced violent behaviour in their own country (Ojuri 2006, 22-23.)

According to Andrew & Hartikainen, emotional violence is accentuated in the lives of immigrant women, as their knowledge of legislative rights and community service is not known. They do not have the access to information because they do not usually speak Finnish and the lack of a social network. It is more difficult to leave home when one does not have the strength to get help owing to lack of information due to the language issue. Therefore emotional violence can last a very long time before immigrant women are capable of seeking help.

In the shelters, immigrant women are given emotional help and also help with practicalities. The aim is independent survival and adjusting to Finnish society, which has been difficult to do because of family violence. Immigrant clients, with their special needs, make work in the Shelter somewhat more demanding. There has to be consideration on ethnic background, legislation for immigrant clients, length of stay in Finland, language skills and knowledge of their rights and duties. For some of the immigrant clients, shelter is the first place where they meet Finnish women and the other way around (Ojuri 2006, 31-32.)

3.3 Legislation

According to Niemi-Kiesiläinen, Kainulainen (2006, 115-116) family violence is always a crime. Being violent towards your wife/ husband or to your children is always considered a crime in the criminal law. Many times victims of family violence stay at home hoping the violence will stop. If and when they do report the violence, victims still feel so attached to the abuser and rarely wish for them to be sentenced for possible
jail time. They prefer the solution to be treatment or counselling. Criminal justice system is not familiar to many people, but it is very an important system in preventing violence. Many times people wonder why report this to the police, as they do not know how it would help their situation. If the victim has reported a previous attack and perhaps has had a restraining order against the abuser, police know that fast help to the victim is needed. In an acute violent situation, the police are the only ones who can take the abuser into custody immediately. There are only exceptional cases when violence is allowed and that is when defending oneself against an abuser.

In the Finnish law, crimes of assault are put into groups; mild abuse (7§, 21.4.1995/578) is when there is very little violence and no physical evidence. Abuse (5§, 21.4.1995/578) is when someone causes an injury or illness intentionally. The violence can be done without using physical violence, but the abuser can cause a mental illness or disturbance. Extreme abuse (6§, 13.7.2001/654) is when someone causes very serious injuries, illnesses or life-threatening situation to another person. It is also considered to be extreme abuse, if the assault has been brutal and cruel. It also belongs under extreme abuse if the violence has been done using a gun, knife or other dangerous objects (Social and health ministry, guide 1998: I fin, 29.)

Söderholm et al. (2004, 150) explain that the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child gives valuable instructions to every-day work, for professionals working with children. The basic rights of the child can be divided into three themes:

**Right to be protected**

In violence-work, safety and protection are the number one priorities. Workers should evaluate, in each case, how their action affects the child’s safety.

**Right for care**

Care and sharing a part of common resources, is an issue these days. Population getting older and also the wellbeing of children, have put a strain on the service system. Wishing for resources without limitations is irrelevant. Instead we can ask, are the resources in Finland focused correctly. How much money violence costs to our society is noticeably large and the money used for preventing violence is noticeably less. When organizing the work done with family violence, they should also make sure that there are sufficient resources reserved for working with children.
Individual child work requires space, time and people who are familiar with it. The needs of children should be put first.

Right of participation

A child has the right to participate in those matters that concern itself. Based on observing the phenomena of family violence, children are participants in such matters. Violence influences their lives in many ways and its influences carry far into their future. Being a participant does not only mean the right to be heard and to be able to express own opinions, but it is also a possibility to share feelings, thoughts and experiences. Being a participant also gives the child a chance to receive information and knowledge. In this case the children are often forgotten. Authorities have the duty to explain their actions, tell about the plans and ways of working to the children as well.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DETAILS

In this chapter I will describe which methods I used in this research and where I collected the material. I will also describe why I chose these methods and what was done after the material was collected.

4.1 Methods

The research was done using qualitative methods. The aim was to find out generally about the phenomenon and qualities of family violence. The research was done to describe the shelters role in breaking the cycle of family violence.

Interviews were used as one part of my research methods. There were a total of four interviews, in the first there were two people working especially with children and the second one with a family therapist and a worker. All of these people work in the same shelter. All interviews took about an hour and I had formed a range of questions beforehand, but also new questions took place during the interview session, as it was more unofficial. All interviews had the same basic questions but there were different
ones, since they all work in different sections of the shelter. Interviews were done using tape-recorders and transcribed from word to word.

My second source was observation. I have been working there for quite some time and now especially for three months while collecting the research material for the thesis. I kept an observation diary daily and used that as a research method. I had to modify some parts, which were used because of confidentiality issues. I naturally used a little bit of my previous knowledge of the shelter, since working there for so long.

4.2 Collecting material

Material was collected over a three-month period while working in a shelter for battered family members. Observation was used to gather ideas and thoughts about working in a shelter and seeing through many cases, what kind of clients the shelter has and what the work the methods are. Seeing the every-day life of these clients gave me a wide perspective on what the clients go through while staying in the shelter.

As I had clients from multicultural families and from Finland, I got to see the different methods shelter uses in order to help them. While working in the shelter I focused more on observation and I kept an observation diary. In this diary I wrote down things that confused me, questions that came to my mind, like “why did they choose this method?” examples about families I had, problems I faced and just general thoughts that came to my mind. Later on I started to read a lot of books on the subject and reflected on the issues I came across within the shelter.

I chose to do four interviews, two of them were with the employees who worked mainly only with children, one with a general worker in the shelter and one with a family therapist. I thought that this way I could get the best knowledge about everything. Then it was time to form questions for the interviews. I formed somewhat different questions to the employees who worked with children, but mainly they were the same. I used a recorder for the interviews and after that I transcribed them from word to word. From there on it was about reading more material, picking the most suitable ones for the thesis and analysing the research material.
5. FINDINGS

I chose to divide this chapter into two main parts, in order to make the results more clear and easier to follow. The first one is The Phenomena and the second is The Process. The analysis is about two different perspectives: Finnish families and multicultural families. This chapter includes parts of the interviews to get their opinions heard and also gives an inside look on what the workers deal with every day.

5.1 The phenomena

The aim of research was to describe the shelters role in breaking the cycle of family violence and how they work to help the victims of family violence.

I will describe the phenomena that is family violence, as it is seen in the shelter and in the lives of their clients. In this chapter I focus more on the aspect of family matters, addressing problems which clients have and why some people are willing to stay at home even though there is violence.

5.1.1 Losing life-control

We all have our own definitions of the word family and what it stands for. In Finland parents, children and grandparents can often be called one’s immediate family. But in many other countries immediate family consists of cousins, aunts, uncles and so on. Families are all about sharing, giving and all having equal rights to be loved and feel safe. We might take a stable home for granted, because in reality it is only a fantasy for some families. So why do they not feel well and what is causing all these problems? To find an answer to that question is very challenging, as we are unable to define just one reason or cause.

People have more and more issues with money, meaning that the economical stability is controlling the wellbeing of a family. Families may have unstable income with
temporary jobs, meaning that they have to have several jobs in order to maintain their household. Every family has different lifestyles and wants different things to maintain a certain status in today’s society. Some people define happiness by having a lot of material things but some need less of them and are fully satisfied with basic things. Having many jobs, parents are faced with many issues concerning their children and caretaking. Economical issues put a huge strain on parents and therefore to the whole family. Often parents tend to think that children need many toys and expensive hobbies to be able to enjoy their childhood, when in reality most children are happy just to be able to spend time with their parents.

Perhaps the answer that ties all the problems together, would be that people have seemed to lose control of their lives (W3).

Unemployment is a common problem these days, more and more companies are cutting down on staff, leaving them without a job. There is this cycle, of how unemployment affects people. First they lose their job and they do not necessarily have enough skills or education in order to get another job soon. They stay at home and do not feel good about themselves. It takes a toll on the relationship and problems arise. Staying home and having nothing to do can lead to depression. On the other hand, there have been cases in the shelter, where parents have never worked, they have been living with benefits and still somehow think they can afford to purchase all materialistic things as people who are working full time. In the end it all comes down to life-control. Who is to tell these people where they can put their money.

There are a lot of material things, many people have everything, even though they don’t have money and then they become debt (W2).

It is difficult to understand that some people would rather buy things and use the money for entertainment, rather than pay rent. If they do not pay their rent, they get evicted.

Thinking about the clientele in the shelter and how many families are there because of evictions, the number has grown noticeably. So the
number of families staying in the shelter has not risen, but the reasons for seeking help have changed and they have become more complex (W1).

One may say that there are more problems in families because of the economical breakdown; as things get tough money-wise, problems come up more easily. Some say that violent behaviour begins after a family is struggling with money and nerves can not take it and abuse begins. I do not necessarily think, that the previous statement is true. Sure there might be cases like that, but usually there is more to it than just money. Financial issues may just be the top of the iceberg, the tension might have been building for ages and there has been signs of violence before.

5.1.2 Taking the first step

There are almost always quite many families with children in the shelter. They can be single mums, fathers with children or even a whole family staying in the shelter. There have also been many cases with elderly people, usually women. The clients may have different backgrounds, but they all have something in common, they are either in shelter because of family violence or because of child protection issues. In the shelter there have always been families with children, this situation has not changed so much during the last few years:

We have the same amount of families as it usually goes according to the seasons. Two years ago there were more small children, especially under the age of three. In Finnish families there are about one or two children. Multicultural families tend to have more children (W3).

It differs quite a bit. A couple of years ago there were a lot of families with children (W1).

The amount of children in a family has increased; there are bigger families nowadays (W2).

One thing that has increased is the multicultural clientele. Most of these clients are immigrant women who have come to Finland through marriage. Usually these clients cannot speak any Finnish as they have been in the country only for a short time.
Violence is often considered to be violence when visible marks can be seen. But violence is more than that. Physically one can hurt someone badly, but effects of emotional abuse can be more traumatising in some cases. In an interview (W4) it was described that violence is something when one is afraid of another person. Meaning that being afraid is already violence. In the shelter for battered family members, workers are faced with victims of violence every day. Workers have seen the whole scale of violence through the clients, starting from threatening behaviour to actually someone almost being killed by their spouse. Thinking of the sort of violence that can be seen in the shelters clientele, there was one common answer to this:

Emotional violence. The next is physical and the fear of something bad happening. Most of the clients have more than one reason when they come to the shelter (W3).

There is quite much close relationship terror and there is rarely any physical violence, more emotional abuse of power and control (W4).

Violence is often related to alcohol. In Finnish culture alcohol plays a huge role in society’s problems. When alcohol is involved, the arguing tends to turn into violence, sometimes from both parties. When there is alcohol involved almost every day, problems rise up more easily and the consequences can be more severe. In a family where both mother and father have substance abuse problems, alcohol takes control of their family life.

When thinking about multicultural families it all comes down to culture. A Finnish man married to a wife from another country starts to use alcohol and wife is not familiar with this kind of culture. Or the situation could be the other way around; a Finnish woman married with a foreign man who has tendency to drink and use violence, because in his culture it is acceptable to use power as a weapon. In both cases violence can be the same type, either emotional or/and physical. In either way, violence has the same effects on the victim. It makes one feel like nothing and not worth anything. May it be in the culture or not, violence is illegal in Finland.

I have found out that when violence is used while not intoxicated, it can actually be more brutal. Not to state that it is somewhat more understandable when the abuser is not sober. Clients have been telling how the abusers hit their head on the ground and stomp
on it, how hot water was thrown on their bodies and skin was burned with a cigarette. Just to clarify, that in these mentioned cases, abuser was sober and fully aware of what he was doing. It just makes you say “ I can not believe how someone could to this to another human being”. Some clients have been suffering from violence for years, continuous beating and humiliation. Even though some people suffer for decades of violence at home, somehow they still don’t leave the violent surroundings.

Home should be a place where one feels safe, so what makes someone stay at home where she is being beaten time and time again? Most of these clients have said that there is so much good in their relationship also. The good times are the ones they stay there for. There is still love, in spite of violence. Some people have been married for 20 years and occasionally the man drinks too much and then pushes the wife around, then wife explained that is only the alcohol what is to blame. Otherwise he is a perfect husband. They say ” I am sure this was the last time, he promised”, “ he cannot live here alone” and “who then takes care of him if I leave”?

The Social and health ministry guide (1998:1 fin, 7) explains, why is it that women stay in a violent relationship and what could possible be the reasons behind it:

- social isolation
- fear that she wont survive alone (with children)
- fear of violent behaviour getting worse
- fear of losing custody of the children
- economical dependency and control
- worry about children, when family is falling apart
- pressure from family and relatives
- guilt about failing family life
- threats and claims from abuser
- belief that the spouse will change
- cultural and religious barriers

Then there is the case of multicultural families; a Finnish man might threaten his immigrant wife that she will lose her children if she leaves. In most cases immigrant
women have been in Finland only a short time, so they do not have language skills or any social networks. If there is violence at home and they wish to leave, how do they know where they go for help? Most of the immigrant clients come, because a friend (usually the same origin as the client) has heard about the shelter. Some may have had a violent situation and police took her to the shelter. Only a few come through the social workers.

When arriving at the shelter the client faces workers, with whom she doesn’t have a common language and she feels insecure. One of the first things workers do in a situation like this is to arrange for a translator to come to the shelter and meet the woman. The most important message the translator has for the woman is that in Finland it is illegal to for a man to hit his wife. That’s where the help begins.

5.2 The Process

In this section the aim is to give an idea how the work is different when there is a multicultural client compared to a Finnish one. This chapter gives you an idea what kind of client work the shelter does. One of the goals of the research was to give an idea of the main challenges in the work and what the future looks like in the case of family violence and the shelter for battered family members.

5.2.1 Working towards change

Shelter’s role is not to say what to do and what not to do. It is more like encouragement for the clients who want to change their lives for the better. They give support and professional guidance on what options the clients have.

The shelters main role is to offer crisis work. This gives security and workers listen to the client’s worries (W3).

The client’s needs always come first and the workers job is to listen, and discuss together with the clients, what could be done to improve their lives. It gives the client a possibility for change. When a client comes to the shelter for the first time, they feel
confused and not really sure what they have done by going there or if it was the right choice at all. Therefore the workers do not want to push any ideas on the clients, since they have enough of feelings to deal with already.

The process starts when a client comes to the shelter (W3).

We can look at the process from the client's perspective in two ways; it is very agonizing, heavy and stressful time, but on the other hand it is soothing, clarifying and safe to stay in the shelter.

There is not just one way of working in the shelter, since there are children and adults. There are different employees who work mainly with children. Most cases are involved with child protection. The process in the shelter is described as preventative and remedial child protection work. Employees who work with the children explain:

Our work is preventative, to the extent that the aim is to make the violence to stop at home. Meaning that the cycle of violence will be stopped, in a long term way (W1).

It is remedial, because we attempt to go through those situations that happened at home, so therefore children are able to live with those experiences (W1).

The shelter has a certain pattern of action. It all starts from crisis stage work. We look at the general situation of the client, we have a lot of discussions together as our job is to listen. We raise different possibilities for change, but the client always chooses which way he/she wants to go. The work mainly consists of practical work; helping with everything like divorce, restraining order, making a police report and so on. Survival-stage is rarely accomplished in the shelter (W4).

When clients come to the shelter they are greeted by one or two workers. There are usually two instead of just one, because usually one does the documenting while the other discusses with the client.

Workers start by asking if the client has left her children at home where the abuser is. If this is the case, then child protection officials will check up on them to see that they are safe. The mother is recommended to take her children with her to the shelter (W4).
Children also take part in the arrival-interview. This is because sometimes this is the first time for the family to talk about the incident/ or violent behaviour at home. It is good to share feelings to each other and also with the employees. The client explains from the very start what has happened and why they have come to the shelter. They are asked about their wishes and what help they need. For immigrant clients the number one wish is to stay in Finland. If the clients have not come to the shelter through their social worker, that means they have not been granted the financial obligation, which is something that is needed to stay in the shelter. If the client does not have that, then workers call to a social worker and try to arrange one for them. In the case of immigrant clients, if they do not speak Finnish, and if they do not have any people with them who can speak Finnish, a translator is called in if possible. Other than that, the starting procedure is pretty much the same.

The most terrifying issue for both Finnish and immigrant clients is the call to the child protection workers. This is something that is obligatory and it is done every time a client comes to the Shelter with a child or children. So, why do client find this phone call so overwhelming? Because usually they think they are going to lose their children, because of the notification. That is not true, but it does go to the register.

It is quite common that the children have seen violence and depending on their age, they will also be asked questions like “did you feel scared?” “what did you see?” and also being complimented on how brave they are and how proud their mother is to have a son/daughter like that. Depending on the case, there might be some light-weighted conversation included, especially with the children, so that they feel a little bit better. Workers describe the arrival interview in the following way:

In order to have a meaning for the follow-up procedure, it should be short and concise, maximum of 45 minutes. There has been a research done about what clients remember about the arrival-stage and about the workers. The only thing that the client might remember is that "she had earrings" (W3).

This is why during the arrival-interview workers does not go too deeply into the problems or discuss about the family’s history. These questions can be asked later on,
because the client is in a sensitive state mentally and also sometimes physically. From the interview the family is taken into their room and workers will show all the facilities. Then it is time to settle in and rest.

5.2.2 Talking with the clients

Talking with the clients is a long process, since they have already gone through so much and are in a fragile state, so workers need to be sensitive with their words. Workers need to clarify first how the clients feel at that moment, because the whole situation is quite overwhelming.

I will tell the client that I have read that you have arrived here at a certain date and time and ask the client "what do you think" and "how do you feel". Then continue with other questions (W4).

I specify the asked questions in the arrival interview, but the next step is pretty much depends on the client (W3).

Many of the clients, who are mothers, feel guilty for bringing their children to the Shelter. Some blame themselves for the violent attack.

If the mother feels guilty of the violent incident and says: "if I had not done this or that, this would never have happened ", We make sure to let her know that "nothing ever gives the permission to hit another" (W3).

Main feelings for the clients during the first days are about guilt and thoughts like: “maybe it was not necessary to come here” or “maybe I should just go back home” go through their minds. They feel like they have made too hasty decisions about leaving and maybe they have exaggerated the situation. The workers tell them that it was a brave thing what they did and that they understand that sometimes leaving from home is not an easy thing to do. The clients are encouraged to stay in the shelter to clear their head and get a real perspective on their situation while being in a safe place.

There are some principles to having a conversation with clients, Perttu (1999, 37-38) explains them:
• show understanding and care
• give non-judgemental support
• give positive feedback of their survival in a difficult situation
• don’t be shocked if they tell about living with violence for 10-20-30-40-50 years.
• don’t ask “why you don’t leave him?”
• don’t blame, moralise or be terrified of the abuser
• don’t ask them to forgive and forget, because that is underestimating the violence.
• when the client says “he is like that when he uses alcohol”, you answer by saying, in that case he has a problem with alcohol and violent behaviour.
• tell that only the abuser can have an effect on his violent behaviour
• show understanding, if the client is more concerned about the abuser, but explain that the abuser is responsible for his own life
• emphasize the importance of the clients own life and right to life without fear and worry

The next step is to find out a possible first meeting, which takes place in the shelter’s premises. The client’s social worker comes also and possibly the abuser, if the client so wants. Maybe the abuser is given the possibility to attend but doesn’t want to or the client is not ready to face him. Shelter’s role is not to judge the abuser or treat him disrespectfully.

The abuser is treated with respect and dignity, because we don’t even know if the claimed abuser really is guilty. We might be totally wrong, maybe they are both to blame the abuse was mutual. Maybe we were given the wrong person as the abuser. We are impartial, we are not the police or investigators (W4).

The meeting takes about an hour and usually it is just the adult client not the children, who attend. This is just a general first meeting and the issues to be discussed are:
Firstly we have to know why they came to us and what was the reason. If both parties are present, we make sure that opinions of both are heard and then we start to think what to do next and how to go forward from there (W4).

In that initial meeting possible future meetings with the abuser and children are taken into consideration and usually a time and place is settled. It is quite common that the meeting between abuser and a child happens in the Shelter, because usually the mother does not want to see the man, so then a worker will check up on them and see that everything is fine.

5.2.3 Helping the children

There are employees who work only with children. Usually their client relationship starts by doing an interview where they discuss experiences and feelings of the children. It might look like it would be difficult to talk to these children about violence and especially about violence which has happened in their own home. Also, what makes the situation even more sensitive, is that the abuser is usually the child’s own father. At this stage workers do not necessarily know if violence has happened to the children or are they just witnesses. For example, seeing your own father hurting your mother is absolutely traumatising and even though they may be called “just witnesses”, it does not mean that they do not need help to recover from the incident. Many times parents are saying: “I had no idea, they seemed fine, he never touched them”.

The situation is, from what I have seen, that children do act normally around their mother, because they do not want to disturb her in any way. They have seen the mother suffering, so they want to please her in every way possible. Although too many times when there is violence at home it does affect the children in one way or another. Usually it is emotional abuse and being a witness of abuse. Workers are there to find out how the children feel and what is needed to overcome the experience.

We are there to listen to the child. It all begins from spending time with them and going through experiences which they have had (W1).
The workers discuss everyday-life with a child; e.g. what it is like to be in day-care or school, what their hobbies are, if they have friends and what their family is like.

The workers also talk to the child about their experiences of violence; what the child considers as violence and what have been the most recent and worst situations they have experienced. It might seem like it would be very difficult to talk to a child about violence, but according to the workers of the shelter, it is not.

First of all we tell, them the meaning of violence (W1).
Explain what this place is and why they are here (W2).
We go through what has happened to them (W1).
We can ask them straight forward: “has someone been violent to you”? (W2).

Since the clients may be very traumatised by all that has happened, it would be totally understandable if they do not even want to talk about it. That is although not the case.

Many children even start the conversation themselves, but then again they can also stop talking very suddenly. Then they want to stop the conversation (W2).

Then when you ask a child, if it is difficult to talk about it, many say no. It also comforts them when one says that we are here to help them (W1).

There are some sample questions by Oranen & Keränen (2006, 74-75), which can be used to evaluate the experiences about violence and possible symptoms:

• What have you seen and heard?
• What have you thought about in a violent situation?
• What have you done in a violent situation, that turned out to be helpful?
• How did you feel?
• Have you been the target of violence?
• What kind of punishments your family uses and what kind of things you get punished for?
• What kind of survival methods you have, what has helped you when you felt bad?
• Have you been able to talk to anyone about these?
• Do you have a safe place where you can go to if necessary?

Then workers will also talk about possible symptoms that a child may have because of family violence. Here are few questions by Oranen & Keränen (2006, 74-75), which can be used to work with a child:

• is it difficult for you to fall asleep?
• do you have bad dreams or nightmares?
• at school, do you think about things at home?
• is it difficult for you at school to concentrate or listen to what the teacher has to say?
• do you have stomach problems, headaches or nausea?
• do you start to argue/fight easily?

There should be a quiet place for discussing with a child. Finding out a place where the child feels comfortable. Workers cannot force the child in any way to talk or manipulate in any way. There are many possible tools and methods that can be used when working with children.

Of course much depends on the clients age. There are certain things you can do if the child is very young; play with them, go to the park and also see the interaction between the child and the parents. Some children are so young that we have to work through the mother for the best sake of the child (W1).

Meetings that we have with workers and mothers, are good for explaining a few things to the child (together mother and worker) so that there are no misunderstandings about
the situation. The following statements by Mullender & Debbonaire (2000, 45-46) gives you a few examples of the issues that are important to go through with the child.

- violence is wrong and no-one deserves it
- it is not their fault and they are not to blame
- their dad still loves them (if this is true) and that they can still see him when they want to, providing if it safe (again, if this is true)
- their dad wants to change (if this is true) and that even if he and mum never live together again, this is a good thing for him to be doing – it shows that he is taking responsibility for what he has done
- their dad is a risk to her safety and that means they may have to do some things that may be difficult or annoying, or that they may not be able to do some things that they want to do, but they hope not for long. That she knows it is not fair and that they will find a way to manage and enjoy being a family without any violence in it
- having a violent dad doesn’t mean that they are going to turn out violent, nor does it excuse them if they use violence

Oranen & Keränen (2006, 82-83) explain that family violence is something we do not talk about and is especially not discussed with children. When witnessing violence and being unable to talk about it, children can feel a big burden on them. They are not allowed to talk about what happens at home, it is a secret. If and when a child talks about problems at home, the silence can be broken. Then it is possible that a cycle of violence that has lasted for generations can be broken. It is common that when parents are forced to look at the situation from the child’s perspective and they really see the pain their child is in, they start doing something to change the situation for the better.

Witnessing violence can be more harming than being an actual victim, because then the child has nobody who protects them. Father is scary and threatening, and because of abuse, mother is vulnerable and helpless from the child’s point of view, as the mother cannot even protect herself let alone the child. Children are known to be survivors, but all becomes easier when they have someone to help them. Help is possible when we know where help is needed and what the family’s situation is like for the child. It is pointless for the workers to claim that they are unwilling to talk to a child about family violence, because it makes the children feel bad. Maybe it does feel bad then, but it does no harm to the child. It does harm to the child, if nobody interferes with the violence at home (Oranen & Keränen 2006, 82-83.)
5.3 Challenges

These are some difficulties faced when working with children and especially those from multicultural families. Most likely there is no common language. How are the workers able to evaluate the child’s problems if there is this language barrier? That is because a part of the work with children involves working with the mother/parents as well.

It is known that often the children speak Finnish better than the parents and parents use the child as a translator and it definitely should not be like that, so that is a reason why immigrant children are more challenging to work with (W2).

If the worker does not have a common language with the child, is it still possible to really help them?

Even though the children do not speak Finnish they still show that they feel bad; maybe through playing or drawing. Then it is all about observation amongst playing with them. One problem is, when some clients are in the Shelter for only a very short time, they may not even meet each other (W1).

One of the most important things is that, we can build up the child’s self-esteem. But that’s about all we can do. Anyway it all starts from the parents and their understanding about violence. If there will be a change for the child’s situation, it has to first come from the parents (W1).

Sometimes it feels that after discussing with the children and then they go home and nothing has changed (W2).

It is also the same with Finnish children. If the parents do not stop the violence, it is then pointless to treat the child, because the violence will continue at home (W1).

We focus on taking off the guilt from the child, to let him/her know nothing is their fault (W1).

All employees are working under the confidentiality agreement also when it comes to working with children. We do need to take into consideration that because they are
minors, just children, the parent has the legal right to know if something serious is happening.

Parents do have the right to know how their child is feeling, but whatever so-called secrets a child shares in the conversation, they are not to be told to the parents. We always ask the permission of the child if we can tell something to the parents (W2).

Of course, if the issues the child brings up concerns her security, in that case we have to tell the parents. A secret is a drawback to child’s development (W1).

And if we have to take the issue forward, we tell that first to the child (W1).

Also some of the challenges that the workers face are dealing with multicultural families. Shelters do not treat multicultural families in a different way from Finnish ones. But to be realistic, there are sometimes many difficult issues especially with immigrant clients, which make the work more challenging.

We do not necessarily work in a different way, but it gives special characteristics in our work methods, violence is violence no matter from which culture the person comes from (W4).

Sometimes it is necessary to think a bit differently, because maybe in their culture violence is more acceptable. You have to take a grip on issues, to show Finnish legislation (W3).

There are so many new things that come across all the time and all clients have very different backgrounds and complex issues that workers have not seen before.

As a worker you need in order, when talking with customers whom you do not share a language with, you need to be more alert and focused. Because you always feel that if you get even one word wrong you may be totally misunderstood. It is much more consuming (W3).
It is quite challenging to work with multicultural families. Because in some cultures it is acceptable to use violence on women, which is done to them by the husbands but there is violence also towards children.

Although in many cultures it is forbidden to physically punish children, we still get clients who say: “that it is completely ok to do that” (W2).

It is challenging because of the language issues. When clients come for example from Vietnam or Thailand. Because of their cultural background they are not allowed to hurt the worker by saying: “now I do not have any idea what you are talking about”, so how are you (the worker) able to know if the message has been understood. Also how can you teach them that it is ok for saying, if you do not understand something (W3).

My opinion is that it multiplies the workload, usually it is that clients do not have anywhere else to go and they could have just come to Finland, everything is so new and strange to them. It is definitely hard work (W4).

Feels like we are doing the work that should be done by a reception centre (W3).

I agree, that is completely true if a client has been here just for few days (W4).

Having all these immigrant clients, the workers must have to deal with their own prejudices as well.

Surely they do, but it is good that workers are quite aware already of their beliefs already. It makes everything a little bit easier (W4).

5.4 Co-operation & Future Prospects

The shelter co-operates with the social office the most, since they are the ones that do decide for how long the clients can stay and are involved in the decision making of the clients future. There are always difficulties with this kind of co-operating because everyone has their own values and believes for what would be the best idea for the client.
The shelter for battered family members is in co-operation with many officials. Like, for example the social office, health care, substance abuse and mental health services. Also with schools, day-care centres and the police (W4).

I think it is working well. It works better than before, because there is social emergency duty now. We can get in contact with them at any time of the day and night. I find it to be very good (W4).

It is all about sharing the responsibility (W3)

By social emergency duty, workers mean that there is now this service available 24 hours per day from the Social Office. Just by phoning one can reach a social worker at any time of the hour. Sometimes it is necessary for them to come and check up on the clients in the middle of the night if there is a difficult situation, for example; a mother is in a very unstable mental state and is unwilling to look after her children and tries to leave her children to the shelter. In this case and any other case, children are looked after by their own parents, this is not a job for the workers in the shelter. Therefore if parents are not able to look after them, they are either placed with relatives or substitute care.

Those employees who are working with children have a slightly different viewpoint on how is the co-operation with social office working.

Some social workers know more than others. Usually we get a call from the same social workers, which are concerned with family violence (W2).

Also, how many social workers put effort into even thinking about the violence. Many times they just think that it is the smallest problem in the family, because there are money problems and so on, like financial issues that seem more important to them. Not all social workers are aware of the seriousness of the violence and how it affects the children (W1).

We also do work with the children after they have left or children from outside of the shelter. The service that we provide is quite expensive and therefore some social workers start to wonder if it is even worth paying for (W2).
So it seems that co-operation works when dealing with financial issues, but when it comes to more personal and emotional issues, there is not enough knowledge or understanding of family violence and how big a problem it actually is.

The other main co-operative partners are day-care centres and schools. While families stay in the shelter, they are advised that children continue their lives as normally as possible. Usually shelters stay in touch with the child’s teacher, while the family is staying in the shelter just to know that things are going well. Many times there are situations when either school or day-care workers are very concerned about the child and want to make a child protection notification. In this case workers in the shelter stay in contact with the teachers to find out what could be the best solution for the child.

The problem with family violence and the fact that it is a well kept secret. Many times even professionals working with families are trying to avoid the subject. It is characteristic to the phenomena of family violence that it stays inside the closed doors. This doesn’t help the victims in any way. How could we change the situation?

There has been quite much talk in the press about family violence. There are segments about the issue on television, so that would break the silence about a very serious and quite common problem in today’s society. It is still kept as a secret, but not so much as in the past (W4).

Older people still think that: “I once made my decision to take this man and so be it” or they think that “no-one else is going through something like this, so I cannot say anything, they would not understand” (W3).

It would be good if people would have courage to interfere, if they hear some fighting or crying in their neighbour’s apartment by asking simply “is everything ok?” (W3)

Therefore does this mean that people do not ask about it because they think that it makes the person feel uncomfortable? Maybe it means that the one asking about family violence, feels uncomfortable. This would mean that the one asking about it and would be involved in the situation by knowing about it. This would mean that the person suffering from violence would probably talk to the one asking about it later on as well. She/he would become the trusted one, the one who gives support and time for the victim. Are we, as human beings, so selfish and scared that we do not want to know
about these kinds of issues? Are we afraid what the responsibility for giving help and advice would mean to us? Sometimes it is good to be able to talk to a so-called stranger about family violence, because they have a neutral view on the issue. There are times when it is too difficult to tell people close to you, that is why we have social workers and another good place to share is a doctor’s office. One might think that what society is like today, questions about family violence would belong to a routine, for example, to maternity clinic workers, but actually that is not the case.

Maybe workers in the child health centre could help the situation by asking the mother “is there violence in your home?” or even to ask: “how do you (and your spouse) argue?” The point is not to ask: “Do you fight at home” but specifically ask: “how do you fight at home?” (W4).

This is something that is like a taboo also with workers. Workers keep asking who has the right to interfere? “It is just a small matter, no-one will ever make anything out of it” or simply saying that they are too ashamed to say anything. This is mainly because maybe they will use the statement as a part of the investigation if it gets to that point.

Knowing what to do after a client says: “yes, we have violence at home”, that is the most frightening part. To know where to advise the client to seek help can be too demanding (W4).

Hearing about these kinds of things makes you wonder who can help these people? If the people who should be asking about these issues are not, who does? On the other hand are we putting too much pressure on the workers. There are things each of us can do to help each other. So if we think that starting from the grass root, first thing is to care about our neighbours. We Finns are not so neighbourly or talkative with half-strangers or sometimes people do not even share things with their friends but would not you like to be asked: “is everything alright? It is up to the neighbour/friend to choose what to answer but at least she/he was asked. It is amazing that in today’s society we tend to close our eyes, so that the mentality is like: “out of sight - out of mind”.
Luckily there are places where they can get help. But do people know about shelters? Do they know what kind of help they offer and who it is for?

In Finland there are a lot of definitions what shelter means, in another place it can mean that there are disabled or elderly people in a “shelter”. It is all a sort of combination of a shelter (W4).

Shelter in Finnish language is “Turvakoti” and turva means safety or a safe place. Therefore as a name it can be a little bit misleading also for many officials. It gives the impression, for example to the police, that shelter is a place to come if people are afraid to sleep alone in their house. The word “turva” or in English “Safety” holds many things inside, therefore it is many times misunderstood (W3).

Many times officials send “the wrong clients” to the shelter. Sometimes police can bring young children there and they do not know that the workers are not allowed to take children there without their parents. So the police are not aware of this and do not know that there is another place which takes children without their parents. Sometimes I saw people trying to get in, who were extremely drunk and the shelter has a non-alcohol rule. There are also places where people can go when under the influence. It may seem a bit harsh to outsiders, if workers need to say no to some people and direct them to another place. This is just the rule, otherwise, the whole thing would spring out of hand and the “real” purpose for the shelter would be lost.

There are some delusions, like that sometimes a client is sent here by “doctors note” (W3).

Which in this case would mean that the client is in need of a place in a hospital, not in the shelter. Because the shelter sometimes takes clients who have lost their apartments, been evicted or are “homeless”, officials think that they can send just anyone without an apartment to stay in the shelter.

It is funny how easy it is to understand, because of all the cases with losing a house with fires and then referred as “homeless”. Then they are sent to the shelter (W4).
Then again there are some people who never get help. It is claimed that municipalities are cutting down money, because of the bad economy and therefore are not necessarily willing to pay the clients stay in the shelter. Municipalities would put clients in to motels etc, because it is cheaper. Another thing is that municipalities will pay for the stay in the shelter for a short time, but in many cases too little time. Some are even afraid that if someone goes home too soon, something bad might happen.

Of course in some areas it could be like that. In many cases the clients themselves leave sooner than needed. I do not think we have had a case that someone has actually died because the municipality somehow “forced” them out of the shelter. It is a scary picture and we are afraid that this will become reality, but it is yet to have happened (W4).

I do not see any point in putting a client into motels or any hotels, because there are no workers available, which we have here. It would be a very light first-aid to the client (W4).

We know that this could all be leading in that direction. I heard in the news that the approximate price for one hotel-night is 80€ and shelters price is well over 100€ per day, so it sounds cheaper. They are not including food and professional workers in that price (W3).

Violence should be openly discussed with the children in one way or another. The workers aim to find out what is going on at home and how it feels for the child. Some children are interviewed, if they are older or the workers use, for example, playing and drawing as a method for finding out how they feel. Workers discuss with parents about what kind of help they need, what are their wishes and then figure out the best way to help the clients to start living the life they deserve.

Shelters are there for the clients through a crisis-stage, when the situation has come to the point that the clients can no longer stay at home. The clients are in a sensitive state of mind and overwhelmed on what has just happened. Each client is different and has a different history with violence. Some clients have been experiencing violence for decades and some just that one time. The workers are not there to judge anyone or accusing on why they have not left earlier. Each client has their reasons and they are being treated respectfully. Workers are there to help the clients figure out themselves
what they want from their lives. They are not there to put words in their mouths or make decisions for them.

The workers in the shelter do various kinds of things with the clients, but the most important thing is just to be there and listen. Many times the clients need help with, for example, arranging a meeting with the police for a restraining order or help how to file for divorce. Shelter’s aim is to break the cycle of violence.

Even though it doesn’t lead to anything at that point when they are there, but at least a seed of thought is planted. The change can be sometimes seen after maybe five years. It is the possibility of “I can have another choice, I do not have to suffer like this”. Maybe it does not lead to solving the situation right then and there, but the thought stays somewhere in the back of the mind and then starts to evolve later on. And when it does, it makes a big change (W3).

I think that giving hope to a client is one of the main jobs for a worker. There is hope for better life. Many people are quite hopeless and say: “this will never change”, but there is always hope (W4).

Working in an environment like this can be hard for workers. Facing battered families and hearing their stories every day can be a bit overwhelming sometimes. I have heard many people saying that “employees in the shelter work with evilness and cruelty”, so for the last thing, I wanted to find out if the workers actually felt like that and it seems that those working with adults do not agree and those who work with children agree with the statement.

I would look at it differently. We work with the “wrong-side” of people. Only a small part is evil and cruel. I believe that there is violence in each of us. It is only a fraction that could say that it is evil and cruel (W3).

No I cannot say that this is a fact. This whole violence thing is so complex and it is not always that we can say: “he is bad and she is not” (W4).

Yes it is true. The challenging part is when you work a lot with the children and then they go home and violence continues. We can not always go and say to the parent that “you should divorce”, so that the child could get out of the situation. (W2).

It is challenging for sure I just do not know what to say, there is cruelty and violence so it is definitely not nice (W1).
We have the innocent ones (W2).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I go through the main results which the research showed. I discuss the findings of the research questions in my own words. I explain the ethics and validity of the research and limitations I came across while doing this research.

6.1 Main results

Everyone has family, in one form or another. The idea of a perfect a family changes throughout the decades. However in the end, a family is built by love and security. Many families in today’s society have various problems. Causes are not simple and cannot be defined with just a few words. One strong point found through this research was that people seem to lose their life-control. Meaning that many people either want to maintain a certain status in life through purchasing many materialistic things or people just rather spend money on something other than rent. Both of these choices can lead to losing the life-control from where it is difficult to recover. On top of that there are problems like alcohol and substance abuse. All of these can lead to a very unstable lifestyle and often at that point violence comes into the picture.

Whatever reason family violence may occur, in no circumstances does it make violence justified. Everyone should have a place in which they feel safe. Usually home is considered to be that place, but too many times family members have to leave their own home, because of violent behaviour. Family violence is a well-kept secret that is not to be talked about. There could be violence in the lives of our relatives, neighbours and friends and we just do not know about it because we do not talk about it.

The shelter for battered family members offers help to those victims of family violence in acute crisis situations. The families seek help from the shelter either for child
protection or family violence issues. Most clients have difficulties in both matters. The shelter has special employees who focus working with the children. Many times, in a case of family violence, children are left aside. It does not matter whether they have been victims or witnesses of violence, they should also be counselled and treated. Work with children is preventative and remedial, the aim being to make the violence stop at home for good.

The clients most commonly are victims of emotional violence, abuse of power and control. Emotional violence can be even more traumatising, in the long term, than physical violence for both adults and children. The number of families staying in the shelter has not increased so much, but the number of children in a family has. This can be linked to the fact that multicultural families tend to have more children and the number of multicultural clientele has increased noticeably.

The shelter’s work mainly consists in dealing with practicalities such as; filing for divorce, advising how to get a restraining order, making a police report and so on.

The shelter in no way makes decisions for the clients, but to give support and professional guidance about possible options which could help them. The workers main job is to listen to the clients and discuss with them as often as possible. Building their self-esteem and making sure that the clients know there is something else for them in life, they are worth so much more.

In the shelter there are some challenges the workers are facing. The main challenge nowadays can be considered the multicultural clientele; the cultural differences and the language barrier. In some countries violence is more acceptable and it might be more difficult for them to understand that in Finland it is not acceptable, it is illegal. Often in the shelter multicultural family means an immigrant woman who had married a Finnish man or the other way around. In these cases there usually is no language skills and there is no social network. It is more challenging to work with clients, with whom you do not share a common language.

The shelter is in co-operation with many with organisations. Most often the shelter works together with the social office, the police, schools and day-care centres. Because one of the purposes of the shelter is to help the clients with practicalities, that is why the co-operative partners are used.
Through the research I found there to be some misconceptions about the shelter. People do not necessarily know about the Shelter for battered family members. One thing is that the public does not know, but even the officials are really not too sure about the place. Sometimes the police and hospitals send clients to the shelter, even though they are not qualified to come there, but in fact their place is somewhere else (like a hospital or a shelter for alcoholics and substance abusers). The workers found it quite worrying that they can not even trust the officials and professionals who work in the social and health sector. Maybe the shelter could go and visit different organisations and explain more about their work.

All in all, the research showed how important it is, to have an organisation, which is concentrated in breaking the cycle of family violence. They are bringing the phenomena closer to our awareness. Sometimes there are small stories about the shelter in the local press but the place still feels so distant to many people. Finnish people do not want to talk about family violence but there is no question it should be discussed openly. The issue should be raised more in the media, not just the news reporting about crimes and death rates. They should be reporting, in the press and media, about the process, what it is like to live in a violent home and how much strength it really takes to leave home. Issues that are this serious should not be avoided, no matter how difficult they are. The mentality of “out of sight, out of mind” has to be stopped. Things will only get worse if we keep closing our eyes.

6.2 Ethics & validity

Everything that is done in the shelter is under confidentiality. Workers are not allowed to talk about the clients, or their cases, to anyone outside the shelter. This was also an issue when doing the interviews and writing my observation diary. First of all I had to get permission from the interviewees if I could use the tape recorder. They were willing to do that, so that made my research easier. They could have said no, as I could, perhaps, have played the tape to people or modify their comments for my best interest. In this case they already knew me, so there was a trust already built between us.
I had to be very careful when writing the observation diary, so that I would not write anything where the client would be recognisable. I knew from the beginning that I wouldn’t be able to use case examples, because of confidentiality issues.

6.3 Limitations

The research can not be generalized, but it shows the experiences of four different workers in an unnamed shelter. The interviewees were all workers from the same shelter and therefore bring out views and descriptions of the process in their work place. This research is not a general research of all shelters in Finland. Research shows results on what is the unnamed shelter’s role in breaking the cycle of family violence. Results are therefore limited.

Due to the fact that I had worked at that unnamed shelter for three summers, it brought personal experience to the interview sessions and to the process of writing the research. I already had a working relationship with all of the interviewees, which could have made the interviews easier or more complicated to the interviewees.

This research is based on interviews and to an observation diary I kept for three months while working at the shelter. It was limited as to what I could use from the diary, since all of it is confidential. I could not use sample cases because of confidentiality agreement.

6.4 Professional development

I have been working in the shelter for three summers; this was going to be my third one. I knew from the very beginning that this wouldn’t be the same as previous years, since I was about to start doing my final thesis there. As I had already worked there, I knew something about their work methods and I was familiar with family violence as a concept. This was still a challenge for me, because while working I was keeping an observation diary every day. The whole observation process was very interesting, and it was quite time consuming and sometimes demanding. I had planned what would be the issues I would more likely to focus on, but things change on the way, which is quite common and the diary was completed in the way that I wanted.
Meeting the clients is always a challenge in a way. As a worker, you can be faced with any kind of client who has the most heart-breaking history. I do not want to sound too harsh, but you get used to the work, you learn how to leave your own feelings out of it and just focus in a professional way. Of course there are cases when you get more emotionally involved, meaning that some stories get to you. I found that the ones where children were also the victims of family violence were the hardest ones. The other ones that have more effect on me were the elders. You learn about violence everyday and you don’t necessarily make a big deal about it anymore. Many were thinking that “I have heard all the stories, nothing could shock me anymore”, but then comes some other case and it is something new and you haven’t seen or heard anything like that before.

It came quite naturally to me to talk to the clients. I don’t fear the unknown or new situations. I actually quite like a challenge. I found myself a little bit unfamiliar in the situations dealing with legislation and social workers. These are the kind of situations you learn from, because actually doing the work and not reading about it teaches you the best.

When I was planning the interviews, it came to my mind that what would the actual situation be like, because I already had history with the workers. Asking questions like “will they think of me as stupid, because I ask this and that?” meaning things they assumed I knew already or the other “can I interview them purely as a professional or will my personal relations with these workers interfere with the interview-session?” These questions were answered very early on and I did not feel uncomfortable as they did not think of me as stupid, for asking some of the questions.

Collecting material was quite easy. The hardest part for me was the analysing part. Putting everything together and thinking what would be the best way to analyse was quite difficult. I did manage in the end but there were many obstacles on the way.
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APPENDIX 1.

Interview one, was with employees who work especially with children.

W1, is a female worker

W2, is a male worker

1. Turvakodin toimintaa kuvaillaan, että se on ennaltaehkäisevää ja korjaavaa lastensuojelutyötä. Oletteko samaa mieltä kyseisen kuvaoksen kanssa?

2. Sanoisitteko että lapsiperheitä on Turvakodissa enemmän kuin ennen?

3. Rajataanko Turvakodissa asiakaskuntaa jollakin tavalla?

4. Jos perhe tulee Turvakotiin lastensuojelullisin perustein, mikä on tyypillisin syy?

5. Ovatko syyt muuttuneet vuosien aikana? Jos niin miksi?

6. Onko määättyä mallia, jonka mukaan tulisi työskennellä?

7. Jos, niin mikä se on?

8. Mitä se konkreettisesti tarkoittaa?

9. Haastatteletko kaikkia lapsia?

10. Miten paljon teillä on yhteisiä hetkiä vanhempien ja lasten kanssa yhdessä?

11. Miten vaitiolovelvollisuus vaikutta siihen, mitä lapsen kanssa käydystä keskusteluista vanhemmalle voi kertoa?

12. Onko asiakkailla jo voimassa oleva lastensuojeluasiakkuus kun tulevat Turvakotiin?

13. Onko heidän perheestään tehty lastensuojeluulmoituksia?

14. Miten te keskustelette perheväkivallasta lasten kanssa?

15. Ovatko lapset yleensä halukkaita keskustelemaan?

16. Onko uusi lastensuojelulaki tuonut jotain muutoksia työhön?

17. Miten yhteistyö sosiaalitoimen kanssa sujuu?

18. Käsitelläänkö monikulttuurisia perheitä jotenkin eri tavalla?

19. Onko tämä haastava?

20. Miten tällaisia lapsia (joiden kanssa ei yhteistä kieltää) voidaan sitten auttaa?

22. Nouseeko se vihan pintaa kun juttelee vanhempien kanssa?
APPENDIX 2.

Interview 2

W3, worker in the Shelter

W4, family therapist in the Shelter

1. Miten kuvailisit lyhyesti Turvakodin toimintaa?
2. Suositellaanko esim. Äidin ottavan lapset mukaansa Turvakotiin, jos väkivallantekijä on sillä hetkellä lasten kanssa kotona?
3. Sanoisitteko että lapsiperheetä on Turvakodissa enemmän kuin ennen?
4. Jos perhe tulee Turvakotiin lastensuojelullisin perustein, mikä on tyypillisin syy (muu kuin väkivalta)?
5. Onko turvakodilla jokin toimintamalli?
6. Sanotaan että tulohaastattelu on tärkein osio Turvakotiin tullessa? Miksi?
7. Miten ymmärrät käsitteen perhe?
8. Miten selittäisit käsitteen väkivalta?
9. Missä muodossa väkivalta näkyy asiakaskunnassanne eniten? Minkälaista väkivaltaa he ovat kär sineet eniten?
10. Perheväkivallalle on ominaista, että se jää kodin ja perhesuhteiden yksityissyteen, miten tilannetta voisi muuttaa?
11. Tämä on myös osittain tabu myös työntekijöiden kesken, eikö?
12. Miten aloitatte keskustelun asiakkaiden kanssa?
13. Käsitelläänkö vanhemman (äidin) syyllisyyttä hänen kanssaan?
14. Asiakkaiden kanssa pidetään palavereita (joissa mukana myös sos. tt), mitkä ovat ne olennaisimmat asiat jotka tulee käsitellä?
15. Miten väkivallantekijään suhtaudutaan?
16. Koetteko erilaiseksi työskennellä mies asiakkaan (kuin naisasiakkaan) kanssa?
17. Pitäisikö sitten olla miespuolisia työntekijöitä?
18. Käsitelläänkö monikulttuurisia perheitä jotenkin eri tavalla?
19. Miten usein työntekijät törmäävät omiin ennakkoluuloihinsa?
20. Ovatko monikulttuuriset perheet haastavia?
21. Miten yhteistyö toimii sos.toimen kanssa?
22. Mitkä sanoisit olevan teidän tärkeimmät yhteistyökumppanit?
23. Mikä rooli Turvakodilla on perhevääkivallan katkaisemisen kanssa?

24. Pitääkö seuraavanlainen väittämä paikkansa; Turvakodin työntekijät työskentelevät pahuuden ja julmuuden kanssa?

25. Mitä mieltä olette seuraavista artikkeleista?

a) Helsingin Sanomat 09.11.2008

Ei kuitenkaan ole itsestään selvää, että kunta antaa maksusitoumuksen tarpeeksi pitkäksi ajaksi Turvakotiin. Ainakin yksi suomalaisnainen on tapettu, kun kunta ei enää jatkanut turvapaikan rahoitusta. Etenkin loppuvuodesta monissa kunnissa kunnissa rahat ovat tiukalla, ja maksusitoumuksia turvakoteihin on vaikea saada.

b) Helsingin Sanomat 09.05.2009

Kunnat karsivat menoja jättämällä turvakotipaikkoja maksamatta. ”Joissain kunnissa on alkanut esiintyä puheita, että perheet on halvempi majoittaa hotelliin kuin Turvakotiin. Toinen tapa karsia menoja, on kiristää hoitoaikoja. Niin kuin nämä ongelmat olisivat hoidettavissa parissa päivässä?”