could lead to legislation, corrective behavioural actions and/or early interventions at school level. The objectives of this study are thus multifaceted.

In particular, the study aims to gain an understanding of who the perpetrators of violence against women and girls are, and why they commit these violent crimes. In addition, the study investigates the psychosocial factors that contribute to the commission of these violent crimes, and generates data that it is hoped will aid the relevant authorities and stakeholders in designing and developing intervention programmes for perpetrators of violent crimes against women and girls.

1.5 Research questions

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- Why do perpetrators commit violent crimes against women and girls?
- What are the psychological characteristics of people who commit these violent crimes?
- Do early childhood influences on social behaviour and disturbances in the childhood environment contribute to violent behaviour in adulthood?
- Can psychological, interpersonal/family, societal/cultural factors lead to violent behaviour?
- Is violence used to control and dominate partners, or does intimate anger lie at its core?
- What is the role of substance abuse in violence against women and girls in Namibia?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The discussion that follows will review the conceptual framework in terms of which violence against women and girls is understood. In addition, theories that account for the phenomenon of violence against women and girls will also be discussed. It should be noted that there is a bias in existing research that focuses on males as perpetrators of intimate violence, and females as their victims, and that most theories of domestic violence are consistent with and reinforce these assumptions.

A number of empirical articles on domestic violence have highlighted the increasing incidence of abuse between intimate partners. In an attempt to explain how abuse between intimates develops, why it occurs and how it is sustained, researchers have relied upon theoretical frameworks to guide their research findings.

As noted by Sommer (1990), Knight and Hatty (1987) point out that the theories put forward by various researchers can be separated into those reflecting the

orientations of sociologists, on one hand, and those reflecting the orientations of psychologists, on the other. A sociological perspective places the phenomenon of domestic violence within a macro model of society; violence is seen as an outgrowth of social factors. A psychological perspective accounts for violence within a micro level of society; violence is attributed to such intra-individual factors as aggressiveness, impulsiveness and paranoia (Straus 1980). The current study reflects upon both sociologically and psychologically based theories which inform the discussion of violence against women and girls.

2.2 Sociological perspective: social learning theory

Sommer (1990) notes that social learning theory is a conceptual framework that has its origins in the work of the psychologist Albert Bandura (1965). She further notes that according to Bandura (1986), children's acquisition of much complex behaviour ensues from their exposure to competent role models that display appropriate behaviour in solving problems and coping with their world. Inasmuch as positive behaviours can be acquired through positive role models, conversely, negative behaviours can also be acquired through the modelling of negative behaviours. With this in mind, Bandura (1979) applied social learning principles to the acquisition and maintenance of aggressive habits (Sommer 1990). Furthermore, Sommer (1990) also notes that it is the latter set of circumstances that has been of interest to those researchers that study family violence. Researchers have applied social learning theory to explain the following aspects of the development and transmission of family violence: the patterning of violence amongst adult children observing violence in their families of origin (Kalmuss 1984); the intergenerational transmission of family aggression (Cappell and Heiner 1990); the generalisation of aggression from one relationship to another across time (Malone *et al*. 1989); and the continuation of marital violence in remarriage (Kalmuss and Seltzer 1986). The research referred to above provides support for the modelling effects of early exposure to violence within the family of origin (Sommer 1990).

2.3 Psychological theory

2.3.1 Personality theory

As noted by Sommer (1990), Eysenck (1965) developed a genetic theory of personality that proposed that the nature of an individual's biology is a determinant of his or her personality make-up. He suggested that some of the variability in human behaviour could be accounted for by the finding that criminals consistently score higher than the general population along extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism personality dimensions (Eysenck and Eysenck 1985; Wilson 1981). Research by Malamuth (1988) demonstrated that high scores on psychoticism among males were also associated with sexual aggression, and predicted aggression against females in a laboratory setting. The existence of a continuum of antisocial behaviour (Eysenck and Eysenck 1985), ranging from minor infractions (e.g. drinking alcohol at a bar while below the legal age) to major criminal offences (e.g. armed robbery) is indicative of an individual's predisposition towards criminality. It is along this

continuum that the perpetration of partner abuse is thought to lie. According to Eysenck and Eysenck (1985), an individual who is most likely to abuse his/her partner would be one who is: 1) impulsive and disinhibited, and therefore fails to acquire social rules (extravert); 2) anxious, and whose anxiety acts as a trigger to learnt deviant responses such as violence (neurotic); and 3) uncaring and unlikely to feel guilt, empathy or sensitivity, and therefore having little difficulty in behaving antisocially (psychotic). While heredity is thought to be "a strong predisposing factor … the actual way in which a crime is carried out … is subject to the vicissitudes of everyday life" (Eysenck 1977:79). This delineation suggests that the interface between a person's inborn characteristics and those found in his/her social environment is extremely important in determining the likelihood that a deviant mode of conduct will emerge.

2.3.2 Disinhibition theory

The application of disinhibition theory is evident in research conducted by both sociologists and psychologists. While the former are interested in the effects of alcohol consumption as a social force (Kantor and Straus 1987), the latter focus on the biochemical effects alcohol has on the behaviour of individuals (Gustafson 1985).

From a psychological perspective, alcohol consumption is linked to violent behaviour through its physiological effects, as it releases an individual's violent impulses and tendencies, and suppresses inhibitions (Hamilton and Collins 1981; Spielberger 1970). Kantor and Straus (1987:214) explained that "alcohol's effects on the central nervous system release inhibitions by depressing brain function or suppressing super-ego function, thereby allowing the expression of rage." Walker (1979) proposed that there may be similarities between the specific blood chemistry changes evident under a generalised stress reaction such as battering and those found in alcoholics. The high rates of alcohol consumption associated with family violence suggest that the disinhibition theory is an appropriate conceptual framework for the study of partner abuse.

2.4 Feminist perspectives

The women's movement has been responsible for bringing the issue of "wife battering" to the forefront. Dobash and Dobash (1979) were the first to suggest that the fundamental causes of violence against wives are to be found in "a patriarchal society". Within a feminist framework, wife abuse is viewed as being the result of an imbalance of power between men and women. Feminists have asserted that throughout time, women have been subjugated by the greater patriarchal society that has placed limits on their opportunities and left them vulnerable to a number of abuses.

The "cycle of violence" theory, which emerged from the research conducted by Lenore Walker (1979) on battered wives, describes the dynamics of an abusive relationship. It is based on the premise that women are not constantly being abused, and that their willingness to remain in an abusive relationship is related

to cyclical fluctuations between periods of abuse and relatively peaceful coexistence. The theory also explains how women become victimised, how they fall into “learned helplessness” behaviour, and why they do not attempt to escape (Walker 1979). The cycle of violence is made up of three separate and distinct phases. The first stage is called the “tension building” phase, during which the abusing spouse exhibits moodiness, is short tempered, and is critical of his spouse. It is during this phase that the other spouse may feel as if she is “walking on egg shells”, and attempts to avert any further escalation of the tension. The second phase is called the “explosion” phase. This is a relatively short-lived phase in which the tensions of the previous stage reach crisis proportions and a physical assault ensues. The third and final phase has been called the “honeymoon” phase, because it is during this phase that the abusing spouse shows great remorse for his actions and promises never to repeat the episode. According to Walker (1979), it is not uncommon that the abused spouse and her perpetrator will engage in lovemaking soon after the assault. It is thought that the interchange between caring and abuse keeps the abused wife from leaving the relationship and the abuser from changing his behaviour. Despite the cyclical nature of the abuse, due to the influence of situational factors, it is difficult to predict the timing of each phase or the repetition of the cycle (Walker 1979).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As the aim of this study was to understand the underlying causes of violence against women and girls, focus fell on psychological and social variables, and those related to early childhood. These are diverse and complex, and demanded a multi-purpose research design. Previous studies on violence against women conducted in Namibia had focused mostly on the quantitative, statistical description of violence. For the current research, in order to gain insight into the contextual meaning of the violent behaviour, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted.

3.2 Research settings

The inmates who constitute the research sample were drawn from the prisons listed below. According to the Ministry of Safety and Security (MSS), these prisons house those inmates who have been found guilty of violent crimes against women and girls.

- Windhoek Central Prison, Khomas Region
- Hardap Prison, Hardap Region
- Walvis Bay Prison, Erongo Region
- Swakopmund Prison, Erongo Region