

GRACIOUS EMPOWERMENT?

Evaluating the impact the GRACE-network project had on the empowerment of female university students in their stance against Gender-Based Violence



Wageningen University and Research Centre
Rural Sociology
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Minor Thesis

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01-04-2011

"Yes the woman does exist but not as a person.

She exists, we believe, in all of us.

This woman is wise, she has learnt and she is open to more learning, more wisdom.

Yet she is not wary, she has a vision, she has her eyes on the horizon.

She knows her strength, the strength that comes with persistence, with overcoming and with the courage to see things as they are.

She is not afraid of her power. Yet she will not use it to disempower others.

She has fought and is prepared to fight some more but she is not looking for it.

And last but not least, she has a sense of humour and a general tenderness and compassion when she looks at the world. She can afford this attitude because she loves herself and gives herself a jolly good time when the situation allows this.

And this woman loves (her) men. Especially the men who are not afraid to see such power in a woman. She is prepared to work and play with them anytime."

GRACE-network¹

Picture of front page: the logo used by the GRACE-network.

Abbreviation used:

- Gender-based Violence = GbV
- Jordan University of Science and Technology = JUST
- Wageningen University and Research Centre = WUR

¹ GRACE-network

Summary

The objective of this minor thesis was to evaluate the GRACE-network project. This project was conducted in Irbid, Jordan. The aim of the GRACE-network project was to investigate how ICTs could be used to empower female university students in their stance against Gender-based Violence (GbV). The project was evaluated during four months of field work in Irbid, Jordan. During these four months the women participating in the project were interviewed and a focus group discussion was organized. The women, participating in the project as participants and as researchers, were asked during these interviews what empowerment meant for them, how they had experienced the GRACE-network project, if they felt empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project and how their stance against GbV was influenced.

To investigate if the GRACE-network project empowered the female university students in their stance against GbV the theory of De Vries was used. De Vries stated that the development of autonomy is needed for someone to become empowered enough to say **'no' to the GbV directed towards them**. The process described by the women involved in the project as participants, the process described by the researchers and the theory of De Vries were compared in this thesis.

The women aligned empowerment with three concepts, Self-love, Breaking Boundaries and Freedom of choice. Freedom of choice was the description used by the majority of the women, seven out of ten. The changes the women described were that they improved their Self-confidence, improved their Self-love and their Awareness of GbV, (self-)abuse and their own dreams and wishes. The researchers involved in the GRACE-network project reported an increase in Awareness and Self-love as project outcomes, not an increase in Self-confidence. All the women participating in the project stated that their level of empowerment increased because of their participation.

In their stance to GbV most of the women did not increase their empowerment enough to **say 'no' to the GbV directed towards them**. Two women indicated that they addressed the people who were treating them in an abusive way in a direct manner, making it clear they did not accept the violence anymore. The other six women indicated that they had become more aware of GbV and were discussing the topic with people in their **environment. They were however not directly saying 'no'**.

This thesis argues that a reason for this outcome could be that the researchers did not directly and consciously address the area of autonomy in the project outcomes reported. This, together with the theory used by the researchers, indicated that there was also a lack of focus on this area during the process of empowerment. This however cannot be stated with certainty and more research would be needed to investigate which role was given to autonomy in the GRACE-network project in Jordan. The outcome of this thesis is the recommendation that if the outcome of more research would be that autonomy was not given direct attention in the GRACE-network project, future GRACE-network projects should give autonomy more direct attention during the process of empowerment. By doing that the researchers may increase the already positive influence of the GRACE-network project on the lives of the women participating.

Key words: GRACE-network project, empowerment, gender-based violence, autonomy.

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Preface

This minor thesis is part of the Research Master International Development Studies at the Wageningen University and **Research Centre**. **My interest in women's development has evolved since secondary school. I was already interested in women's development during secondary school, my 'profiel werkstuk'** (essay written as part of the final examination) was about the history of feminism in The Netherlands, and this interest only grew during my five years of studying in Wageningen. I believe women are still seen as secondary to men in most parts of the world and I have learned during my studies that development of a country is not possible if half of the population is not involved in this process. **Besides my interest in women's development**, I have also developed an interest in the Middle East, specifically the Arab States. I did a minor in Islam studies at the University of Utrecht from September 2008 till August 2009 which helped me to realize that I wanted to focus on the Middle East. Because of this I started with a minor Arabic language acquisition in September 2009 which I finished in August 2010. I have enjoyed learning the language so far and want to continue doing this until I speak it fluently.

This minor thesis could not have been realized without the help and support of some very special people. I would like to thank Dr. Arwa Oweis, who not only supervised me during my research in Jordan but also took me into her home and treated me as a member of the family. My time in Jordan would not have been the same without this beautiful gesture of hospitality and all the love and support I was given by Dr. Arwa Oweis and her family. I also want to thank Mohammad M. Ajlouni, who arranged the contact between Dr. Arwa Oweis and the Wageningen University and Research Centre. I want to thank the women who enthusiastically participated in my research, answering all my questions and giving me the opportunity to get an idea of the processes they went through. Without their participation I could not have conducted my research. I want to thank my supervisor Bettina Bock for the helpful feedback she gave me during the process of writing this minor thesis.

Introduction

In this minor thesis I will discuss the outcomes of a research conducted in Irbid, Jordan. During this research I evaluated the GRACE-network project that was conducted in Jordan. In this project the researchers tried to answer the question how ICTs can be used to empower female university students in Jordan in their stance against Gender-Based Violence (GbV).

In Jordan women are generally seen as second-tier citizens. Because of this position they are more vulnerable for violence, specifically for Gender-Based Violence. Women face many forms of abuse in their everyday life, but the Jordanian penal code does not have laws that criminalize domestic violence. Many forms of abuse are not seen as violence and women often accept them as normal. An important aspect of the GRACE-network project was to increase the awareness about violence, using ICTs, to help women see that it is not normal to be treated in an abusive way.

During the evaluation it was investigated whether or not the research question posed by the researchers in the GRACE-network project has been answered. This was done with attention for the concept empowerment and what this meant for the women involved in the project. The answers will hopefully help the researchers in the GRACE-Network project to improve the project and increase the positive influence the project has had on the lives of female students and their battle against GbV.

The process of empowerment described by the women in the GRACE-network project will be compared to the process of empowerment described by De Vries in this minor thesis. The theory of De Vries is based on the idea that empowerment in relation to violence is not possible without the development of autonomy, presented in her two books: **'Violence, the phenomena, the trauma and the healing process'** (2006) and **'The development of autonomy in basic healing processes'** (1998).² Based on the data from the evaluation I have conducted in Jordan, the project results as discussed by the researchers of the GRACE-network project and the theory of De Vries, the following research question will be answered:

To what extent did the GRACE-network project in Irbid, Jordan empower female Jordanian university students in their stance against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?

Sub questions:

- *What does empowerment mean for the female respondents and the researchers involved in the GRACE-network project in Jordan?*
- *What influence has the GRACE-network project had on the lives of the participants and researchers involved in the GRACE-network project in Irbid, Jordan?*
- *Did the response of the participants and researchers involved in the GRACE-network project in Irbid, Jordan, to GbV change because of their participation?*
- *What are the differences between the process of empowerment described by the participants, the process described by the researchers and the theory of De Vries?*

² Titles translated from Dutch by A. R.

In the first chapter an introduction to Gender-Based Violence, Jordan and empowerment will be given. After that I will discuss the background of the GRACE-network project and give an overview of the output as reported by the researcher Dr. Oweis in the second chapter. The third chapter will be dedicated to the methodology I used during my research in Jordan. In the fourth chapter an explanation will be given about the theory of De Vries, outlining my theoretical framework. After that the data collected during the evaluation in Jordan will be presented and the analysis will start in the fifth and sixth chapter. In the fifth chapter the process of the GRACE-network project will be discussed, focusing on what the women see as empowerment and which changes they went through because of the GRACE-network project. In the sixth chapter the outcomes will be presented, answering the questions if the women feel empowered and how their stance towards GbV has changed. In the seventh chapter I will analyse the data from the research by comparing the theory of De Vries, the experiences of the women involved in the project as participants and the researchers. This will be done to investigate how the process of empowerment took place. Besides using the theory of De Vries to compare the process of empowerment described by the women in the GRACE-network project and the researchers, I will also investigate which influence these differences might have had on the outcome of the project in this chapter. In my conclusion I will answer my research question and try to give recommendations for a possible new GRACE-network project in Jordan. Finally a discussion will be presented in which possible problematic issues concerning this evaluation will be discussed.

Chapter 1: Gender-Based Violence, Jordan and Empowerment

In this chapter a short introduction will be given to the concepts Gender-based Violence (GbV), empowerment and the country Jordan. First the concept GbV will be explained. After that the occurrence and meaning of GbV in Jordan will be discussed. A final part of the chapter will be dedicated to explaining the difficulty of using a term like empowerment and the relationship between GbV, ICTs and empowerment.

1.1: Gender-Based Violence

Gender defines the identity of a man or woman according to what it means in a specific society to be male or female. These roles are generally seen as social roles, not biological and are based in culture. Based on the concept gender, Gender-Based Violence (GbV) is used to:

"Distinguish violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender from other forms of violence. It includes any act which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm. GBV includes violent acts such as rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation and murder. It also defines threats of these acts as a form of violence."

Femmes Africa Solidarité³

GbV can be directed towards men and women and come from men and women, but the majority of the victims are female and the majority of the perpetrators are male.⁴ During this minor thesis GbV will be discussed specifically directed towards women, which was the focus in the GRACE-network project. Some forms of GbV occur more in specific cultures, like female genital mutilation and sex-selective abortion, but GbV occurs in all cultures and in all countries:

"Globally, up to six out of every ten women experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime."

UNIFEM⁵

Because of the sensitive nature of GbV it is difficult to research. The violence mostly happens behind closed doors and is seen as something that is a 'private issue'. The victims are often ashamed, afraid of the consequences if she will tell her story or see it is a normal part of life. Despite the difficulties surrounding researching GbV it has been getting a more prominent place in humanitarian and developmental programmes. The United Nations has identified GbV as a global health and development issue and many action programs have been undertaken around the world as a response.⁶

1.2: Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is situated in the Middle East, with neighboring countries Israel, The West-Bank, Syria, Saudi-Arabia and Iraq. It became independent from the United Kingdom in 1957 and has since been ruled by a monarchy. The current

³ Femmes Africa Solidarité

⁴ Terry and Hoare (2007)

⁵ Unifem

⁶ Russo and Pirlott (2006)

king, King Abdullah II, has ruled Jordan since 1999 and has extensive powers. He appoints local governments, approves legislation and is able to dissolve the parliament.⁷ **Since the 1967 war between Israeli's and Palestinians**, almost two-thirds of the **Jordan's** population is made up by Palestinians, who have been granted full citizenship. About ninety percent of the population is Muslim. The largest religious minority are Christians with six percent.⁸

Historically the families in Jordan are patriarchal families, often led by a sheik who is the head of the family. After death the eldest sons ascends to this position. In most families nowadays the sheik does not have a large influence any more on their everyday life, but **there is still a very clear hierarchy. The father is seen as the 'master' in his own house** and the sons in the household take this place when the father is not present. In the extended family the eldest male is the leader and should always be treated with respect and obedience.⁹ Sons are prized at birth and have a higher status in the family than daughters. These patriarchic traditions and social norms encourage discrimination against **women. Women in Jordan face discrimination in Jordan's family laws, which are mostly based on the Qur'an and the Hadith, a collection of the Prophet Mohammed's sayings.**¹⁰ Women have no parental authority, inherit a smaller share than their male family members and polygamy is, in restricted form, legal.¹¹

Many national surveys have shown that violence against women happens often in Jordan. One survey showed that nearly one in four women in Jordan experience psychological violence, inflicted primarily by their husbands, fathers and brothers. Another survey **showed that 'hitting by the hand' occurred often or always in 26% of houses surveyed in Jordan**, with women and girls being the most frequent victims.¹² These forms of violence, domestic violence, are widely accepted and seen as something that is private and something where people from outside of the family should not get involved in. Chastity is expected from all single women and if the chastity of a woman is compromised, or if there is a risk this might be the case, a male relative may feel obliged to punish her for this. Honor killing is the most extreme punishment and not uncommon in Jordan. When these cases go to court the charges are often dropped or the murderer receives only a short sentence. Besides honor killing, women also have limited protection from other forms of violence. There are no laws to protect women from domestic violence and women are often discouraged from reporting violence because of the social stigma and shame associated with such crimes.¹³ This shows that violence against women is seen as normal and a legitimate way to punish women. This makes it more difficult to research GbV. It is so accepted that many women do not realize that what they are experiencing could be GbV. The difference between legitimate violence and illegitimate violence may not be very clear and will differ per person.

1.3: Empowerment, GbV and ICTs

In the evaluation conducted in Jordan the influence of ICTs on the level of empowerment in relation to GbV of the women involved in the project was investigated.

⁷ BBC News (2011)

⁸ Countries and their Cultures - Religion.

⁹ Countries and their Cultures - Social stratification.

¹⁰ Countries and their Cultures - Political life.

¹¹ Social institutions and Gender Index (2009)

¹² Clark et al. (2009)

¹³ Oweis (2009)

According to the Van Dale English - Dutch dictionary the definition of empowerment is: to be authorised, capable, to have power.¹⁴ This definition is quite vague, broad and can be applied to any field and interest. This can be seen in the different ways empowerment is used. **It can be used in advertisement, 'empower yourself by buying this', or as a religious term, 'spiritual empowerment'.** These ways of using the term empowerment are very different from the way the term is traditionally used by Feminist activists.¹⁵ They described empowering women in the context of challenging power structures that subordinate them.¹⁶ In this evaluation it was needed to define how empowerment was used in the GRACE-network project because of this broad application This will be done in the fifth chapter, in which the definitions given by the women participating in the project will be presented.

The term ICTs in this report constitutes internet, telecommunications, media, online libraries and documentation centres and other related information and communication activities. ICTs by itself cannot be seen as something that (dis)empowers women, but it can be used as a tool.¹⁷ The usefulness of ICTs can be seen in resistance movements, like in the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia where the social network Facebook was used to organize demonstrations. Besides these national uproars, ICTs can be used in other ways to empower women. The most important quality of ICTs for a country like Jordan is that it reaches people who would probably otherwise not be reached. Women are not as mobile in Jordan as men and it is not uncommon for a woman to spend most of her life inside her house. ICTs provide these women the tools to get in to contact with other people, to let their voices be heard and inform them about GbV and other relevant topics. In this way ICTs can be used to create awareness, to give women information and a way to orient themselves. ICTs can create a **space to address women's concerns, new manifestations of GbV and to promote women's rights.** Although ICTs can have a very positive influence on women, in most countries women have been kept out of wide-scale usage. There is often a male-monopoly over access and technical training, ICT jobs and the language of ICT education.¹⁸

Computer and cellular usage in Jordan has been on a steady rise since the 1980s. In September 2010 the number of cellular phone subscribers in Jordan reached 6 250 000, which exceeds 103% of the total population. The number of internet users reached 293 000 in this same month, 32% of the total population.¹⁹

The question whether or not ICTs can be used to empower women in their battle against GbV cannot be answered yet. Because this is not clear, the GRACE-network decided they wanted to investigate this potential. One research that came out of this desire was the GRACE-network project in Jordan.

¹⁴ Van Dale English - Dutch Dictionary

¹⁵ Cornwall (2007)

¹⁶ Oxaal and Baden (1997)

¹⁷ Buskens et al (2004)

¹⁸ Oweis (2009)

¹⁹ Amonn News (2010)

Chapter 2: The GRACE network

In this chapter the GRACE-network will be discussed. After a general overview of the goals of the GRACE-network, the GRACE-network project in Jordan will be explained. In the final part of the chapter the outcomes reported by Dr. Oweis, the researcher involved in the GRACE-network project in Jordan, will be shown.

2.1: The GRACE-network

The GRACE network originated in 2004 in Africa with the aim to:

“Explore the ways in which women in Africa use ICTs to empower themselves, the external, structural barriers as well as the internal factors which prevent them from using ICTs to their advantage, and the strategies they employ to overcome these impediments.”²⁰

The Grace-network wanted to do this in three ways. By offering capacity-building opportunities for researchers; creating a network which would be doing on-going gender and ICTS research which would be based in various research institutes; and by using the outcomes of the different research questions to influence policy at local, national and regional/global levels. Capacity building was an important focus of the project, in which researchers would be given the opportunity to develop their research skills as well as the capacity to use ICTs effectively.

The problem statement in the GRACE-network was that African women do not seem to benefit as much from ICTs as men do and the researchers hoped that:

“By being alert of a gender dimension in ICT development at an early stage of the information revolution, we can prevent greater scaled undesirable effects in the future.”²¹

The project started with 15 projects in 12 countries, spread throughout Africa. After the success on one continent, the GRACE-network decided to extent its network to the Arab world: the Middle East and North Africa. They started GRACE II in 2008 and currently the following countries are involved in the network: Cameroon, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South-Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia. All these countries are bound together by the overall research question:

“ How do women in Africa, MENA (Middle East and North Africa) and Asia use ICTs for empowerment?”

All these countries have their own research questions, making every project specific. The research questions are raised by local academics, which makes sure that the questions raised are based on issues women deal with in that country and that the projects do not clash with the local culture.²²

²⁰ Buskens et al. (2004), pg. 3.

²¹ Buskens et al. (2004), pg. 6.

²² Buskens et al. (2004)

2.2: The GRACE-network project in Jordan

In Jordan there were two research questions:

- "How can ICTs be used to empower female university students in Jordan in their stance against Gender-Based Violence?"

- "How can ICTs be used by young Jordanian women to "unlearn not to speak"?"

I evaluated the project that was focused on the first question, how ICTs can empower female university students in their stance against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). This project was executed on the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST). The researcher of the project, Dr. Oweis, was asked to write a project proposal. This proposal was chosen by the GRACE-network and she was trained in a capacity building workshop.

In the GRACE-network project on the JUST Dr. Oweis wanted to:

"Give the female university students a mental space and ICT tools that could give them insights and allow them to think about the issue of GbV. To increase their understanding and awareness of how they are co-contributing to the creation and maintenance of GbV. This could influence women's attitudes and behaviors toward GbV."²³

She wanted to change the attitudes of accepting violence into more assertive behavior of not accepting it and thereby hopefully decreasing the number of incidents of GbV.

The GRACE-network project in Irbid, Jordan started in September 2009 and ended in July 2010. It started with 12 participants and 2 researchers. Two of these participants did not finish the project. Dr. Oweis said that they were working on their master thesis and did not have the time anymore to participate in the project.

The tools used in the project were ICTs, more specifically: searching on the internet and using email, but also focus group discussions, one-on-one interviewing, dream drawing sessions (group meetings where they used a specific drawing technique in which they made their dreams visible and who or what was stopping them from reaching their dreams) and daily writings.

The researchers would send the participants an email asking them to think about a specific aspect or read an article and reflect on it. After this the participants would have discussions using email. The participants themselves also searched for articles and discussed them with the group and the researchers. They would have group meetings in which the researchers discussed certain concepts and then the participants would discuss them and reflect on them. The articles and discussions were always related to violence against women, self-abuse and/or reflections on the lives of the participants.

²³ Oweis (2009), pg. 4.

2.3: Research Report Dr. Oweis

A number of results were reported by Dr. Oweis, who used four themes to organize the data: Social networking (social butterflies), Reflection on their being and doing, Capabilities and Greatness (scholarship). I will give a short summary of the outcomes Dr. Oweis reported, which will be used later in the report to compare the process of empowerment described by De Vries and the process of empowerment described by the women involved in the project.

Social networking (social butterflies): the effect of critical viewing of internet sites concerning GbV. The viewing of the sites made the women participating more aware of GbV and what was going on in their surroundings. It also made them aware of their own initial response when reading these articles and what this said about the attitude towards GbV in the Jordanian society. An example was given by one of the participants who wrote about a time when a girl came up to her in a hospital and told her that she was being abused by her parents and needed help. The response of the participant was to point to a policeman and tell the girl to tell the police man about this. The girl walked away without talking to the policeman. She wrote in an email to the other respondents:

"Me, you, and the majority of people in our society mistrust women who in some way or another are exposed to violence by ANYONE. We look sceptical at them, and do not even try to think that they are innocent -> They are always GUILTY."

They also experienced a feeling of being free to say what they wanted to say, while not being afraid to be judged. Because of this freedom they were able to reflect on their lives and share these reflections with others. This gave them a feeling of security and the feeling that what they had to say was interesting and important. An example:

"I want to tell you about the effect that this group had on me. Honestly, I became more expressive in term of my thoughts and emotions. I become less conservative to express and share with others (JUST group) some experiences, which were previously a type of secret and were hidden experiences! It could be plausible that chatting via email can break the ice of embarrassment to share with others your feelings!"

Reflecting on their being and doing: by participating in the project, reading about GbV, reflecting on their own thoughts, ideas, being and doing, the women became more aware of their actions (or the lack of actions) that contributed to the unequal relationship between men and women and GBV. They realized they had been putting the social norm above their own wants and needs, trying so hard to be the perfect mother, daughter, wife, sister that they forgot about themselves. Self-love and self-abuse are concepts that were introduced and frequently used to explain the change the women wanted to make in their lives. One of the participants gave her definition of self-abuse:

"I abused myself when I put myself last. All of my surrounding had the priority before myself. When I want to cook, I think of the desires of others. When I want to get a new dress, you will find me starting to look for my children while I am supposed to be choosing my dress. I recurrently blame myself for not achieving anything perfectly, and when I engage myself in all life concerns, these concern do not have a direct impact on my life."

The researchers in the GRACE-network project see self-love as not abusing yourself or accepting abuse from others. The women participating became not only aware of the lack of self-love, they also actively tried to improve this. This is best seen in the list the participants made, 7 points how to love yourself:

- "1. Consider your body as a tool that will help you to achieve your dreams, so value it and appreciate it.*
- 2. Get a high education level with a high degree, which is a precious hope.*
- 3. Celebrate MY achievement, even very little successes.*
- 4. Enjoy every second of my life.*
- 5. Change my misunderstood attitudes and experiences towards those who help me to achieve my big dream.*
- 6. Say to yourself, "Life is too short to waste it by treating myself badly."*
- 7. Don't feel guilty for this loving."*

Capabilities: A practical effect of the project has been how the participants improved their computer-skills. They became used to searching on the internet, selecting articles that could be of interest to the group, using YouTube, Google and publishing their comments online. Another influence, which was already mentioned, was how participation in the project gave the women that the feeling their ideas were interesting and worth sharing. One of the participants reflected:

"I can see that most of us had been starting to talk freely. Actually it's something fantastic to feel free to say what I feel, you know! For me it was such an irritating thing to hold a pen and document all the things that we hear in the lecture (as been done in the previous course!). At last we are free of that! This lets us feel that what we are saying is important because it is important, not because it will be recorded as participation! Do you get me?"

Greatness (scholarship): An unexpected effect has been the improvement of the participants' educational results. Teachers besides Dr. Oweis commented on the improvement of the women's input in classes. Four of the participants were in the same class and their teacher saw the difference between their performance and the performance of the rest of the students in the class. She saw an improvement in their expressivity, reflexivity, confidence and leadership abilities. The students commented that before they started participating in the GRACE-network project they did not feel they were master-students, even though they were halfway through their masters. After participating in the project, they felt they were actual master students. They felt confident, able to express themselves and to make themselves be heard.

Concluding these results presented by Dr. Oweis show changes in the women involved in the GRACE-network project in multiple areas. According to Dr. Oweis the women have become more aware of GbV and their own role in this. They started to critically reflect on their being and doing, improving their self-love. They also improved their computer-skills and educational results.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Setting

During four months, from September until December 2010, I conducted a research in Jordan, evaluating the GRACE-network project that was based on the Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST) in Irbid. The head researcher of the GRACE-network project, Dr. Oweis, supervised me during my research.

Design

The data was collected using a qualitative research approach. Focus group discussions and interviews were used to ask the female participants and the researchers what empowerment means to them and what influence the project has had on their lives. The interviews were semi-structured interviews in which I used a topic list to make sure the respondent discussed all the topics important to my research. This topic list is added to this report as appendix 1, see page 53. I followed these topics and questioned loosely, not letting them influence the direction of the interview too much. During the focus group discussion the women involved came to the university. We discussed several aspects that were of interest for me. The agenda used during the focus group discussion can be found as appendix 2, see page 54. Besides the items brought forward by me, which can be seen in the agenda, we also discussed some aspects the women themselves wanted to discuss with the group, like how to respond if someone you love is being abused. I used a recorder to collect all the data during the interviews and the focus group discussion. Besides the collection of data I also read the data Dr. Oweis had already collected and the reports she had written.

Participants

The participants in the evaluation of the GRACE-network project were eight female respondents who participated in the project from September 2009 until June 2010 and the two researchers who conducted the research. Ten women were actively involved in the GRACE-network project as participants, but two participants were not available to be interviewed during the evaluation. The group of participants was a group of women who were all Jordanian university students or employees during the project. Nine of the women involved in the project worked or studied at the JUST. Of the eight women who were involved in the project as participants, seven were master students in the Master of Maternity Nursing Program at the time of the project. One participant was not a master student at the JUST, but an employee at a university near Amman. When the evaluation took place all the women had graduated.

Respondent #	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Marital Status	Children
#1	42	Jordanian	Nurse in military sector	Married	3: 1 boy, 2 girls.
#2	42	Jordanian	Assistant Professor	Single	-
#3	26	Jordanian	Unemployed	Single	-
#4	26	Jordanian	Unemployed	Single	-
#5	32	Jordanian	Lecturer	Married	2: girls
#6	42	Jordanian	Staff Nurse	Married	3: 2 boys, 1 girl.

#7	27	Jordanian	Clinical Nurse specialist	Single	-
#8	34	Jordanian	Staff Nurse in the military sector.	Married	3: girls.
#1R	51	Jordanian	Dean of Nursing	Married	2: girls.
#2R	46	Jordanian	Vice-Dean of Nursing	Married	3: 1 boy, 2 girls.

Respondent #x are the 8 women who were participants in the GRACE-network project. The other two women, #1R and #2R were the researchers involved in the project. Researcher #1R was present approximately half of the time, responding to the emails, being present at some group meetings. Researcher #2R was always present and participated in all the activities in the project. In the project the researchers were however not standing by, they were participants as much as the eight women participating in the project. Researcher #2R explained it as followed:

"When you conduct a research project like this, which is a developmental research, your role as researcher with qualitative research is not to be an outsider. You have to be an insider in order to be able to understand the content and the concepts being discussed in the research. You have to experience the processes yourself and to be able to do that, you have to be a researcher and a participant."

Because of this characteristic of the research I will also show the learning processes the researchers went through and how their participation in the project has influenced their lives when I discuss the data and analyse it.

Ethical Consideration

Before the research was conducted the proposal had to be approved by the Institutional Review Board at the JUST and by the Wageningen University and Research Centre (WUR). The participation in the project was voluntary and anonymous. This was all made clear to the participants before the focus group discussions and the interviews. Consent was asked to use the tape recorder. I introduced myself, told them something about my background and explained the purpose of the research. If anyone was uncomfortable or decided she did not want to participate in the project, she was assured that she could leave at any moment. The data will only be used for the purpose of this study and only me and my supervisors will have access to this information.

Validity & Trustworthiness

Before the question whether or not the female participants feel empowered in their stance against GbV could be answered, it had to be clear what they see as empowerment and when they feel empowered. I also made sure I was aware of any other influences, besides the GRACE-network project, which could have empowered them. It did this by asking them during the interviews that if they reported feeling changes, whether or not they believed the GRACE-network project had caused these changes. This is to make sure that the empowerment is indeed an effect caused by participating in the GRACE-network project.

To make sure the answers obtained in the interviews were trustworthy, multiple methods were used. The answers obtained during the interviews were compared to the answers given in the focus group discussions and in the data gathered during the project. Another factor that increased the trustworthiness of the research is that the researcher who was involved in the project, and whom the female respondents trust, introduced me to the female respondents. The influence of the researcher could also have had a negative effect. The presence of the researcher could have caused the female respondents to be more positive about the effect of the project. This influence was minimized since the one-on-one interviews were done without the presence of Dr. Oweis.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will discuss the theory of De Vries on autonomy and empowerment. I will look at the word empowerment in combination with Gender-Based Violence and how I will compare the theory of De Vries to the empowerment process described by the women involved in the GRACE-network project.

4.1: GbV, Empowerment and De Vries.

Looking specifically at Gender-Based Violence, as was the case in the GRACE-network project I evaluated in Jordan, the importance of empowerment is shown in the work of De Vries on healing after experiencing abuse. De Vries states that a person needs to go through a process of developing autonomy, in order to heal after abuse and to be able to **say 'no' to more abuse in the future**. She describes autonomy as independence of the human spirit, as the experience of freedom and self-confidence **to make one's own choices**. A person needs to develop her will **to be able to formulate the sentence 'no, I don't want this anymore'**. **As long as you experience yourself as being determined by** (the will of) others, you will live according to their rules (and let yourself be abused). You feel and act as a victim, whose will does not count and who is not able to change things. The first phase of the development of autonomy starts with **becoming aware** of what is happening in your life and how you feel about this. When you are aware of how you feel about the way you are treated, or treating yourself, you can start to experience the **choice to say 'no' to this**. This is the beginning of the second phase: **experiencing a sense of autonomy and the process of learning to formulate what you don't want**. By doing so, one starts to experience a (beginning) sense of self-worth. This gives a person **the tools and the motivation to say 'yes' to oneself and to actually say 'no' to the (self-) abuse** one is experiencing: I am worth to live a life without abuse now and in the future. This is the beginning of the third phase of the process of the development of autonomy and improving ones empowerment in relation to GbV.²⁴ This relation between autonomy, empowerment and GbV can also be seen in other literature, like the article written by Magar, in which she discusses the case of an empowerment approach of a local NGO in dealing with Gender-Based Violence in India.²⁵ She says agency is needed to stop abuse, which she explains as:

*'One's capacity and motivation to define her own life choices and pursue her goals, despite the opposition she faces.'*²⁶

4.2: GRACE-network, Empowerment and De Vries

In my evaluation of the GRACE-network project in Irbid I did not focus on making empowerment something measurable, something quantitative, but on the experiences of the women involved. Do they feel empowered? Do the researchers who implemented the project feel the research question has been answered and the women involved are empowered? And which phenomena reflect their empowerment in their view? This can be seen in my use of semi-structured interviews in which I asked the women for their definition of empowerment, their experience with this concept and what the process they went through looked like. In my analysis I will compare the theory of De Vries to the

²⁴ De Vries (1998)

²⁵ Magar (2003)

²⁶ Magar (2003), pg. 511.

process of empowerment that the women involved in the project describe. I will first describe the data I collected in Jordan and compare the data to the theory of the process of empowerment described by De Vries. With the use of this theory I will try to evaluate the outcomes of the GRACE-network project, comparing the process described by the women involved in the project and the process described by De Vries. I will also investigate the influence these differences might have had on the outcome of the project.

Chapter 5: The process of the GRACE-network project

In this chapter I will discuss the GRACE-network project as experienced by the women involved. I will divide the chapter in three sections. I will discuss the answers given by the respondents, first focusing on the concept of empowerment and then on their experiences in the GRACE-network project. The final part of this chapter will be a conclusion, summarizing the observations made. During this chapter I will write the concepts that can be seen as the most important concepts **bold**. These concepts will be used again in the next chapters and the conclusion.

5.1: Empowerment

Empowerment is a very important concept used in the GRACE-network project. The goal of the project was to figure out how ICTs can be used to empower women. As was already discussed in the first chapter, the definition of empowerment is often very broad and vague. This makes evaluating such a project, without further explanation what a certain term means, very difficult. Because of this, a concern in my evaluation was to get a clear picture of what empowerment means for whom.

I will give an overview of the answers given by the respondents when asked the question what empowerment meant for them.

#1: taking care of herself and helping other women gaining this form of empowerment.

#2: to have a free choice and make her own decisions.

#3: identifying her own boundaries and breaking them.

#4: being aware of the many options she can choose, choosing the one that she wants, not the one her surroundings want her to choose and being responsible for the consequences.

#5: to make her own choices, being able to choose something she wants and not what is socially acceptable and being responsible for the consequences.

#6: getting out of the boundaries she put for herself and others put for her and not letting others abuse her.

#7: to have freedom of choice, being aware of her options and having knowledge to pick the option right for her, not letting others decide for her or abuse her.

#8: to be free from judgment of others, to be able to share her opinion, express her feelings without fear and knowing her limits.

#1R: freedom and ability to make decisions based on her knowledge and experiences.

#2R: to do what she wants to do and have the freedom to do it because she wants to do it and not because she thinks she should do it.

These answers show that the participants in the GRACE-network project and the researchers gave a number of meanings to empowerment. The most dominant way of how empowerment was described was by aligning empowerment with **freedom of choice**. The other ways empowerment was described were by aligning it with **taking care of yourself**, **breaking boundaries** and **not letting others abuse you**. 'Taking care of yourself' and 'not letting others abuse you' can be aligned with the concept self-love. In the GRACE-network project there was a lot of attention given to the concept of self-love, which can be seen in the results presented by Dr. Oweis discussed in chapter 2. **In the section 'Reflection on their being and doing', the concepts self-love and self-abuse**

were discussed (pg. 14 of this report). This section showed the importance of self-love in the results presented by Dr. Oweis. The researchers in the GRACE-network project see self-love as not abusing yourself or accepting abuse from others. Researcher #2R explains why there was a lot of focus on the concept of self-love:

"When you recognize that the way you are treating yourself is abuse, you can say: 'no, this is abuse, I am not going to do it. I am going to stop abusing myself'. When you stop abusing yourself, I think you will not accept others abusing you. Once you start recognizing this cycle of self-abuse and violence, when you recognize how you are accepting violence from yourself and from others, I think you can do something about it."

Because of the use of the concept self-love there are three different descriptions of empowerment that can be seen, aligning this with **freedom of choice**, with **breaking boundaries** (both linked to the concept of freedom) and with **self-love** (which encompasses caring for yourself and not letting others abuse you).

From the participants and the researchers in the GRACE-network project seven out of ten aligned empowerment with **freedom of choice**. They see empowerment as being able to make their own choices. This can be seen in the answer given by respondent #5:

"To make my own choices, being able to choose something I want and not what is socially acceptable and being responsible for the consequences."

One of the participants, #1, aligned empowerment with **self-love**:

"Taking care of myself and helping other women gaining this form of empowerment."

Two other participants, #6 and #7, discussed self-love, besides freedom of choice, saying they wanted to be free to make their own choices, but also that empowerment meant not letting people or themselves abuse them. Two participants aligned empowerment with **breaking boundaries**, either put up only by themselves or also put up by others. This can be seen in the response of respondent #3 when asked what she thought empowerment was:

"Identifying my own boundaries and breaking them."

Interestingly, respondent #8 is the only respondent that puts a limit in her description of empowerment, women knowing their limits. A woman should know her rights, make sure she gets what she deserves, but not by violating the rights of the men in her family:

"Her husband, family, son, other males in her life. She should know her rights within limitations, in the right way."

This interesting discrepancy will further be discussed in the seventh chapter.

5.2: Experiencing the GRACE-network project

In this section of the chapter the experiences described by the women who participated in the GRACE-network project will be discussed. I will divide this section in four parts: Ideas about the project before it started; Techniques used; Lessons learned; and the

Influence the project had on the lives of the women involved, making a distinction between the changes the women who were participants in the GRACE-network project described and the changes the researchers involved in the project saw in them.

5.2.1: Ideas about the project before it started

The participants in the project gave different answers to the question why they decided to join the GRACE-network project when it was presented to them. Three of the eight participants in the GRACE-network project said they joined because they wanted to change something in their lives, that they needed this. An example is the answer given by #2. She said she wanted to:

"Know who I am. Really, Wallah²⁷, honest when I say to you that I knew that affront of time. I wanted somebody to guide me to find maybe a small light to step towards."

These participants had clear goals: wanting to find out who they were and wanting to improve themselves so they could help others. The answer that was given by the largest number of participants, four participants, was that they did not have a clear idea of what the project was, but decided to join because they were interested or encouraged by the other women who joined the project. They did not have clear personal goals, besides learning more about the project. An example is #8, saying she joined because:

"I knew the women that were joining the group, they are very kind and I love all of them. I did not know dr. Arwa until I engaged in the course and the project. But they encouraged me and I like an adventure. So why not?"

One participant in the GRACE-network project said she joined because she thought joining the project would give her (academic) benefits. Respondent #5 said:

"It was part of our course, she is our doctor and it is good to work with her."

All of the women who were aware of the goals of the project joined because they felt that they needed it, that they could reach certain personal goals, like participant #2 said. The women who joined because it sounded interesting, different or because they were encouraged by the other women, like #8, were not very well informed about the project or its goals, which can also be said about the participant that joined for (academic) benefits.

The two researchers involved in the project gave similar answers when asked this question. Researcher #1R mostly focused on the academic benefits, saying that she thought participation in the project would strengthen her abilities, making it possible for her to counsel women who have been involved in abuse. Researcher #2R focused more on what she wanted to gain from the project personally. She said she joined because:

"I thought there was a missing part in me that I needed to work on, which is understanding who I am as a person, as a woman. I always felt that because I am a woman, I don't have all my rights and even though I understand all the social and cultural perspectives, I didn't really like it. So I wanted to find a way that I could deal

²⁷ Translation to English by A.R: I swear to God.

with that. Not accept it, but understand it, so I can help other women to deal with it and to help to reduce ramifications of it."

This shows that the reasons why the researchers got involved in the GRACE-network project, just like the women involved as participants, differed from each other. It can be seen that the women who were aware of the goals of the project were also aware of the fact that something needed to change in their lives.

5.2.2: Techniques used

In the project several techniques were used: the emails, the focus group discussions, dream drawing, one-on-one interviews and daily writings. In the research question posed by Dr. Oweis, the researchers wanted to see how ICTs could be used to empower women in their stance against violence. To get an idea of what the influence of ICTs was during the project, the respondents were asked the question which one of the techniques used influenced them the most.

All the women that participated in the GRACE-network project named one of the techniques that required face-to-face contact, like the focus group discussion or the dream drawing sessions. Respondent #3 explained it as followed:

"I liked focus group discussions. They explore more. The more we open our minds, the more we think. And all of us are available. It is not like with the emails, when maybe four or three will reply. In the discussion everyone will say something and this may trigger you to ask two or three more questions."

One of the respondents, #2, who was the only one that was not a student at the JUST but became involved in the project through a mutual friend, pointed to a negative side of using email. She said that she often felt excluded from the group when using the emails. She said:

"When I write a response I expect the students to respond to me, agreeing or not agreeing and why they disagree. But I found they changed the whole topic and they ignored me sometimes. Maybe this was because I came from the outside. They excluded my responses from their responses through email, maybe because they saw me as a foreigner."

She said that this feeling, of being an outsider was not present during the group meetings, when she felt like she was part of the group, all talking about the same topics.

What these answers show is that the women involved in the project as participants did not think ICTs alone empowered them. **They felt the biggest changes because of the 'live' contact.** But still the influence ICTs had on these women should not be underestimated, especially in the beginning of the project, as was stated by respondent #3:

"In the emails I was more secure in the beginning. I could take my time, interpreted what they were thinking, thinking of me. But after a while, after getting the comments in the email, I discovered that they all think the same way as I do, you don't have to be shy or embarrassed by your ideas. We are thinking the same."

From the two researchers, #1R said that she thought the emails had the biggest effect because it gave the women the opportunity to really express themselves. The other researcher, #2R, said that the techniques could not be seen as separate:

"I can't say this was more influential than that, I think the final outcome is influenced by each technique on its own. Some of the techniques I used were like a pre-preparation, like the focus group and the dream drawing. I used these to prepare the minds and the reflective skills of the girls to enhance their skills in thinking. I think in the collective effort, all of them were important. The focus group discussion, one-on-one interviews, ICTs, the emails, yeah, even the phone calls sometimes, asking; what are you doing, how have you been, you know?"

The comments above show that ICTs did have a specific effect on these women, it gave them a secure network. Because of this secure network the women could share their feelings, insecurities and fears. While doing this, they found out that the other women were feelings the same feelings, insecurities and fears. Because of that the women were not afraid to share these intimate feelings. This created a network in which they could get to know each other and feel safe. It is clear that ICTs alone would not have had the effects on their lives that participation in the project had now, as was stated by #2R, when she said all the techniques together worked towards the final outcome. Because of that the role of ICTs should not be overestimated or taking out of the context of the other techniques.

5.2.3: Lessons learned

The most important lesson learned from the GRACE-network project by the women involved as participants and as researchers, learned by nine out of ten, was that they were **abusing themselves**. They were putting themselves last, not caring about themselves, **not loving themselves**.

The answers of the following participants illustrated this:

#8:

"In my life-style I didn't care for my own time, for myself. All my time was used for my family, daughters, husband. I didn't care about my own time, to do what I wanted. I didn't care about my sleeping hours. After my daughters went to bed, it would be my husband's time and I would sleep for three or four hours and I didn't care."

#3:

"I was a really bad person for myself. In my family we don't have battering or hitting, but maybe I do it to myself by putting myself last. I am not married, but I have sisters and brothers and I am trying to play the mother role for them. I am the youngest, but I try to play the mother role. I put myself last, I need to put myself first."

#6:

"I know now that I abuse myself, I discovered that I am judgmental and criticize others and I care about what others say about me. I put myself last. I prioritize my children, my family, my job, I put myself last."

Another answer that came forward was that the women involved in the project increased their **awareness**. They became more aware of what they thought about their lives and

what they wanted to change. This gave the women the feeling they got to **know themselves better**. This can be seen in a statement given by respondent #2 when asked what changed because of her participation in the GRACE-network project:

"I started to have insight in who I am, as #2. As a person, not as a nurse not as a daughter, no, as #2, as a person."

Besides self-awareness, the women also improved their **self-confidence**. This gave them the feeling that they could make their own choices and that they should try to convince others that their ideas are correct, and still believe in their ideas if others do not agree with them. They felt that their opinions mattered. An example of this is given by respondent #7:

"Right now I want to go to another country for work. This is not allowed in our culture, especially since I am single and I am female. I found many rejects from the community around us, family, colleagues. But I feel that I can manage myself in another country and I am now trying to find a good contract so I can go."

Other examples of answers that were given were that the women became aware of the fact that they were judging others and caring about the judgment of others. They also felt able to help other women, women who are experiencing abuse or were at risk.

This shows that the most important aspect that the women learned by participation in the project was that they were abusing themselves, by not giving themselves the time to do something for them and by always doing everything for others. Besides this awareness they also increased their level of self-knowledge and confidence, believing in their abilities to make their own choices and not letting the judgment of others influence their choices.

The researchers gave similar answers when asked what they thought *the participants* had learned in the process. Researcher #2R said that the women not only became **aware** of the self-abuse, they started **loving themselves** for who they really are. They became aware of GbV and in what ways this was happening around them and to them. Researcher #2R also said that they became aware of what she called the 'cycle of being instrumental':

"We want to be adherent to all the special rules and regulations for women in our society because the more adherent you become, the more society will appraise you. So to get that appraisal, and you become really addicted to that appraisal, you become even more instrumental to others. We did not do things because these things were our needs and desires. It were the needs and desires of society."

The lessons the researchers involved in the project learned themselves were not that different from the participants. They both became **aware** of the fact that they were abusing themselves, illustrated by the answer given by #2R when asked if she could clarify what she meant when she said that she abused herself:

"I work myself out. I am treating myself as an instrument, I am an instrument for other people. Meeting everybody's needs and desires and denying my own needs and desires. I was also abusing myself by not being assertive enough, like when somebody says

something and I did not really respond in an assertive way. After that happened and when I didn't respond in the way I should have responded, I felt guilty about it and I blamed myself. Once I was doing this to myself, I lost self-confidence.

They both also said they got to know themselves better, were able to look critically at their lives and became aware of what they wanted to change. Researcher #1R said that because of her participation in the project she forced herself to look at the things in her life that she wanted to change but had been trying to ignore for years because they were too painful. She learned that she needed to be true to herself, even if this meant going through painful processes. Researcher #2R became aware of the fact that she used to do a lot of things in her life because she thought she needed to do them, to be a good woman, wife, daughter, sister, mother, and not because she wanted to do them. This shows that the researchers may not have been official participants in the GRACE-network project like the other women, they did go through similar learning processes.

These answers show that the participants felt that they learnt lessons in the area of **self-love**, becoming **aware** of the (self-)abuse they were experiencing, that they improved their **confidence**, that they got to know themselves better and felt more able to make their own choices. The researchers also identified changes in the participants, but focused on the increase in **awareness**, about (self-)abuse and GbV, and the increase in **self-love**. The improved confidence and ability the women experienced when making their own choices were not mentioned by the researchers when they discussed the changes they saw in the participants. The influence this difference may have had on the outcomes of the project will be discussed in the seventh chapter.

5.2.4: Project influence

The women mentioned several effects the participation in the GRACE-network project had on their lives. The most important effect the women mentioned was that they treated themselves better, took care of themselves, increased their **self-love**:

#2:

"I started to control my diet, have normal sleeping hours. I started to change my lifestyle, like walking, going to social events."

#1:

"I play on Facebook, FarmVille. I should have my own time to do whatever I want. I have my time and this is one of the things I love. Instead of interesting myself in going to the salon, care for hair style or something else, I like wasting time on Facebook, playing FarmVille, opening emails etc. It is my own time."

Most of the participants also said that they were happier with their lives, more satisfied after their participation in the GRACE-network project, as can be seen in the reaction of respondent #6:

"My goal in the GRACE-network project was to be satisfied with my life. To love myself, to accept myself and this is what happened."

Besides the relationship with themselves, the participation in the project also influenced the relationships the women had in their lives with their husbands, children, parents and colleagues. Almost all the women who had daughters said that they wanted to make sure

their daughters were empowered, were not forced to do everything for their brothers and future husbands, were given the chance to make their own decisions and be able to take the responsibility for the consequences. The most important outcome concerning the relationships with their family or colleagues was that these relationships became less tense. The women who participated in the project were able to **communicate their wishes better**, without shouting, were more **confident** in making their own choices and cared less about the judgment of the people around them. This can be seen in a comment given by respondent #8, who has three daughters, when she explained that she was often put under pressure to have a new child, to have a son:

"By my mother-in-law and my mother. They ask for another baby, so we can have a son. Maybe before my participation in the GRACE-network project I sometimes wanted this. But now, no. Maybe I want another child in the future, but not specifically a son. It can also be a daughter. My family does not have power over our lives. So I don't care."

Many of the women, seven out of ten, made **a practical change** in their lives. For some this meant that they could follow their dreams, as was the case for respondent #7, who wanted to go abroad for work which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Respondent #2 explained that she wanted to implement a study at her work. She had been wanting to do that for a very long time now. When she told her dean about it, her dean wanted to get involved, claim the credit #2 would get for her work. She told me that after the project, she was able to tell her dean 'no':

*"I reached the point that I told her:
'no, I don't want you. I want to work by myself'.
This was a major achievement. I did not believe myself when I got out of her office, that it was me who told my dean no. I think maybe the project gave me the strength to do that."*

But respondent #2 made more changes. She told the head of her department that she wanted to start a project of her own, focused on the care of stroke-patients by family members at home, and received permission for this. She is in the first phases of implementation now.

Respondent #8 was able to change jobs, when she confronted her boss about the promotion she deserved:

"When I finished my education, I was the only one with a master's degree in the hospital. My boss kept me working in the ward even though I had a chance to be in a higher position, which was my right. I think if I did not participate in the project I would have not confronted her. But after I was finished with the project I went to her office and I discussed this with her, to be in the position that I deserved. She did not respond. After that I went to her boss. Now I have my position."

The answers that the women gave show that the influence the GRACE-network project had on their lives has been big. They did not only start to love themselves and care for themselves, their relationships with the people around them improved and they were able to make some practical changes they said they would not have made without the GRACE-network project.

The changes the researchers saw in the lives of *the participants* involved in the GRACE-network project were mostly that they became more **aware** of GbV in their lives. They started to reflect on their lives, **recognize the (self-)abuse** and started to see that **this abuse was not acceptable**. Besides these changes researcher #1R also said she noticed a big change in how the women who participated in the project participated in courses on the university. She gave a class where almost half of the students in the class participated in the GRACE-network project. She said the women participating in the project stood out:

"The way they discussed, this was different. They looked critically at what the available evidence meant to a certain issue. They were raising difficult questions to be answered for the class. One aspect we discussed are ethical dilemmas in nursing. One of the GRACE students said that this made her feel unsure if she should practice in an environment without a code of ethics. She said that before this project she never thought that these issues were important to nurses like she did now."

These changes show that the participants evolved on personal and professional level. On the professional level they were not only able to get a new job or a promotion, they were also standing out in class. The women became more critical and reflective which was shown in their behavior in class. Again a difference can be seen between the changes as seen in the participants described by the researchers and the changes the participants described themselves. The women themselves described that they improved their **self-love**, were better able to communicate their wishes, improved their **self-confidence** and were able to make practical changes in their lives. The researchers however focused only on the areas of **self-love** and the increase in **awareness** of (self-)abuse and not seeing this abuse as acceptable anymore. The development made in the areas of self-confidence and being able to make choices are not mentioned by the researchers as a change in the women involved in the project. Even looking at the academic changes the researchers did not focus on the improved self-confidence of the women but the increase in awareness of issues that they would not have brought up in class before their participation in the GRACE-network project.

The changes the researchers went through have been similar to the ones the participants said they went through. They increased their **self-love**, which was shown in the response of #2R when she was asked what changed in her life. She said:

"I am becoming more content, more confident. I stopped hating myself, I stopped hating other people."

They also talked about their personal relationships. Researcher #2R explained what changed in her relationship with her family:

"I used to be reactive, anything my husband said, and even my kids and my parents, I overreacted to defend myself. I was always thinking that people were trying to attack me or judge me, so I was always defensive. Now, I am a little bit more relaxed. I take my time, I analyse the situation and then I respond. This is reducing the friction which goes on between me and my husband, my kids and my parents."

The effects on their personal relationships have however not been only positive. Researcher #1R said that after she became more **aware** of the changes she wanted to

make, especially in her marriage, she started to discuss this with her husband. This did not have the effect she hoped for:

"I started to talk about certain things with my husband. But this didn't really change my life very positively, because he did not perceive it as something very nice to talk about at this stage. I can see a little bit of development in that area, but what I mostly gained from the project are the tools and strength to say that this is something that I know and I don't want to continue like this."

The two researchers also focused on how to empower their daughters, giving them the tools to make their own decisions and live the life they want to. Researcher #1R said that she mostly wants her daughters to marry the man they love, truly love, wanting to prevent them from marrying a man the way she did. Researcher #2R said that she is trying to give her daughters their own space to develop themselves, wanting to avoid to make the mistake her parents made, trying to control their every move. These outcomes show that the lives of the researchers have been impacted in a similar way as the lives of the participants were impacted.

5.3: Conclusions

Looking at the data presented in this chapter the women aligned empowerment with three different concepts, **breaking boundaries**, **freedom of choice** and **self-love**. Most of the women, seven out of ten, aligned empowerment with freedom of choice, making it the dominant explanation of what empowerment entails. The women described multiple ways in which the project influenced their lives, their level of empowerment and their relation to GbV. The women felt that their level of **awareness** increased in several areas. They became aware of the fact that they were abusing themselves, that they were not loving themselves enough and of the GbV that was happening to them and the people in their environment. But they not only became aware of the GbV, they also started to see it as unacceptable. Besides this awareness they improved their **self-confidence**, feeling able to make their own choices. This was seen in **the changes** the women made in their lives, getting a new job for instance. This was also shown in the changes made in their relationships in which they felt they could communicate their own wishes better. Another aspect that changed in the relationships in the lives of the women involved in the project was that all the women who have daughters said that they wanted to raise their daughters in such a way that they would become empowered women. A final change that is mentioned multiple times was the increase in **self-love**. The women started to love themselves more, which can be seen in the changes they made in the way they were treating themselves. It became clear that these changes are not only the effect of the use of ICTs in the project, but the outcome of a specific combination of techniques. The techniques which required face-to-face contact were experienced as the most influential.

Interestingly a discrepancy was shown between the changes the women said they experienced and the changes the researchers saw in the women involved in the project as participants. The women mentioned **awareness**, **self-love** and **self-confidence**, which was translated in changes made in their lives. The researchers said they saw changes in the women made in the areas of **self-love** and **awareness**, not in the area of self-confidence. This discrepancy is important and will be discussed further in the next chapters.

Chapter 6: The outcomes of the GRACE-network Project

In this chapter the project outcomes will be discussed. This chapter will be divided in four sections. First I will focus on the question if the respondents feel empowered or not because of their participation in the GRACE-network project. After that their experiences with Gender-Based Violence will be discussed. I will end this chapter with an overview of the answers the researchers gave when asked if the GRACE-network project reached its goals and a concluding section, summarizing all the observations made in this chapter. In this chapter I will again write the concepts that can be seen as the most important concepts **bold**.

6.1: Feelings of empowerment

The women were asked the question whether they thought they were empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project. All the participants said they did feel empowered because of their participation. The majority however said that it was a working **process** and they were still working on it, still trying to increase their empowerment. Respondent #3 gave an example of a moment when she felt empowered. She described empowerment as identifying your own boundaries and breaking them, but also stated that she is not there yet:

"I am trying, I am trying. I always assumed that I am not allowed to go to our shop and work there, in my mind. But when my brother had difficulties, I was immediately send there to work with him. In my mind, the picture that I had, I could not go there. I put this boundary for myself, no one put it there for me. After I explored the perceptions of others, I went there."

Another response that was given was that the respondents felt that they were empowered, but had **not yet been tested** in a situation in which they could show their empowerment. These participants saw empowerment as being free to make their own choices and said the project had given them the tools to do this, they just did not have the chance yet. Respondent #4 is one of these respondents. She said that she had the feeling that she was empowered, but until now did not have the test yet to show if she was empowered. She has not made changes in her life so far, saying the opportunity has not arrived yet. When asked if she could describe this feeling respondent #4 gave the following description:

"feeling of being free, being free of the judgement of others, aware of the choices you have, aware that you can convince others of what you do and what you will do in the future. Responsibility is the thing that has not been tested yet."

One of the participants in the GRACE-network project, respondent #2, said that she was empowered, but that she thought this was not only because of her participation in the GRACE-network project. She said her level of empowerment increased at work, but this could have also been a result of her graduation and her new job as assistant-professor. After this comment, she said she thought the project did have a big influence, helping her to see things more clearly.

These answers show that the participants in the GRACE-network project feel empowered because of their participation. Some of them have not been able to test their feelings of

empowerment and almost of all them say that they are still working on it. One participant said that she thought that she has not only been empowered by the GRACE-network project, which is important to keep in mind while evaluating the project.

The only one who said she was **empowered without a doubt** was one of the researchers, namely #2R. She said when asked if she felt empowered:

"Yes, absolutely, yeah, I feel empowered. Because I know I am capable and able. I have all this expertise and people trust me, they come for advise to me. I know what I am doing. Yeah, I feel empowered."

The other researcher, #1R, said that she did feel empowered, but had moments of weakness. She said that she was always **working on becoming more empowered**. The two researchers however said that they thought the increase in their level of empowerment was not only because of the GRACE-network project. They said they both already felt empowered before the project, but it increased because of their participation and they became more aware of it than they were before. This shows again the importance of keeping in mind that other factors could have influenced the changes in the level of empowerment of the women.

These answers show that the women do feel empowered. They see it as a **process** they are still working on; they feel that they are empowered, but that they have **not been tested yet**; and one respondent, #2R, said that she feels **empowerment without a doubt**. It is also important that three women, the two researchers and respondent #2, said that the increase in their level of empowerment may not be influenced only by the GRACE-network project. Other processes were happening in their lives, like a new job, which could also have influenced their empowerment. This shows that other processes that were happening at the same time of the project should be kept in mind and the reported outcome of the project should be viewed critically to make sure the validity of the evaluation is high.

6.2: Experiencing Gender-based Violence

This part of the chapter will be divided in three sections, a section shortly discussing what was seen as Gender-based Violence in the GRACE-network project, experiences the women involved in the GRACE-network project had with GbV before their participation and how their response to GbV changed because of their participation.

6.2.1: Gender-based Violence in GRACE

It became clear in the interviews that the women did not only mean physical violence when they were talking about GbV. Almost all the women, when asked if they could give examples of their experiences with GbV, gave an example that highlighted discrimination. Four women also talked about physical abuse, but three of these four highlighted discrimination first when asked about GbV. Other aspects that were mentioned when talking about GbV were ignorance of the sexual needs of a woman, verbal abuse and financial abuse.

6.2.2: Gender-based Violence before participation GRACE

Besides the self-abuse the women experienced, their experiences with GbV were discussed a lot. Most of the women said that they saw a lot of GbV around them.

Respondent #2 said when she was asked if she saw a lot of violence around her, there were many, many, many stories. As was explained by respondent #1, most women are not aware that what they are experiencing is abuse:

"We have educated women, master degree, maybe even PhD, and they do not know they are being abused by their husband, children, family. They do not recognize this is violence."

These stories of violence can be found in the media. Looking at articles about GbV and discussing them critically was one of the strategies that was used in the GRACE-network project. Because of that the women became more aware of these stories and started to focus automatically in the newspapers on the stories about violence against women. But the GbV also happened closer to the respondents. Respondent #6 said that in her village, a very small rural village, 80% of the women said they were suffering from GbV. Other examples could be seen happening to their family, colleagues or students:

#2:

"One of my students was married, I am not sure for how long, and she has children, two or three. She came to my office and she started crying. She told me her husband got married to another women and he took the children from her. He said he did this because she was studying and she did not have time for the children and he did not want that life. So he got a divorce and took her children because she was studying in the university."

#5:

"My brother and sister finished high school this year, they are twins. They both want to study engineering, but they did not get a high enough mark to do this in Jordan. So my father told my brother that if he could not do it here, they would send him abroad.

I said: 'that is nice, my sister could go with my brother'.

But my father said: 'no, she cannot go.'

I asked him: 'why? Her brother is with her.'

He said: 'no, he will be busy, he will have friends, she will be there alone.'

I said: 'but he will be there alone too then'.

My father said: 'he is a man'."

#8

"My colleague had four daughters. With the last birth she had a C-section and her health was bad. But she wanted to have a son, she needed to have a son. I said:

'it is okay, you have four daughters. Some people do not have any children, they are infertile'.

But no, this is our culture. The son is the best. One son is better than 10 daughters."

As can be seen, these examples that were given were examples of discrimination, women being treated in an unfair manner because they are not men. Their husbands can decide to divorce them and take their children, they are not allowed to study abroad even though their brothers are and they are discriminated before they are born, boys being preferred over girls.

Besides GbV happening to the people close to the women involved in the GRACE-network project, most of them also said they experienced different forms of GbV themselves. An

example is given by respondent #2, who explained that she feels abused when men address her in a demeaning way:

"When I go to a supermarket or a mall, there is always security. They ask me:

'What do you want, bint?'

Bint means girl in Arabic, little girl.

'What do you want?'

So they make me feel like I am just a small girl. Even if they know you are educated, you are a doctor, they see you as a little girl, as a little bint. I find this very humiliating!"

The restrictions on women to travel abroad for work or studies were already mentioned when the experiences of respondents #5, whose sister was not allowed to travel even though her twin brother was, and #7, whose environment did not approve of her plans to travel, were discussed. Respondent #3 experienced this herself, when she wanted to travel to another country for work:

"I wanted to travel to another country for work. I have four brothers, all of them are older than me. The first words that one of them said was:

'you are a girl, how will you go there and act?'

I think I am more structured than him, I used to go to Irbid every day, two hours traveling, I spend all my day in the university and I know what I am doing.

'But you are a girl, you will not be able to manage your issues. You need to stay here'.

My mother agreed:

'you need to stay here. You are a girl, you do not need to go there'.

I accepted, I am stuck here and I am very disappointed."

Respondent #6 experienced different forms of GbV when she was younger, inflicted by her parents and brother:

"My father, my mother and my older brother were physically, verbally and to some extent financially abusing me. When I was a little girl, my mother forced me to obedience, to follow my brother and to do what he wants. I had to wash his clothes, bring his food. If I refused to do this, they would hit me, maybe even kill me, so I was taught to do that."

These examples show that the women experienced GbV, but it can take many different forms and shapes. Three respondents, #1, #4, #8 said that they had not experienced any form of GbV, but they did say it happened everywhere around them and they could give many examples of what happened to other people.

Both of the researchers were also seeing GbV and #2R was also experiencing it. As was said by #2R when asked if she saw GbV in the Jordanian society:

"We live in a paternalistic, male-dominant society and there is too much discrimination between girls and boys. When a woman is pregnant of a girl, they pity her because they want boys. Boys carry the name of the family, boys are supposedly more appreciative, stronger, they don't bring shame to the family. When a woman gives birth to a girl, they will always tell her:

'Well, maybe next time you will get a boy'.

So, there is GbV. Everywhere, in every corner. Every time you breath. It is a big deal."

Researcher #1R said that she saw a lot of discrimination in the hiring procedures of the JUST. She said she experienced many times that a woman was not hired for a job, even though she was the best, because the second best was a man. She said men are considered more reliable because they do not get pregnant, so the chances that they will work for you for a longer time are considered better. Researcher #1R said she herself did not experience GbV, but did recognize that she would probably not have been in her position had she not chosen a female profession, namely nursing. Researcher #2R was facing GbV in her own family, coming from her parents:

"When my brother finished his test at the end of 12th grade, my father was willing to send him outside the country to become a doctor. I was allowed to study, except inside the country, in the university very close to my place. I was not allowed to go and get my masters' degree abroad, except if I got engaged and then I was allowed to go. Even the way my parents treat my brother. They give him everything. They give him money, my father bought him a car, for me they never did anything like that."

These answers show that all the women involved in the GRACE-network project saw GbV in their environment and six of the women said that they had experienced forms of GbV themselves. The most important form of GbV that was named by the women was discrimination, women being treated differently than men only based on their sex, as can be seen in the examples on the restrictions on women when they want to travel.

6.3.3: Changes in response to GbV because of GRACE

The women involved in the GRACE-network project said that their responses to GbV have changed because of their participation in the GRACE-network project. Some of the respondents said that they became **more aware of GbV**, more aware that they could **not accept** anymore the way they were being treated by their environment because they experienced this as abuse. An example is respondent #5 who was asked how she felt when she was restricted in her choices because she was a woman:

"I cannot tell you that I was really unhappy, because it was normal, our culture is like that. So I would feel unhappy in the moment, but after that, it was okay again. People could even convince me that what I wanted was wrong. But now, no, it is not like that anymore. When I know it is the right thing I will advocate for that. This will end with you still believing in yourself. It doesn't matter if they don't believe it, as long as you believe you are right in wanting what you want."

Another aspect that was mentioned a lot when asked what changed in their reaction to GbV was that the women felt more able to **help other women** who were dealing with GbV. The respondents said they had learned the differences between empathy and sympathy and that they stopped focusing on the problem and feeling sorry for the woman involved. Instead they felt they were more able to show this woman the different choices she had and could support her in making her own choice.

Changes in addressing GbV were shown in examples provided by respondent #7 and #8, who both said that they tried to address the way they were treated by **discussing** this with their environment, questioning their behavior and trying to show them that it was not normal to treat them that way, simply because they are women. Respondent #8 said:

"I try to explain, to let them analyze everything more, to make them think, what is the difference between male and female? I ask them to tell me what the difference is. In this way I try to put the subject under debate. Maybe they will accept my way of thinking or maybe they will reject it. Because of it I am often seen as an advocator for women, which is what I have become."

The last outcome that was mentioned by two of the women was that they were more able to respond directly to the abusive way they were being treated. They felt able to say they did **not accept it** anymore. Respondent #7 gave the following example in which it is shown that she is not accepting it anymore to be treated in an abusive way, by being discriminated:

"Right now I want to go to another country for work. This is not allowed in our culture, especially since I am single and I am female. I found many rejects from the community around us, family, colleagues. But I feel that I can manage myself in another country and I am now trying to find a good contract so I can go."

Respondent #2 said she was able to **say 'no'**, not accepting it anymore that strange men would treat her in a demeaning way:

*"One man told me to park my car somewhere else because he wanted to put his truck in that place for unloading products. I told him:
'Please I want to go to that place for a couple of minutes'.
He started to shout. I told him he could shout as much as he wanted, I wanted to go to that shop so I left my car there and went. Maybe before my participation in the GRACE-network project I could not have done that."*

As can be seen by the mentioned changes in the reactions of the women involved in the GRACE-network project to GbV, they became not only **more aware of the abuse** that was happening around them and towards them, they are working hard on stopping it by addressing the issue in **discussions**. Two participants were able to show that they were not accepting the GbV anymore by directly **saying 'no'**.

The researchers did not feel similar changes because of their participation in the GRACE-network project. Researcher #1R said that she already, before the project, did not accept GbV and this did not improve because of her participation. Researcher #2R did experience changes, saying:

"I think I became a more content person, I don't really care that much now. All I care about is my future, my children's future and how I can build my future and be the successful person who I am. I think this is more important than paying attention to things I don't have control over. I don't have control over my father and the way he wants to treat me, the only thing I can control is my own treatment of myself and my children."

The researchers were also seeing a lot of GbV around them, like the participants. They experienced it in their lives, families and jobs. The difference with the participants is that the researchers made different changes. Researcher #1R said she was already not accepting GbV in her life and this did not change. This lack of change can be explained by

the limited participation of researcher #1R. Researcher #2R mostly stopped letting the unequal treatment by her parents affect her life and started to focus on the things she could influence in her own life.

6.2.4: Conclusions

These answers show GbV was mostly seen by the women involved in the project as discrimination, women being treated differently than man because of their sex. While discussing this GbV and the responses of the women to GbV, a number of changes were repeatedly mentioned. The women became more **aware** of GbV happening in their environment and happening towards them. While becoming more aware of the GbV, they started to see this GbV as something that is not acceptable. The women also changed their responses to GbV. They felt they were more able to **help women** in their environment who were facing GbV by making them aware of the GbV as something that is unacceptable and the choices these women had. They started **discussing** GbV in groups, trying to make these people aware of the unacceptable character of GbV. A final outcome that was mentioned was that two women were not accepting the GbV anymore by **saying 'no'** directly to the people who were treating them in an abuse way.

Looking at these four groups it can be stated that one group, the women saying 'no', are directly addressing the perpetrators of the GbV they or others are experiencing. The other three groups of answers are more **indirect** changes in their relation to GbV. The majority of the participants of the GRACE-network project, six of the eight participants, gave an answer that focused on the three indirect reactions. This shows that a small minority of the women involved in the GRACE-network project were afterwards able to **directly reject GbV by saying 'no'**. **The implications of this statement will be discussed further in the next chapter.**

6.3: Question answered?

The goal of the GRACE-network project was to answer the following research question:

"How can ICTs be used to empower female university students in Jordan in their stance against Gender-Based Violence?"

The two researchers were asked if they thought this research question was answered. Researcher #1R said that this was not really the case, mostly because they only had a short amount of time to implement the project and no one should expect miracles in only a few months. The process of improving the empowerment of the women involved in the project is still a **working process**. She said that they did:

"Create awareness amongst them and helped them. The thing is, whether they are really empowered and continue to increase that, has a lot to do with personality and how much the women were convinced. It is very difficult to say and it is a very difficult subject. These women are part of a society that has its own believes and ideas. We succeeded in creating awareness. I think this is a very important part of prevention."

This shows that researcher #1R does see a certain development taking place in the right direction, but the end goal, empowering female university students in their stance against GbV, has not been reached yet. Researcher #2R was more positive about the GRACE-network project reaching its goals. She said:

"To a big extent, I think I did answer the question. By giving these participants the opportunity to explore some of these concepts like what is GbV and to reflect on their own lives. They became more aware of what GbV is and to what extent they are exposed or not exposed to GbV. They raised the question if they would be able to recognize GbV. I think they do after GRACE."

Researcher #2R felt **the question is answered** and that this project shows how ICTs can be used to empower female university students in their stance against GbV. She said that the women involved in the project did not only become more aware of what GbV is, they also changed their attitude towards it. Most of them saw GbV as a normal aspect of life in Jordan, but after the project researcher #2R felt the women changed this, they started to see GbV as something that is unacceptable.

The researchers were also asked if they would repeat the GRACE-network project and if so, what they would change in the project. Researcher #1R said that this project would probably be repeated in one of the Gulf states. She said that she and researcher #2R were already asked for this. She felt, however, that it is more important to use this way of teaching, of interacting with students, in their everyday life as teachers, than repeating the project in a different country. When asked what she would change researcher #1R said that she thought men should be included in the project:

"Just to teach them how to have a dialogue together, so they can carry that with them when they go home to their husbands. I always love to see these empowerment programmes for boys as well as girls because boys are raised self-centred and oppressed by social tradition. That is why they act in the way we don't want them to act. One of the most important things is that boys need a lot of counselling. Of the efforts, 99% are geared towards women, but if we educate boys and train boys on how they can change their attitude towards women, I think this can be brilliant because they can grow together."

Researcher #2 also said that they were planning GRACE 2 right now. She said that she would definitely be in for a new GRACE-network project. When asked what she would change in a new GRACE-network project she thought for a long time. She explained she had not thought about that yet. Finally she said she would recruit the women for the project in a different way. Right now it was very convenient for her, but she felt, because she was their teacher, that maybe the women who decided to join the project did not have a lot of choice.

These answers show that the researchers involved do not have similar thoughts on whether or not the project was a success or what should be changed about the project. Researcher #1 sees the project as **a working process** but researcher #2 feels that the **research question has been answered**. This makes it interesting to keep an eye on the development of GRACE 2 to see which shape the project will take and how this will be different from the first GRACE-network project.

6.4: Conclusions

Summarizing it can be said that all the participants in the project said that they feel empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project, but they did see it as **a working process** or as something that was **untested**. Only one person stated that she was **empowerment without a doubt**.

The answers showed GbV was mostly seen by the women involved in the project as discrimination. A number of changes in relation to GbV were discussed by the women. They became more **aware** of this violence, started to see it as unacceptable and **discussed** this with the people in their environment. They felt that they could **help other women** who were facing GbV. Only two women were able to directly say **'no'** to the people who were abusing them.

The researchers did not mention all these changes when asked which changes they saw in the women involved in the project as participants. They said the level of **awareness** was raised, concerning self-knowledge, (self-)abuse and GbV. They also said the women improved their **self-love**, treating themselves better. The improvement in self-confidence was not mentioned by the researchers when asked which changes they saw in the women involved in the project. This is an important discrepancy which will be discussed and analysed further in the next chapter.

The two researchers gave different answers when asked whether or not their research question was answered. Their answers could be summarized in either seeing the project as a **working process** or having the feeling that the research question posed in the GRACE-network project **was answered**. However, as was shown in this chapter, only **two women said that they were directly addressing GbV by saying 'no'**. The other six women were addressing GbV in a more indirect way, by starting discussions and trying to help women who are experiencing GbV. Because of this it seems that the research question that the researchers in the GRACE-network project tried to answer has not been answered. In the next chapter this will be discussed further and a possible explanation will be offered.

Concluding, the data presented showed that the GRACE-network project positively influenced the level of empowerment of the women involved in the project. However, only two women were able to address GbV in a direct manner, not accepting it anymore, after their participation in the GRACE-network project. In the next chapter a possible reason will be offered for the fact that only two of the eight participants felt able to reject GbV in a direct manner after their participation in the GRACE-network project.

Chapter 7: GRACE and De Vries

In this chapter I will further analyse the data presented in the previous chapter and compare the process described by the women involved in the GRACE-network project to the theory of De Vries, which was discussed in chapter 4. This chapter is divided in four sections, discussing the concept empowerment, the influence the GRACE-network project had, if the women are empowered because of their participation and what changed in their relation to GbV.

De Vries made the connection between creating awareness, the ability to express your choices, and being able to say 'no' to (self-)abuse and determining your own life. De Vries makes clear that the ability to say 'no' to any form of abuse cannot be achieved without creating awareness about how you experience your life and the development of autonomy. Autonomy gives a person the confidence to make her own choices and to take **care of herself by saying 'yes' to what she does want and 'no' to the (self-) abuse she is experiencing.**

7.1: The meaning of Empowerment

The women involved in the GRACE-network project gave a number of meanings to empowerment. The most dominant way of how empowerment was described was by aligning empowerment with **freedom of choice**. The other ways empowerment was described were by aligning it with **self-love** and **breaking boundaries**.

These answers can be compared to the theory of De Vries. Autonomy was described by De Vries as experiencing the **freedom** and confidence to make your own choices. As was explained in the theoretical chapter, De Vries stated that a certain level of autonomy has **to be developed to develop the ability to say 'no' to abuse** and seeing yourself as worthy enough to say 'no'. Most of the women gave a description of the concept of empowerment that fits with the stage of gaining autonomy in the process of empowerment De Vries described, having the freedom to make your own choices. A consequence of this gained autonomy is that a person will be able to **break boundaries** in her life, whether these were put up by herself or also by others. The next stage in the process of becoming empowered is the stage in which a woman starts to say 'no' to abuse by responding in such a way that it shows that she is not accepting it and treats herself as worthy. This means that a woman does not only have the feeling of being able **to say 'no', but is actually saying 'no' to violence. This stage can be aligned with self-love** as used by Dr. Oweis in the GRACE-network project. Three women aligned empowerment with the concept of self-love.

Looking at the data presented by Dr. Oweis as the outcomes of the GRACE-network project, autonomy as an aspect of empowerment is not given much attention. In the descriptions presented in chapter 2 (see pg. 14-15), Dr. Oweis reported four outcomes: an increase in their awareness of GbV, an increase in their self-love and saying no to violence, improved ICTs capabilities and an improvement in their scholarly results. She did not report on women making other choices or feeling the freedom to do so. This shows that Dr. Oweis did not report on autonomy in the sense of freedom to make your own choices, as an outcome of the project. This is interesting because almost all the participants and the researchers said that being empowered means having freedom of choice, having autonomy.

7.2: The influence of the Project

In this section the process of the GRACE-network project, which can be seen by analysing the influence the project had on the lives of the women involved, will be compared with the process of empowerment described by De Vries: (1) becoming aware, (2) developing autonomy to have a free will and (3) seeing yourself as worthy and saying no to (self-)abuse. De Vries stated that in this process these steps can be interwoven and should not be seen as completely separate.²⁸

Looking at the influences the women participating in the GRACE-network project described, most of them mentioned changes experienced in the area of increasing **awareness**, increasing **self-love** and improving **self-confidence**.

Looking at these changes described by the women, they can be placed in all three of the phases described by De Vries: becoming aware; increasing autonomy; and seeing yourself as worthy and not accepting (self-)abuse. In chapter 2 the conclusions from Dr. Oweis were presented, which showed a lack of direct focus on the area of autonomy. However, in the data presented by Dr. Oweis, autonomy can be found, in between the lines. The women reflected on articles about GbV, discussed their lives, became aware of what they wanted to change in their lives and what self-love meant to them. To do these things, they gave their opinions, became more confident and became aware that their opinions and ideas were not only appreciated, but that they were worthy. These aspects all increased their level of autonomy, to have a free will, free choice, a free mind. The lack of focus on autonomy in the results the researchers discussed was also seen in the data presented in the previous chapter. The women involved in the project as participants described not only changes made in the areas of awareness and self-love, but also in the area of self-confidence and the ability to make their own choices. The researchers however did not mention these areas when they discussed the changes they saw in the participants, only reporting changes in the areas of self-love and awareness.

By only looking at the conclusions presented by Dr. Oweis in chapter 2 and the outcomes discussed by the researchers during the interviews, it would be indicated that, compared to the theory of De Vries, the researchers in the GRACE-network project missed one step. The theory that was used was that when the self-love of the participants increased, they **would also be able to say 'no' to GbV. This indicated that they wanted the participants to increase their self-love, to be able to know that they do not deserve the (self-)abuse they are experiencing, but they did not directly focus on the first signs of developing autonomy to give the participants the tools to say 'no'. However, the outcomes described in the previous chapter indicate that the GRACE-network project did influence the level of autonomy of the women, besides the influence the project had on the level of awareness and self-love.** The question that is interesting is why this developed of autonomy was not reported. It was either not seen, and thus not reported, or not reported because not deemed to be of importance. Another reason could be that the changes in autonomy took longer to manifest itself and were not visible at the time because they were not present. Using the data that was the outcome of the evaluation of the GRACE-network project conducted by me and the data presented by the researchers as the results of the project, no clear answer can be given, but it seems this was not the case based on the outcomes, techniques and theory described by the researchers. Attention should be paid to this

²⁸ De Vries (2006)

dimension of autonomy in the future when outcomes are presented by the researchers involved in a possible new GRACE-network project.

7.3: Empowerment and GRACE

The responses given by the women when asked if they felt empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project, can be divided in three groups. The first group of answers said **yes**, the second group said yes, but that they are **still working on it** and the last group said yes, but that they were not sure because they were **not tested yet**. The majority of the women said that they felt that they were empowered, but that they were still working it. Two respondents, respondent #4 and #5, said that they did feel empowered but that they were not tested yet. Only one woman, researcher #2R, said that she was, **without a doubt, empowered**. This difference between the researcher #2R and the other women involved in the project could be explained by her position, as vice-dean and head researcher. The difference between researcher #1R and #2R is interesting, but cannot be explained by differences between the two women. The same can be said for the difference between respondent #4 and #5 and the other participants in the project. Respondent #4 and #5 are not of the same age, one is married, one **single, one has a job, one is unemployed, one has children, one doesn't**. Further research would be necessary to explain these differences.

It is also interesting that three women, the two researchers and respondent #2, said that the increase in their level of empowerment may not be influenced only by the GRACE-network project. Other processes were happening in their lives, like a new job, which could also have influenced their empowerment. This shows that other processes that were happening at the same time of the project should be kept in mind and the reported outcome of the project should be viewed critically.

7.4: Gender-based Violence and GRACE

Most of the answers given by the respondents when asked how their response to GbV changed can be divided in four groups. The first group of answers focused on **becoming more aware** of the GbV and also seeing this GbV as something unacceptable. The second group of answers focused on stopping abuse towards themselves and others by **starting discussions** concerning rights of women and gender discrimination. The third group of answers focused on being more able to **help other women** who were experiencing GbV. The last group of answers shows that the women were stopping abuse towards themselves and others by directly **saying 'no'**. Looking at these four groups it **can be stated that one group, the women directly saying 'no', are directly** addressing the perpetrators of the GbV they or others are experiencing by not accepting it anymore. The other three groups are more **indirect** changes in their relation to GbV. The majority of the participants of the GRACE-network project, six of the eight participants, gave an answer that focused on the three indirect reactions.

The only two participants who directly addressed the people who were abusing them by **saying 'no', were participant #2 and #7. Participant #2 explained how she no longer** accepted it that men talked to her in a demeaning way. She gave the example of a time when she parked her car somewhere to go to the shop and a man told her to move it. She did not move her car and told the man that he could shout all he wanted. Participant

#7 gave the example of making the choice to go work abroad although her environment did not agree with this choice.

This difference between participant #2 and the other participants in the project could be explained by a number of differences between them. Respondent #2 was not a student at the JUST and she became a participant in the project because she heard of it and contacted the researchers to become a participant. Further, she is the only woman above 30 who is not married and does not have children. Whether or not these differences indicate a different position towards GbV should be investigated more, but it does shed light on an interesting difference. The difference between the answers provided by participant #7 and the other participants cannot be explained by differences between them. She is not married, but so are two other participants of her age, and she was a student at the JUST, like the other respondents. More data should be collected to see what caused this difference.

The two people who fell outside these categories are the two researchers. The response of researcher #1R did not change that much, she said she already did not accept GbV before the project. The response of researcher #2R was not to react to GbV directly, as she had been doing for years, but to stop letting it affect her life. This difference can be explained by the fact that the researchers indicated that they see themselves as already empowered. Their positions, as the dean and the vice-dean of the Nursing faculty and as the two head researchers in the GRACE-network project, indicate that they were already further developed in the process of empowerment than the women involved in the project as participants.

Looking at their responses and comparing this to the theory of De Vries it can be said that the first group of answers, **directly saying 'no'**, complies with the theory of De Vries by seeing this as a high level of empowerment in relation to GbV and having enough autonomy to voice their wishes. The women who gave the second group of answers, **indirectly** trying to stop abuse, looking at the theory of De Vries, do not seem to have developed a high enough level of empowerment and the autonomy yet to be able to say 'no'. **They are aware of what is going on in their lives and the society, and want to** discuss this with others, but are not confronting the people who are abusing them in a direct manner.

This shows that although most of the women indicated changes in their lives in the areas of autonomy and self-love, this does not mean that their direct response to GbV changed. **Most of the women did not indicate that they started to directly say 'no' to violence, like** respondent #2 and #7 did, who showed changes in their direct response to GbV. This indicates that the process anticipated by the researchers of the GRACE-network process, making women more empowered in their stand towards GbV, has not been accomplished yet by improving their self-love and their awareness of the GbV happening. The women became more aware of what GbV means and recognized violence that was happening to them or people around them as GbV, but the majority of the women have not been able to address the GbV directly by not accepting it anymore. Using the process of empowerment as described by De Vries this indicates that the majority of the women participating in the GRACE-network project have not developed the autonomy yet to be **able to say 'no'**. The lack of direct focus on the area of autonomy can explain why only **two women are able to directly say 'no' to GbV, while six do not seem ready for this. The**

influence the project had on the level of empowerment of the women involved may have been greater if the researchers had focused directly on the area of autonomy.

7.5: Conclusions

It is shown that all the women involved in the project felt that their level of empowerment increased. The women showed changes in three main areas, increasing their **awareness**, increasing their **self-confidence** and increasing their **self-love**.

Looking at the area of increased awareness, the women became more aware of their environment, their wishes and dreams, the (self-)abuse and the GbV they were experiencing and seeing in their environment. This increased awareness gave the women the tools to look critically at these areas, which changed their position towards GbV. They started to see it as unacceptable.

The increased self-confidence made the women feel more able to make their own choices. This could be seen in big changes, like a change in jobs or a planned trip, but also in smaller choices, like the choice to spend time on the computer instead of doing things for the family.

All the women involved in the GRACE-network project as participants said they increased their self-love. They started spending more time on themselves, taking care of themselves, treating themselves better, loving themselves more.

The researchers in the GRACE-network project expected that an increase in self-love **would result in the ability and will to say 'no' to GbV**. This was explained by saying that they expected that when a woman starts to love herself more, she will stop abusing herself. When she stops abusing herself, she will not accept abuse anymore from others, which will give her the power to say no to this abuse. According to this argument the **women involved in the project are on their way to being able to say 'no' to GbV and will arrive there in the future if they keep on increasing their self-love**.

Looking at the theory of De Vries, the outcomes indicated that most of the women are in the phase of becoming aware of the GbV directing towards them and happening around **them and not yet in the phase of clearly saying 'no' to these forms of violence**. This indicates that most of the women involved in the project started on the road to increasing their level of empowerment in relation to GbV, but are still in the beginning of this process. They will keep progressing in this process if they keep increasing their level of autonomy.

This two theories show a large difference. The theory used by the researchers implies that when a women increases her self-love enough, **she will eventually say 'no' to GbV**. De Vries however states that first the development of autonomy is needed. Without this **autonomy women will not be able to say 'no'**.

But are the women empowered in relation to GbV? As can be seen, all the women feel their level of empowerment increased because of their participation in the GRACE-network project. Looking at GbV however, most of the women were not directly addressing the people who were treating them or people around them in an abusive way. They did address the topic by starting discussions and trying to raise awareness, but did not directly **say 'no'**, with two exceptions, participant #2 and #7. This shows that for only two participants the increase in empowerment in relation to GbV, needed to be able to

say 'no' to GbV, was enough in this project. The other participants are addressing GbV, but in an indirect matter.

An explanation for this could be that in the results presented by the researchers shown in the second chapter of this thesis and the outcomes discussed by the researchers in the interviews, two areas were given attention: the **increased awareness** and the **increased self-love**. The participants themselves also named **self-confidence** as a third area of progress. The fact that researchers did not report this area of change in the presented outcomes can indicate that there was also a lack of focus on this area during the project itself. This can also be seen in the theory used by the researchers. According to this theory a woman will say 'no' to GbV if her self-love increased enough. In the techniques described by the researchers the women had to give their opinions, reflected on their lives and critically review articles. These techniques improved their self-confidence. The outcomes show that although the researchers did not directly focus on an increase in self-confidence as an outcome or in the presented theory, the self-confidence of the women did improve. This shows that the level of autonomy of the women can be positively influenced without direct attention, which was stated by De Vries. However, this improvement in self-confidence might have been bigger if the researchers had focused on this area directly.

Looking at the theory of De Vries, development of autonomy, which encompasses self-confidence, is essential in the process of increasing empowerment in relation to GbV. The lack of direct focus on this area can explain why only two women are able to directly say 'no' to GbV, while six do not seem ready for this. The already visible influence the project had on the lives of the women involved might have been greater if the researchers had focused directly on the area of autonomy. This cannot be stated as a certainty because it is not clear why the researchers did not include the changes in the area of autonomy in the reported outcomes. Maybe the researchers did not see it, maybe they did but did not think it was important to report or maybe the change in autonomy happened after the project outcomes were written and the researchers could not report it because it was not there yet. However, what can be said is that the data used in the report and the theory used in the project indicate a lack of focus on this area during the process of empowerment. The evaluation of the GRACE-network project showed that out of eight participants only two were able to directly say 'no' to the GbV directed towards them. The lack of focus on autonomy could be a reason for this. To get a more accurate picture of this, more research could be done, specifically addressing the question whether or not the researchers in the GRACE-network project in Jordan did focus directly on autonomy in the process of empowerment.

Conclusion

In this minor thesis I wanted to answer the following question:

To what extent did the GRACE-network project in Irbid, Jordan empower female Jordanian university students in their stance against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?

The outcome is that in the GRACE-network project, the researchers answered their research question to some extent. The women involved in the project have increased their level of empowerment, as stated by themselves, by becoming aware of their lives and increasing their self-love. The project has had a positive influence on their lives by inspiring the women involved in the project to take better care of themselves and many of the women have stated that they are happier since their participation in the GRACE-network project.

During the GRACE-network project multiple techniques have been used: ICTs (searching on the internet and using email), focus group discussions, one-on-one interviewing, dream drawing sessions (group meetings where they used a specific drawing technique in which they made their dreams visible and who or what was stopping them from reaching their dreams) and daily writings. While the research question of the GRACE-network project focused on the influence of ICTs on the empowerment of women, the influence of the other techniques should not be missed. Most of the women indicated that they had been influenced the most by one of the techniques that required face-to-face contact, which shows the limited importance of ICTs in this project.

The data that was presented in this thesis showed that the women aligned empowerment with three concepts, Self-love, Breaking of boundaries and Freedom of choice. Freedom of choice was described by seven out of ten women, making it the dominant description that was given when the women were asked what they thought empowerment meant for them. The changes the women said they experienced were multiple but can be summarized by looking at three processes, an increase in Awareness (of GbV, of their own wishes, of (self-)abuse), in increase in Self-love and an increase in Self-confidence. The outcome that was reported by the women was that they did feel empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project.

The participants and researchers in the project have showed that most of them are aware of the fact that the process of increasing their empowerment in relation to GbV has not come to an end yet. Almost all the women involved in the project said that they did feel empowered because of their participation in the GRACE-network project, but that they are still working on becoming more empowered. One of the researchers stated very clearly that the project was just a start and how the process proceeds depends on the women themselves. According to the expectations of the researchers of the GRACE-network project the increase of self-love will eventually lead to saying 'no' to GbV.

Looking at the increase of empowerment that was indicated by the women involved in the GRACE-network project, this has not increased in relation to GbV to the level needed to be able to say 'no' to GbV for most of the women. Their awareness has increased and they are trying to address the issue in an indirect way, by addressing the issue in

discussions with people in their environment, but only two of the women felt able to **actually say 'no' to this abuse.**

In the evaluation of the GRACE-network project the process of empowerment described by De Vries, the process described by the women involved in the project and the process described by the researchers have been compared. The largest difference between the theory of De Vries, the process described by the women involved in the GRACE-network project and the process described by the researchers was the attention given to autonomy. According to De Vries this development of autonomy is essential for women to **become able to directly say 'no' to GbV.** The theory used by the researchers in the GRACE-network project, an increase in self-love will eventually **lead to saying 'no' to GbV,** pays no attention to the development of autonomy. In the outcomes presented of the GRACE-network project an increase autonomy was not reported, but was an implicit part of the process of increasing the awareness and self-love of the women. Although autonomy seemed to have had an implicit role, changes in the level of autonomy could be seen in most women. This shows that the level of autonomy for the women can be positively influenced without direct attention as stated by De Vries.

However, this lack of attention for autonomy can be an explanation for the fact that almost none of **the women are able yet to directly say 'no'.** **The impact of the project could have been larger when the process of increasing the women's** autonomy had received more direct attention.

My recommendation for future GRACE-network projects is that the process of increasing **the women's autonomy should be given more direct attention** to improve the already positive influence the project had had. The impact of the project on the lives of the women involved could be larger when this is done and this chance should not be missed. More research should be done, addressing the question whether or not the researchers in the GRACE-network project in Jordan did focus directly on autonomy in the process of empowerment. During the evaluation of the future GRACE-network projects the impact of the direct attention for autonomy should be analyzed. This could show whether or not this change has a positive impact. If this is the case, the importance of autonomy in relation to empowerment and GbV should be taken seriously when new GRACE-network projects are formed. This could increase the already positive influence of the GRACE-network project on the lives of the women involved.

Discussion

In this thesis the influence of ICTs on the level of empowerment of female university students in Jordan in their stance against GbV was investigated.

During the research it became clear that although the question focused on how ICTs could be used to empower female university students in Jordan, the influence the project has had on the participants involved was not just the effect of ICTs. It was the effect of all the techniques used: focus group discussions, dream drawings, interviewing and daily writings. This is important to realize because it shows that if a new project only takes the ICTs as an exemplary technique from the GRACE-network project in Jordan, the same results will probably not be obtained.

Two important terms used in the research question of the GRACE-network project are subjective which caused difficulties in the evaluation. Empowerment is the first important and subjective term. I tried to overcome the difficulties with this term by asking the women involved in the project what empowerment meant for them. In this project the women already discussed the topic empowerment multiple times which made it easier for them to explain to me what empowerment meant for them. This could not have been the case if the term empowerment was unfamiliar to them. Their answers were quite similar, which could be seen in chapter 5, but did show how subjective the term is. This subjectivity should always be kept in mind when someone is investigating empowerment. Without a clear picture of what empowerment means for someone a change in their level of empowerment could be missed and not mentioned as an outcome.

A second difficulty with the term empowerment is that it entails a process. Because it is a process certain developments in the beginning of the process may be small, but still very significant. The difficulty with this can be that this small development might be missed as a project outcome, by the participants, by the researchers and by the evaluator. This should be kept in mind while evaluating an empowerment process, which minimizes the changes of underestimating the influence the project had.

The second subjective and important term is GbV. Some difficulties arise when violence is investigated. What is seen as violence? This differs from person to person but also from culture to culture. Especially in a country like Jordan it is important to get this clear because some forms of violence are a normal part of life for many women. They do not classify them as violence because they are so normal. To be able to recognize these forms of violence as violence a certain level of awareness is needed. To get a clear idea of what violence was for these women they were asked during the interviews if they saw violence around them, if they could give examples and what they experienced as GbV. This made it clear that discrimination was seen as violence, which may typically not be classified as violence by many people in a country like The Netherlands. It was very important to get this clear because otherwise their different attitude towards discrimination would not be seen as a change in attitude towards GbV and would be missed as an outcome.

A second difficulty with investigating violence is the sensitive nature of the phenomenon. Most of the violence happens behind closed doors and is seen as a private issue. Victims are often ashamed of it or afraid to talk about it, fearing repercussions. In the Middle East this topic is made more difficult because the honour of a woman is very important.

When this honour is, or might be, violated, this woman is often punished. The worst punishment is death. When a woman discusses something like domestic violence with an outsider this can violate her honour and the honour of the family (these two are linked very closely). Family business, of which domestic violence is a part, should stay family business. By telling these stories to an outsider you are violating this rule. Because of this many women are too afraid to talk about it. In this evaluation this difficulty was minimized because the women involved in the project had already discussed GbV during the project. However the outcomes presented in this minor thesis concerning the violence the women were experiencing is most likely influenced because of this difficulty, understating the violence the women were experiencing. This is unfortunately very difficult to avoid, especially in a research period of only four months, and should be kept in mind while interpreting this report.

In this minor thesis the theory of De Vries was used to analyse the outcomes of the project. The difficulty with this implementation was that the theory of De Vries is a theory written from the field of psychology, not sociology. That meant that the theory was focusing on individual psychological processes instead of bigger processes in the group, which is the focus of sociology. Keeping this in mind the theory was still very useful to evaluate the GRACE-network project, with the important contribution of the concept autonomy. This is also a subjective term, but because it was used in relation to the theory of De Vries her definition of autonomy was used in this minor thesis. Using a term like autonomy can give the same difficulties as using a term like empowerment. Autonomy entails a process, which creates the risk of underestimating the influence of the project because some developments are small and barely visible. This was especially important with the GRACE-network project because it might be a reason why the researchers did not report the development in the levels of autonomy.

What should be kept in mind during the interpretation of the outcomes of the GRACE-network project is the influence of other factors on the level of empowerment of the women during the project phase. Examples of these factors are graduating from a **master's degree, obtaining a new job or a promotion and starting something new like a research project**. This can be consciously experienced by the women as positively influencing their level of empowerment, but also subconsciously. Three women brought this up during the interviews which showed the importance. The influence of other factors are impossible to avoid in social sciences since subjects are not in a laboratory kept well away from these other influences. This does not make the outcomes useless, but it should be kept in mind while interpreting them. The chances of overestimating the project outcomes becomes smaller, when this is kept in mind while interpreting these outcomes.

This evaluation focused on whether or not the researchers were able to answer the research question they posed, how ICTs could empower women in their stance against GbV. Because of that the success of the project is based on whether or not the women increased their level of empowerment in relation to GbV. That showed the impact the project had on the relation with GbV, but focused less on other positive influences the project has had. The women stated they felt empowered, happier and loved themselves more. This is an important outcome which shows the success of the project. Another important outcome was that all the women with daughters said they were raising their daughters to become empowered and strong women. Because of this the project influence will be bigger than the 8 women participating and may have an important

influence on the Jordanian society. This shows that although it is stated that only two **women felt able to directly say 'no' to GbV, the project has had many other positive** influences on the lives of the women participating.

A final note should be made about the timing of the evaluation. The evaluation took place shortly after the GRACE-network project was finished, there was one month in between. Because of that the long-term effects of the GRACE-network project are not shown in this evaluation. To obtain a complete picture of the effects of the GRACE-network project, a second evaluation should take place a year or maybe more after the project ended.

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Appendix 1: Topic list interviews

- Age
- Nationality
- Occupation (job/study)
- Marital status
 - If married: children

Opening question: How did you experience the GRACE-network project?

- GRACE-network project ->
 - Why join?
 - Goals?

Change relationships in your life? Which one? How?

if children, changed the way you raise them? How?

The biggest change? Why?

What influenced you the most of the techniques? Why? How?

Daily writing -> still do this? What influence?

Reach goals?

- Empowerment

What see as empowerment? Empowered because of participation in GRACE? (using own description of empowerment) How?

- in education

- in relationships
- family life

- **growing up (also for children you're raising now if applicable)**

Is there someone you know who you consider empowered? Why?

Examples of what empowers in life

Is there something you would like to change to become more empowered in your life?

What?

- Disempowerment -> What do you see as disempowering?

What does this mean?

Is there someone you know who you consider disempowered? Why?

Encounter? Examples

- GBV -> what do you see as GBV?

See it? What types? Where?

What effect does this have?

Have you encountered this in your life?

How did you respond to this?

Did participation in GRACE change your response to GBV?

Appendix 2: Agenda Focus group discussion

Start: 9.00 AM

Welcome

- Introduction
- Purpose of today.
- One-on-one interviews

Meditation exercise

Discussion

- Empowerment
- Life since participation GRACE-network project
- GbV

Break: 11.00 AM

End: 1.00 PM