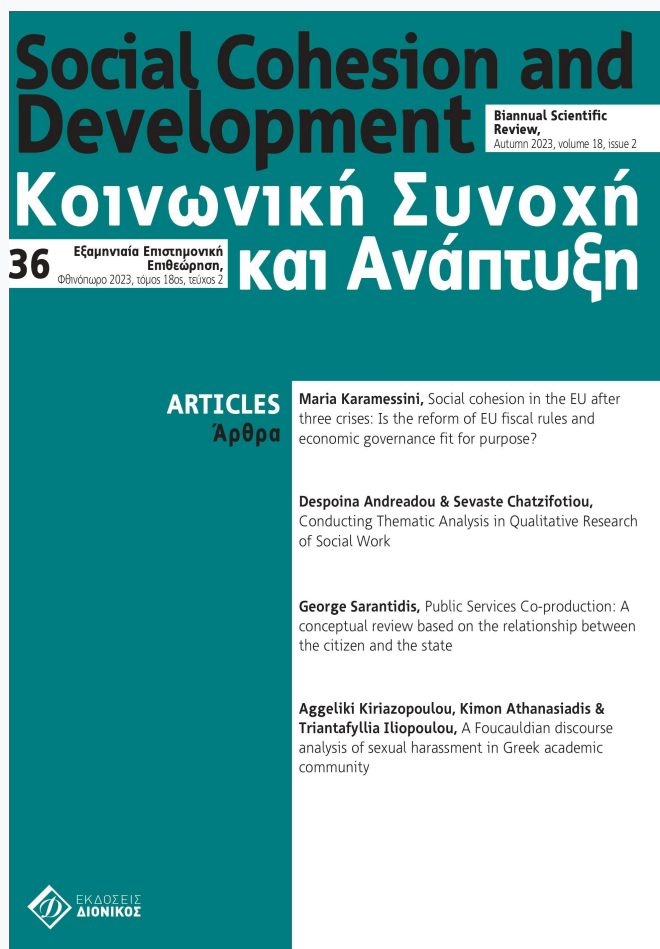


Social Cohesion and Development

Vol 18, No 2 (2023)

No 36



Conducting Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research of Social Work

Despoina Andreadou, Sevaste Chatzifotiou

doi: [10.12681/scad.37477](https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.37477)

Copyright © 2024, Despoina Andreadou, Sevaste Chatzifotiou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Andreadou, D., & Chatzifotiou, S. (2023). Conducting Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research of Social Work . *Social Cohesion and Development*, 18(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.12681/scad.37477>

Conducting Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research of Social Work

Despoina Andreadou, *Democritus University of Thrace*

Sevaste Chatzifotiou, *Democritus University of Thrace*

Διεξαγωγή Θεματικής Ανάλυσης στην Ποιοτική Έρευνα της Κοινωνικής Εργασίας

Δέσποινα Ανδρεάδου, *Δημοκρίτειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θράκης*

Σεβαστή Χατζηφωτίου, *Δημοκρίτειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θράκης*

ABSTRACT

Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used qualitative data analysis method in social science research offering an accessible and theoretically flexible approach for analyzing qualitative data. This is a discussion paper comprising an analytical overview of thematic analysis, its conceptualization, characteristics and applications. Furthermore, a social work worked example using thematic analysis with data from one of our own research projects – domestic violence and parenthood - is analytically discussed providing a step-by-step guide for the analysis process. We conclude by bringing more light to the importance of the method and advocating it as most useful and flexible for qualitative social work research.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η θεματική ανάλυση είναι μια από τις πιο ευρέως χρησιμοποιούμενες μεθόδους ανάλυσης ποιοτικών δεδομένων στην έρευνα κοινωνικών επιστημών, προσφέροντας μια προσίτη και θεωρητικά ευέλικτη προσέγγιση για την ανάλυση ποιοτικών δεδομένων. Αυτό το άρθρο περιλαμβάνει μια αναλυτική επισκόπηση της θεματικής ανάλυσης, των χαρακτηριστικών και των εφαρμογών της. Επιπλέον, παρουσιάζεται ένα παράδειγμα κοινωνικής εργασίας που χρησιμοποιεί τη θεματική ανάλυση με δεδομένα από ένα ερευνητικό έργο μας (ενδοοικογενειακή βία και γονεϊκότητα). Υποστηρίζουμε ότι αυτή η μέθοδος είναι η πλέον χρήσιμη και ευέλικτη για την ποιοτική έρευνα της κοινωνικής εργασίας.

KEY WORDS: Thematic analysis, qualitative research, social work research.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Παγκόσμια Επιστηστική Κρίση, Εναρμονισμένος Δεθεματική ανάλυση, ποιοτική έρευνα, έρευνα κοινωνικής εργασίας.

1. Introduction

Thematic analysis is the most widely used qualitative analytic method in social sciences across a range of disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, social work, education, psychology, counseling, psychotherapy (Clarke & Braun, 2018; Swain, 2018; Tsiolis, 2018), still its applications in the research analysis process is not always satisfactorily clarified. Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that thematic analysis is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn as it provides a set of foundational, core techniques and skills that are used in many other methods of qualitative analysis, namely grounded theory, narratives, discourse analysis, content analysis, etc. Also, that it provides a great deal of accessibility and flexibility and can be applied across different epistemological and ontological positions, namely essentialism/realism and/or constructionism depending on the researcher's decisions on the theoretical framework and positions in general.

Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Researchers who are relatively unfamiliar with qualitative methods may find that thematic analysis can be relatively quick to learn and provides a foundation in the basic skills needed to engage with other approaches (King, 2004). Thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, and a useful tool for forcing the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling even large sets of data, helping them to produce a clear and organized final report (King, 2004). It is widely used in social work qualitative research projects, and along with content analysis seem to be the most popular picked up methods for data analysis. Despite that, it appears well under reported regarding their analysis process and conceptual meaning.

2. Definition, conceptualization and characteristics of the-matic analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2013) and should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative data analysis recognized as a method by itself (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since first being named as an approach in the 1970s' (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 3), a number of different versions of thematic analysis have been proposed in a variety of disciplines such as psychology (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely thematic discourse analysis (Taylor & Ussher, 2001), thematic decomposition analysis (Ussher, & Mooney-Somers, 2000), reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) etc. In doing so, most methods of analysis have inevitably been connected to the conceptual framework and data process proposed by the thematic analysis in such degree that the later is often considered the basic tool to be used across the different methods. In other words, thematic analysis is the major analytic method to provide the basic core skills to the researcher across the range of qualitative analysis.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is not necessarily linked to a specific theoretical perspective and can thus be applied to a number of theories and epistemological approaches (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives, and is useful as a 'basic' method because: "a) it works with a wide range of research questions, from those about people's experiences or understandings to those about the representation and construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts; b) it can be used to analyse different types of data,

from secondary sources such as media to transcripts of focus groups or interviews; c) it works with large or small data-sets; and d) it can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 3). This flexibility refers to both the general organization around the analysis process as well as the more specific decisions need to be made by the researcher around the types of analysis, the theoretical and epistemological paradigms, the conceptual frameworks, the researcher's role in the analysis and the final report of the work.

Furthermore, this reflexive approach to thematic analysis (or reflexive thematic analysis) adds a new light to the conceptualization of the method, as it stresses the need to be highlighted and be implemented with theoretical knowingness and transparency from the part of the researchers Braun and Clarke (2020). The later strive to be fully aware of the philosophical sensibility and theoretical assumptions informing their use of thematic analysis and these are enacted throughout the analytic process and reporting of the research, rendering the researcher's role in knowledge production to the very centre of the whole process. As the researchers stress out, quality reflexive thematic analysis is not about following procedures 'correctly' (or about 'accurate' and 'reliable' coding, or achieving consensus between coders), but about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process having the opportunity for a second researcher to be involved in the analytic process so a collaborative and reflexive approach to reading the data can be developed. This is also an activity - among others - which addresses the credibility of the research and in the long run trustworthiness as well (Chatzifotiou, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Braun & Clarke (2020, p. 4) there are six-phases in the process for data engagement, coding and theme development. Their most recent articulation of this is: 1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report. Furthermore, they clearly state that this six-phases approach is not intended to be followed rigidly. Still, there is a possibility these can blend together, as the researchers' analytic skill develops more, and consequently, become familiar with the analytic process which in turn becomes increasingly repetitive. Other qualitative researchers, have in the same vein, developed similar stages for thematic analysis influenced by the ones above. For example, Tsiolis (2018, p. 98) has implemented five stages in some of his research projects, advocating the usefulness and flexibility of the method.

The flexibility of thematic analysis as a method, rather than a fully-embedded methodology, means it can be undertaken with quite different guiding theories and using quite different orientations to data, coding practices and theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The same authors have developed thematic analysis to be a method characterised by independence from any particular epistemological and ontological base – and this 'flexibility' is partly what makes it distinct from other qualitative analyses (Swain, 2018). This flexibility, alongside its accessibility, makes it particularly suitable even for researchers with little experience to qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998; Swain, 2018), although they need to know that their data sets have to be well organized and described in detail and the finished product need to be a holistic account of what was done, how was done and why.

3. Generating Themes or patterns in Thematic Analysis

For and foremost, in doing thematic analysis qualitative researchers need to acknowledge on theoretical positions and values in relation to qualitative research, eg - among other things - the “give voice” to the participants is of paramount importance. It is important to consider that determining a theoretical framework – not necessarily a pre-existing one - and methods of analysis means that these should match each other and consequently should influence a number of crucial decisions to be made. For example, which type of analysis the researchers want to do? What claims do they want to make in relation to their data set? Will they go for a more depth or a more horizontal referencing? Will they choose a latent or a semantic level of approach? Do they decide for a bottom-up (inductive) way of analysis, or a top-down (deductive) one? How will they theorize meaning of their data? Will they follow a realist/experientalist epistemological paradigm or a constructionist one? Will they want to have an active role to play during the process of analysis or will they be able to free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments? The route to a credible and trustful thematic analysis via searching across the data set to find repeated themes / patterns of meaning, is very much a decision based process.

The concept of the theme or pattern is an integral part of the method of thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). A theme refers to a particular pattern of meaning in the data. The theme is used as a characteristic concept that organizes a team of repetitive ideas within the text, enabling researchers to answer one of the questions of the study. Sub-themes can also be created focusing on a specific concept which when highlighted makes the theme particularly important. Themes should be the final ‘outcome’ of data coding and iterative theme development. They can be emerged out of the data as a result of an interpretative level of coding across the whole data set, or of an explicit/semantic level of coding on a specific question area of interest within data. Similarly, themes can be the result of a data-driven analysis (inductive way) with no pre-existing coding frame, or be the result of a theory-driven analysis (deductive way) with a prefixed theoretical framework. Either a more inductive or more theoretical/deductive way, thematic analysis is a situated interpretative reflexive process (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Also, themes are located on two levels: semantic/explicit or latent (Boyatzis, 1998). A thematic analysis typically focuses exclusively or predominantly on one level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). “With a semantic approach, issues are identified within the explicit or superficial meanings of the data, and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.13). In this case, the analysis process includes the description, where the data is simply organized to show a semantic content. In this field, the significance of the themes and the broader concepts and their implications are shown and are often correlated with the previous literature (Frith & Gleeson, 2004). In contrast, “a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.13).

4. Thematic analysis, qualitative research and social work

Researchers within the field of social work are using qualitative inquiry with increasing rates (Lietz et al., 2006; Padgett, 2004). The social work profession is acknowledging the role that qualitative inquiry has in their field as more and more social workers are turning to qualitative methodology in their research during many last decades (Bein & Allen, 1999; Lietz et al., 2006; Padgett, 1998, 2004).

Considering social work's mission to raise awareness of the needs of underprivileged populations, qualitative research should as closely as possible reflect the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the people who participate in research. In this way, social work researchers prioritize the voice of the participant over that of their own (Lietz et al., 2006). Desiring to give priority to the meanings of participants does not mean that qualitative researchers must deny the process of co-constructing meanings. The postmodern tradition acknowledges the role of the researcher in creating meaning with its participants (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Lietz et al., 2006).

Reflexivity is defined by Horsburgh (2003, p. 308) as 'active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation'. Reflexivity involves deconstructing who we are and the ways in which our beliefs, experiences and identity intersect with that of the participant (Mac Beth, 2001). This reflection occurs both in individual thought and through dialog with others that acknowledges the researcher's own experience and perspectives (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). Instead of trying to hide behind the false sense of objectivity, the researcher makes his or her own sociocultural position explicit. Finally, reflexivity is not a point in time event, rather, is a process that occurs throughout the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Padgett (1998) states, there is an ethical responsibility within social work to uncover voices that have been hindered or to bring awareness to perspectives that have been oppressed. It is through rigorous research activity within qualitative work that we can work to bring awareness to thoughts, ideas and experiences not commonly heard. In order to do this, we must have strategies that will allow us to manage threats to trustworthiness including the ways in which who we are and what we have experienced may keep us from hearing what our participants are saying.

Qualitative research tends to interpret and seeks to understand in depth a phenomenon within it. It seeks to clarify the nature of social practices, relationships and beliefs as well as the concept of human experience on the part of the participants, and requires understanding and compiling of various aspects and data. It aims to understand a particular phenomenon from the point of view of those experiencing it and interpret them from the meaning given by them (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). Researchers in the field of social work use qualitative research with rising rates (Lietz et al., 2006). A lot of texts are now available in quality methodology, social sciences as well as social work programs have increased the number of courses in qualitative research (Lietz et al., 2006). The profession of social worker recognizes the role that qualitative research has in our field as more and more social workers turn to quality methodology, their research, to give voice to the underprivileged populations (Lietz et al., 2006). Taking into account the task of social work to raise awareness of the needs underprivileged of populations, quality research should reflect as much as possible the thoughts, feelings and experiences of people involved in research (Lietz et al., 2006). As Padgett states, there is a moral responsibility in the context of social work to uncover voices that have been hindered or repressed (Lietz et al., 2006). Within the framework of qualitative research, we can bring to light thoughts, ideas and experiences that we do not often hear (Lietz et al., 2006).

The framework analysis of qualitative research is determined by the research approach. In this sense, thematic analysis has a strong point of connection with quality research and social work. Thematic analysis can be an "essentialist or realist method", which reports experiences, meanings, actual behavior, attitudes, or real motives of the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke,

2006). “It can also be a contextualist method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). This is the first point of proximity between quality research, social work and thematic analysis, which studies the relationship between the individual and the environment.

As mentioned in previous sections, thematic analysis is not a complex method and has many advantages. In addition, the flexibility of the method allows for a wide range of analysis options, which means that your data may be broaden (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis gives the opportunity to better understand the potential of any issue (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this respect, social work practitioners should be more familiar with the thematic analysis as an independent and reliable qualitative approach to the data analysis. Typically, the method of analysis should be guided both by our research question and by our broader theoretical and epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What follows is a worked example of one of our social work research projects where we conducted reflexive thematic analysis.

5. A Social Work worked example using thematic analysis

We will try to present, in a tangible and concise way and using data from semi-structured interviews conducted in the context of qualitative research methodology on a worked research project titled: Domestic Violence and Parenthood: “The experiences of mothers victims of partner violence who sought help from formal services”. This was a research project that was successfully evaluated for an MA degree in Social Work to one of the coauthors and constitutes the meta-analysis of its analysis process for the purposes of this paper (Andreadou, 2016).

The presentation of the thematic analysis draws its elements from the influential and pioneering work of Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2012; Clarke and Braun 2013), and the following adaptations by Tsiolis (2018, p. 98-99) stating that research questions have a guiding role for the researcher in the search for the excerpts to be chosen, and that theoretical categories drawn by the researcher during the bibliographic review process, are used as theoretical awareness frameworks in the data coding process. Our version of thematic analysis is further informed by the process of reflexivity and is developed in 6 phases. Namely, 1) transcribing the interviews, 2) familiarizing ourselves with the data and gathering homogeneous excerpts that correspond to research questions, 3) creating initial codes, 4) transitioning from codes to themes, 5) defining core themes, and 6) reporting of findings and reflecting on action/upon research. This is in accordance with Braun and Clarke’s (2019, 2020) statement that quality reflexive thematic analysis is about the researchers’ reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement within the analytic process.

Having the above bibliographical knowledge in mind, we moved on to conducting thematic analysis method to our research project on domestic violence and parenthood and the role of social work counseling. What follows is hopefully a straightforward step-by-step guide to conducting thematic analysis for qualitative social workers:

Phase 1: Transcribing the interviews

According to Cartwright (2020, p. 6), there are two main approaches to transcribing interviews: full verbatim and intelligent verbatim. “Full verbatim transcribing means including everything

that is said by both the researcher and the participant, including all the erms and ums! Intelligent verbatim leaves things like false starts to sentences and all the erms out". As intelligent verbatim does not always let the researcher understand the participant's reluctances to answer or emotional difficulties to respond to a question, we decided to use full verbatim and thus accurately enter the words of the interviewees and the researcher without correcting any mistakes, pauses, interruptions, repetitions, etc.

In this light, the audio recording of the conversation with the interviewees was fully verbatim transferred to a written text as soon as the interview process was completed. This process is widely known as "transcription", that is the transfer of the conversations into written text of the recorded or videotaped verbal interactions, according to defined notation rules (Tsiolis, 2014, p. 269). The notation system we used during the transfer was accommodated by Tsiolis's (2018, p. 100) and an indicative element of it is shown below in Table 1: Full Verbatim.

Table 1: Full Verbatim

Symbol	
(...)	Significant pause: thinking deeply, trying to remember, needs a break etc
[laughter]	Out of speech information reported by the researcher
_____	Emphasis: indicates emphasis <u>through</u> its elevation tone and volume of the voice
	Participant's reluctance to answer
	Emotional difficulty to answer

Phase 2: Familiarizing ourselves with the data and gathering homogeneous excerpts that correspond to research questions

We carefully read again and again the transcribed material, got acquainted with it and identified those excerpts that provided us with information for each research question (and / or sub-question) (Tsiolis, 2018, p. 100). Excerpts from a research question were found and piled up together, although this did not rule out the possibility that relevant excerpts could also be found in other parts of the interview. It was therefore important to read all the material carefully and try to find all the information that corresponds to each of our questions and / or sub-questions.

Two of the research questions asked by the researchers were: (a) What are the effects of domestic violence in mothers victims of domestic violence regarding their role as a parent, and (b) what is the effects of social support provision to the lives of mothers victims of violence? More specifically, reading again and again the material we detected elements, concepts and issues presented in a repetitive pattern of meaning, related to the effects of domestic violence on their parental role and the support they received from various sources of help. By locating and compiling these excerpts together we created homogenous piles of material that corresponded to each research question of the study.

Phase 3: Creating initial codes

This phase involves the production of codes from the data. Codes identify a characteristic of the data (semantic content or explicit) that appears to be of interest to the analyst and refers to the most basic part or element of the first data or information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process also is called coding and the conceptual definitions, which express the meaning that the researcher gives to this data section, are called codes (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57; Isari & Pourkos, 2015, p. 115; Tsiolis, 2014, p.107). According to Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 61), codes assign and name an attribute (a unit of meaning) that the researchers recognize in some part of their data (eg in an excerpt of the transcript of an interview) and appears be important in answering their research questions.

In the light of the above, we marked the specific excerpts wherever they appeared in the material and matched them with a specific conceptual definition (i.e we gave them a code name). An example of such codes is presented in the following Table 2: Coding Process. Some of the codes generated by the researchers came from the words of the participants themselves or reflected their ideas, while other codes derived from the conceptual and theoretical framework adopted by the researchers based on other similar research that had been appeared in the existing literature (Braun & Clark, 2012; Lapierre, 2010; Letourneau et al., 2007).

Table 2: Coding process

Data extract	Coded For
"... I made too many mistakes, unjustified mistakes, failed, I was charged too many failures over the years ..." (Woman, Div.50)	"Failure and Mistakes"
"I felt guilty, I felt remorse that we arrived here and the children would not live in a quoted normal, say family, the first two weeks mainly ..." (Woman, Div. 35)	"Complaints and remorse"
"... my 12-year-old son is clinging to me, that is, even his very personal one will tell it to Mom ..." (Woman, Div. 50)	"Strong Attachment"
"At that time they were stuck too much and the two of them were afraid of losing me, I do not know what had created that feeling." (Woman, Div. 35)	"Afraid of losing"
"I have given them the freedom to tell me everything even if it is the hardest... I have told them I am willing to help you. That is, communication "(Woman, Div. 50)	"Good communication with children"
"Nevertheless, I was going back to school, I was engaging with children constructively. I had the strength, we did things together, we went along with supermarkets, our walks..." (Woman, Div. 35)	"Dealing with Children"
"I have a good friendship with my friends, which is very good psychotherapy for me, with all these discussions, we are going through very nice.." (Woman, Marr. 55)	"Emotional support from the friendly environment"
"... in the first place, psychological support from my friends was important because they helped me see things a little more cool and not so emotionally and draw some plans, solve problems ..." (Woman, Marr. 44)	"Psychologicalsupport"
"It is definitely and legally supportive, because it did not really know what my moves should be in order to be able to be protected in the future, and this advice was very legal" (Woman, Div. 35)	"Legal Support"

Phase 4:

The transition from codes to themes Phase 4 starts when all the data are initially coded and sorted and we had a long list of different codes that we had identified in our data. This phase orientates the analysis on a wider level of themes, involves sorting the various codes into potential themes, and comparing all relevant encoded data within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 19). Some initial codes can continue to shape the main themes, others may be sub-themes and others may still be rejected (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20). The themes are more abstract conceptual constructions and general from the codes (Tsiolis, 2018, p. 109-110). They result from the processing, comparison, merging of the codes and correspond to a repetitive pattern of meaning (Tsiolis, 2018, p. 110.)

In the light of the above, we proceeded to the following process as seen in Table 3: Creating Themes/subthemes/candidate themes Process.

Table 3: Creating Themes/Subthemes candidate Themes Process

Coded data	Potential themes or subthemes or candidate themes
<p>"Failure and Mistakes" I made too many mistakes, unjustified mistakes, failed, I was charged too many failures over the years ..." (Woman, Div.50)</p> <p>"Complaints and remorse" I felt guilty, I felt remorse that we arrived here and the children would not live in a quoted normal, say family, the first two weeks mainly ..." (Woman, Div. 35)</p>	(1) Effects on Parenthood
<p>"Strong Attachment"... my 12-year-old son is clinging to me, that is, even his very personal one will tell it to Mom ..." (Woman, Div. 50)</p> <p>"Afraid of losing" At that time they were stuck too much and the two of them were afraid of losing me, I do not know what had created that feeling." (Woman, Div. 35)</p>	(2) Challenges and Difficulties
<p>"Good communication with children"</p> <p>I have given them the freedom to tell me everything even if it is the hardest... I have told them I am willing to help you. That is, communication "(Woman, Div. 50)</p> <p>"Dealing with Children"</p> <p>"Nevertheless, I was going back to school, I was engaging with children constructively. I had the strength, we did things together, we went along with supermarkets, our walks..." (Woman, Div. 35)</p>	(3) The positive aspects of the mother-child bond
<p>"Emotional support from the friendly environment"</p> <p>Nevertheless, I was going back to school, I was engaging with children constructively. I had the strength, we did things together, we went along with supermarkets, our walks..." (Woman, Div. 35)</p> <p>"Psychological support"... in the first place, psychological support was important because they helped me see things a little more cool and not so emotionally and draw some plans, solve problems ..." (Woman, Marr. 44)</p> <p>"Legal Support" It is definitely and legally supportive, because it did not really know what my moves should be in order to be able to be protected in the future, and this advice was very legal" (Woman, Div. 35)</p>	<p>(4) Support from the wider friendly and family environment</p> <p>(5) The Positive Contribution of the institute</p>

Phase 5: Defining Core Themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), some candidate issues are not really themes, as they may merge into each other. At this point, we further defined and named the core themes that we presented in our analysis as seen in Table 4 below. Each theme was presented separately and its content was highlighted based on the particular aspects that emerged during the analysis of the data. Possible differences or variations that characterize each theme can also be highlighted. At this stage, excerpts from the texts of the interviews can also be presented, in order to substantiate the findings and to show in a convincing way how the themes are highlighted (Tsiolis, 2018, p. 122).

Table 4: Defining Core Themes

Candidate themes	Core themes
(1) Effects on Parenthood (2) Challenges and Difficulties (3) The positive aspects of the mother-child bond (4) Support from the wider friendly and family environment (5) The Positive Contribution of the institute	1.The Negative Effects of Domestic Violence on the Parenthood of mothers-victims 2.The positive aspects of the mother-child bond 3. The Impact of Social Support from formal and informal sources

Phase 6: Reporting the findings and reflecting on action

According to Cartwright (2020, p. 4) it is important during any research project to reflect on action. Reflection on action means thinking about what you have done and how you can improve. Good research practice requires that researchers reflect on action throughout a project. It is also important at the end of any research project to evaluate what you have done by thinking about how you can improve what you do in the future and also what you have learned (Whittaker, 2012).

In the same vein, regarding thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) support that the final analysis is a product of deep and prolonged data immersion, thoughtfulness and reflection, a rather active and generative process. They emphasised that themes do not passively emerge from data to capture this process, rather than are analytic outputs developed through and from the creative labour of the researchers' coding. The emergence of the themes reflect considerable analytic work and are actively created from the researchers resulting from a cross roads of a) the intersection of theoretical and empirical data, b) the process/es of analysis and c) the researchers' subjectivity. Furthermore, our research skills had been improved as we had learned through experience how power difference can impact the analysis process and research findings per se.

In the light of the above literature, we reflected upon action throughout the whole research, and below in Table 5: Reflecting on Action we provide a selective element of how we applied reflective thematic analysis on our project:

Table 5: Reflecting on action

Quotation from participants	Critical Reflexivity of the researchers
"Nevertheless, I was going back to school, I was engaging with children constructively. I had the strength, we did things together, we went along with supermarkets, our walks... "(Woman, Div. 35) "I have given them the freedom to tell me everything even if it is the hardest... I have told them..I am willing to help you. That is, communication "(Woman, Div. 50)	According to their words, the bond with their children is based on constructive communication, dialogue and freedom of expression. These women can educate or care for their children just like any other parent, demonstrating their resilience and determination. While we expect domestic violence to have many negative effects on women's lives, it is equally important to see women as active agents or actors who, despite huge obstacles, continue to feed their children and build a better life for themselves and their families.
"... I made too many mistakes, unjustified mistakes, failed, I was charged too many failures over the years ..." (Woman, Div.50) "I felt guilty, I felt remorse that we arrived here and the children would not live in a quoted normal, say family, the first two weeks mainly ..." (Woman, Div. 35)	Abused women can feel overwhelmed and constantly try to survive on a daily basis, in difficult conditions. Confidence in their skills and authority as parents can be severely undermined, either directly by their abuse or indirectly as a tactic by their partners, in order to lose control. Domestic violence undermines, and can seriously damage, the mother-child relationship.

6. Conclusion

Qualitative social work research offers rich and compelling insights into the real worlds, experiences, and perspectives of welfare and other social care clients as well as professionals. Thematic analysis method offers a really useful qualitative approach for those purposes and offers a toolkit for researchers who want to do robust and even sophisticated analyses of qualitative data.

This article provides a workable example of the steps involved in the thematic analysis process and describes an approach that demonstrates rigor in a qualitative research. It basically reflects upon previous research conducted by pioneering academics who introduced thematic analysis method into the qualitative data analysis spectrum (Braun and Clarke, (2006, 2020), and successfully applied it to qualitative social work research. In this vein, it can well be said that qualitative research and the approach of thematic analysis is well suited – among other disciplines - to the science of social work as it is the deep understanding of a person's or a group's place within their personal and social environment that is under investigation and methodological attention. Qualitative research and approach of thematic analysis contribute to a deep understanding of both the research question being studied and the context in which it evolves, through the elevation of the respondents, the penetration into their personal sphere and the approximation of their own visual reality.

Bibliographical References

Andreadou, D. (2016). *Domestic violence and Parenthood: "The experiences of mothers-victims of violence who turned to support organizations"*. (Unpublished postgraduate thesis), Democritus University of Thrace.

Bein, A., & Allen, K. (1999). 'Hand in Glove?: It Fits Better Than You Think. *Social Work*, 44(3), 27-47.

- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Braun V., & Clarke, V. (2012). "Thematic analysis". In: H. Cooper (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, (pp. 51-77). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise & Health*, 11(4), 589-97.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2020). One Size fits all? What counts as quality practice in reflexive thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1-25.
- Cartwright, L. (2020). Using Thematic Analysis in Social Work Research: Barriers to Recruitment and Issues of Confidentiality. *Sage Research Methods Cases Part 1*.
- Chatzifotiou, S. (2000). 'Conducting Qualitative Research on Wife Abuse: Dealing with the Issue of Anxiety'. *Sociological Research Online*, 5(2).
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2018). Using thematic analysis in counseling and psychotherapy research: A critical reflection. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 18(2), 107-110.
- Gough, B., & Lyons, A. (2016). The future of qualitative research in psychology: Accentuating the positive. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science*, 50, 234-43.
- Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-80.
- Horsburgh, D. (2003). 'Evaluation of Qualitative Research', *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 12(2), 307-12.
- Isari, F., & Pourkos, M. (2015). *Qualitative Research Methodology. Applications in Psychology and Education*. Athens: Association of Greek Academic Libraries. Retrieved from: <https://repository.kallipos.gr/handle/11419/5826>
- Johnson, R., & Waterfield, J. (2004). 'Making Words Count: The Value of Qualitative Research'. *Physiotherapy Research International*, 9(3), 121-31.
- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257-270). London, UK: Sage.
- Lapierre, S. (2010). More Responsibilities, Less Control: Understanding the Challenges and Difficulties Involved in Mothering in the Context of Domestic Violence. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1434-1451.
- Letourneau, N. L., Fedick, C. B., & Willms, J. D. (2007). Mothering and Domestic Violence: A Longitudinal Analysis. *Journal Family Violence*, 22, 649-659.
- Lietz, C. A., & Zayas, L. E. (2010). Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners. *Advances in Social Work*, 11 (2), 188-202.
- Lietz, C.A., Langer C. L., & Furman, R. (2006). Establishing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research in Social Work Implications from a Study Regarding Spirituality USA. *Qualitative Social Work*, 5(4), 441-458.

- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- MacBeth, D. (2001). 'On 'Reflexivity' in Qualitative Research: Two Readings, and a Third'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(1), 35-68.
- Padgett, D.K. (1998). *Qualitative Methods in Social Work Research: Challenges and Rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Padgett, D.K. (2004). 'Introduction: Finding a Middle Ground in Qualitative Research'. In D. K. Padgett (Eds.), *The Qualitative Research Experience*, (pp. 1–13). Belmont, CA: Thomson/ Brooks & Cole.
- Swain, J. (2018). A Hybrid Approach to Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research: Using a Practical Example. *Sage research methods*. Retrieved from: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526435477>
- Taylor, G.W., & Ussher, J.M. (2001). Making Sense of S&M: A Discourse Analytic Account. *Sexualities*, 4(3), 293-314.
- Tsiolis, G. (2014). *Methods and techniques of analysis in qualitative social research*. Athens: Critique.
- Tsiolis, G. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative data. In G. Zaimakis (ed.), *Research Routes in the Social Sciences. Theoretical – Methodological Contributions and Case Studies* (p.p. 97-125). University of Crete – Laboratory of Social Analysis and Applied Social Research.
- Ussher, J.M., & Mooney-Somers, J. (2000). Negotiating Desire and Sexual Subjectivity: Narratives of Young Lesbian Avengers. *Sexualities*, 3(2), 183-200.
- Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6(5), 100-110.
- Whittaker, A. (2012). *Research skills for social work*. London, UK: Learning Matters.

Biographical Notes

Despoina Andreadou is a licensed social worker at the Social Services of Local Authority. She holds an MA in Social Work in Education from the department of Social Administration and Political Science, Division of Social Work, D.U.T.H. Her doctoral thesis is on Domestic Violence and Parenthood in the Light of Social Work: "The discourse of mothers-victims of violence who turned to support networks", (Department of Social Work at the Democritus University of Thrace). Her research interests are on domestic violence, parenthood, gender inequality in the family and qualitative methodology.

Sevaste Chatzifotiou is an Professor of Social Work, Gender and Domestic Violence at the Department of Social Work at the Democritus University of Thrace. She holds an MA in Social and Community Work Studies (Uni of Bradford-UK) and in Social Research Methods (Uni of Manchester-UK). Her doctoral thesis is on Help Seeking behavior of Abused women in Greece (Uni of Manchester-UK). Her research and teaching interests are among others, domestic violence, ethics and values in Social Work, qualitative research methodology and gender inequality in the family, education and society. Contact: schatzif@sw.duth.gr.