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The significance of sheltering in the lives of four woman affected by abusive relationships

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2007-02-15T10:28:02Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1995

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is recognized as a pervasive problem in South Africa. This study focused on the narratives of four abused women and attempted to establish the significance of sheltering in their lives. A qualitative research design was used based on semi-structured interviews and a short follow-up questionnaire, which were analysed thematically. The findings supported past research, indicating that the women's experiences were very diverse, and they contained many similar features to those reported in previous studies. Each of the four women was not a passive victim, having taken the decision to leave an abusive and violent relationship. Sheltering provided for these women the protected space necessary to move beyond, and in addition provided structure and social support necessary to start to transcend the abuse. Sheltering was found to fill in the gaps created by a society in transition, in which abuse and violence are often tolerated or condoned within the existing social and family structures.