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AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S  
EXPERIENCES WITH A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

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TAMEKA LYNETTE GILLUM

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**AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH  
A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION**

**By**

**Tameka Lynette Gillum**

**A DISSERTATION**

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## ABSTRACT

### AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH A CULTURALLY SPECIFIC DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION

By

Tameka Lynette Gillum

Despite over thirty years of tremendous progress addressing domestic violence, intimate partner violence still remains a serious problem. It remains the single greatest cause of injury to women in the United States. However, until recently, very little attention has been devoted to women of Color and women from disadvantaged backgrounds as distinct populations in the domestic violence research and literature. In general, research on intimate partner violence within families of Color remains sparse. This dissertation: 1) highlights the limited attention that has been given to examining intimate partner violence in the African American community; 2) defines and exemplifies culturally appropriate interventions and highlights the need for such interventions to address intimate partner violence within communities of Color; 3) argues for a qualitative investigation of African American women's experiences with the only culturally appropriate domestic violence intervention in existence that targets the African American community, and 4) presents the results of this investigation and discusses its implications.

There is limited research on intimate partner violence in the African American population and scarce attention has been paid specifically to the experiences of African American women who have been battered. A number of researchers and theorists have identified some of the culturally specific factors that may contribute to intimate partner violence in African American interpersonal relationships. In light of the evidence and theorization on culturally specific factors contributing to domestic violence in African

American relationships, several authors have indicated a need for culturally appropriate domestic violence interventions for African American survivors and perpetrators in order to adequately deal with the issues of intimate partner violence within the African American community. The purpose of this current study was to qualitatively investigate how helpful a culturally specific domestic violence program (Asha Family Services), which targets the African American community, has been to African American female survivors of intimate partner violence. The study also examined how women's experiences with this culturally specific agency differed from their experiences with mainstream services. Fourteen African American female survivors of intimate partner violence who received domestic violence services from the Asha and three staff members from the agency were interviewed in order to define the agency and explore survivors' experiences with it. Results suggest that this agency does indeed provide culturally specific domestic violence services which target the African American community and that survivors benefit greatly from these services. Survivors articulated many things that they found helpful about the services offered at Asha. In addition, survivors indicated that they benefited more from the culturally specific services provided by Asha than they had from mainstream domestic violence interventions. Implications for practice and research are presented.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all women who are survivors of intimate partner violence and all those who have lost their lives at the hands of abusive partners. It is dedicated to all Women of Color survivors who have had to deal with the impact of racism in addition to dealing with their abusive experience. This work is done in hopes of improving services to survivors and the ultimate goal of a society free from violence against women and girls.

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## INTRODUCTION

Despite over thirty years of tremendous progress addressing domestic violence, intimate partner violence still remains a serious problem. It remains the single greatest cause of injury to women in the United States, more common than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined (Huang & Gunn, 2001; Russo, Koss, & Goodman, 1995; Thomas, 2000). It has been estimated that anywhere from 3 to 4 million women annually are physically abused by their partners, costing the U.S. health care system an estimated \$5 - \$10 billion yearly (Russo, Koss, & Goodman, 1995; Thomas, 2000). Domestic violence often results in injury, chronic health problems, heightened stress, and other mental health problems (Russo et al., 1995; Sutherland, Bybee, & Sullivan, 1998, 2002), as well as puts women at increased risk of poverty, divorce and unemployment (Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk, 1999; Russo et al., 1995).

Intimate partner violence is a problem that cuts across all races, cultures and social classes (Coley & Beckett, 1988; Gillum, 2002; Huang & Gunn, 2001; Williams, 1993, 1994). However, until recently, very little attention has been devoted to women of Color and women from disadvantaged backgrounds as distinct populations in the domestic violence research and literature (Asbury, 1987; Hampton, 1989; Gillum, 2002; Harrison & Esqueda, 1999; Sorenson, 1996; Thomas, 2000; Thompson, Kaslow, Kingree, Rashid, Puett, Jacobs, & Matthews, 2000). In general, research on intimate partner violence within families of Color remains sparse (Thomas, 2000). Bearing this in mind, this dissertation: 1) highlights the limited attention that has been given to examining intimate partner violence in the African American community; 2) defines and exemplifies culturally appropriate interventions and highlight the need for such interventions to

address intimate partner violence within communities of Color; 3) argues the need for a qualitative investigation of African American women's experiences with the only culturally appropriate domestic violence intervention in existence that targets the African American community, and 4) presents the results of this investigation and discuss its implications.

### Domestic Violence in the African American Community

There is limited research on intimate partner violence in the African American population and scarce attention has been paid specifically to the experiences of African American women who have been battered (Gillum, 2002; Harrison & Esqueda, 1999; Huang & Gunn, 2001; Thomas, 2000; Williams, 1992, 1993). Due to the limited amount of available research, it is difficult to specifically assess the prevalence of intimate partner violence within the African American community. However, from what research does exist we can assess that African American women experience incidence and negative affects of intimate partner violence *at least* at levels comparable to women in the general population (Brice-Baker, 1994; Thomas, 2000). Though early research on intimate partner violence within the African American community asserted that rates were higher within this community (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), subsequent research has dispelled this myth, validating that once socio-economic status is controlled for, African American families are no more violent, and may even be less violent, than their white counterparts (Cazenave & Straus, 1979; Coley & Beckett, 1988; Hampton, Gelles, & Harrop, 1989). However, more recently West (2002) has argued that Black women experience an alarmingly high rate of intimate partner violence.

A number of researchers and theorists have identified some of the culturally specific factors that may contribute to intimate partner violence in African American interpersonal relationships (Asbury, 1987; Brice-Baker, 1994; Brown, 1985; Cazenave & Straus, 1979; Collins, 1991; Hampton, 1980; Hampton, 1989; Hine, 1989; Willis, 1989). Staples (1982) was one of the first to do this. He suggested that Black families are under greater stress because of a belief held by many Black husbands that their wives will seek sexual satisfaction outside of marriage if they are not satisfied at home. He argued that jealousy, in conjunction with community norms that encourage extramarital affairs and regard marriage as a license to physically dominate women, contribute to violence in African American relationships.

Asbury (1987) was another early pioneer in this work. She utilized an Afrocentric perspective to examine the experiences of African American women in violent relationships. From a review of the literature she identified many factors that may be contributing to violence in African American relationships. These factors included 1) flexibility and fluidity with the roles of African American males and females, 2) economic difficulty, which is pervasive in many African American families, 3) early exposure of children to violence in some African American communities, 4) substance abuse, 5) arguments over children and pregnancy, and 6) questions about the wife's fidelity and sexual problems. Asbury also identified factors that influence an African American woman's decision to seek help or not, which included 1) feelings of social isolation, 2) feelings that they may not be understood or welcomed at shelters, and 3) reluctance to seek help because of internalized common stereotypes about African

American women including that of sexual temptress, ugly mummies, bridges that hold the family together, and/or emasculating matriarchs.

Willis (1989) proposed that when the African American male meets the African American female he sees someone whom he has been told is dominant in the family, “a castrating black woman (the matriarch).” He argued that African American males and females have been programmed from an early age, by society, to be destructive of each other, and as a result mate selection in the African American community is predicated on negative stereotypes, which increases the likelihood of problems in the relationship.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) identified stereotypes of African American women (e.g., mummies, matriarchs, jezebels and welfare mothers) as controlling images that cause African American men to objectify African American women. Collins (2000) contended that these images, created by White Americans during the slave era and beyond, have served to control and oppress African American women and reflect the dominant group’s interest in maintaining Black women’s subordination. With this in mind it is not difficult to conceive that a belief in these images by African American men may also prompt a desire to control, oppress, and subordinate African American women in relationships, especially since it is believed that some African American men may wish to become “masters” in their relationships by fulfilling traditional, Eurocentric, white defined definitions of masculinity. Collins (2000) also argued that if these African American men are blocked from doing this they may become dangerous to those closest to them, implying that attitudes formed from a belief in these stereotypes increases the risk of violence in relationships between African American men and women.

More recently, other authors have begun to take a much closer look at the links between cultural issues specific to the African American community and intimate partner violence. Brice-Baker (1994) examined domestic violence in African American and African Caribbean families. The author began by presenting factors that interfere with researchers being able to get an accurate estimate of the prevalence of domestic violence and then presented some theories that have been proposed to explain family violence. She indicated that a societal tolerance for violence against Blacks in this country, as well as the myth that violence is an acceptable and condoned part of Black culture and Black family life, contribute to intimate partner violence in African American communities. Also highlighted was the impact of the harsh realities of institutional and internalized racism experienced by African American men and their contribution to low-self esteem (a characteristic often attributed to batterers) of African American men. Economic distress in African American communities was discussed as a possible contributor to the infliction of violence on African American women by African American men as well as a possible reason why African American women stay in these abusive relationships. The impact of stereotypes about African American women was also identified as a contributing factor. Brice-Baker argued that African American women have been stereotyped as 1) unattractive, 2) the glue that holds the family together, 3) matriarchs, and 4) love objects and sexual temptresses. These images suggest that African American women are somehow at fault for the violence they experience.

Thomas (2000) also theorized about cultural factors that contribute to intimate partner violence within the African American community. He cited the tolerance for violence against Blacks in this country and the myth of violence as an accepted and

condoned part of African American family life. He also suggested that environmental factors, including but not limited to unemployment, economic difficulties, racism, racial stereotyping, and economic inequalities, all of which disproportionately affect African Americans, sustain environments which promote or allow interpersonal violence.

Thomas also asserted that racial stereotypes of African American women can serve to undermine their self-esteem and must be addressed in any type of intervention designed to assist African American female survivors of intimate partner violence.

Most recently, Gillum (2002) provided evidence for a link between stereotypes about African American women and intimate partner violence in the African American community. She found that African American men's beliefs in the matriarch and jezebel stereotypes were positively related to their belief in the justification of intimate partner violence against African American women.

In light of the evidence and theorization on culturally specific factors contributing to domestic violence in African American relationships, several authors have indicated a need for culturally appropriate domestic violence interventions for African American survivors and perpetrators in order to adequately deal with the issues of intimate partner violence within the African American community (Brice-Baker, 1994; Coley & Beckett, 1988; Gillum, 2002; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Sorenson, 1996; Uzzell & Peebles-Wilkins, 1989; Williams, 1992; Williams, 1993, 1994a, 1994b). Thomas (2000) indicates that while services for survivors have necessarily been gender specific, they have not generally been culturally specific.

## Culturally Appropriate Interventions

Culturally appropriate interventions are those designed specifically for a target population (Alcalay, Alvarado, Balcazar, Newman, & Huerta, 1999; DeLamater, Wagstaff, & Havens, 2000; Robinson, Uhl, Miner, & Bockting, 2002; Young, Gittelsohn, Charleston, Felix-Aaron, & Appel, 2001). They utilize language and settings familiar to the culture of the target population as well as staff that represent that culture. They are designed in collaboration with members of the target population and take into account their culture-specific values, norms, attitudes, expectations and customs (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988; Pruett, Davidson, McMahon, Ward, & Griffith, 2000; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson, Davis, Gittelsohn, Going, Becenti, Metcalfe, Stone, Harnack, & Ring, 2001; Young et al., 2001). These interventions are delivered in synchrony with the participants' cultural framework (Gregg, Narayan, Kumanyika, & Agurs-Collins, 1998).

Researchers have identified culturally appropriate interventions as important for a number of reasons. Mainstream interventions have often failed to reach certain racial/ethnic minority populations for various reasons from language barriers to isolation of these populations from mainstream American society due to cultural differences, prejudice, and racism. Many mainstream interventions fail to diverge from their standard modes of operation and dissemination, which often are not effective in reaching minority populations (Alcalay et al., 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988).

Pruett et al. (2000) have indicated that in order for an intervention to be acceptable to a target population, it must be culturally sensitive and appropriate and developed in collaboration with the population being served. Erickson & El-Timimi

(2001) have argued that in order to effectively work with “culturally different” populations one must use culturally appropriate interventions. Nicholson & Kay (1999) also see culturally appropriate interventions as important for the purposes of re-connecting those they serve to their own cultural values, beliefs, and networks.

Gondolf and Williams (2001) point out that African Americans are often suspicious of mainstream social services because they tend to be dominated by whites and they tend to see whites as unfamiliar and unsympathetic to their social reality and experiences.

So, what are the components of a culturally appropriate intervention? Many researchers have suggested components for the development of such interventions. One important component is that they should be developed in collaboration with members of the target population and relevant stakeholders (Alcalay et al., 1999; Pruett et al., 2000; Thompson et al, 2001; Young et al., 2001). Next, they must use language that is familiar to the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Young et al., 2001). For example, if an intervention is targeting a population of whom the majority speak Spanish as their first language, materials and instruction should be made available in Spanish as well as English. If an intervention is targeting an adolescent population, language should be used that is consistent with the adolescent lingo of that generation. Also, channels of information dissemination must be used that will actually reach the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988). If a target population is more likely to watch television or listen to the radio than pick up and read literature, an intervention must utilize these forms of media to successfully reach the population. Further, staff implementing the intervention should be representative of the target



population, persons with whom the recipients can identify (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2001). Participants are more likely to feel comfortable in an environment where they see and interact with staff members that are “like them.” This is especially true for people of Color who may typically interact with predominantly White staff in service provision agencies and feel invalidated or disempowered in those interactions, or for youth who are used to adults “telling them what to do.”

In addition, interventions should be conducted in an environment that feels comfortable and safe to participants. This type of environment may take more time and effort to build for racial/ethnic minority groups who may be distrustful of social services in general or come from cultures where it is frowned upon to discuss or share “family business” or personal issues with “strangers” or “outsiders” (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Young et al., 2001). This may include carrying out the intervention in a physical space that is familiar and comfortable to participants and/or including artwork or other items culturally relevant to the target population in the intervention space, in addition to representative staff. It would also include adequate time for the building of trust and rapport.

Another important component is that the cultural values, norms, expectations, and attitudes of the target group need to be integrated into the messages and into the format of the intervention (Alcalay et al., 1999; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; DeLamater et al., 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988; Pruett et al., 2000; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al.,

2001; Young et al., 2001). Included in this is consideration for the family-centeredness of collectivist cultures. Most mainstream interventions in the U.S. have been designed according to the values of western individualist societies. For collectivist cultures, as many communities of Color are, consideration needs to be given to the family, both immediate and extended, and inclusion of them, whenever possible and necessary, in the intervention process (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988; Pruett et al., 2000; Young et al., 2001). Also included in this is the importance of building social support networks for intervention participants (Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Young et al., 2001). African American women specifically have mentioned social support as a motivating factor in intervention efforts (Young et al., 2001). For target populations that have been especially isolated, assisting them in building support networks with people who share common cultural values can be especially helpful and validating (Nicholson & Kay, 1999). See table 1 for a concise list of these components.

<b>Table 1 - Components of Culturally Appropriate Intervention</b>
Developed in collaboration with the target population and relevant stakeholders (Alcalay et al., 1999; Pruett et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2001; Young et al., 2001)
Use of language familiar to the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Young et al., 2001)
Use of channels of dissemination which will successfully reach the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988)
Representative staff (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2001)
Conducted in an environment comfortable for participants (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Young et al., 2001)
Incorporation of cultural values, norms, expectations and attitudes of target group into the intervention (Alcalay et al., 1999; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; DeLamater et al., 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988; Pruett et al., 2000; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2001; Young et al., 2001)

Some culturally appropriate intervention programs have begun to be implemented which target the African American community. One such program was a culturally appropriate STD/AIDS education intervention which targeted Black male adolescents (DeLamater, Wagstaff & Havens 2000). The authors' intervention consisted of two distinct components: a videotape intervention and a health educator intervention. Both were developed with the intention of promoting condom use among African American males aged 15 to 19. The culturally appropriate videotape was created through collaboration with an African American video production team with the assistance of local African American male adolescents. These adolescents helped develop and film the video as well as acted in the video. The video used actors, music, dress and language salient to the target population. The video included information geared toward educating youth about STDs and HIV including dispelling prevailing myths about the contraction of STD/HIV, facts about contracting STD/HIV, instructions on how to properly use condoms and the stories of African American youth who had contracted an STD or HIV. The use of video allowed the intervention designers to use dialogue, music, lyrics, images and personal stories to present their messages. The other component of this intervention included the relaying of this same information in a face-to-face session with an African American trained health educator. The use of a trained educator of the same racial/ethnic group allowed for the incorporation of a more personal, concerned touch. Both types of intervention proved beneficial to the youth, increasing condom use and knowledge (DeLamater et al., 2000).

Similarly, Robinson, Uhl, Miner & Bockting (2002) implemented a culturally appropriate sexual health intervention targeting low income, urban, primarily African American women. This intervention incorporated HIV and sexually transmitted disease prevention strategies combined with sexuality education. First, this program was developed through collaboration between a university based Human Sexuality program and three community-based organizations serving the African American community. In addition, focus groups with the African American target group were conducted prior to curriculum development and prior to the study's design phase. Second, innovative recruitment strategies were used. Participants were recruited through the three collaborating community agencies, community-based organizations, businesses serving primarily African Americans, community newspapers, and community activities and celebrations. Third, professional and paraprofessional African American staff served as intervention facilitators and small-group leaders. In addition, since this was a trial, female interviewers were recruited from the target population and from collaborating agencies and trained to administer the interview protocol. Benefits of this intervention included improved sexual anatomy knowledge and increased positive attitudes towards the female condom.

Young et al. (2001) utilized results from focus groups conducted with African American women to develop two culturally appropriate interventions designed to increase healthy physical activity among African American women. The first, Project EXE-L, was designed to increase daily physical activity behavior among African American women. This intervention was conducted in churches, creating a comfortable environment for participants. It used language familiar to the target population. The

program was designed to optimize social support among women in the intervention, including such approaches as pairing women with “buddies” who regularly provided support for participants. Classes conducted as part of the intervention incorporated prayer and inspirational scripture. They were led by certified aerobic instructors from the African American community and were accompanied by gospel music.

The second intervention, WIN, was designed with the intention of controlling high blood pressure among African American women. This included working toward goals not limited to but including weight loss, increased intake of fruits and vegetables, and increased physical activity. This intervention was also conducted in a community church. Again, language was used that was familiar to the participants and motivational pieces were incorporated into group sessions. Results from these interventions are still forthcoming (Young et al., 2001).

Examples of successful culturally appropriate interventions targeting other communities of Color exist as well. Salud para su corazon was an intervention designed for the Latino/a community with the goals of increasing awareness about heart disease, raising knowledge about cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention and promoting heart-healthy lifestyles. First, a community profile was generated which gave the intervention designers insight into identifying the target audience. Then, focus groups were conducted with the target population in order to identify the community’s knowledge and attitudes about heart disease and its risk factors, media usage and preferences as well as publication and material needs preferences. The authors used this information as a basis for selecting and developing messages and deciding the type of materials most appropriate for their awareness campaign. Interviews were also conducted with

community leaders for added insight and to secure the community's involvement and support of the intervention. A Community Alliance of relevant stakeholders was created whose purpose was to have a partnership role in the planning, development, and implementation of the campaign and to serve as a link between the sponsoring organization and the community. Hence, incorporation of the target community's voice was done in several ways. A multimedia intervention program was then designed. It included the creation and dissemination of bilingual materials for health care professionals; the use of Spanish language television to broadcast a series of 30-second humorous narrative public service announcements which were in Spanish, starred a Latino family, and used culturally appropriate settings and language; discussion groups; and the development of training materials, an implementation manual, and motivational videos. This program also showed great benefits to the community, including increased awareness of risk factors for CVD (Alcalay et al., 1999).

Nicholson & Kay (1999) discussed the development and implementation of a culturally appropriate group treatment intervention aimed at Cambodian refugee women to help them deal with their adjustment to their new lives in the United States. Several features made this a culturally appropriate intervention. First, group leaders (there were two) included a bilingual Cambodian social worker. This was important as it created the presence of someone the women could identify with and also left the women free to speak in their native language, Khmer. The other group leader, although white, was an older woman. This was also significant in that Cambodian culture attributes wisdom to age. Culturally appropriate activities and discussions were conducted in order to help provide a safe environment for women. Group sessions included sharing traditional

Cambodian meals, which allowed for more informal socialization and helped facilitate an increase in women's social support networks. Women were also provided the opportunity to express topics and activities they would like to see in the groups, which were subsequently included, as well as had the opportunity to lead groups themselves. This group also resulted in significant benefits for the women involved.

### *Culturally specific domestic violence programs*

Some authors have made additional suggestions for culturally specific domestic violence interventions targeting the African American community. They include recognition that many African Americans turn to family and religious leaders for sources of support (Brice-Baker, 1994). It is also important to understand that women may want the abuse to stop but not want anything "bad" to happen to their spouse (Brice-Baker, 1994). The incorporation of both support groups and individual work in treatment plans for African American women has also been suggested. The groups should include structured exercises focused on self-esteem building, including emphasis on how racial stereotypes of Black women affect self-esteem. They should also include development and reinforcement of existing coping skills, including exploration of the fact that Black women need not accept mainstream standards of success and can create their own standards based on their cultural norms. These groups should also serve to decrease isolation and provide emotional support (Brice-Baker, 1994; Thomas, 2000). In reference to working with African American men who batter, an intervention must be capable of communicating disapproval of battering behavior without perpetuating racial stereotypes. There also must be recognition of oppression and other negative experiences that African American men encounter without excusing their behavior (Brice-Baker,

1994; Thomas, 2000; Williams, 1992, 1994a). In addition, these men need to be educated about the origins of stereotypes about African American women and made aware of the ways in which they permeate our society and how they negatively affect their relationships with African American women (Gillum, 2002).

### The Current Study

The purpose of this current study was to qualitatively investigate how helpful a culturally specific domestic violence program (Asha Family Services), which targets the African American community, has been to African American female survivors of intimate partner violence. The study also examined how women's experiences with this culturally specific agency differed from their experiences with mainstream services.

Therefore, the specific research questions posed for this study were:

- 1) How does Asha define their culturally specific domestic violence intervention?
- 2) What elements of African American women's experience at Asha Family Services have been most helpful to them?
  - a. Do women identify culturally specific components as helpful and if so, which ones?
- 3) For women who have a history of service involvement with mainstream services, what were their experiences with these agencies and how is their experience with Asha different from those experiences?
- 4) What culturally specific intervention components, if any, do survivors and staff identify as desirable that do not yet exist?

As the domestic violence movement is beginning to pay attention to issues of



diversity and recognize the need for culturally appropriate interventions, it is important to investigate women's experience with one such existing program to find out which aspects are particularly helpful to women so that they may be modeled in subsequent programs. It is also important to examine how experiences with culturally specific programs differ from experiences with mainstream services to highlight the importance and usefulness of culturally appropriate programs. There has been a general call for additional research to aid in the development of culturally specific programs (Gregg et al., 1998; Peterson & Mañin, 1988). Gregg et al. (1999) have specifically called for the use of qualitative methods for such research indicating that these techniques are optimal for obtaining adequate understanding of culturally specific group interventions.

## METHODS

This study used qualitative methodology in order to achieve its research goals. A primary strength of qualitative inquiry is its capacity to allow for an exploration of research participants' interpretations of their experiences and the meanings they create from these experiences. This approach is also empowering to participants as it allows for individuals to tell their stories in their own words (Banyard & Miller, 1998). Therefore, the use of qualitative methods allowed for me to explore, in depth, women's experiences with Asha through an empowering mode of inquiry. Participants were afforded the opportunity to talk about their experiences and tell their own stories, in their own words.

A phenomenological approach was used in this research process. The main purpose of this approach is to understand the essence of lived experience of an individual or group of individuals. Individual interviews specifically are particularly useful for understanding individuals' perspectives and gathering their stories (Patton, 2002). With

this research I was seeking to understand the experiences of African American women who utilized the services of Asha Family Services, the only known program in the country that defines itself as a culturally specific domestic violence intervention targeting the African American community. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was most in line with the purpose of this study.

## Setting

### *What is Asha Family Services?*

Asha Family Services, located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the only culturally specific domestic violence intervention serving the African American community. Milwaukee itself is a mid-sized, midwestern city. Milwaukee County, in which the city of Milwaukee is located, is home to approximately 940,164 residents according to the 2000 Census. Twenty-five percent of the county's residents are African American, compared to 5.7% total in the state of Wisconsin.

Asha Family Services was founded in 1989 by its current Chief Executive Director, Ms. Antonia A. Vann. Asha Family Services defines itself as follows on their agency website:

“Asha Family Services, Inc. is a private, non-profit, spiritually-based agency whose goal through collaborative efforts is to provide comprehensive family violence and substance abuse intervention for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence that is culturally specific (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>; Annual reports 200-2002, 2002).”

Asha Family Services also defines itself as follows on their agency paperwork:

“Asha Family Services, Inc. is a community-based, private, non-profit, people of color-governed organization committed to providing effective family violence intervention and prevention for all families and persons affected by violence in their home. Specializing in skilled services specific to African American populations since 1989, our goal through collaborative efforts is to treat ills and facilitate healing and growth in families. Asha employs spiritual, holistic, and culturally specific treatment methods with the background, training and skill to provide treatment specific to many African American families.”

Asha further specifies that its services target high-risk populations (women, children, and men who are at or below poverty level residing in the city and county of Milwaukee) with the ability to provide culturally specific services and programming for many African American families (Asha Family Services, Inc., Annual Report, 2000-2001; Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

#### *Mission*

Asha Family Services’ Mission is as follows:

Asha believes in the preservation and strengthening of the African American family. To this end, we are committed to the provision of a spiritually-based, holistic and culturally responsive service designed to end violence against African American women and children specifically, families of other communities of color and all families in general. Our belief is that in order to adequately address family violence and promote healthy living, we must treat the abuser as well as the abused.

Asha Family Services also believes in the provision of a continuum of care, not only for the transformation, restoration and empowerment of injured families, but also for

a range of clientele including persons at high risk for HIV infection and other communicable diseases, mental health and substance abuse outpatients, and those incarcerated and transitioning back into the community. A healthy and vibrant community is a reflection of strong, healthy, vibrant, and resourceful families residing in it and Asha is committed to promoting this positive symbiotic relationship (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>; Annual Reports 2000-2001, 2002).

### *Philosophy*

Asha articulates its philosophy as follows:

Asha Family Services proceeds from the assumption that the total person – mind, body and spirit – must be recognized and attended to for restoration. Therefore, Asha's approach is holistic, meaning an individual is not addressed on the basis of a single issue, but by the unique combination of circumstances and needs that each presents (Vann, 2003).

### *Programs and Services*

Asha Family Services offers a variety of programs services at various points in time. Below is a complete list of all the programs and services they offer. What programs and services are offered at certain points is contingent upon funding that the agency receives during a particular time point.

#### *Programs for Women*

*Asha women of Color "Sister Circles"*. Since 1989, Asha has provided a safe space for survivors to exchange ideas and discuss their experiences. The group seeks to help to eliminate fears and foster feelings of friendship, respect, sisterhood and trust

between women of the same group ancestry. Sister Circle groups are active for women of color and those who wish to join them. Members may receive domestic abuse and sexual assault information and prevention, safety planning, intimate partner and sex related issues education, HIV/AIDS and other STDs education, information and referrals. Services are via peer-support and credentialed staff counseling. Sister Circle groups include groups for those who are post and currently incarcerated women via our Corrections Care Continuum. Groups are offered twice a week for 1½ hours each group session. Transportation is also provided (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>)

#### *Programs for Men*

*The Ujima men's educational program.* Since 1995, Asha has run a 24-session, non-traditional abuser treatment program which was developed by and for African American men. Its culturally specific curriculum was designed for Black males over the age of 17 who are having problems with inappropriate expressions of anger, conflict resolution, and physical violence towards a spouse or partner. Men are given domestic abuse and sexual assault information and education, information and education on intimate partner relationships and other sex related issues, HIV/AIDS and other STDs education, information and referral. There are day, evening and weekend groups (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>)

*The "Brother to Brother" fatherhood initiative.* This program serves as a stand-alone aftercare of Ujima. It is a resource designed for the self-development and relationship development, training and support for healing between African American

males, their women, children, families and community (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>)

*Brothers Against Domestic Violence.* Through this service Asha offers a bodyguard escort service and emotional support to help women feel safe while going through the process of obtaining a restraining order, court appearances, or any outing that the victim may feel unsafe (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

#### *Co-Gender Programs*

*Corrections Care Continuum (CCC).* Since 1990, Asha has provided comprehensive services to male and female offenders incarcerated in facilities around the state of Wisconsin. In-custody victim support groups are established in female prisons and transition case management services are provided for women re-entering the community. Family violence education groups are conducted regularly in prisons for men. Services are set up to support a smoother transition of these men who are re-entering the community. CCC also serves as a community-based after-care including AODA and mental health case management for ex-offenders who have completed treatment programs while in custody (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

#### *Programs for Children*

*Our Children Advocacy Project (OCAP).* Since 1990, Asha has provided services on site and at area schools. OCAP provides direct services, advocacy, and support for children who witness or experience domestic violence. OCAP's goals are to break the isolation of children who experience violence in the home, teach children and youth how

to protect themselves by developing safety and support systems, promote emotional and physical health as well as strengthen self-esteem (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

*Young Sisters support group.* This program uses a didactic/experimental approach to address the life management needs of the participants. It is designed to assist participants in the development of emotional competencies, alternatives to aggressive thinking strategies and anger management of females ages 13-17 with the primary focus on African American females (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

*Ujima Jr. for teens.* This 16 week group is an “alternative to aggression” course for African American males ages 13-17. The curriculum is designed to address emotional competence, including the expression, understanding and regulation of emotions such as anger, as well as alternative thinking strategies. Drugs, illegal behaviors, sex-related issues, HIV/AIDS and other STD education and referral, relationship issues, and abusive behaviors are addressed (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

#### *Services*

*SOAR Resource (Solutions & Options Applied with Respect).* Since 1998, Asha has provided services, including domestic abuse, mental health and substance abuse treatment, for Welfare to Work job seekers in Milwaukee county.

*Family and individual case management.* Since 1995, qualified family violence prevention advocates at Asha have provided intense case management, advocacy and referral services for families who need assistance in accessing a variety of community

services and supports. Services are provided both on-site and through home visits (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

*Substance abuse and mental health treatment services.* Since 1995, Asha has operated a community-based, state-licensed outpatient mental health and substance abuse treatment clinic that targets the African American community and specializes in family counseling regarding childhood and adult victimization, anger, grief and stress behaviors and the intersections between family abuses, mental health and substance abuse problems. Frequency and duration of sessions vary by individual need and services are offered on a sliding scale based on income (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

Asha also provides a number of other services including: pre/post partum depression screening by which assessment is applied for depression during and around the time of pregnancy and linkages enhanced to community-based intervention services for depression that are age and culturally specific for women of reproductive age; HIV/AIDS outreach and education provided by trained Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS) who actively seek and engage individuals within Milwaukee County who may be at high risk for HIV infection and other communicable diseases; OCAP parenting sessions for parents and child caregivers which utilizes a didactic/experiential approach for the enhancement of basic parenting skills and a strengths based approach to women and their families; TTY telephone information service for deaf and hearing impaired; computer classes for adults and children to train and educate them on current computer programs; and community education/training which provides inter-personal violence presentations for schools, churches, correctional facilities, social service agencies and



other organizations and businesses on the issues of family violence and working with African American populations (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

Asha served 5,099 clients in 2000 and 3,987 clients in 2001. At least 678 clients in 2000 and 845 clients in 2001 were women seeking services because of domestic violence (Asha Family Services, Inc., Annual Report, 2000-2001; Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>). Asha Family Services works primarily out of two sites located in close proximity to each other in the city of Milwaukee. One is the administrative office, which handles all administrative business and houses all staff related to such business. The other office, considered the “Customer Care” center, is the site from which the majority of client services are conducted.

#### *Setting Access*

I gained access into the site through the CEO and founder of the agency, and conducted a preliminary site visit with the agency. It was at this point that I met the majority of staff in the agency. I was welcomed into the agency and assured that I would have access to participants and programs as needed for the purposes of this research. An administrative agreement outlining these arrangements can be found in Appendix A. Access to this setting was relatively easy throughout the process of this research. I received assistance in obtaining respondents from agency staff, and was afforded space in the agency for recruitment and interviewing.

## Procedures

Multiple sources of data were used for this study, including archival analysis, interviews with agency leaders and staff, and interviews with survivors receiving agency services.

### *Research Question One*

In order to answer research question number one, “How does Asha define their culturally specific domestic violence intervention?” two data sources were utilized: archival analysis and interviews with agency leaders and staff.

#### *Archival Analysis*

A content analysis of archival data was conducted in order to get a better understanding of the agency. This involved the collection of agency paperwork related to the agency philosophy, mission, programs, and activities. Included in this were annual reports for years 2000-2001 and 2002, pamphlets, brochures, advertisements, program descriptions and website information. Some of this information was obtained during a preliminary site visit and examination of the agency’s website, and the remainder were received during subsequent visits to the agency. This paperwork was compiled and coded in respect to which of the following areas it contributed insight into: defining the agency itself, agency philosophy and mission, agency programs and services, culturally specific elements of the intervention and the agency’s funding sources. Culturally specific elements were identified by both what the agency itself identifies as culturally specific component of their intervention as well as what has been identified as culturally specific intervention components by the literature. This information was then used to describe the agency.

### *Key Staff and Leader Interviews*

Key staff members were interviewed in order to obtain some of this same information, as well as to gain their perceptions of women's utilization and experience with the agency.

*Sample.* Interviews were conducted with the Coordinator of Victims Services, for an administrative perspective, and two of Asha's women's advocates for a direct service provider perspective. One of these advocates was also the facilitator for a Sister Circle support group. The Coordinator of Victim's Services was selected because it is believed that her role is integral to women's programs at Asha. The decision to interview two women's advocates was made in order to incorporate the perspective of those who provide direct services to women at Asha, including running the support group. The Coordinator of Victim's Services had worked at the agency for approximately three years. Of the advocates, one had worked at the agency for approximately three years and the other, who facilitated the support group, had worked at the agency for over eleven years.

*Interview protocol.* These were in-depth, semi-structured interviews and general questions included: 1) Why do they think Asha Family Services was founded? 2) How do women come to receive services at Asha? 3) What services at Asha do female survivors utilize most frequently? 4) What would they identify as the culturally specific components of Asha's services? 5) How do they think women feel about their overall experiences at Asha? and 6) If they were to design their own culturally appropriate domestic violence intervention targeting the African American community, what things would they include? The staff interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

*Data analysis.* Two of these interviews were tape-recorded and one staff member preferred not to be tape-recorded. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and verified by the researcher. Handwritten notes were recorded and typed for the respondent who refused tape recording. The data were then sorted according to question for those interview items related to this research question. These question responses were then coded in respect to which of the following areas it contributed insight into: the agency itself, agency programs, agency philosophy, culturally specific elements of the intervention, agency's affiliations, as well as the agency's overall operation. This information, in addition to that obtained from the content analysis of archival, was used to describe the agency. A set of codes was generated through the first reading of interview transcripts. Using this list of codes, the transcripts were individually reviewed again to ensure that all material for each code was coded.

#### *Research Questions Two, Three, and Four*

Two sources of data were used in order to answer the remaining research questions: "What elements of African American women's experience at Asha Family Services have been most helpful to them;" "Do women identify culturally specific components as helpful and if so, which ones;" "For women who have a history of service involvement with mainstream services, what were their experiences with these agencies and how is their experience with Asha different from those experiences;" and "What culturally specific intervention components, if any, do survivors and staff identify as desirable that do not yet exist?" These sources were interviews with survivors who were receiving services and leader/staff interviews.

### *Survivor Interviews*

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with women who received survivor services from the agency to talk with them personally about their experiences with the agency.

*Sample.* A total of fourteen survivors who had received services at Asha were interviewed. At the time of the interviews respondents had had at least three service contacts with Asha and had received services from the agency for anywhere from one and a half months to five years. Survivors ranged in age from 25-55 years. Education level among respondents ranged from completion of 8<sup>th</sup> grade to completion of a Bachelor's degree. Of those respondents who indicated employment status they included one student, not working, one student working part time, one employed part time, four disabled and three unemployed. Respondents had at least two and as many as eleven children. Annual income levels among respondents ranged from under \$5000 to between \$35,000-49,999. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Demographics of Survivor Sample N = 14	
Age Mean = 40	25-55 years,
Annual Income	
Under \$5000	2
\$5000-9999	2
\$10000-14999	3
\$15000-24999	1
\$35000-49999	1
missing	5
Education Level	
Less than high school	3
High school graduate/GED	4
Trade school	1
Bachelor's degree	1
missing	5
Employment Status	
Student, not working	1
Student, working part time	1
Employed, part time	1
Disabled	4
Unemployed	3
missing	4
Number of Children 39 years	2-11, ages 1-
Length of Involvement with Asha	
6 months or less	7
6 months – two years	4
over two years	3

*Sample Recruitment.* Some survivors were recruited through conversations with the advocates who worked with women in the agency. Advocates were asked to identify women who were currently receiving survivor services from Asha. Of these women, advocates were asked to identify those who utilized multiple services at the agency, such as advocacy, support group, the children's program, alcohol or drug treatment services, and/or mental health services and those they believe have also received such services

from mainstream agencies. The purpose of these different requirements was to get a diversity of women's experiences with the agency. Advocates supplied lists of their most recent clients and an attendance roster from a recent support group. Advocates were able to identify some women who were receiving multiple services but were unable to identify which women had received domestic violence services from another agency. Lists generated by the advocates were short, including only seven women. I attempted calling each of these women in order to solicit their participation. The results of these attempted contacts were as follows: one woman was in the hospital at the time that I placed a call to her home, I spoke with her mother who indicated that the woman should be home by the end of the week but would not be in a condition to talk; one woman's name was given without a phone number so could not be contacted; a third woman listed was not African American and thus did not qualify; I placed a call to reach the fourth woman but was told by a woman who answered the phone that the woman I was trying to reach no longer lived there and that she did not know where this woman was; a fifth woman self-identified as a batterer, not a survivor, and thus did not qualify; the sixth woman on the list was successfully interviewed; the seventh woman agreed to participate but was leaving to go out of town the day that I reached her and would not be back during my stay in Milwaukee. In addition, I also attempted calling women listed on the support group attendance roster, which was a total of fourteen women. Seven of the women on the support group attendance roster resided in a residential substance abuse treatment home to which I went in person to solicit participation. I recruited three of these seven women and plus three others temporarily residing in the shelter. Of the other seven women listed on the support group attendance roster, one was the woman who self-

identified previously as a batterer, one was not African American and thus did not qualify, three did not have phone numbers listed for contact and the remaining two I did reach and interview. To those women who were able to be reached by these means I explained to them the project purpose, proposed length of the interview (1½ hours), and payment (\$20 for completed interview). It was explained to the women that their decision whether or not to participate would not affect the services they were receiving from Asha Family Services. They were then asked whether they wished to participate. Nine of the fourteen survivors were recruited through the above means. Overall, all women who were successfully reached by these means agreed to participate in the study. No one refused. The one woman who was reached but leaving town that day had agreed to participate but we could not schedule a time during my visit (which was my last) in light of her departure to conduct the interview. She did indicate that if I needed to come back at some point to conduct more interviews, I could contact her. Survivors were also recruited through support group meetings at the agency. Five additional woman were recruited through this means. During the time frame that I obtained my sample, the support group was the main means by which survivors were obtaining services from the agency. Considering that none of the women asked refused participation and most of the survivors in this sample were support group attendees (obtained from support group attendance rosters and solicitation during support groups) this sample was indeed representative of those survivors receiving services from Asha during the time of this data collection.



For women who agreed to participate, interviews were conducted with them at a time and place they identified as most comfortable, convenient and safe for them. As a result, interviews were conducted at Asha and at women's homes and temporary shelters.

*Interview Protocol.* These in-depth, semi-structured interviews included such question as: 1) How did women come to receive services at Asha? 2) What specific programs do women participate in at Asha? 3) What would they identify as the culturally specific components of Asha's services? 4) How do women feel about the culturally specific components of Asha's services? 5) Have women received services from other domestic violence programs? 6) How do women feel about their overall experiences with Asha? and 7) Do women have additional suggestions for the development of culturally appropriate domestic violence programs targeting the African American community? The survivor interview protocol can be found in Appendix C. All interviews were audiotaped for subsequent analysis and consent for doing so was received from participants prior to the interview's commencement. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and verified.

#### *Key Staff and Leader Interviews*

Similar information gathered from staff interviews was the second source of data for addressing research questions two and four. Interview questions were also included that address these research question (see Appendix B, questions 2, 3, 10, & 11). Staff/leader interviews were used to secure more than one perspective on these issues and to reinforce or enhance survivor information.

## *Data Analysis*

Analysis of these questions involved both cross case and within case data analysis.

*Cross-case analysis.* A cross-case analysis approach was used to address research question numbers two, three and four, which address which elements of women's experiences of the agency they found most helpful, which aspects of the culturally appropriate services offered by Asha women found helpful, how women's experiences with Asha related to their experiences with mainstream agencies and what culturally specific intervention components, if any, survivors and staff identified as desirable that do not yet exist. Cross-case analysis is a means of grouping answers from different people to common questions or analyzing different perspectives on a particular issue (Patton, 2002). For research question number two, the coding process utilized a combination of emergent and literature-guided approach. Prior to starting data analysis, potential culturally specific components of the intervention were identified through the content analysis of agency paperwork, the staff interviews and the literature review and a preliminary coding scheme was developed. The data were first coded for predetermined codes and any emergent codes and problems with the coding scheme were noted. The coding scheme was then revised and the data was recoded for the emergent and changed themes. This process allowed me to identify which elements, across women and staff, were identified as being the helpful to them.

For research question number three, only emergent coding was utilized as there were no pre-determined notions of how women would relate their experiences with Asha to mainstream services. A set of codes was generated through the first reading of

interview transcripts. The coding scheme was then reviewed and revised. Using this list of codes the transcripts were again individually coded using the final coding scheme.

To address research question number four, only emergent coding was utilized as there were no pre-determined notions of what survivors or staff/leaders would identify as useful but non-existent. Since no elements were identified as non-existent and desirable no re-coding coding or revisions of coding schemes were necessary for this question.

Throughout the process of analysis, I read each interview transcript with the coding of each of these three research questions, noted emergent themes and revived these themes to identify larger meta-themes. I identified common ideas and larger patterns that seemed to be consistent across cases for each of these questions. Emergent themes for each question were then discussed with a committee member with extensive knowledge of qualitative methods. This committee member reviewed codes and relevant quotes and provided feedback, differences of opinion were discussed, and when necessary, codes were redefined and renamed. A PSY 490 student was then used to review the revised coding scheme. Her insights were also incorporated and revisions made accordingly. Once a final coding scheme was reached after this process, I then went back and recoded each individual interview with this final coding scheme.

*Within-Case Analysis.* A within-case level analysis was used to explore the question of how women's experiences with Asha differed from their experiences with mainstream services. A within-case level analysis is often used for the purposes of exploring, describing, and explaining individual case experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were sorted and compiled according to question for those interview items related to women's experiences with mainstream agencies. This allowed me to

explore each woman's individual story of her experiences with mainstream services and how this related to her experiences of receiving services at Asha. Each woman's answers to these questions were explored. For each individual woman who indicates having had experience with mainstream agencies, I described her experience utilizing her story, creating a within-case summary. These individual within-case summaries were reviewed by the above-mentioned qualitative committee member who provided feedback and I made revisions accordingly. My research assistant (the PSY 490 student) also created within-case summaries for each of these participants. I compared my within-case summaries with those of my research assistant for verification. Our stories were very consistent. These within case summaries were summarized and common patterns of stories emerging across participants were identified and documented. This summary and common themes were also reviewed by the above mentioned qualitative committee member.

#### *Data Collection Timeline*

In order to collect this data three weeklong site visits at the agency were conducted. During the first visit, I observed agency activities and women's support groups solely for the purpose of getting a feel for the agency. In addition, I documented culturally specific features of the agency setting, which included cultural artwork or posters on the walls, Afrocentric artifacts on tables and reading materials portraying African American interests. Staff interviews were also conducted during this first visit with the agency. At this time I began a search for survivors to interview at the following visit. During the second and third visits, interviews were conducted with survivors.

### *Protection of the Rights of Research Participants*

All necessary procedures were taken in order to ensure the protection of informants. UCRIHS approval was received from Michigan State University. A signed administrative agreement with Asha's CEO was obtained. In addition, informed consent was obtained from all participants by my reading over the consent form with participants and having them sign a consent form, indicating their understanding of the project purpose and their agreement to participate. I assured survivors' confidentiality by keeping the names of survivors separate from their taped interviews and interview transcripts. In addition, in presenting the findings of this research, fictitious names are used for the survivors who participated. Every effort was made to assure confidentiality of staff, although it is acknowledged that since this is a small organization and only a small number of staff were interviewed, complete confidentiality was not guaranteed. Also, the real identities of staff are not used in the write-up of these findings. All information was securely stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked research office throughout the process of this research.

### *Authentication*

Authentication is a process by which one ensures that participant voices are represented accurately and fairly in the presentation of results. Authentication of these qualitative results took place in a number of ways. First, throughout the data analysis process emergent trends and patterns in the data were discussed with a committee member well versed in qualitative research methods (as described above). Second, a PSY 490 student was enlisted for the process of verification. This student was first trained in qualitative methodology and went through the interviews as well. She independently

coded data as well and gave assessments of her interpretations of women's experiences (as described above). Notes were compared across persons for confirmation of themes and ideas, and adjustments were made accordingly (as described above). Afterwards, a "member check" session was conducted to validate the interpretations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Results from research question two and three were presented in a lay reader friendly format to a small group (5 women) of survivors who were receiving services from Asha for feedback. This included one of the survivors who was previously interviewed for this study. Attempts were made to contact all women who agreed, at the time of their interview, to a follow-up contact via the contact numbers they had at the time of the interview. However, none of these women could be reached by this means for participation in this member check session. These five women were asked to give feedback in reference to whether these results reflected their experience with Asha and when applicable, with mainstream agencies. They were also asked whether they disagreed with any of the results that were presented to them. These women indicated that these results were accurate reflections of their experiences and elaborated on some of the results presented by relating some of their personal experiences with Asha and with mainstream agencies. Consequently, there was convergence between the experiences of the survivors participating in the "member check" session and the interpretations and finding from this study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), a "member check" is the most important technique for establishing credibility. Women were given \$10 for participation in this session and snacks were provided.

Staff interview transcripts were given to them for verification and feedback if the staff so desired to give it. Each staff member received a copy of their interview transcript

(notes) along with a note from me indicating that they were free to review the transcripts and contact me if they wished to provide feedback, add to or elaborate on anything they discussed at the time of the interview. I provided them with contact numbers and my e-mail address.

### *Personal Relationship with Research Participants*

I had the opportunity to interact with a majority of the staff during my time at the agency and worked to keep a good rapport with them in order to continue my welcome at the site. I conversed with staff, dined with them and enjoyed leisure activities with them. I also interacted in a casual way with some of those receiving services at the agency. Although this type of relationship existed with informants I was still able to be objective in data collection for several reasons. First, I was not directly invested in the agency. Although I was glad that such a service existed for African American women in the Milwaukee community and that the need for culturally specific intervention was being validated in at least some area of the country, I did not have a vested interest in glamorizing the agency for reputation sake. I did not work at the agency so my personal economic welfare was not at stake. Also, my purpose at the agency was made known to agency staff as well as women receiving services whom I interviewed or observed in groups or meetings. Finally, I believed that the best way for African American intimate partner violence survivors, Asha Family Services, domestic violence agencies, researchers, domestic violence advocates, people wishing to design and implement culturally specific domestic violence interventions, and myself to benefit from the time and work at Asha was to give an honest assessment of the agency and the experiences of the women who receive services there.

### *Preliminary Biases and Suppositions*

In order to do this work justice I had to admit first to my own biases and suppositions, which undoubtedly influenced my approach to this research and my reading of the data that resulted from this investigation. I have engaged in several activities over the years that have influenced the way I see and think about the issue of culturally appropriate interventions and domestic violence.

First, I have been involved in the domestic violence movement for over eight years in various capacities. This includes but is not limited to volunteering at domestic violence shelters, working crisis lines, serving as an advocate for survivors, interviewing survivors, training advocates, researching the issue, and working with a state coalition. Throughout this work I have had the opportunity to interact with survivors as well as those who work with survivors. Throughout this I have heard the dissatisfaction of African American women, as well as other women of Color, who have received domestic violence services from mainstream agencies.

I have also engaged in reading literature that discusses the shortcomings of mainstream interventions in relation to their serving women of Color, and African American women in particular. I have read the works of numerous prominent researchers and theorists, particularly in the area of addressing domestic violence in the African American community, call for culturally appropriate interventions. I have also read literature addressing the importance of culturally appropriate interventions and their successes, in various capacities.

I have conducted focus groups and interviews with African American female survivors that gave me insight into their experiences as well as their needs. I have talked



with them extensively about their experiences with mainstream services as well as how shelters have fallen short of meeting their culturally specific needs and what types of services they would like to see available to them. Some of these things are consistent with the services that Asha offers.

I have also had extensive interaction with survivors and workers at the numerous family violence related conferences that I have attended over the years, some specific to addressing domestic violence within the African American community and other communities of Color. At these conferences I have heard survivors as well as prominent researchers and activists talk about the shortcomings of mainstream interventions and call for better services to meet the needs of survivors of Color.

Over the past few years I have also had considerable involvement with the National Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). I have attended many of their conferences and meetings, helped them conduct focus groups, as well as interacted in various capacities with numerous members of their steering committee. In addition, I have been active with the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence Women of Color Task Force where I have had the opportunity to communicate with many women of Color working in mainstream domestic violence and sexual assault agencies. Through these interactions I have again heard many of the sentiments expressed above.

As a result of my engagement in these various capacities I believe certain things. I believe that most mainstream domestic violence interventions do not adequately meet the needs of African American women, as well as other women of Color. I believe that women of Color do have culturally specific needs and that interventions need to be

designed to meet these needs. I also believe that culturally specific interventions are appropriate and necessary in order to adequately serve women of Color who are survivors of intimate partner violence. In addition, I believe that more research needs to be done to explore these culturally specific needs so that the results can be incorporated into the development of these interventions. I also feel that more research needs to be done on existing culturally specific interventions to examine what they are doing and how they are doing it.

## RESULTS

### **Research Question Number One: How does Asha define their culturally specific domestic violence intervention?**

#### **A Culturally Specific Domestic Violence Intervention**

Generally speaking, Asha Family Services defines itself as a culturally specific domestic violence intervention which targets the African American community.

*“Asha Family Services, Inc. is a private, non-profit, spiritually-based agency whose goal through collaborative efforts is to provide comprehensive family violence and substance abuse intervention for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence that is culturally specific.”* (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>; Annual reports 200-2002, 2002)

*“Specializing in skilled services specific to African American populations since 1989, our goal through collaborative efforts is to treat ills and facilitate healing and growth in families. Asha employs spiritual, holistic, and culturally specific treatment methods with the background, training and skill to provide treatment specific to many African American families.”*

*“Asha believes in the preservation and strengthening of the African American family. To this end, we are committed to the provision of a spiritually-based, holistic and culturally responsive service designed to end violence against African American women and children specifically, families of other communities of color and all families in general.”*

(Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>; Annual Reports 200-2001, 2002)

### Culturally Specific Components

Asha Family Services identifies, by agency literature and staff accounts, a number of culturally specific components of its program. These include (1) Afro-centric curriculum, (2) Afro-centric environment, (3) family centered approach, (4) holistic approach, (5) representative staff and board, and (6) spiritually based approach.

#### *Afro-centric Curriculum*

Staff members at Asha identified their curriculum as culturally specific in that the issues covered in groups and programs tended to center around African American culture, lifestyles and experiences. This includes discussion of African American history and culture and the ways in which various social ills differentially impact the African American community including domestic violence, substance abuse problems, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*Staff #1: I think um...the curriculum... When, I say culturally specific, I think it's more or less, um, based on...our culture and how...and how our culture...relates to, you know, like lifestyles and...and how...you know, how we came about, you know, as a people...slavery...you know, to me, all of that plays a part in the services that you give. All of that plays a part and a lot of times...in the groups and...in the conference sessions,*

*we talked about that. You know, we talked about um...family...family lifestyles and family issues and you know, how you came up...you know, how you were brought up as a child because I...I think that has a lot to do with how you...how you come out, you know, and the decisions that you make...(p.13)*

*Staff #2: Well, our batterer's treatment program is culturally specific for the men because they get the Afro-American men that's abusers, you know. So we talk to them about.... we talk to them about the black culture. How black men are, you know, are treating...to care about women more, you know? More so than, you know, beating women, you know, so they...they talk to them about more on that realm of things. You know...and most of the men that come to the group they really love it you know? Because that's what we give them. We give them that history, you know, of Black Americans, Afro-American's, you know? Where they come from so they know, you know...you know...uh...we not really abusive people. It's a learned behavior, it's not nothing you, you was brought up through the years, you know? It's a learned behavior so you learn that to, yourself, you know? So if it's learned then it can be unlearned. (p.6)*

#### *Afro-centric Environment*

Both staff and agency literature emphasized the importance of the environment of Asha being Afro-centric. This manifests itself in two ways, first, the agency is located in a predominantly African American area of the city, second, the environment inside the agency is a reflection of African American culture. During my time at the agency I observed many things in the environment which would characterize the space within this agency as Afro-centric, this included: Afro-centric art on the walls; photographs of Black women, children and men hanging on the walls; Afro-centric artifacts on shelves and

tables; educational and ad campaign posters depicting Black women, men, children and families; agency literature and program brochures depicting Black women, children, men and families; books on bookshelves by African American writers, and; popular African American culture magazines resting on tables (field observation, 2003).

*“One of the first things you should consider is the physical location and the environment where participants will come for services. Ask yourself the following questions: Is your agency located within the target group’s community...Is the art or other information on the walls of the office reflective of your clientele?” (Vann, 2003)*

*Staff #1: Because to come in and see yourself...They say that [when] a person come in for services they have to see themselves and then it goes back to that comfort level too and then [when you] come in for services, you want to feel like you’re welcome and you want to feel like you’re comfortable...Uh-huh. We...we...we were talking about that yesterday, you know, just being able to go somewhere and feel comfortable.*

*That’s...that’s very important. When you’re dealing with somebody who, you know, who’s been in a domestic violence situation and you know...that’s...that’s very important.*  
(p.21)

*Staff #2: Well, people walk in the door and...and they smile at it or some people walk in the door and say yeah, this is a culturally specific, culturally specific agency, you know? Because they see it surrounds them so they know that’s what we all about...Uh-huh, yeah, uh-huh. It’s just like a family setting, you know. That’s what the family’s all about. Just like a family when you’re in your home and you know how you want your family setting to be so it’s the same thing just how you want your agency setting to be. (p.14-15)*

### *Family Centered Approach*

Asha Family Services “believes in the preservation and strengthening of the African American family” as indicated in their mission statement. To this end they provide services to each individual member of the family who wishes to stay together in the aftermath of family violence. Children may participate in the children’s program, survivors may participate in the Sister Circle group and other applicable services and perpetrators may participate in the Ujima Men’s Program and other applicable services. Staff reflected on the importance of this component and why it is culturally specific.

Staff #1: *Because, I mean...I think in a lot of the other, you know, I’m just saying that I believe that in a lot of cultures, it’s just leave, you know, leave. If you’re in a violent situation you leave but a lot of...a lot of the women don’t want to leave. They want to learn how to work through that...through that family component. You know, a lot...a lot of the women don’t want to leave and I think taking that, working with the whole family. It is what, what you need to do, you know? If...if...if the whole family is willing to work, you know? If the family is willing to work at it, though...Because I think there’s with African-American families...I just...I just think our history plays so much.... you know, a big part. You know? I’m not saying...making excuses, you know, or acceptance for domestic violence but it’s...it’s...I think a lot of...a lot of people feel like, you know, we’ve already been through so much, you know? ...You know, a lot...a lot of the women...a lot of the women feel guilty, you know? There’s so much guilt and I think it’s because a lot of the women feel like, in this society, the African-American male is already being put down so she...she...she feels like to, to almost get on, you know, get on the band wagon that’s going to put him down even farther, you know?...(p.16-17)*

### *Holistic Approach*

Asha believes that “healing requires healing all parts of one’s life” (Annual Reports 2000-2001, 2002). Through conversations with staff at the agency they believe that domestic violence is just the root of many women’s problems and that there are multiple problems that stem from that. This is why they offer multiple programs and services in addition to those that specifically address domestic violence including mental health services and substance abuse treatment services (personal communication, 2003). Staff address why this is particularly important for the African American community.

Staff #2: *Uh, yeah, yeah. It is, for one thing we have...look at mental health, okay. For one thing, how we...uh...like I was saying history. How we let fears control our life. And our fear...With Black Americans, the same thing like history. How we grew up with abuse and we grew up with uh...sexual abuse, we've been knocked around. We've been put down. We've been taught, I mean all our lives...even by our parents, you know being through abuse and witnessing abuse. I mean, that brings on the same thing as saying that some people have so much trauma in their lives...they traumatized...that we have to handle that part too so that's coming with the mental health part...And the AOD part, whew, lord. AODA part, it's like, that...okay, like...fear, well fear causes people to get on drugs, you know. Fear causes the people to get on alcohol. So we had to provide all these services to help them with that so I guess all of it...the whole thing...encompass the whole...the whole thing for Afro-American people...(p.7-8)*

### *Representative Staff and Board*

Asha believes the following:

*“It is essential for providers who serve a large minority population to assure that their staff reflect those they serve. This is just as important for the governing body and administration of the agency who will set policy for these folks. The organizational leadership must actively seek out and recruit staff and Board members who are able to represent authentic realities of clients and their varying needs. Without this understanding and input, programs cannot begin to create culturally appropriate responses.” (Vann, 2003)*

As a result, the majority of staff members employed at Asha Family Services and the entire Board consist of African American individuals. Staff again reflected on the importance of this component.

Staff #1: *...so to be able to come to somebody and identify with somebody that's...that means a lot. You know? That means a lot. And when you have the different races, you...you have to...you have to understand the background of that culture because if you don't, I'm not going to reach you... You know? I'm not going to reach you. You know? Because it's...it's...it's different levels of respect. You know? There's...it's just...it's just so much understanding that culture. (p.14)*

Staff #2: *Well the thing, like I said before, uh, we know, we know more of they needs because we have the same back ground. Know, women know...like Afro-American women know what most Afro women, Afro-American women want, you know? What we want to see this person be, you know? And like the men, you know...you know, we want to make you a better person. We want to talk to you about what you're doing. You know, how you're hurting our Afro-American women...(p.14)*



### *Spiritually Based Approach*

Asha Family Services takes a spiritually based approach to the provision of their services because they believe as follows:

*“Religion plays heavily in the lives of many African American. Service providers must support and make space for women who rely on religious and spiritual practices.”* (Vann, 2003)

Asha Family Services does not promote a specific religious doctrine but incorporates spirituality by such actions as having prayer upon the conclusion of a group and hiring non-denominational ministers to run some of the support groups and provide spiritual guidance and advocacy (personal communication, 2003).

### *Other Culturally Specific Components*

Asha encompasses other culturally specific components as identified in the literature although they do not specifically address these as such in their literature and reports from staff.

### *Developed in Collaboration With the Target Population and Relevant Stakeholders*

Asha Family Services was founded in 1989 by its Executive Director, an African American woman who is a survivor of intimate partner violence (Asha Family Services, Inc., Website, <http://www.Ashafamilyservices.com>).

### *Uses Channels of Dissemination Which Will Successfully Reach the Target Population*

Asha Family Services engaged in an “It’s Your Business” campaign which is a culturally specific domestic violence prevention/intervention campaign developed by the Family Violence Prevention Fund to target the African American community. Through

this campaign they have advertised their agency via culturally specific posters, fliers, ads on buses and billboards and radio announcements.

### *Uses Language Familiar to the Target Population*

English is the primary language of most African Americans, therefore, language is not the same issue here as it would be for those who speak a foreign language.

However, African American staff would be more familiar with the *slang* terms and language that may be used at times among African Americans.

Asha Family Services also incorporates other components that they feel are important to working within communities of Color. These include woman-defined advocacy where women identify the priorities and needs, respectful interaction with clients, effectively responding to cultural dynamics, understanding that African American women may engage in differing helpseeking behaviors than their White counterparts and understanding how mental health problems manifest themselves among African Americans (Vann, 2003).

In sum, Asha Family Services defines itself as a culturally specific domestic violence agency which targets the African American community. They are very specific in their literature in identifying how they seek to make their services culturally specific. Staff accounts of the culturally specific services that Asha provides are consistent with this literature (see table 3).

<b>Table 3: Culturally Specific Components of Asha</b>		
<b>Component</b>	<b>Supported by Literature</b>	<b>Supported by Staff Account</b>
Afro-centric Curriculum		<b>X</b>
Afro-centric Environment	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Family Centered Approach	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Holistic Approach	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Representative Staff and Board	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Spiritually Based Approach	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Developed in collaboration with target population and relevant stakeholders	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Uses channels of dissemination which will successfully reach the target population		<b>X</b>
Uses language familiar to target population		<b>X</b>

**Research Question Number Two: What elements of African American women's experiences at Asha Family Services have been most helpful to them?**

All fourteen of the respondents interviewed identified elements of their experiences with Asha Family Services that they found to be helpful. There were also a number of things that women identified as potentially helpful to them, meaning that they had not yet utilized that particular aspect of Asha's services but planned on using it in the future or just found it helpful to know that Asha had certain things available to them in case they needed to use them in the future. Women also identified aspects of Asha's services which they had not used themselves but indicated that it was helpful that these things existed so that others in the African American community who needed them could benefit. In summary, women identified a great number of things about Asha family services that they found helpful to themselves and to others in their community. These are all presented in the following.

Overall, survivors identified six general things that they found helpful about what is offered at Asha Family Services. These included (1) emotional support, (2) having staff who have “been there”, (3) practical assistance, (4) empowering practices, (5) outreach, and (6) culturally specific components (see Table 4).

Table # 4 – Elements of Asha That Survivors Find Helpful					
Emotional Support (N=14)	Having Staff Who Have “Been There” (N=11)	Practical Assistance (N=12)	Empowering Practices (N=11)	Culturally Specific Components (N=14)	Outreach (N=7)
<b>Support Group Design and Content (N=14, STAFF #1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides an outlet for discussing problems/venting</li> <li>Provides context for “being real”</li> <li>Group offers activities besides discussing dv</li> <li>Confidentiality</li> <li>Provides nonjudgmental and supportive environment</li> <li>Provides comfortable, welcoming environment</li> </ul> <b>Support Group Composition and Interaction (N=11, STAFF #1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides context for identifying with other survivors</li> <li>Hugs upon dismissal of group</li> <li>Group members exchange phone numbers</li> <li>Others in group are African Am.</li> </ul> <b>Staff (N=10)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asha staff talk with and</li> </ul>	Asha staff understand her/Survivors able to relate to staff (N=9) <p>Facilitator discusses her experience/Staff open regarding her experience (N=5)</p> <p>Group facilitators have experienced domestic violence (N=9)</p> <p>Staff serve as role models (N=4)</p> <p>Some staff have been incarcerated (N=3)</p>	Asha provides resources directly (N=4) <p>Asha helps survivors obtain community resources (N=8)</p> <p>Asha provides transportation to obtain resources (N=6)</p> <p>Resources provided are specific to survivors’ unique needs (N=6)</p>	Enables women to leave abusive relationships (N=2) <p>Provides context to help women build their emotional strength (N=6)</p> <p>Provides context in which to assist women to build their self-esteem/ self-worth/ confidence (N=8)</p> <p>Helps women to not be afraid anymore (N=2)</p> <p>Helps women</p>	Family centered approach (N=10) <p>Prayer/Spirituality /Spiritually based approach (N=14)</p> <p>Designed for African Americans (N=8)</p> <p>African American staff (N=14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survivors able to relate better to African American staff</li> <li>Provides employment opportunities for African American women</li> </ul> <p>Curriculum is Afro-centric (N=13)</p>	

<p>listen to survivors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitator shows love and care to participants</li> <li>Staff provide encouragement</li> <li>Staff let you go at your own pace</li> </ul> <p><b>Agency (N=14)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing Asha is there for her</li> <li>Provides support for overcoming addiction</li> </ul>			<p><b>to understand why they stay (N=2)</b></p> <p>Teaches how to recognize (first) signs of abuse (N=8)</p> <p>Teaches women that they don't have to tolerate abuse (N=6)</p> <p>Teaches accountability (N=2)</p>	<p><b>Afro-centric environment (N=10)</b></p> <p><b>Holistic approach (N=10)</b></p>	
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Emotional Support (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

All of the survivors identified ways in which Asha Family Services provided them with much needed emotional support. For all of them this included aspects of the support group. For some it also included feelings about the staff and the agency.

*Support Group Design and Content (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

Survivors identified a number of elements of the support group design and content that they found to be emotionally supportive. These included (i) provides an outlet for discussing problems/venting, (ii) provides context in which survivors can “be real,” (iii) group offers activities besides discussing domestic violence, (iv) confidentiality, (v) provides a nonjudgmental and supportive environment, and (vi) provides comfortable, welcoming environment.

*An outlet for discussing problems/venting (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

For many survivors, the group helped them to discuss problems that they were dealing with in their lives. The group was an outlet for them. It was a place where they could go and vent about their current circumstances.

*#02: ...I would just go, you know, go there sometime so I can ease my mind and they really helped me out a lot. I would just go there and talk about certain things and get it off my mind... (p.2)*

*#04: Since, once I learned to open up, see, and that's why ASHA really helped me, because I was just ho-, bottling everything inside, you know, and I wouldn't, I would just sit there. I wouldn't say how I feel, you know...Truly didn't even know*

*how I felt, because this was so many years I didn't have a choice of my feelings, you know. It didn't matter how I felt...You know. So they taught me to open up and they let me know that my feelings do count...You know, and by talking those things, you know, I mean, really that, that helped me a hell of a lot because, I mean, I would just hold everything in until I explode. And it'd be a real big mess, if I'd explode...You know, so (Laughs) for me, talking things out, all different type of things, you know...(p.15-18)*

*#10: ...you get to talk about your problems and uh to get it off you, you don't keep it inside. That's helping me and helping me to get stronger... (p.2)*

*#13: Umm...what's been most helpful for me was knowing that I had a place that I could go to that I was able to talk and feel comfortable talking about my past abuse... (p.2)*

*Provides context in which survivors can "be real" (#03, 05, 08)*

There were a few survivors who indicated that they found it helpful that the group provided a context in which they could feel as though they could "be real" in terms of discussing their experiences. They felt as though they were able to speak candidly in the group about personal issues. They felt as though they could be open and honest and did not need to minimize or sugar coat what they had been through.

*#03: Um, (Pause) hmm, hmm, (Pause) I guess, if I'm understanding your question correctly, I guess the fact that, you know, we can be real, and just put our stuff on the table. (p.36)*

*#05: I can just be honest with myself...And I feel that if a lot of people, you know, that's, that's basically probably where I get a lot of strength from, with Asha's*



*support group, is because, you know, I don't have to fake it. You know, I can just go there and put it out there and just be myself and be honest with myself, and if I'm honest with myself, you know, I can overcome a lot of obstacles and situations that I might be going through, because, you know, I don't have to hold back... You know, I can just tell it like it is. This is how it is. Because, you know, it's other women, maybe 3, 4 more, you know, that been went through the same thing, so I don't feel bad... (p.25)*

*Group offers activities besides discussing domestic violence (#01, 02, 03, 05, 08)*

For some survivors they found it helpful that the group did not just sit around and discuss domestic violence all of the time. The group also offered other activities on occasion including games, written exercises, potlucks, movie viewing and other activities that women enjoyed participating in.

*#01: So we used to do this ball, they got a ball at ASHA, if you're angry or upset, you let them, let them know how you feel. And we used to play with that ball all the time. (p.11)*

*#02: ...But sometimes we have potlucks at Asha and eat so and [Jane] 'll show a spiritual movie, like the plays that be at um...the plays that be down at um Riverside theater, the spiritual, spiritual plays, she'll get 'em and bring 'em in and show it. (p.13)*

*#03: ...but when I watched the tape, and the tape, you know, showed abuse in another light, you know, in another form, you know, and it was a comedy type thing, like it's, this is not just, you come in here and you sit down, and you know,*

*you have a meeting and everybody talks. You know, once I realized that it wasn't really like that, you know, it was like, I liked that. (p.38)*

*Confidentiality (#06, 13, 14)*

Women found it helpful that within the group was a rule of confidentiality. This helped women to feel more comfortable and safer to discuss their experiences.

*#06: Because they, that's, I mean that's like um, you can maybe, you know, once you like going to any of the meetings or something that they have, and you get to know the staff and they get to know you, you can really sit down and talk to them and, and it's, uh, being in confidentiality and that uh, they can feel where you're coming from. (p.9)*

*#14: ...ASHA has been really instrumental for me. You know it's been good for me because at least I know that I can go there to those groups and whatever I say there, stays there. You know and especially with the facilitators...you know, you cannot stop women from carryin' ...talking, but most of the women that come there they leave whatever they say or hear there, they leave it there. And that's, that's a safety issue for abusive, for people who have been abused because you don't ever know who you're talkin' to. You know...and it makes it kind a hard. If I talk to you and walk out the door...and meet your ex-mate on the corner, not knowing that he was your mate, I could be ridin' the bus with him and say you know I was talkin' to this lady today, and she told me...and then...well if you saw me comin' from this direction, this would give him a reason to know where you, in the vicinity, that you were in this area, and that's not healthy. That's very unhealthy for especially people who have stalkers.(p.1)*

*Provides nonjudgmental and supportive environment (#01, 04, 05, 07, 08, 11, 12, 13, 14, STAFF #1)*

For some it was particularly helpful that the group provided a non-judgmental environment where they could receive support and encouragement from other group members. This helped women to feel that they would not be blamed for or viewed negatively for having experienced being in an abusive relationship. Having this non-judgmental and supportive environment helped women to feel safe and free to discuss their abusive experiences.

*#05: ...And don't have to worry about nobody judging me...or saying she was stupid, she, how could she take, you know, all of that for so many years, and this and the other...you know, because it's women that done been in abusive relationships for 25, 30 years. You know, people be like, how could, how could you be in it that long? ...It's hard to get out. You know, being able to talk about things like that without nobody judging you...is very helpful to me...I know I can always go there and release it and it'll be acceptable, and I can receive some positive, and structured feedback, you know, without being degraded and just kicked. You know, and I, I be needing that. (p.26-27)*

*#08: What I hear, a lot of it be like positive feedback and stuff. People trying to help other people... (p.8)*

*#11: ...But they listen and they don't judge us... (p.9)*

*#12: ...A woman need that, you know, that support. Asha have it, have that nice support. (p.10)*

#13: ...it's been support, very supportive... (p.1)

*Provides comfortable, welcoming environment (#03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 12, 13, 14, STAFF #1)*

Survivors identified as helpful the fact that they were able to feel comfortable and welcomed in the group. They identified feeling comfortable and welcome as important to their being able to express themselves in the group context.

#04: *And, and it's somewhere that I feel comfortable, you know...And that's, that's a lot, that got a lot to do with it...You know. If you're not comfortable with what's around you...You know you won't um, you won't open up, and you won't share, and you won't be comfortable enough to, you know, get the things out that you need to get out to keep you strong...to keep you from falling back into your old way of living or feeling that you don't deserve anything better than what, and then just settle for anything, you know... (p. 5-6)*

#07: *I guess um...being able to share my experiences from my past. Um...feeling safe when I share my experiences, you know? Knowing that whatever I say won't be used to...against me or um...or...or talked about behind my back, you know? Um...I guess that it's like when they say sister circle, it's like sisters for real...So um...that...that makes me feel good because I used to be one who couldn't communicate. I didn't like to share my experiences 'cause I was always afraid of what that person may think of me and I feel comfortable, I can just go in, let my hair down, take off my shoes and you know? (p.4)*

#08: *Yeah, because some time they can tell...they can tell when you not um...doing...something else is on your mind when they come around to you*

*whatever...if you don't want to talk that you know it's open whenever you ready to talk or if you want to write it down on a piece of paper. Whatever makes you feel comfortable so they try to do what's comfortable for the person. They don't want to just embarrass you or whatever so...I like that part of it...(p.14)*

*#12: ...you just welcome there, you belongs there, you know... (p.3)*

*Support Group Composition and Interaction (#01, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, STAFF #1)*

Survivors also identified elements of the support group composition and interaction that they found to be emotionally supportive. These included (i) provides context for identifying with other survivors, (ii) hugs upon dismissal of group, (iii) group members exchange phone numbers, and (iv) others in group are African American.

*Provides context for identifying with other survivors (#03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13)*

For many survivors it was also very helpful to them that the group afforded them the opportunity to be around other domestic violence survivors and hear their stories. This was especially helpful in that many women who felt that they were the only ones experiencing violence no longer felt as if they were alone.

*#03: ...it's just knowing that you're around people that been through what you've been through, they just not exactly the same situation...But you know, you know, you ain't the only stupid one there. (Laughs) You know, went through what you went through, so...that's why I go. It, it's comforting, it's just not comfortable talking with people...you don't know. (p.8)*

#04: *And then once I, once I could, once I, went one time, they made me feel so comfortable, enough. You know how, and when you're in a violent relationship, you feel like you're all alone, you know, and knowing that I wasn't the only one going through this, you know, they, they spoke so freely and shared their experiences so freely, you know, that, you know, I, I felt, "Dang. I'm not by myself on this." You know. (p.3)*

#09: *Because uh, once I was going and I thought my problem was bad but when, you know, I seen other people was in the same relationship and probably worser than what I was in and it kind of made me feel a little better about myself and what I was going through. I felt I wasn't alone, you know? I thought you know, I was the only one getting beat up, you know, at the time, you know, we don't want to see it, you know... (p.1)*

#10: *Because it help us...I mean...listening to other people's problems, and then you have a problem, it helps you...(p.15)*

#### *Hugs upon dismissal of group (#01, 10, 12)*

Some of the women also appreciated the fact that group members gave each other hugs upon the dismissal of the group. This helped to create a feeling of connectedness and made the group feel more like a family.

#01: *...we get all our women hugs before we leave...(p.13)*

#12: *...I can get that hug. I can get hugs from everybody 'cause I done met some friends. I met friends there, they like my sister. It's like this one, this girl...she come to me, she say [Susan<sup>1</sup>], you okay? I say yeah I'm doing good, you know.*

*They hug me and...you need that hug, you know, from Asha. And they're like your*

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<sup>1</sup> All names used are pseudonyms

*family, you know. You can go there, you can hug different peoples and you feel good about yourself, you know. I got through this, you know, with their help. I got through this, you know. That hug helps. It lifts you up. When people talk to you and say, [Susan] you doing good, you know. And when you first go in there, you be looking like, ooohhh...and you know when you come out of it, you know, you growing up, you growing up and they can see you months and months, you know. Then they say, you look nice, you doing good, give me a little hug... (p.8)*

*Group members exchange phone numbers (#01, 08)*

For some it was helpful to them that some group members exchanged phone numbers in order to remain in communication and serve as supports to each other outside of and between group meetings.

*#01: ...And um, give 'em a call once in a while. We take people's numbers and give 'em a call. (p.13)*

*#08: ...People trying to help other people...they be...exchange phone numbers and...I know...when I first started coming to group, we was at the other building and I um...exchanged phone numbers with a couple of girls and we exchanged phone numbers and we became friends and stuff...(p.8)*

*Others in group are African American (#03, 05, 08, 10, 11)*

Survivors found it especially helpful that the majority of survivors in the support groups were also African American. This created a context in which the women were with “their own”. They felt that this was a group of women that they could relate to and could understand them and their experiences specifically as African American women who are survivors of intimate violence.

*#03: You know, and um, it's just being able to talk about whatever you feel you need to talk about and knowing that everybody there understands you. You know what I'm saying? Sometimes uh, you know, mixed races uh, have, you know, however you might put it, might not understand. One race might not understand...you know, what another is going through. You know somebody of another culture might not understand, you know, what you're going through. Some that, you know, that's a comfort to me. Knowing that everybody in there is predominantly black.(p.36)*

*#05: ...And the reason why I say that is because um, basically it's like, it depends on my environment, wherever I'm at, you know, and the majority of, you know I'm more essential to dealing with being honest with what I'm going through if I'm comfortable, you know...And, and like I said, most of the women there, are Afro-Americans and, it's like, you know, the Afro-American, there ain't no shame in my game. You know what I'm saying? ...You can just put it out there and just be real with yourself...to whereas, you know, like when I'm in the uh, majority mixed group of ma-, more white or Hispanics and stuff, I don't feel that I can put everything out there because of, I guess it boils down to, you know, your pride, or whatever. You know what I'm saying? I might not be able to really see the help and the, the things that I need from a group if I'm not comfortable with it...because I'm not able to, you know, just put it all out there. But like a sister, I just go ahead and tell it like it is. You know what I'm saying? ...Because she, she done told it like it is. You know what I'm saying? So she ain't no better than me.(p.24-25)*



*#08: I feel more comfortable because most of the time I come it's all Black women and all, you know...it's...it's less likely for somebody to get offended because I have come when they've had like maybe one White person there and somebody say well niggers don't, you know...and then that person gets offended but I just feel it's more of...you can talk more and stuff and nobody gets offended by any type of language even though nobody really too much cusses or anything but I feel more comfortable that no...you know, that we can all kind of relate and stuff, pretty much are with most of the people in our group are with the same kind of whatever and it's...it just feels more comfortable. Nobody have to worry about being offended or not fitting in because you don't want to say something that's going to affect somebody else that's actually not the same color or whatever so. I just feel comfortable with an all black group.(p.10-11)*

*Staff (#01, 03, 05, 06, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 14)*

Survivors identified aspects of their experiences with staff at Asha which also served as sources of emotional support for them. These included (i) Asha staff talk with and listen to survivors, (ii) facilitator shows love and care to participants, (iii) staff provide encouragement/comforting words, and (iv) staff let you go at your own pace/accept you where you are.

*Asha staff talk with and listen to survivors (#01, 09, 10, 11, 14)*

It was helpful to survivors that staff members at Asha talked with and listened to them when they felt they needed to talk. Survivors felt that staff members were readily available to talk with them, in confidence, when needed. Staff members would allow survivors a few minutes prior to, during, or after support group meeting if survivors felt

the need to discuss something that they did not wish to bring up in front of the whole group. Staff were also available for survivors to make appointments with if they felt they needed more time to talk and work through issues. This was especially important for women who did not feel they had others in their lives with whom they could discuss their problems.

*#10: Yep.... she really good too, she real good to talk to and she explain herself and stuff like that. So it's helping me real good. Yep. Um...I like, because like, one thing I like about too, if you come in and you're like upset or angry, she takes you in the hallway and talks to you, and don't nobody else got to know what's really, really going on with you, but her...just one-on-one... (p.7-9)*

*#14: ...You know...and they, they're willing to listen...that's the most important for me. And they're willing to listen to me...you know sometime I feel like...I don't have nobody to listen to...nobody to listen to me. Even the people right in the same setting sometime, in your own house...sometime you can't, they don't, they hear you but they don't listen. You know what I'm sayin'? And over there I don't feel like that when I go over there. They make it really comfortable for me when I go over there and I have to talk...to, when I need to talk to somebody...I can just sit down and say look I need to talk. Okay we'll make an appointment so we can get together and talk...and they don't have a problem with that, and that's what I like about them 'cause they're...nothing is too big or too little. And they...they extend themselves.(p.7)*

*Facilitator shows love and care to participants (#03, 05, 06, 10, 12, 14)*

The fact that the group facilitator showed love and care for participants, including giving them hugs and telling them that she loved them was helpful to participants as well. Facilitators were friendly and made participants feel at home in the group. This was particularly helpful for survivors who did not have the support of family.

#03: ...*There are a few of the people that come on Monday, and um, [Jane], you know, she'll talk about what she's been through, and what she had to do. You know what I'm saying? ...And she always hugs everybody...and tells 'em she love them...She just makes you feel like, you know, you have a, you know if you feel like you don't have a home 'cause your situation, you have a home here... You know what I'm saying? And, and that, that's helped me in a lot of ways 'cause like I said, I'm here with somebody I know, but we're not family... You know what I'm saying? ...I just know her. So knowing that, you know, when I come on Monday, that [Jane] is gonna be here... You know, as soon as I come in, she's gonna give me a hug...she gonna tell me she love me, and, you know, we gonna do prayer, and she holds everybody hands, and everything, you know. That, that's real helpful... You know, especially in some place where you don't know anybody...and you don't have any family. You know what I'm saying? So that, that's been a real help. That's, that's a bigger help than somebody coming to you saying well, I'm gonna do this for you, you know, and I'm gonna...do that for you...It's a bigger help when you have somebody come and give you a hug...And like I said, they don't even know what I've been through. You know, as far as they're concerned, I could just be sitting there like everybody else... You know what I'm saying? So, for her to come and give me a hug and tell me it's gonna be*

*all right, and she don't even know what I've been through... You know what I'm saying? That's a big help... And I haven't even shared yet, you know, so. That's a big help. 'Cause as far as they're concerned I could just be sitting there, you know, taking into everybody else's business... and haven't even been through anything yet. And you know, and still, every week she show me love, like, like she doesn't know my whole story. (p.17-18)*

*#10: ...So that help too when we have prayer, and people show people love, and she always hug us when we get finished with group. So that's special too, because sometimes you don't get that hug or that, let a person know that you care about them. And she do let us...she do care, you know, she cares...Because some people don't even care. You know, she seem like a caring person and she talks to us about different things, so...yep.(p.11)*

*#14: ...I mean maybe that's the word I'm lookin' for—for somebody that cares about me...is what I, you know is what's important to me, and that's why I keep going back because they care. If they didn't care, if they even start to act like they didn't care, I wouldn't even be going there. I wouldn't even wanna go there...the extra night that I don't even have to go...you know...I wouldn't wanna be trying to get there that night, but because I know they do care...and I, I don't know. That would be, that's my biggest thing is that they care, and they make you feel wanted...make you, they care about you...and that's what I, that's the biggest thing to me...is that they really care about me. I, you know, if they don't care about...what else is going on in my life...they do care about my safety...and that's important. As long as they're carin' about my safety and knowing that I'm safe*

*and that I'm well...you know...that's important. Nothin' else don't matter...cause if, if I'm not safe or well nothin' else could matter...you know. That's what matters to me, and that's what I like about those people over there...that they do care.(p.9-10)*

*Staff provide encouragement /comforting words (#03, 05, 09)*

Staff at Asha also provided survivors with words of encouragement and comfort which survivors found helpful, especially those who were not getting much needed encouragement from others in their lives.

*#03: ...So, for her to come and give me a hug and tell me it's gonna be all right, and she don't even know what I've been through...You know what I'm saying? That's a big help...And I haven't even shared yet, you know, so. That's a big help.(p.18)*

*#05: You know, they had a lot to offer me, you know, and so when I went for the very first time, um...what's her name? [Ms. Vickers], she had a presentation of um, you know, how like women change their lives. You know, you go through the system, you, you know, like I have AODA issues, I'm a recovering drug addict, I'm a mother of 5...And I've been through the system and how, you know, [Ms. Vickers] was so positive with her speech that she gave, that kept me going back, you know...Because she was a woman that was out there and in the same, you know, I, we, it was like we were, I related to her in a lot of ways. And she was very encouraging to me, letting me know that, you know, I don't have to give up just because I fail momentarily... (p.4)*

*Staff let you go at your own pace/accept you where you are (#05, 08)*

It was also helpful to survivors that the staff at Asha let them go at their own pace, particularly in terms of their decisions to leave their abusive relationships and that staff accepted them at whatever point they were in their lives.

*#05: Being accepted no matter whether I slipped and fell or, you know, or if I, if I wasn't reaching my goals or my accomplishments that I had set for myself. You know, just being accepted for who I am. (p.9-10)*

*#08: ...they don't rush you or say hey, you've got this amount time or you can't do this. They let you do it at your own pace and they let you know if you need to talk you can always call them or whatever. (p.19)*

Survivors also discussed ways in which Asha's hiring of staff who are survivors of domestic violence was helpful to them as will be described under the theme, *Having staff who have "been there."*

*Agency (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

Survivors also identified things about the agency itself that they found helpful to them. These included (i) knowing that Asha is there for her/having somewhere to go and (ii) provides support for overcoming addiction.

*Knowing that Asha is there for her/Having somewhere to go (#01, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

For many of the survivors, the simple fact that Asha existed and that they felt that Asha was somewhere that they could go if they needed support or assistance was helpful to them.

#03: *No, not this week, you know, maybe next week. But knowing that this program is here, especially for somebody like me, that's coming from out of state, you know, that don't have any family here. You know what I'm saying? And, I need an outlet... You know what I'm saying? Like this. Like I said, even if I haven't talked, you know...just knowing that it's here has helped a lot...For real.* (p.73)

#04: *Um, but I, but ASHA has shown me that if ever need be, if it ever occurs again, that I do get in a relationship like that, a lot of different ways of, of getting out of there, you know... You can call them, they'll come and get you...they'll help you, you know, and um. So that makes me feel a lot securer too, you know.* (p.4)

#11: *...But one thing, they very helpful, and they there when you need, 24/7.*

*That's the most outstanding thing about Asha.* (p.34)

#12: *...I love it because I can go there any time and talk to somebody. You know, about my problems, and they there for me. They're there for me. I love it.* (p.7)

#13: *Umm...what's been most helpful for me was knowing that I had a place that I could go to that I was able to talk and feel comfortable talking about my past abuse...* (p.2)

*Provides support for overcoming addiction (#02, 04, 05, 12)*

Many survivors in this sample were in recovery from substance addictions. For these survivors, it was helpful to them that Asha provided support for overcoming these addictions.

#04: *So, talking about that also, or, you know um, getting that out in the open, helped me to learn that there's a better way to do things than it, than medicate*

*myself or run to drugs because drugs is really not gonna help the situation...Its gonna really make it worse. (p.18)*

*#05: Um, good. Good. And another thing uh, what ASHA is like, you know, okay I mentioned I have AODA issues, and I am a recovering addict, and, you know, sometimes my addiction, if, if I slip and relapse, and I'm in, back in the process of my addict-, addiction, you know, you get embarrassed and shamed, too shamed to go back, thinking well, everybody's gonna talk about you and...you know, gonna say well, you know, "Why did she do it?", or "I knew she wasn't, it wasn't gonna last too long." I've never, never had that there, you know...They came to my house and then like, you know, when you don't, when you discontinue going, and especially if you're an addict, they assume that, you know, well maybe she's using again, or whatever, but they came and got me, you know. Don't be Ashamed, just come on back. You know, it's okay...You're human. That's part of recovery, relapsing is, you know. So I've, I've, I love them for that...You know, so I'm blessed with that. You know, because ah, one time, if they wouldn't have came to get me, you know, and let me know that it's okay that I fell, you know, I slipped back into the mode of using alcohol and drugs again, and then, you know, come on back, I probably would've still been out there...You know that, that, that um, showed me a lot, that they really are concerned about women, you know, trying to change their lives and their behaviors and, you know, deal with their addiction...and with your children and, you know, just everything. You know, I never felt uncomfortable with them, and they always show you a lot of, a lot of love and support there.(p.8-9)*



*#12: Oh man...keeping me from drinking (laughter)...It keep me out of trouble. I don't have to come out of Asha Service and go into a bar...(p.9)*

Having Staff Who Have “Been There” (#01, 03, 04, 05, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)

For many of the survivors interviewed it was especially helpful to them that the staff at Asha Family Services had experienced life circumstances and situations similar to their own. They identified a number of ways in which this was helpful to them which included (a) Asha staff understand her/survivors able to relate to staff, (b) facilitator discusses her experience/staff open regarding their experience, (c) group facilitators have experienced domestic violence, (d) staff serve as role models, and (e) some staff have been incarcerated.

*Asha staff understand her/Survivors able to relate to staff (#01, 03, 04, 08, 11, 12, 14)*

By virtue of the fact that staff members had experiences similar to those of the survivors the survivors felt as though the staff were in a better position to understand them and their experiences and survivors were better able to relate to the staff. They discussed this as helpful to their experience at Asha.

*#05: You know, they had a lot to offer me, you know, and so when I went for the very first time, um...What's her name? [Ms. Vickers], she had a presentation of um, you know, how like women change their lives. You know, you go through the system, you, you know, like I have AODA issues, I'm a recovering drug addict, I'm a mother of 5...And I've been through the system and how, you know, [Ms. Vickers] was so positive with her speech that she gave, that kept me going back, you know...Because she was a woman that was out there and in the same, you know, I, we, it was like we were, I related to her in a lot of ways... (p.4)*

*#08: I feel more...I feel like I can relate to them better because I done been to different counselors and things before and it's not the same. It's like they don't understand. It's better when it's African-American's and more can relate to and stuff and like, we have like a lot of the same ideas about raising the children or what...what's acceptable and what's not acceptable so I feel more like I can relate to them... (p.17)*

*#12: Yeah...you know, so um...it's just great, it was just great. I was glad to be there, you know. Like somebody can understand me, you know...(p.3)*

*Facilitator discusses her experience/Staff open regarding their experience (#03, 04, 05, 08, 11, 12)*

It was also especially helpful to survivors that not only did the staff have similar experiences as them but that the staff were also open in discussing these experiences. Staff freely talked about their own experiences in the support groups.

*#03: ...There are a few of the people that come on Monday, and um, [Jane], you know, she'll talk about what she's been through, and what she had to do...(p.16-17)*

*#08: I mean they...they, some of the time they share their own experience and stuff to kind of help you relate knowing they not just say well you're right and this and that...they share some of their own experiences and kind of relate to you a little bit better then... You know? They pretty open with a lot of their stuff... (p.18)*

*#12: Yeah, because a lot of them on the staff been through it, you know. They can get up and talk and tell you about what they been through. I like it because, you know, they can tell their problem, you know, they just not hearing our problems.*

*They have problems, too, you know. Um...I like it when they join in and talk about their problems. We just don't want to talk about our problems all the time, you know. We want to hear theirs. And by their, they had a problem, we can grow, you know, through it, you know. I like that, you know. Because if a person didn't have the problem, how you gonna help me with my problem, and you don't, you haven't been through it? (p.16)*

*Group facilitators have experienced domestic violence (#03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 11, 13, 14)*

Many survivors also described the fact that the group facilitators had also experienced domestic violence as particularly helpful to them and their experience at Asha.

*#03: ...You know, I didn't really want to talk about it, you know, so coming here and knowing that I can...if I want to, and the people that I'm talking about it to, you know, it's not like, you just come in here and I'm telling my story to somebody that has no idea, you know, they can't relate to me. The people that I'm talking to know what I've been through. You know, all the women that run the um, the meetings, all of them have been through domestic violence, you know. Um, some of them have even been to jail, and they talk about that...You know what I'm saying? So that makes me feel comfortable that they feel that they can come in there and put that on the table...You know what I'm saying? They feel like anything you want to ask them, they don't hold nothing back...You know what I'm saying? So that, that's putting a lot on the line, you know, for people that you don't really know like that.(p.71-72)*

#11: *Right. Because that makes a big difference. I mean, you may not judge me, but you really don't understand how, what we feel, is what I'm saying. And they've been through it, so they know. Because sometimes, they be in the groups, too. Not [Linda], but um...[Shannon], and the young lady that's facilitating. They definitely know, because I don't see how you can run a domestic violence women's support group and you never been hit in your life.*(p.9)

#13: *...I also find it helpful that those, that the staff is umm...is...survivors or have dealt with the type of situations that we deal with there. Umm...especially within the domestic violence/abuse group, because it's hard to have somebody explain...abuse to somebody that ain't ever been there or has no relevant history of it. I mean, and it doesn't mean you had to physically go through it yourself, but maybe my auntie went through it, or maybe my cousin went, and I saw this, and I watched it. I mean you know, so yeah, it's helpful, very helpful...very helpful.*(p.17)

#14: *...having somebody to understand...having somebody that can relate to the same situations. Not having somebody that's...only learned, and this has no reflection on you (giggles), having, only have somebody that learned through a book...about...what it, how it should be. Having to have somebody that has had experience...with the same type a things that I've been through...you know...*  
(p.10)

*Staff serve as role models (#05, 09, 11, 12)*

The fact that the staff employed at Asha had previously experienced similar

situations to those survivors receiving services it helped women to see that they could overcome their situations and move on to do something positive with their lives. The staff at Asha, therefore, served as role models to survivors.

#05: *Yea. They sure do. Yea. Mmmhmm. Yes. Yes and, and that's very encouraging to a lot of women, 'cause I'll be like shoot, I thought I had it bad, but you know, and then to see where they are today in they lives, you know what I'm saying, the careers they have, the, you know, the things that they're doing for other women and, you know, it just boosts me up. I be like, shoot I, I, I, I can get it together 'cause, you know, I, I have to... You know, it ain't, it's never too late. You know, you can be all the way down to the bottom of the pit, but you can come up...in life if you choose to, if you want to, if you strive for success, and, you know, you got to change a lot of things in your life. And basically I can always figure that, I always have to speak on the AODA terms is, you have to change your, the people, places, and the things that you're doing in order to accomplish, you know, something better in life...And, you know, it's, it's something else they do there, but it's, it's very good. Very good... You know, 'cause all of them, that the majority of the staff that I, I deal with on a weekly basis, they all have been there...So, you know, and look at them today... You know, they're very inspiring, and really make me, I got to do it too. 'Cause, you know, they'd done it, and I got to do what I can do. You know, I want to do it. I have the desires...and stuff. And being around them, you know, the, the, the structure is so positive, it just generates.(p.31-32)*

#09: ...*And the one thing I like about Asha...see the head lady, she been in jail. You know, the head lady, she been abused and a lot of the workers...all the workers, they've been abused so yeah, that's a whole lot...yeah, that's...because they been through it so they can teach it because they've been through it and they can let you know how I got over it and how I did, you know? To get a piece of mind because sometimes, you know, that stuff balled up inside of you.*(p.17)

#11: ...*So yes, I think it helps for Black women, and domestic violence Black women, that, because see, that gives you, and also what we see that they were able to move on and got into, like, she's a counselor now. I might not never would've felt I could be one because of the abuse. She was able to put hers to the side, so she tell us her experience, how she did it, we could listen and that could be us. That's one thing that's important...to see a domestic violence person, and now they a counselor. See because we have low self-esteem, so you know, we don't, we don't feel like we gonna amount to anything. We allowed him to beat us so long, that we believe whatever he says. But to watch her, and she got ov-, got out of it, and her abuse was worse than ours, we can do it too...* (p.13)

*Some staff have been incarcerated (#03, 07, 09)*

For some survivors, especially those who had previously served time in correctional facilities, it was helpful to them to see staff at Asha who had also previously been incarcerated and discussed their experience with that as well.

#07: ...*And then they...I even seen...some of the women that work there now is women that I've even been incarcerated with...And I think that's a good thing*

*because that's a second chance in life. Asha's a pretty....a good program. Very good.(p.12)*

*#09: Yeah, I noticed they hired a couple of people that came from jail or whatever, you know? That was nice, you know? I think that was nice of, on their part to hire people that didn't have a job coming out of prison. I think that was nice. Yeah, they helped them more, yes they do, and I ain't mad about it but I like it, you know? Because they need it more, you know? We already out here, you know, and got our place I thank God for that, you know? But they don't have a place right now, you know so yeah, I like that. I appreciate them for doing that too.(p.16)*

Practical Assistance (#02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)

Asha Family Services was also helpful to survivors in providing them with much needed practical assistance. They identified a number of ways in which Asha provided them with this assistance including (a) Asha provides resources directly, (b) Asha helps survivors obtain community resources, (c) Asha provides transportation to obtain resources, and (d) resources provided are specific to survivors' unique needs.

*Asha provides resources directly (#04, 05, 11, 12)*

For some survivors it was helpful to them that Asha had lots of resources to offer which assisted them in meeting some of their material needs.

*#04: ...They have a lot of, of resources, you know, um, that I, that's available to me...(p.5)*

*#05: ...it's a protecting um, program they have for women with domestic issues like myself. Um, when I was going through a relationship and a physical*

*relationship with a guy that I was dating, and he was physically violent. They have guys that will come and take you to your home to like, escort you.*

*Um...What do they call them? The body-builder guy...But you know, they, they protect they women...You know. It's, it's very, it's a very good program...You know, and I have had to reach out to that source to get escorted to go and get clothes and, you know, 'cause...I was in fear of my boyfriend, you know, when I go home he gonna get me and...Living in them abusive relationships for like 8 years...but I had the protection and the security that I needed...And I received that through ASHA.(p.2-3)*

*#12: ...they'll give your kid clothes. They'll give you clothes. They, they offer a lot of service, you know. I can go in there and my kids need some shoes, they got them right there. I say [Maxine] my daughter need a coat, she'll go get a coat. If they hungry, they'll give them a meal 'cause [Paula], she always cooking. (9-10)*

*Asha helps survivors obtain community resources (#03, 05, 06, 07, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

When Asha did not have a particular resource that survivors needed they were still able to be helpful to women by providing them with referrals or themselves contacting other sources to assist women in meeting their needs. Some survivors in particular talked about Asha's role in assisting previously incarcerated women obtain much needed resources upon their release from correctional facilities.

*#05: ...I just, uh, the job network program and um, they've helped assist me with uh, things as far as housing referrals, when I, you know, had got out of prison and was trying to get back on my feet and stuff. They assisted me with things for housing and um, clothing for myself and children. You know, I went the other day*



*and we got, 'cause I had an interview with Milwaukee Times yesterday, so we went there to the, they have a, a part called the Bottomless Closet...and they prepare women for interviews and, you know, if you have business, casual dress, or whatever the dress code is, and I went there and we received, I received clothing...for my interview and everything that I had yesterday, which was a blessing to me because right now I don't have a job and I don't have too many clothes. You know, so I was blessed to be able to be presentable when I went to my interview yesterday...So I was real happy about that.(p.7)*

*#07: You know? You don't have to go here, here, here and there, you know? And what ever they don't have, they will help you find, you know...(p.6)*

*#12: ...they just help you out, you know. They'll help you out with your finance too, you know. You know, whatever you need, they'll try to get it for you.(p.10)*

*#14: ...And they're willing to help me with uh...anything that I need. They've extended themselves to everything that I need from if I needed to go to a psychiatrist, they will help me with that. If I needed to be umm...any, anything that I needed help with... (p.7)*

*Asha provides transportation to obtain resources (#02, 03, 04, 06, 11, 14)*

Survivors also found it helpful to them that Asha Family services provided transportation. Asha provided transportation for survivors and their children to get to and from support groups and often provided survivors transportation to other places to assist them when needed.

*#03: Um, usually I'll take the bus here, you know...but if I need a ride, you know, or know if I know I'm goanna be late, or it's too cold to take the bus, I can call*

*and um, they'll send somebody to come and get me, and bring me home. You know what I'm saying? That's a blessing...I appreciate that for real...(p.24)*

*#11: ...They, you know what, they pick us up and bring us here...and drop us off at home. A lot of places you have to get there on a bus. We have a lady that's unhealthy. She can't even walk across the street. Do you know they bring her across the street. That's one we was talking about now. She might be in there now. They actually, they should, she should walk, but, you know, she won't. So they even go out their way, as far as that. They try to tell her, but she don't listen. So they bring her anyway. They will bring her across the street. How many people gonna pick us up, pick you up and bring you, then bring you home? I have my daughter downstairs, they make sure we get home. They drop, you know they have to care to drop that many people off, and pick them up. They have three or four groups sometimes, and they actually do this every Thursday. Going out of they way dropping us off and picking us up. As long as you do your part, we have to call the same day, that morning. And I do. A ride too? You know I'm gonna call them, I appreciate that. I have a bus pass, I can get on the bus. But they'll pick us up...(p.16-17)*

*#14: The people at ASHA, if you don't have a ride...the facilitator comes and picks us up and brings us back. And she told me that when I leave here...when I wanna come to, back to groups just ta...umm call'er up and tell'er that she's coming...tell'er that, what night I'm comin' to group, so if I'm comin' to both nights, and she will make sure that I have a ride for both nights. A ride there and a ride back, because umm...uh...I live way on the other side a town. Well I live*

*almost in the area where is ASHA is. I live further north than where ASHA is. I live on [respondent's address] —way on the other side a town—and from there to my house is pretty difficult ridin' the bus. You know 'cause I don't have a vehicle right now, and...so they're willing to come and get me...and to take me home...*  
(p.7)

*Resources provided are specific to survivors' unique needs (#05, 06, 08, 09, 11, 14)*

Survivors felt that Asha was willing and able to meet their needs no matter where they were in their lives or what their needs were. In a way this empowered women to dictate their own services. They found this particularly helpful in that they identified their needs to the staff at Asha and the staff provided assistance in meeting these needs.

*#05: ...it's like they will come and meet your needs. Wherever you're at...in life and whatever problem you're having, you know, it's always somebody there in different fields that can assist you to a lot of different things...(p.2)*

*#08: ...African-Americans...they try to support you and help you in any kind of way. If it's the food pantry or clothing bank or whatever...they try to help you without judging you. Just asking you what you need and trying to get it to you as fast as you can...they can.(p.17)*

*#14: ...I mean you know if you got a problem, then they're gonna direct their issue, that's your issue, we're gonna direct...our services to your immediate need...at that time, they gonna direct their...that's what they do. They just direct it straight to their need. If I got a need that I can't help myself with...then I know that I can call those ladies up, and they'll say okay...I'm comin' to get you. Where do you need to go? Do you need to go to the doctor? Do you need to be*

*dropped? You know whatever my needs are, they will see to it that I get them, and that's what's important to me...(p.4)*

#### Empowering Practices (#04, 05, 06, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

What was especially helpful to many survivors receiving services from Asha were the multiple ways in which the agency serves to empower survivors to take control of their own lives. Survivors identified a number of ways that Asha facilitates this process including (a) enables women to leave abusive relationships, (b) provides context to help women build their emotional strength, (c) provides context in which to assist women to build their self-esteem/self worth/confidence, (d) helps women to not be afraid anymore, (e) helps women to understand why they stay, (f) teaches how to recognize (first) signs of abuse, (g) teaches women that they don't have to tolerate abuse, and (h) teaches accountability.

#### *Enables women to leave abusive relationships (#04, 05)*

What was especially helpful to some survivors was that their experience with Asha assisted them in leaving abusive relationships that they were still in when they started receiving services from Asha.

*#04: Um, it helped me a lot because I was dealing with a lot of um, things at that time with, with my husband and um, trying to learn how to let go of that relationship and um, learning that I deserved better...(p.1)*

*#05: ...So I was able to eliminate myself from the relationship that I was in, and I continued to keep going and, you know, I was able to get out of that relationship, but being honest, if it wasn't for the support system that I had with the women there, the staff as well as the women that was just coming attending the groups, I*

*don't know, you know, if I would be here today. You know, or if I would have been strong enough to be able to. I know I probably wouldn't have been strong enough, had the strength to just get out of the relationship because it was a very, very physically violent relationship that I was in. (p.3)*

*Provides context to help women build their emotional strength (#04, 05, 08, 09, 10, 13)*

Survivors identified as helpful the fact that Asha provided a context in which they could build the personal strength they needed to regain control of and experience peace and happiness in their lives.

*#08: ...It's been pretty helpful and helped me over the past year and stuff and has made me stronger in some senses. I haven't got all the strength I need to...to just totally get away from my um, children's father but this has helped me to set down some rules and stick to some of the stuff I was saying to him about his behavior changing and taking his rights away of um, being around his kids if he's not going to get his act together so...(p.3-4)*

*#09: Uh, being there, you know, when I first got there, you know how you're scared to say what your problem...you know, what you've been through or whatever. But now today, as I've been there long enough I can tell anybody walk through the door, you know, that uh...just keep on coming back and then you'll get stronger...you know, by sticking with the sisters and working things out you know...(p.7)*

*#10: Because it help you, and it makes you stronger...And it has made me stronger. Yes, it has made me real strong.(p.12)*

#13: *...when we see one person change, it's strengthens the next person, so...you know it's gonna be a little easier each time we go... (p.4)*

*Provides context in which to assist women to build their self-esteem/self-worth/confidence (#04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 13)*

For many survivors Asha was helpful in providing a context in which they could re-build their self-esteem that had been destroyed or damaged by abusive partners.

#04: *Keep me strong, knowing I deserved better and, you know, that I was a good person, you know. Because after being in a domestic violence relationship for so long, you're, your mate tend to kill your self-esteem...You know. It make you feel like you're nothing, you're wo-, you're not worth anything, and nobody else gonna want you...You know? And uh, the women of ASHA made me feel that I was worthy of, you know, being loved and um, you know, changing, you know, that I didn't have to live like that, you know, and accept, being abused.(p.2)*

#09: *Yeah, I love when them sisters come there and they would saved and, you know...and they have some much positive to feed to, you know? Its just...there's just something about them, I guess, you know, that makes me feel good inside and feel better, good. You know, a lot of the time we don't feel good about ourselves, you know, and when they come, you know, it just...it makes you feel like you're worth something. A lot of people don't think they're worth nothing, you know? I felt like that, too, before. You know? Started all my torment and yeah...I like that. Uh-huh.(p.13)*

#10: *Um.... the things that she talk about to us, she be like um.... because I was...um, I didn't have no self-esteem about myself. You know, I didn't have, it's*

*just that my husband, the things that he said to me...it made my self-esteem be low. I wouldn't try to do nothing for myself, I wouldn't like go shopping, I wouldn't keep my hair up. I wouldn't, I just wouldn't do nothing. But since I been coming here, and she talking to me it's like....now I go shopping, or get my nails did, or my hair, and I wouldn't do none of that stuff. I would just stay in the house or go to work, come home. Go to work, come home...(p.8)*

*#13: Umm (giggles)...oh well I would have to say for women of color in general...umm...we come from...backgrounds where we've been, we've been, we've had some real severe damage thrown to us for years (giggling)...for years, and in reaching us that way there's a lot of things geared toward building our self-esteem, our self-worth, umm...to give us some pride of our culture and our heritage. Umm...there's also a thing about umm dealing with the color of our skin, and umm...I mean I've gotten quite a few little pieces of information from them about umm...just self-respect for who I am, and where I am, you know... (p.6)*

*Helps women to not be afraid anymore (#06, 10)*

Survivors also identified as helpful the fact that their experience with Asha helped them to no longer be afraid of abusive partners, men in general or people in general. This is especially important as many women live in a constant state of fear as a result of being in abusive relationships.

*#06: ...helping us not to be afraid of, you know, of whatever...(p.5)*

*#10: ...And since I've been coming here, it helped me too, this part too because um, I used to be afraid to...um...to be around um, certain people. And this helped*

*me a lot because....I know what to expect about people now when I be around certain people and the things that they say. I know how to avoid listening to stuff, you know, that gets me upset or angry...that helped me out too. It helped me a lot when I came here, because I was so screwed up. You know, I had got to a point that I was like, really um...I couldn't cope with the people out there, because it was so many, I guess it's because of the things that I had went through and the things that people had did to me, like my husband and everybody else. I was just afraid....I was just afraid and since I been coming here it helped me a lot...(p.8)*

*Helps women to understand why they stay (#09, 11)*

For a couple survivors Asha was instrumental in helping them to understand why they stayed in abusive relationships.

*#09: But now, I'm out of it. I'm so happy. I guess they said he controlled my mind, that's why...you know, I was learning that at Asha. The man takes control of your mind and then tries to tell you what to do, and how to do it and when to do it. It's the truth, yeah, I guess he did all that.(p.7)*

*#11: ...They made me, they gave me a reason to understand why I accept a relationship like that. And I didn't have to feel bad about it, either. And, like I said, she said, they told me it was because of the way we was raised, and Black woman have a, not Black women per say, but women have a thing about cuddling a lot. Cuddling in our relationships a lot, you know, we was raised to take care of the man, and do this for the man and that for the man. And I, 'cause I was trying to figure out why I always have domestic violence guys. I didn't, I don't have it written on my forehead. But, I do everything my old man ask me to do, and he still*



*was mean. One time, I had cleaned up the house, I had just had my little girl, and I remember this day so well, and I had a pizza. He had the pizza. He must've asked me to do something, I don't know what it was at that time. But he hit me in my back, and I don't, I didn't even know what for. The house was clean, you know. I had just put the baby down. I felt it was like he owned me, he felt like he did. And he just hit me. And I was hurt, because he could've broke my back. And he used to, like the scars on my face, he just pushed my face through some glass. For what? You know, I didn't do anything to him. But she said it was, the facilitator, when she was talking about her, she was saying that, because of the low self-esteem I was feeling...(p.15)*

*Teaches how to recognize (first) signs of abuse (#04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 12, 14)*

For many survivors it was important to them that Asha taught them to recognize signs of an abusive relationships. This was particularly helpful to women in terms of helping them to identify past abusive relationships and to avoid abusive relationships in the future.

*#04: And ASHA taught me that, you know, to recognize the first signs of abuse, you know, um, when somebody's being possessive, you know, just different things I learned from them and it's, it's, it's really great.(p.10)*

*#05: ...I've got so much out of the domestic violence group, as far as how to be alert and aware of signs in abusive relationships... You know, I am truly alert to that now. You know, so I would never, ever place myself in a relationship, 'cause there is signs...that, you know, women can see, especially if they've been in abusive relationships, you know, not just the physical abuse, but the mental and*

*the verbal abuse as well... You know, they put me on my feet to be aware of these signs.(p.10)*

*#08: I think it is. It's easier to bond and easier to um, relate with them or whatever because a lot of them I know have been through some of the same situations and they, and...they in a certain age group too there...they able to let you know some things before you go through them or tell you about some things before you even go through them. They know some of the signs even better... 'Cause they done been through them before or whatever and they can kind of help you before you even get there. They can tell you some of the warning signs of abuse if you don't...if you're abused if you don't know what...kind of help you out before you get there.(p.17)*

*Teaches women that they don't have to tolerate abuse (#04, 05, 09, 10, 12, 14)*

What was especially empowering to many survivors receiving services from Asha Family services was that Asha taught them that they deserved better relationships and that they did not have to tolerate abuse.

*#04: Um, it helped me a lot because I was dealing with a lot of um, things at that time with, with my husband and um, trying to learn how to let go of that relationship and um, learning that I deserved better, and... (p.1)*

*#09: But I learned through Asha that that is not love and I don't have to take that abuse so that's why I stayed with Asha.(p.2)*

*#12: ...You ain't been abused no more, because other peoples in there talk to you, and give you some uh, points about different, you know, approach about mens,*

*you know. Like, you don't need that man, or you ain't got to be with that person that you know, hurt you and stuff like that...(p.8)*

*#14: ...and made me understand that I can deal and learn...how not to be abused...(p.13)*

*Teaches accountability (#04, 08)*

For a couple of survivors it was helpful that Asha taught them to recognize their part in allowing abuse to happen to them. This was important in that if women were taught to recognize that they played a role in allowing abuse to happen in their relationships, they also had the power not to allow it to happen in future relationships.

*#04: ...but then, at the same time, none of this could have happened if I would've never allowed it... (p.18)*

*#08: Yeah, because they...I think I'd just be talking just one main thing...it would probably just...when I do talk it would just be oh his fault this, it's his fault that and stuff and then more when they talk about different things I realize what part of the blame I have to take for myself and what part of the blame is actually his fault. Can't just go on blaming just one person or whatever so...(p.15)*

*Outreach (#01, 03, 05, 06, 07, 13, 14)*

Survivors expressed that Asha Family services did outreach in various capacities, which was also helpful to them.

*#01: ...They call me sometimes.*

*I: You mean kind of call you to check on you, or...*

*#01: Mmmhmm.*

*I: Well, who, who would call you.*

*#01: This other lady, she used to work there but she don't call since she uh, uh, got another job. (p.4-5)*

*#05: Um, good. Good. And another thing uh, what ASHA is like, you know, okay I mentioned I have AODA issues, and I am a recovering addict, and, you know, sometimes my addiction, if, if I slip and relapse, and I'm in, back in the process of my addict-, addiction, you know, you get embarrassed and shamed, too shamed to go back, thinking well, everybody's gonna talk about you and...you know, gonna say well, you know, "Why did she do it?", or "I knew she wasn't, it wasn't gonna last too long." I've never, never had that there, you know...They came to my house and then like, you know, when you don't, when you discontinue going, and especially if you're an addict, they assume that, you know, well maybe she's using again, or whatever, but they came and got me, you know. Don't be Ashamed, just come on back. You know, it's okay...You're human. That's part of recovery, relapsing is, you know. So I've, I've, I love them for that...You know, so I'm blessed with that. You know, because ah, one time, if they wouldn't have came to get me, you know, and let me know that it's okay that I fell, you know, I slipped back into the mode of using alcohol and drugs again, and then, you know, come on back, I probably would've still been out there...You know that, that, that um, showed me a lot, that they really are concerned about women, you know, trying to change their lives and their behaviors and, you know, deal with their addiction...and with your children and, you know, just everything. You know, I never felt uncomfortable with them, and they always show you a lot of, a lot of love and support there. (p.8-9)*

*#07: ...Asha is a very, very good group and it's been very helpful to me. So um...you know, especially the prison program because in prison there's a lot of women who have no one and no one to talk to. I think that's very helpful for them. They...that's like a family they never had, you know? And it builds your self-esteem. That's a good thing... (p.18)*

**2a. Do women identify culturally specific components as helpful and if so, which ones?**

Culturally Specific Components (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

All fourteen of the survivors identified culturally specific components of Asha Family Services as helpful to them and their experiences with the agency. Specifically, they identified (a) family centered approach, (b) prayer/spirituality/spiritually based approach, (c) Designed for African Americans, (d) African American staff, (e) curriculum is Afro-centric, (f) Afro-centric environment, and (g) holistic approach.

*Family centered approach (#03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

For many survivors the family centered approach that Asha takes to providing services was particularly helpful to them. This manifested itself in many ways for women. For some it was the fact that they offered a group for the children to help them deal with abuse that they experienced and/or witnessed, some referred to the fact that Asha ran a children's group concurrent with the support group so that women did not have to find childcare elsewhere in order to attend the groups, some indicated that the family centered approach helped to build the strength of the family, and some indicated that the children's group helped their children to understand the experiences of their abused mothers.

#03: ...Because, I mean, even if a woman is going through it, but, you know, if she could still see herself with him if he gets help...you know, and if it's gonna keep the family together, you know, if they got kids, and it'll keep the family together, and even though what she's going through, you know, if she feel like she can't leave him, and she'd rather stay with him, and he can get help then, that is helpful, you know, if they can keep the family together. (p.49)

#04: Yes I do because even though the person that's battering, doing the battering...they need help too. You know? And if you just leave 'em, they're never gonna get the help they need. So they're gonna continue to batter. You know? ...So I believe that taking that approach can probably help a lot of people, you know. It could take a lot of batterers, (Laughs) and change their lives...You know? ...So I think that's a great thing they're doing there...Great!...And then, like I said earlier, sometimes when you've been battered, and you're trying to get out that relationship, you're not gonna allow yourself to be battered again, or abused, so you're gonna do it before they get a chance to do it to you....And if, and if you're, you, ASHA use that, that component, the family thing, they can teach you that you're just as wrong as that person that was abusing you...You know? So I, I think that's great. I really do.

I: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm. Do you feel that it's necessarily culturally specific, in that do you feel it's particularly important for the African American community to treat the whole family, or for...

#04: Yes. I think because um...Back in the old days, they said it, it seems that it was, acceptable for a man to control and abuse the women. You know? ...And

*ASHA is showing them that it's not right, and it, it, and, and it has to change...in order for our race to survive...because not only are the husbands battering, the children are battering their parents now...the parents are battering their children...You know, and, and it, and if it doesn't stop somewhere, it's just gonna be, ugh! You know?(p.22-23)*

*#08: I think in...they just...they look forward to going to group too so I think it's something to benefit all of us and making us stronger as a family. They starting to see things the way I see them but I think they way they've been seeing and the way I've been seeing them, they don't want...they father around either but...they...they...most of the time...I think a lot of the time they just play and eat and talk to the other kids and stuff but they kind of understand what I'm...what I be going through and they talk to me about it or whatever...(p.5)*

*#13: ...I usually look for stuff that's gonna benefit me and my children...when I...become involved with it because my children are very much me...very much me. I can't hardly function. I got eight kids. I can't hardly do too much a nothin' without that (giggles)...without mine (giggles)...and so for me...it helped. It would have to be a place where my whole family could be involved. If my kids can't be there, I ain't too much thrilled about being there because... my job is to be the mother and to raise 'em and to be with 'em. How can I possibly be with them when I'm with you, and you ain't got nothin' for them, so.(p.15)*

*Prayer/Spirituality/Spiritually based approach (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10,  
11, 12, 13, 14)*

For all of the survivors interviewed, the spiritually based approach that Asha takes to their service delivery was helpful to them. This was for multiple reasons. For some women it was because they were raised in the church or raised spiritually and their experience with Asha was therefore a continuation of that, for some survivors it was the fact that spirituality helped them to cope with and get over their abusive experiences, others identified the fact that spirituality historically has been a central and important part of African American people's lives. What was also important to survivors was the fact that Asha did not force spirituality on anyone who was not interested or didn't believe in spirituality and that they did not enforce a certain religious doctrine such that it was able to be inclusive of all women despite their religious background or current religious identification.

*#04: It's, (Laughs) it's wonderful for me because, I, I was raised very spiritually...and, they don't force you to believe in any God or anything, you know. It's just a spiritual way, you know, to learn, your inner spirit, you know. And me, I am very spiritual, you know, and I do believe in God, and Jesus, and so to me, that just helped me a lot because my, the way I came up is, I can't do anything without God in my life. You know, so, that right there was a plus for me...automatically... (Laughs) I think that was part of what really drew me to them...Once I started going, that really drew me...You know...Because I, I need that...I need that.*



I: *So it's, is it helpful to, have you found that helpful, that there was a spiritually based component?*

#04: (Simultaneously) *Yes. Very. Very...I think, yea, because most black people um, men and women, but most black women were raised in church, raised spiritually, you know...And that part brings a whole 'nother meaning to the, you know, changing your life. You know what I'm saying? ...So, yea, I think that's very necessary...*

I: *Now do you think your exp- here, experience with ASHA would be very different if it wasn't spiritually based?*

#04: *I do...Because I need that in my life...Me personally, I need that. Without the spiritual part, it would just be another group...You know? ...Yea. I don't need just a group...You know? I need a foundation, and that's what the spiritual part gives me, a foundation.(p.19-21)*

#05: *Very helpful to me, but there have been other women that's not spiritually like that, so, you know, at the closing of our groups, we always close with a prayer, but they still welcome people to come that are not spiritually bonded at this time in their life, you know...But they don't discriminate against them. You know, they can just step to the side, while the ones that are into it, and the ones that want to join in with the prayer, prayer like that. And I think that's good...Because we have um, I've been to groups before where people weren't spiritually bonded, and that they, you know, felt, you know, like the directors of the group, or whatever, the facilitators of the groups, felt that if you wasn't spiritually bonded, you couldn't, you know, be a part of this group...And ASHA is*

*not like that. You know, the ones that, that want it, you know, participate in it, and if you don't, you're still welcome to come. And when we come to that part of the group, then you can either leave, or just step to the side while we go ahead and close it with prayer...And I think that's very good.(p.15-16)*

*#07: ...I feel a whole lot better after a group when we say a prayer and I can walk out, I feel new...Than to walk out knowing I just brought it out and...and it's just there...Once again, I'm glad that it's like that because I don't think that I would be able to make it if it weren't.(p.9-10)*

*#09: Yeah, it should be. It's important to me. I can't speak for nobody else but it's very important to me. I guess the raising that I got, you know that spiritual raising, it just make me feel good when they come through there. Maybe it's just me. Yes, I love it when...oh, yes, I love it when I see 'em...*

*I: So you think it's important that they include...?*

*#09: Yeah, they should. Yeah, 'cause see that helps a lot of us, you know? (p.14)*

*They help the African American community/Designed for African Americans (#02, 04, 06, 08, 09, 11, 12, 14)*

For many survivors it was especially helpful and important to them that Asha Family Services was an agency that was designed for and helps the African American community specifically.

*#02: Yeah it's important. Black women need it. We need help 'cause...not too many people that like to help us...You don't find too many groups out here like to help Black people. A lot of us Black folks don't get too much help.(p.8)*

*#09: Yeah, it's important. Uh-huh. 'Cause you know what? A lot of black folks don't stick together like they should. You know? Like sometimes your family will turn and sometimes your friends. Yes, that's helpful. You know? Let's stick together and I love this Sister Circle because that's one thing...they main thing is helping one another. Yes, very helpful.(p.18)*

*#11: ...but I think Black people need it because we don't have the funds, or the money to get the help we need. Like, I hate to say this, but like white people do, that's been abused, depending on they background, as far as money. They have the financial help. We don't. I know I don't have any money. If it wasn't for Asha offering this to me free, I don't know what would I do...But, I am very proud of Asha Family because they help the community, you know, the Black community. If you got some white there, hey, you welcome there too, you know. So, it's more Black than white go there. Asha just doing a real good job, real good job. (p.21)*

*Asha has/hires African American staff (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13,*

*14)*

All survivors identified it as helpful that Asha Family Services hired African Americans to provide services at the agency. They identified this as helpful in two ways (a) survivors able to relate better to African American staff and (b) provides employment opportunities for African American women.

*Survivors able to relate better to African American staff (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

Each of the survivors identified it as helpful to their experience at Asha that the staff were also African American because they were better able to relate to the staff on

this basis, thus raising the quality of their experience and the extent to which they benefited from Asha's services.

*#03: Yea probably so. Probably so. I probably wouldn't be as comfortable...as I am now. Like I said, I'm , I'm not racist, you know, it's just, I guess I'm just a product of my environment, of where I grew up with, you know, we stayed in one area, and they stayed in another area, you know, we just, we tended to show more feeling. You know what I'm saying? For our situation, you know, and I'm more comfortable with somebody that can understand my situation that, then, that, you know, they're just there because that's their job.(p.50)*

*#04: But to me, just being a black woman, talking to a black woman about my husband beating me in my head, is easier than talking to a white woman...And I'm not prejudice, but it's just easier, it would just seem easier to me, you know...I just don't seem like I could talk to somebody el-, not out of my, out of my race, about something like that...You know...Period. You know, um, but with me personally, dealing with ah, black women, is easier for me...Mmmhmm. I mean because, I mean, just for a say, um, I'll talk, I will, I would talk to you or I would talk to this white lady right here. Well to me, it'd be, I would directly go straight to you because I think I would feel more comfortable...in opening up and sharing, I mean, even if I have to put in my mind, well this is my sister I'm talking to... You know what I'm saying? ...So that's kind of the, the feeling I get out of it...You know...I'm not saying that I couldn't open up to a white lady, because I probably could, you know, that's just me... (p.14-15)*

*#07: ...if this is supposed to be for African-Americans I would expect that they would have staff that is African American.(p.12)*

*#10: Yeah, because black people, black womens understand other black womens. Ain't no way a white woman understands what a black woman going through. Because I noticing this since I been there, Black women, I mean Black women are stronger than white women, because I see it everyday. So, it's good for Black women to be together...But if you're dealing with going to a group with a white woman, it's going to be hard. Because...I just noticed it, I just notice it. Because...we're different, we are totally different...(p.20-21)*

*#12: Um...I think so, um...that's what it's for, African-Americans right, um.... I think they had one white somebody up in there and...to me it, it don't fit real well. You have to be a Black American to und-, to really understand, you know, our culture, about being a Black woman... (p.15)*

*#13: Umm I find it helpful that they're African American... (p.17)*

*Give African American women a chance (#05, 07, 09, 14)*

Some survivors also identified as helpful the fact that Asha provided employment opportunities for African American women. Many expressed that it was hard for African American women to find jobs, especially those who have been previously incarcerated and that Asha helped to fill this need.

*#05: Um, I'm okay with it, you know, I don't, I'm, I'm okay with it 'cause, I'm okay with it, and um, I know they, you know, they hire a lot of women that have been through the system, incarceration and stuff too, and... Majority of the black women, you know, to me, you know, I feel that we're more in needs of jobs, you*

*know, and it's not like, I don't think it's anything meaning by like they're being racial about it, but, you know, the black women to me are, need more of a boost, so it's like they're giving them a chance... You know, I don't, but I don't, I don't have a problem with that. I think it's good. You know, I'm, I have to go, I'm having an interview next week, to try to see if I can get employment at ASHA.(p.19)*

*#09: Uh, yeah. Yeah! Why not, huh? They have they own little old jobs going they done got, huh, they got all the jobs and we ain't got nothing, it's hard for us to get, you know, jobs and stuff. Especially if you ain't got an education. You know? We just sitting in a bad situation so yes, I appreciate them for doing that, you know? Helping the ones that need help. Yes I do, I appreciate it. Even though it... 'cause it could have been me and I appreciate it, you know? Even though it's not me.(p.16-17)*

*#14: ...I know they do, but...they need to hire some young women...give them some work...so they can stop being around here in the street. You know, but I guess they do that too. I have not had job experience with them, because I don't...I don't have a reason to right now. Even if I had a reason to...um, I don't have problems having a job. Nursing made it so I don't have problems having a job. You know...and I'm glad that they do...hire our women... 'cause I think our women have a harder time getting a job...than our men do... (p.20)*

*Curriculum is Afro-centric (#01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

All survivors also identified it as helpful that the curriculum that Asha Family Services has designed and used in their groups is Afro-centric.

*#08: It make me more comfortable because everything is pretty much African-American like the setting and just everything pretty much that we discuss and stuff it's...more relating to African-American's and how we deal with situations and how we can better deal with situations. How we was brought up and stuff like that.(p.19)*

*#12: Yeah, it'd be different. It'd be a whole lot different. Um...it's good to talk about, you know, different issues about the Black community. You know, it helps out with my family, you know. I be going through a lot with my family so, when they talk about it, it helps out a lot... So there have been quite a few things that I've gotten culturally there as well as umm...and they've been things that helped...helped it...(p.7)*

*#14: You need to see that. It's called One Week. And it's a good movie, but now guess what? It was a Black movie (giggles)...You know...and we find it hard to tell ourselves...that we doing, you know the wrong things. We find it hard...we, as females, Black females...oh...I ain't sleeping with his friend. Well when you're using two different names...my name Yolanda, your name Reesy, well it could be the same woman...see. You know that's the kind a stuff they try to show you, but this is what's going on in our community. This is what's going on. This is, they showed it because it has something to do with AIDS, and AIDS in on the rise in the Black community. So we need to know all of that...that brothers, two brothers sleeping with the same Black woman. It's good. They doing some good things. They really are, and I wouldn't wanna see 'em do nothing better, nothing different...The same woman. She got two different names, and that's how...how*

*we have done each other. Yeah. I think that's important that they do show stuff like that and...and, and educate us too...you know it's important. It's important when you get an education about us, about each other. It's important, you know because they teach you Black history in school, in high school, in grade school, and all that. But it ain't the same Black history. It ain't (giggles)...Uh-uh, it's not community Black history (giggles). They need to teach some community Black history. You know, learn your community. Learn what's going on in your community, and what's happening, and who's there to help you...of your same ethnicity, in your community. Lord know that there are sisters in your community...or brothers in your community that can reach out and help you. They don't teach 'em nothing like that...cause it's the be done...and that lady over there doing it. She's doing it non stop from what I could see. I don't see she making too many mistakes. I mean I can't see where she's really done nothing...beyond the norm. You know I think she's handling her functions real well over there, and that there is...she teaching. She's doing, she's doing some teaching over there...(p.24-25)*

*Afro-centric environment (#03, 04, 06, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

Many survivors expressed that the Afro-centric environment of Asha was also helpful to their experience. They expressed that it helped them to feel safe and comfortable, like they fit in and that this service really was for African Americans.

*#03: ...you're a little more comfortable...I just feel more comfortable, I might feel a little more comfortable when I come in someplace, you know, that makes me feel like, okay, yea, you know, I can come here...(p.51-52)*



I: *And do you think that's helpful to your experience there?*

#04: *Yes... 'Cause I know they're focusing on the Afro-American...And our race needs help...Yea...Yes, I do. Mmmhmm. Because it, it gives you the atmosphere you need when you come in there, to feel comfortable, you know, to feel safe.(p.25)*

#08: *...I've noticed that they got the art and stuff they make you feel...kind of like at home and stuff so I guess that kind of make people more comfortable too.*

I: *So, has that been helpful for you to have those things in this setting?*

#08: *Uh-huh. It make me more comfortable because everything is pretty much African-American like the setting...(p.19)*

#13: *Umm...unless you know kinda that you're...kinda around your own folks it keeps you in the atmosphere of being at home, which is yeah. It just, it doesn't really umm...have an impact on what type of service I would probably receive knowing that they Black there, but it just umm gives you a sense of umm...knowing that it's cultural, knowing that this is geared towards you. I don't think it would have an impact on the services directly. I think it, it just gives you that sense of umm...environment, gives you a warming; it gives you a little...it kind a makes you not so defensive (giggles), yeah...Yeah, I think it is. I think it is because umm...that sterile White atmosphere too clinical for us (giggles)...too clinical for us. Uh, uh, when they gonna bring out the electric chair and shock therapy or something (giggles)...It does, and more relaxed, more at ease...makes it warm, makes it warm.(p.19-20)*

*Holistic approach (#03, 04, 05, 07, 08, 09, 11, 12, 13, 14)*

Survivors also identified the holistic approach that Asha takes to assisting survivors as helpful to their lives and overall experience at Asha. They talked about the fact that domestic violence is only the root of their problems and that many other problems stem from that which need to be addressed as well and that they were grateful that Asha offered additional services to address their other needs. Specifically, some women identified the Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction (AODA) as helpful since many women turned to self-medicating themselves with these substance to deal with the violence that was occurring in their lives. Other talked about the anger management program as helpful in their overcoming the anger they feel towards abusive ex-partner and sometimes men in general.

*#03: You know what I'm saying? So, it, it is important to offer other services than DV because when you're coming out of domestic violence situation, you might have more problems that you, than you went in with...(p.44)*

*#04: I mean, because I found out, see I, I'm a, I'm in recovery...and um, not only the, the women's support groups are good for me, but also one-on-ones are good for me, and they provide those too.(p.5)*

*#11: ...They don't only deal with domestic violence issues, they deal with all of it. And I experienced that because I have more than just that issue. I have drugs that I was doing, I don't do anymore. I had a attitude issue. I was raped a long time ago. So they deal with all of that. But I have to talk about with them, to know. And they have to make me feel comfortable where I could talk about it. So that's how I knew. I wasn't able to talk about the rape, but I do now. It's past me. We talk about it in group now. Then you find out it happened to other women. See so, they*

*help you with a lot. It's not just the domestic violence, and I don't feel it should be just that. Because things leads up to domestic violence; why you accepting it, what happened in your life and how you dealing with it. We been told drugs was a way out. Alcohol...try to...oohh, he gonna hit me today, let me get drunk to deaden the pain, see. And if you don't deal with those, how you gonna accomplish the other ones? Because domestic violence leads to a lot of things. First, it's the psychological, what you do to get it off your mind. So you drink. And it doesn't help, you just think it does. But if you don't address that drinking issue, then how you gonna deal with the dv issue. So they help you with a lot, not just dv. And I don't think it should be just that...(p.22-23)*

*#13: ...I think that the holistic approach is the best approach. I mean from my own knowledge of human services and...umm I think that the holistic approach is the best approach. I think that umm...lookin' at a person's situation all the way around would best benefit them if they're gonna deal with that person, because you can Band-aide and keep Band-aiding and put a little antibiotic on it, but eventually that's gonna fester up, and it's gonna be a big ole boil or eruption or somethin' happen there (giggles)...A real graphic vision, and umm...there are a lot of programs that do do the Band-aide approach or the little antibiotic approach, and I think that we need to quit puttin' Band-aides on stuff that really needs to be surgically fixed or (giggles)...or really needs us to go ahead and get deep down and dirty and wash it out...Clean it up and you know...heal it, to totally heal it, you know. And umm I don't, I don't think that they do the Band-*

*aides. I believe that they are doing, they're trying...to go further than a Band-aide...(p.11)*

In sum, survivors were able to articulate many things that they found helpful about the services offered at Asha. Most expressed ways in which Asha's services were helpful to them personally, while many also expressed the potential for certain services to be helpful to them in the future or helpful to others in the African American community. Survivors found it helpful and important that certain services existed even though they may not yet have personally benefited from them. Women spoke very highly of Asha, the services they offered and their personal experiences with the agency.

The results of interviews with staff members echoed many of the sentiments of survivors. Coding of this data identified many of the same themes identified in survivor interviews (see Table 5). Although three staff members were interviewed, quotes from only two of these could be included in cross-case analysis since quotes could not be extracted for the staff member who opted not to have her interview tape recorded. However, her perception of things that survivors find helpful at the agency echoed those of the other two staff members.

<b>Table 5: Common Themes Identified as Helpful by Both Survivors and Staff</b>	
<b>Survivors</b>	<b>Staff</b>
<b>Emotional Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support Group</li> <li>○ Staff</li> <li>○ Agency</li> </ul>	<b>Emotional Support (Staff #1)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support Group (Staff #1)</li> <li>○ Staff (Staff #1)</li> <li>○ Agency (Staff#1)</li> </ul>
<b>Practical Assistance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Asha has lots of resources</li> <li>○ Help with obtaining resources/Provide referrals</li> <li>○ Meets your needs where you are</li> </ul>	<b>Practical Assistance (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Asha has lots of resources (Staff #2)</li> <li>○ Help with obtaining resources/Provide referrals (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>○ Meet your needs where you are (Staff # 1 &amp; 2)</li> </ul>
<b>Empowering Practices</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provides context in which to assist women to build their emotional strength</li> <li>○ Provides context in which to assist women to build their self-esteem/self-worth/confidence</li> <li>○ Teaches women that they don't have to tolerate abuse</li> </ul>	<b>Empowering Practices (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provides context in which to assist women to build their emotional strength (Staff #1)</li> <li>○ Provides context in which to assist women to build their self-esteem/self-worth/confidence (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>○ Teaches women that they don't have to tolerate abuse (Staff #2)</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally Specific Components</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family centered approach</li> <li>○ Prayer/Spirituality/Spiritually based approach</li> <li>○ Designed for African Americans</li> <li>○ African American staff</li> <li>○ Afro-centric environment</li> </ul>	<b>Culturally Specific Components (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family centered approach (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>○ Prayer/Spirituality/Spiritually based approach (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>○ Designed for African Americans (Staff #2)</li> <li>○ African American staff (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>○ Afro-centric environment (Staff #1 &amp; 2)</li> </ul>

**Research Question Number Three: What are women's perceptions of mainstream services and how is their experience with Asha different from those perceptions?**

A total of six respondents had received a variety of previous domestic violence services from mainstream agencies. These services included shelter, transitional housing, relocation services, material resources, support groups, children's groups, and individual advocacy and counseling. Most of these were received in the state of Wisconsin although one respondent had received services at shelters outside of the state. Overall, women described mostly problematic experiences with mainstream services and positive experiences with Asha in comparison to mainstream services. Survivors described this phenomenon in a couple of ways. They talked about certain elements as lacking from mainstream services and/or they talked about Asha as encompassing those same elements (see Table 6).

<b>Table 6 – Mainstream Services Compared With Asha</b>		
	<b>Mainstream Services</b>	<b>Asha</b>
<b>Organizational Culture With Regard to African Americans</b>	<b>Culture of Organization Not Welcoming to African Americans (N=2)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different Religion Than Those Common Among African Americans</li> <li>• Survivor Was a Minority in the Setting</li> <li>• White Environment</li> </ul>	<b>Culture of Organization Welcoming to African Americans (N=5)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency Feels Comfortable (More Comfortable than Mainstream Services)</li> <li>• Has More to Offer Black Women/Created for Black Women</li> </ul>
<b>Sensitivity to Process of Leaving an Abusive Relationship</b>	<b>Insensitivity to the Process of Leaving An Abusive Relationship (N=4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required Proof of Abuse</li> <li>• Denial of Services</li> <li>• Lack of Tolerance for Women Returning To/Not Leaving Abusers</li> </ul>	<b>Sensitivity to the Process of Leaving an Abusive Relationship (N=1)</b>
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	<b>Barriers to Adequate Assistance (N=6)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Holistic Approach - Limited Services</li> <li>• Lack of Outreach/Passive Approach</li> <li>• Inadequate Structure of Support Group</li> <li>• Didn't Provide Tools Needed to Get Out of Abusive Relationship</li> <li>• Staff Brushed Her Off/Didn't Have Time to Help</li> </ul> <b>Help Available That Partially Met Needs (N=6)</b>	<b>Structures Which Increase Ability to Assist (N=6)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Outreach/Extends Services</li> <li>• Services Are More Beneficial</li> <li>• Offers More Services</li> <li>• Hires Staff With Whom Survivors Can Identify (re: DV and AA)</li> <li>• Services Offered Within the Community</li> </ul>
<b>Support of Environment</b>	<b>Non-supportive Environment (N=5)</b> <b>Basic Feelings of Support and Comfort (N=6)</b>	<b>Supportive Environment (N=4)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draws People Back</li> <li>• Sincere in Wanting To Help You</li> <li>• More Welcoming</li> </ul>

Despite the problematic nature of their experience with mainstream services, survivors were able to point out positive aspects of their experiences with these agencies. In the following results, I first present survivors' positive aspects of their experiences with mainstream agencies; second, survivors' problematic experiences with mainstream agencies and; third, survivors experiences with Asha relative to their experiences with mainstream agencies.

#### Positive Aspects of Mainstream Services (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)

Survivors identified some positive experiences with mainstream services. Specifically, they described (1) basic feelings of comfort and support, and (2) help available that partially met needs.

##### *Basic Feelings of Support and Comfort (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)*

Survivors expressed at some level they liked the mainstream agencies which provided them with services and felt welcome, comfortable, and supported there.

#02: *Yeah, I was welcomed.*(p.11)

#05: *...I enjoyed it...*(p.28)

#08: *...they made us feel real comfortable...*(p.20)

#10: *...it's nice there. The staff is real nice...*(p.16)

##### *Help Available That Partially Met Needs (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)*

Survivors expressed that help was available at mainstream services and that these services did meet some of their needs, including temporary refuge from abusive partners.

#03: *...I mean, you know, if it was a necessity, yea, I went. Whether, you know, they liked it or not. You know what I'm saying? ...Yea, you know, if I felt like I*



*needed, if I was, I mean, that's what they was there for, regardless. You know what I'm saying...So, if I needed their services, yea I was gonna go...(p.60)*

*#05: ...it was somewhere where we could just go and eat, and sit and talk, and the kids be down in the basement. You know, it was basically, really, we, I would go really, to get away...from the guy that I was with. You know, well I'm going to group. I'm going to group, you know, to get away from him and be able to talk about some of the things...they helped in a lot of different way as far as like, with clothing and with uh, childcare for my children, and...you know, they had a lot of thing to offer too...(p.29-31)*

*#08: ...They helped a little bit...(p.21)*

In summary, survivors were able to express ways in which mainstream services were able to be helpful to them. For some, it was simply a relaxed environment which served as a refuge for them for a couple of hours, for others it was assistance with obtaining resources. Thus, they felt that these services did assist them at some level.

#### Negative Aspects of Mainstream Services (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)

Overall, survivors expressed many more ways in which mainstream services were problematic to meeting their needs. They described a number of ways in which these agencies fell short of assisting them in their efforts to seek help from their abusive relationships. These included (1) the culture of the organization not welcoming to African Americans, (2) insensitivity to the process of leaving an abusive relationship, (3) barriers to adequate assistance, and (4) non-supportive environment.

*Culture of Organization Not Welcoming to African Americans (#05,13)*

Survivors described ways in which the culture of these organizations was not welcoming to them as African American survivors. These included (a) different religion than those common among African Americans, (b) survivor was a minority in the setting, and (c) white environment.

*Different Religion Than Those Common Among African Americans (#05)*

The fact that one particular group was run through a Catholic church, by a nun, and most of the group consisted of Catholics was described as problematic by one participant. In general, most African Americans do not relate to Catholicism.

*#05: ...it was, you know, ran by white people, and [Sister Sally], the nun, and you know, uh, a lot of people there were Catholics...(p.28)*

*Survivor Was a Minority In The Setting (#05, 13)*

Survivors described experiences of being the only or one of few African American women in the support group or shelter setting.

*#05: The majority was Hispanics from the south side, and some white people from on the far east side, and it was a very, it was like, maybe 5, 6 black women there...basically when it started off, it was just like a, a, a, support group for whites and Hispanics. (p.34)*

*#13: Right after I came I stayed, and they were very, when I went to this facility for domestic violence, there was umm...I was the only Black woman there. (p.8)*

### *White Environment (#05, 13)*

Survivors described a number of ways in which they felt the overall environment of the agency was Eurocentric. These included surroundings that represented White culture and the agency being run by White women.

#05: *...everything in their surroundings was based on, you know, the white culture... (p.23)*

#13: *No. I was not comfortable there at all, and part of it had to do with the sterile [White] environment...the umm...those penny loafer shoes...and their program may have not been designed for me. I don't even know (giggles). You get what I'm saying? I just was dropped in there (giggles)...You know and it may have not even been designed, I mean because just like this program is designed for women of color. That program may have been designed for something else. Who's to say? I just don't know for sure, okay. But I knew when I got there I didn't fit that cookie cutter (giggles). (p.21 – refer to page 20, "...that sterile White atmosphere too clinical for us (giggles)...too clinical for us", p.28)*

### *Insensitivity to the Process of Leaving an Abusive Relationship (#03, 08, 10, 13)*

Secondly, survivors described ways in which they felt that these agencies were generally insensitive to the process of leaving an abusive relationship. This included (a) required proof of abuse, (b) denial of services, and (c) lack of tolerance for women returning to/not leaving abusers.

#### *Required Proof of Abuse (#03)*

The experience of agencies requiring actual proof of abuse in order for survivors to receive assistance was discussed.

*#03: And um, they had a program in there like I said, it was called Victim Services. What it was, was if um, you were going through anything, and you left, you had to be going through domestic service, domestic violence to get into [mainstream agency], and you had to have proof...(p.56-57)*

#### *Denial of Services (#03, 10)*

Survivors talked about ways in which they were denied services from agencies. This included being kicked out of an agency because of repeated decisions to return to an abusive partner, being refused services at an agency because the abusive partner had stalked and tracked the survivor down in another state and came to the shelter where she was staying, and a survivor being asked to discontinue attending support group at a domestic violence shelter in which she was staying.

*#03: ...And um, I was booted from that because of him...He found out where the safe house was, and um I think he had showed up or something. And they look at that as um, endangerment to the rest of the women in the house, so I was let go from that program. (p.57-58)*

*#03: ...the second time around they just closed the door on my face... Well, you know, it was like well we helped you the first time and, you messed up, and you on your own now... (p.61)*

*#10: And I'm like, and then that's why I'm not really going to group no more at that place because, I had went off in group. And I told them how I felt, and I told them that I wasn't fixin' to kiss nobody butt to have a friend. And I exploded in group, and I was like, and I let all the womens know that I'm not fixin' to kiss y'all butt to be y'all friend. And I'm not fixin' to be out here gossiping, y'all don't*

*do nothing but gossip and sit around and talk about people. I'm not with that clique. I'm trying to better myself...I exploded...I'm a outspoken person, and that's how I am, and other people don't understand that in group...So I guess they said I couldn't go to group for a while, because I had did that. But I had to let them know though. 'Cause they was like, [Oleta], you gonna run them people....I was like, run them off. I'm not fiddin' to kiss they butt to be their friend.(pgs.17-18)*

*Lack of Tolerance for Women Returning To/Not Leaving Abusers (#03, 08, 13)*

Survivors described a feeling of general intolerance on the part of these agencies for the “process” of leaving an abusive relationship.

*#03: ...it's like people are not sensitive to your situation because it's so many people coming in there with the same situation, and then especially if you leave and you come back, you know, it's like, why even bother, you know, why bother coming back here if you know you're gonna leave and go back to the situation and then be back in here the next week...or the next two weeks, you know. (p.60)*

*#08: I think they did in a way but I felt like they was kind of judging me, you know? Like I got out of this situation well, I know they mean good saying I got out of this situation and I know you can to but it's like they see you going like you take a step forward and you end up taking a step back they...oh, I don't know how much longer...like they kind of tell you they can't help you if you won't keep messing up or whatever and I'm like, I thought that's what you all was here for? I'm not intentionally trying to go back to him or whatever but...it...I told them it was hard. I'm taking care of the kids by myself and they'd be like, oh, we*

*understand that. I left my husband and I had two kids and I'm like ...it's not the same situation. It's not nowhere near the same and a lot of people don't realize they have help. They have their parents or whatever to help them which a lot of people, they do have their parents or whatever to help them...help them but after you go through a situation for so long, a lot of people stop helping you 'cause they don't believe you want to change it so...they, I don't think they really understood. They didn't even understand how difficult it is with small children and doing it by yourself on a fixed income and stuff like that so...I think they was just kind of giving me the brush off in some ways.(p.22)*

*#13: ...But then they were strictly domestic-violence driven, and umm...their key thing was leave him alone. You don't need him, so...for me it was...that agency was pretty good it just umm...but the focus was leave him alone. They didn't deal with the fact that you was in love that man that was your abuser. (p.21)*

#### *Barriers to Adequate Assistance (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10,13)*

Thirdly, survivors described ways in which they felt the agencies encompassed structural barriers that impeded their ability to adequately assist them as domestic violence survivors. This included (a) no holistic approach - limited services, (b) lack of outreach/passive approach, (c) inadequate structure of support group, (d) didn't provide "tools" needed to get out of abusive relationship, and (d) staff brushed her off/didn't have time to help.

### *No Holistic Approach – Limited Services (#02, 03, 05, 08)*

One problem that survivors described was the limited services these agencies offered. One survivor described the fact that the agency discontinued the provision of childcare during the group, which impeded her ability to attend the support group.

*#03: Yea there's no group um, they don't, I don't even think that they have as many services, they don't offer as many services as ASHA does. Um, nobody offered, you know, if I had um, alcohol abuse or drug abuse, um...If I wanted to talk to anybody about anger management, you know, they, I didn't, I don't recall anybody offering those type of classes or services, you know... (p.64)*

*#05: ...You know, at the [mainstream agency], they didn't have nowhere where they could refer you as, like a safe house or something, or they didn't have people that can um, take you to go get your, that would go with you to get your children and get your clothes. (p.35)*

*I: And they didn't have childcare so...*

*#08: They stopped. They had...they was remodeled the building or something and they didn't have any childcare so I wasn't able to take the children with me and I didn't want to leave them with him so I kind of stopped going when they was remodeling and stuff...(p.21)*

### *Lack of Outreach/Passive Approach (#03)*

The lack of outreach on the part of these agencies was also described as problematic.

*#03: I mean the people that come in, you know, so, it's like, they are not gonna go out of they way to try to, you know, extend services to people, you know and,*

*like I said, the turnover is so great, you know, I, I would imagine it's pretty hard to do that, you know, extend services like that to people that, you know, might show up one week and don't show up the next, you know. (p.64)*

#### *Inadequate Structure of Support Group (#05, 08, 10)*

Survivors described many aspects of the structure of the support group they attended which impeded its ability to be helpful. These included the following: the group being too large to be helpful; the agency hiring persons outside of the agency to run support groups; survivors feeling rushed and that there was not enough time in group; survivors feeling that it was hard for them to talk in group; survivors feeling that the group was not supportive of discussion of feelings; the group seemed to remain stagnant, members never seemed to get better; and, leaders of group not appearing to be at a helpful level in terms of their ability to assist.

*#08: That's why they try to limit the time people get to talk and stuff and they was like oh, you've been so many times and you don't talk or...that's because everybody else be talking so much...And I think it's not...fair, I mean if somebody got an issue or something they should kind of lay it on the table and let them...kind of let the advocate know before the group starts that they have an issue and...that way when they start they can be like okay, we have an issue we need to address right away, we need some advice on. And they just start off like that instead of at the end of the group, oh, I had something to talk about, you know? And then they won't have enough time to get that person's issue out or whatever or before they start, does anybody else have an issue that needs to be addressed immediately before we start with this person... I mean, it*



*just....sometimes there's just not enough time. An hour...that's when it started getting' good some times and it be time to go. (p.21-22)*

*#10: Because, you know why, because, when I go to that group there, they don't talk about what we talk about here. You know what they talk about? They talk about things that they done did it, I mean they talk about things that they done did in the past, and they never, seem like they never get better. And I don't want to stay in that boat. I mean, I'm trying to get over that, and go on with the future...(p.19)*

#### *Didn't Provide Tools Needed to Get Out of Abusive Relationship (#05, 08, 13)*

Survivors talked about their feeling that these agencies did not provide them with the tools they needed to get out of their abusive relationships.

*#05: ...And it was nothing uh, I haven't, with the [mainstream agency], you, um, you know I would, I was able to go there and vent, but I wasn't really able to receive no type of recommendation. You know what I'm saying? Nothing really helpful to me... You know, and it was like, well, you know, call the police or, you know, just leave him alone. It ain't like that... You know what I'm saying? It, it wasn't, it ain't that easy. It wasn't like that the so, you know, I continued in that relationship because I didn't know how to get out and I wasn't getting what I needed from them to get out, because, you know, it, it, I, I couldn't get nothing from it.(p.27-28)*

*#08: ...I felt like...I still end up in the same situation so it wasn't really no sense in me keep going and you know they was getting kind of tired of saying oh, well, you know, you need to get out of this and I was doing the best I could. It seemed*

*like I was just...it just wasn't happening and I didn't want to keep...I don't know if I would upset them or they didn't understand because they was out of the situation already or... 'cause they had a lot of brochures and stuff available and stuff for like...people information and stuff...like everything from like lead poisoning to domestic abuse, shelters and all different types of things but it was kind of not helping to go to the group and then he'd be outside waiting for me so...and it kind of didn't help me at the time... (p.20)*

#### *Staff Brushed Her Off/Didn't Have Time To Help (#08)*

The problem of agency staff giving survivors the “brush off” or not having enough time to devote to assisting survivors was also discussed.

*#08: 'Cause I think they was overwhelmed because there was so many people there and so many issues they had to address so...it wasn't enough staff or enough time...I think they was just kind of giving me the brush off in some ways. (p.22)*

#### *Non-supportive Environment (#03, 05, 08, 10, 13)*

Lastly, many survivors felt that the overall environments of these agencies were not supportive of them. This manifested itself in a variety of forms. Survivors felt betrayed by agencies, at times felt unwelcome, felt agencies were generally insensitive to and didn't understand their experience or situations and described general feelings of lack of support and lack of comfort. Some women expressed frustration at the way they were treated by these agencies and that they felt as though they were being “judged” in these agencies. Women also described problems with other survivors who were residents with them when they received shelter.

#03: ...*They was just gonna leave me out here to die...you know, it's not really anybody there to make you feel like, you know, well um, we got your back, you know, you're covered... You know, there's nobody really there to make you feel like that, you know...*(p.58-59)

#03: ...*the second time around I really didn't feel like they did, because, you know I felt like it wasn't my fault... You know what I'm saying? And, if you're in a situation where the man is persistent... You know what I'm saying? There's really nothing you can do about that... You know. So for them to tell me that I couldn't come back, or they couldn't help me because of what happened. You know what I'm saying? That was basically just saying, you're on your own.*(p.60-61)

#03: ...*after, uh (Laughs) my experiences in New York and North Carolina, I was kind of fed up... Fed up, you know, I'd deal with this myself, and uh, I think I have one place that, barely want to help you, unless you come in there broke down...and then you got the other one, you know, if you go through a little something that's out of you're control, there's nothing else they can do for you...*(p.65)

#08: ...*in a way they was trying to help but in a way they was real judgmental. They was like well um, did you leave him yet, you know whatever they would try to figure it out...I know that's they job to figure out if you not with the person no more but it's kind of like they judging well, okay, if you're not going to make your changes, what are we here for...*(p.24-25)

I: *What was your experience like with that agency?*

#13: *Very, very cold. It was a economic thing also even though I...we had...we, my husband and I, had money and stuff, but I was a Black woman. Okay, and uh...I think I stayed there overnight, and I left.*(p.25)

#### Positive Experiences With Asha (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)

To the contrary, in survivors' discussions of their experiences with Asha relative to mainstream services, they were very positive. Survivors identified a number of ways in which their experiences with Asha were better than their experiences with mainstream domestic violence services. These include (1) culture of organization welcoming to African Americans, (2) sensitivity to the "process" of leaving an abusive relationship, (3) structures which increase ability to assist, and (4) supportive environment.

#### *Culture of Organization Welcoming to African Americans (03, 05, 08, 10, 13)*

Survivors described ways in which the culture of Asha was welcoming to them as African American survivors as opposed to mainstream services which they described as un-welcoming in a number of ways. The ways in which Asha was welcoming to survivors included (a) agency feels comfortable, and (b) has more to offer Black women/Created for Black women.

#### *Agency Feels Comfortable (#03, 05, 08)*

Survivors expressed that they felt comfortable at Asha, more comfortable than with other mainstream services.

#03: *...So, I guess, you know, when you asked me have I know, do I know anybody that's been to any other um, domestic violence, you know, I, I would, I, I guess I would have to say that they're more comfortable with ASHA, because I see them here.* (66-67)

#03: ...*You know, I just, I wanted to go through what I was going through on my own, in the beginning. You know, I didn't really want to talk about it, you know, so coming here and knowing that I can...if I want to, and the people that I'm talking about it to, you know, it's not like, you just come in here and I'm telling my story to somebody that has no idea, you know, they can't relate to me. The people that I'm talking to know what I've been through. You know, all the women that run the um, the meetings, all of them have been through domestic violence, you know...So that makes me feel comfortable that they feel that they can come in there and put that on the table.*(p.71)

#08: ...*I feel more comfortable in the group...* (p.24)

*Has More to Offer Black Women/Created for Black Women (#05, 08, 10, 13)*

Survivors expressed that they felt Asha had more to offer African American women than mainstream services and that they felt Asha's services were created for African American women. One survivor went as far as saying that had she known about Asha before, she would not have sought services from the mainstream service.

#05: ...*it wasn't like with the ASHA group, you know, there be black people, they putting it out there, because they have been there... Uh, it makes it, mmm, different from the [mainstream agency], because of uh, you know, with the black woman, the bl-, the black women, it, it, it has a lot to offer to the black woman... You know, as far as we can relate on the same terms, you know, and things like that.* (p.28, 36-37)

#08: ...*it's easier to bond with the people here or whatever because they don't...too much judge you...So, it's just something...I look forward to being*

*around um...African-American women and just being able to bond a little bit whether it be just...it could be something little...it could...it just something that...you may have been hearing something...depressing from somebody else all day and you come in and they just...just...it's just...I don't know...it's just...it's just...that group all together just...everybody um...try to bond together and stuff...just accept each other as they is and help each other to work on they faults and stuff and kind of make goals for ourselves and work on one thing at a time and stuff so... (p.23-24)*

*#13: ...this program is designed for women of color...(p.28)*

*Sensitivity to the Process of Leaving an Abusive Relationship (#08)*

The feeling that Asha was sensitive to the process of leaving an abusive relationship in contrast to the previous agencies which weren't as sensitive to this issue was also discussed. These included an understanding of the process of leaving and abusive relationship and an acceptance of survivors regardless of their current relationship status. Asha's program accepts one where they are in relation to their intimate relationships with abusive partners and lets women go at their own pace in terms of their decisions and process of leaving their abusive relationships.

*#08: ...they don't...too much judge you...they don't give you no limited time and say well, you got two weeks to leave him or you know, you can't come here no more. They don't kind of do that. They let you take your time because they know it's a time thing, it's a time consuming thing and it don't happen over night and a lot of places don't understand the closer you get to leaving the more abusive the person becomes. So, I think a lot of places don't understand that or they be so*

*overwhelmed they don't have time to just sit and listen or give advice or whatever. But they do here...(p.23-24)*

*#08: ...here they don't, they accept you if you in the relationship if you not in the relationship, they just open, let me know when you need help and what you want me to do so. I like that better because they let you know at the beginning, whatever we can do to help you we'll do but a lot of it is your decision so I like that part better...They don't force you and they know it's a time consuming thing and they not help-, uh, expecting it to happen over night so ...they let you go at your own rate more as the other group was like okay, well this been going on, when is it going to stop?... (p.24-25)*

#### *Structures Which Increase Ability to Assist (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10, 13)*

Survivors discussed many ways in which they felt that Asha had structures in place that increased their ability to assist them more so than mainstream services. These included such things as (a) more outreach/extends services, (b) services are more beneficial, (c) offers more services (d) hires staff with whom survivors can identify, and (e) offers services within the community.

#### *More Outreach/Extends Services (#03, 08, 13)*

Some discussed that Asha actually extends their services and does more outreach than mainstream services.

*#03: ...You know I'm, when I say it's not, I mean, like I said I benefit more from the services that they offer here because I get people that really want to help you here, you know, they really want to, you know, extend you these services if you need them. (p.63)*

#03: ...*You know, from where I've come from, and what I've been through, you know, this is the best facility that I've been through. Been, yea, been through, you know, that's offered help, you know. There's a difference in having the help, and actually offering it...(p.71)*

#08: ...*they just open, let me know when you need help and what you want me to do so. I like that better because they let you know at the beginning, whatever we can do to help you we'll do but a lot of it is your decision so I like that part better... (p.24-25)*

#13: *Nobody never told me nothing about no program for a man then. Nobody every mentioned any of that, and so that there was a difference because they, the difference was is that...they...they [Asha] offered the services to me...you know in suggestion well did you tell him then that you know, and they, we didn't even talk about relativity of time, and I believe those programs were around then, some of them...or they may have been new coming to the field or whatever you know, but umm...no, no one every told me that then, so I guess that would be a difference, would be a difference. And umm when we talked about, when I talked about my abuse there at ASHA we did talk about that. And the fact that when you know you was so in love with him how come you all didn't get help together? You know how come he didn't get into a program and you too? You know umm...did you go to marriage counseling?(p.23)*

#### *Services Are More Beneficial (#02, 03, 05, 08, 10)*

Many discussed their feeling that Asha's services were more beneficial to them than the other agencies from which they sought services.



#02: *At [mainstream agency] they ask you but, they don't too much...well for me, I got better understanding by coming to Asha than I did there. I learned more from Asha than I did at [mainstream agency] ... 'Cause like I said I got more out of Asha than I did at [mainstream agency]. That makes a difference.... it makes a difference. (p.12-13)*

#03: *...I have to say the services that I received here have benefited me the most. (p.63)*

#05: *...I'm receiving more, I've received more from ASHA in the short length of time that I was with them from all the years I had put in with the [mainstream agency]...You know, I got more of, just different types of support, you know, I got more direction with ASHA as far as like how to, you know, really go along with, you know, getting to the bottom of a, a problem, or something...You know, I had more assistance with them than with the [mainstream agency]. (p.34)*

#08: *...once I started coming here I started liking it more...more and more and I just...this is the best one I've ever been to yet so...(p.20)*

#10: *... So this is better for me. It's helping me a whole lot. (p.19)*

#### *Offers More Services (#02, 03, 05, 13)*

Survivors felt that Asha offered more services than the previous agencies from which they sought assistance, including transportation, substance abuse treatment and physical protection to retrieve personal belongings from the home.

#02: *...Because if you don't have a ride to go there, they don't pick you up like Asha do. They'll bring you back home but they won't pick you up...Asha they get you and carry you back. (p.11-12)*

#03: ...I don't even think that they have as many services, they don't offer as many services as ASHA does. Um, nobody offered, you know, if I had um, alcohol abuse or drug abuse, um...If I wanted to talk to anybody about anger management, you know, they, I didn't, I don't recall anybody offering those type of classes or services, you know... (p.64)

#05: ...And when you're in abusive relationships and, you know, your spouse is, you too scared to go home because he's gonna beat you, or whatever, and he ain't gonna let the kids go, and all this crazy stuff, you know. With ASHA, like I said, they got these big men, and they will go with you...and you didn't, you don't have to call the police... (p.35)

*Hires Staff With Whom Survivors Can Identify (re: DV and AA) (#03, 05, 10, 13)*

Survivors felt a greater sense of identification with staff based on the fact that the staff were also African American, had been through domestic violence and some had even had previous incarceration and/or substance abuse issues. This feeling was facilitated by the staff's openness regarding their own personal experiences and their sincerity, which helped women to feel comfortable. Some survivors even saw the staff as role models.

#03: ...the people that I'm talking about it to, you know, it's not like, you just come in here and I'm telling my story to somebody that has no idea, you know, they can't relate to me. The people that I'm talking to know what I've been through. You know, all the women that run the um, the meetings, all of them have been through domestic violence, you know. Um, some of them have even been to jail, and they talk about that...You know what I'm saying? So that makes me feel

*comfortable that they feel that they can come in there and put that on the table... You know what I'm saying? They feel like anything you want to ask them, they don't hold nothing back... You know what I'm saying? So that, that's putting a lot on the line, you know, for people that you don't really know like that. (p.71-72)*

*#05: ... 'cause all of them, that the majority of the staff that I, I deal with on a weekly basis, they all have been there... So, you know, and look at them today... You know, they're very inspiring, and really make me, I got to do it too. 'Cause, you know, they'd done it, and I got to do what I can do. You know, I want to do it. I have the desires... and stuff. And being around them, you know, the, the, the structure is so positive, it just generates. (p.32)*

*#10: Yeah, because black people, black womens understand other black womens. Ain't no way a white woman understands what a black woman going through. Because I noticing this since I been there, Black women, I mean Black women are stronger than white women, because I see it everyday. So, it's good for Black women to be together... But if you're dealing with going to a group with a white woman, it's going to be hard. Because... I just noticed it, I just notice it. Because... we're different, we are totally different. (p.20-21)*

*#13: [Maxine]. She umm, she was, it was, she a down-to-earth sister. She still wear wigs cause that's still part of her, you know. Umm... and anybody who knows anybody about our folks, and we know where our folks come from by the way they look and they dress and that, okay. And she still has her cultural stuff. I mean she still has that. I mean she ain't gave up her 70s. Umm (giggles)... Yeah,*

*she ain't gave up her 70s stuff and...and she's still got it. You're right, you're right, so. You know that there was welcomin'. You know somebody who's just, you see they down-to-earth, you know. You see they haven't, they ain't playin' this here I'm the staff person, and...which we have here you know (giggles). And then um, they keep it, it was a welcomed...type environment to where you, we need you to be here. We need you to be here. Without you here, we ain't gonna be here. Umm mm, that's the way it was; that's the way it was, yup...Umm hum, made me feel that my participation would do them...just as much as good as it does...me good, you know. And, and actually it does because I know within support groups a lot a times it, the facilitator is not part of what you been through or where you been. The groups are dry. The groups are like uh. You chokin' on getting through it. This doesn't have validity to them...and...it...it keeps you from givin' (giggles), it keeps you from giving. It's like eatin' a piece a dry bread when all you have to do is put a little butter on it to get it going, you know (giggles). You understand what I'm sayin', so there...that makes a big difference, makes a big difference.(p.27)*

#### *Services Offered Within the Community (# 08)*

To some survivors, Asha was simply more convenient for them to seek services from because of the proximity of Asha to their neighborhood relative to other services.

*#08: ...and this is closer to my neighborhood too... (p.21)*

*Supportive Environment (#03, 08, 10, 13)*

Lastly, women discussed many ways in which they felt Asha had an overall supportive environment. These included (a) draws people back, (b) sincere in wanting to help you, and (c) more welcoming.

*Draws People Back (#03, 08)*

Survivors discussed a general sense that Asha as an agency actually draws people back, even after periods of absence. One survivor indicated that she would even continue to attend the group even after she leaves her abusive relationship for good.

*#03: ...A few of them will say that, um, they've attended other classes at other domestic violence, um, I guess outlets, or whatever...yea, programs, but they always come back to ASHA. You know, I've heard a few of them say, yea I went over, but, you know, I've been back to ASHA for about 2 months now... You know so, I, I guess this one, you know, will also, is also benefiting them more...than the other programs because even though they say they've been gone for a while, they come back, and you know. (Pause) And that caught my attention too, you know... for somebody to say they'd been gone, but they come back, you know, there must be something at this program... You know what I'm saying. That makes them feel like, you know, even if they miss a few meetings, you know, for them to come back, you know, it's got to be something with the program. (p.67)*

*#08: ...I stopped for a little while but I ended up coming back to the group. (p.23)*

*#08: ...I feel this is a group I'm going to stay with for a while. Probably even after I get out of the relationship for good and stuff...I probably still like to attend Asha and maybe I can help some other people down the line. (p.24)*

*Sincere in Wanting to Help You (#03, 08, 10)*

Survivors expressed that they felt supported at Asha. They felt Asha was less judgmental of them. And one survivor discussed the fact that she actually looked forward to coming to Asha because of problems she was having at the domestic violence shelter in which she was staying and looked to her time with Asha for support. Survivors also got the sense that Asha actually wanted to help them.

*#03: You know, like I said, considering the programs that I've been through, or been to. You know what I'm saying? Like I said, this is the first program that I've been to that, you know, actually act like they want to help. You know, it's not just a job. You know, so it's not just a paycheck. You know they're not just here to, to get paid. You know they're actually here to help...If you want the help... (p.72)*

*#08: ...it's more...um, advocates that you can...if you really wanted to talk you can pull them to the side and they'll make time for you. They won't kind of like brush you off or say they got something else to do all the time or...they just...it's easier to bond with the people here or whatever because they don't...too much judge you... (p.23-24)*

*#10: ...And I would just stay in my room every day so, but I would be glad to come here on Mondays, because it helped me, you know, so this place had helped me because I was going through a lot down where I'm at now...(p.17)*

*More Welcoming (#03, 08, 13)*

Survivors discussed how they felt more welcome at Asha than they did at other domestic violence services.

I: *Did you feel welcome at that other agency?*

#08: *Um...not as welcome as I feel here. (p.23)*

#13: *...I was welcomed when the van picked me up the first day I left and went there. There was a Black driver. Umm (giggles), and he was kind a tellin' us what was gonna happen when we got there. Umm there was three of us and neither one of us had been there before, so...it was a...a warm experience. He was courteous; he was kind; he opened the door for us. Umm...and then uh...we talked and we laughed, turn the music up, let us sing and yell, we don't get all that up in here, so...You know and plus it was freedom from here. We riding in a car, oh yeah (giggles), so it was nice. It was nice, and we in our hood, so it was nice. And umm...when we got to the agency, we were welcomed. Umm...I can't, I don't wanna pronounce her name wrong, like is it [Max-]...[Maxine]. She umm, she was, it was, she a down-to-earth sister. She still wear wigs cause that's still part a her, you know. Umm...and anybody who knows anybody about our folks, and we know where our folks come from by the way they look and they dress and that, okay. And she still has her cultural stuff. I mean she still has that. I mean she ain't gave up her 70s. Umm (giggles)...Yeah, she ain't gave up her 70s stuff and...and she's still got it. You're right, you're right, so. You know that there was welcomin'. You know somebody who's just, you see they down-to-earth, you know. You see they haven't, they ain't playin' this here I'm the staff person, and...which we have here you know (giggles). And then um, they keep it, it was a welcomed...type environment to where you, we need you to be here. We need you to be here. Without you here, we ain't gonna be here. Umm mm, that's*

*the way it was; that's the way it was, yup... Umm hum, made me feel that my participation would do them...just as much as good as it does...me good, you know...(p.26-27)*

Overall, women felt better about their experience with Asha and found this experience to be the most beneficial for them. They indicated that mainstream services were able to be helpful but that Asha was much more helpful to them. They (1) discussed ways in which the culture of mainstream organizations was not welcoming to them as African Americans while speaking of Asha as welcoming to them; (2) they described a general insensitivity of mainstream organizations to the process of leaving an abusive relationship while expressing that Asha was sensitive to this process; (3) they discussed structural barriers of mainstream organizations which impeded these agencies abilities to adequately assist them while Asha had structural supports in place which enabled them to be more helpful to survivors; and (4) discussed that the environment of mainstream agencies were generally non supportive while Asha was very supportive to them.

Within-case analysis of the data revealed a similar story. Overall, women had a better experience with Asha than they did with mainstream services. Survivors' stories indicated that although mainstream services were helpful in some ways, these services fell short of meeting their needs in various ways. Survivors had received services from a number of locations. Three respondents had attended domestic violence support groups. One of these groups was run through a local women's center, the other was run through a local community program. Three of the women had received services from domestic violence shelters. One respondent received services from two domestic violence shelters out of state, the remaining two respondents received services from within-state shelters.



All of the survivors indicated that these services were helpful in some way. It was helpful to survivors that these services offered such things as a place to go and vent, temporary refuge from abusive partners, temporary housing, resources and information. Most also indicated that they felt comfortable and welcome at these agencies.

Survivors, however, indicated that these agencies fell short of meeting their needs in multiple ways. These included terminating survivors for services as a result of repeated returns to an abusive partner, refusing service to survivors, rushed groups, staff who do not have time to talk with survivors individually, not receiving helpful feedback to deal with problems and not giving survivors the tools necessary to leave abusive relationships. These agencies also had environments that were uncomfortable for survivors. Survivors were pressured to leave abusive partners, brushed off by staff, felt judged, felt uncomfortable being a minority in the setting and at times felt the services were cold and unwelcoming.

Each of these survivors indicated that they had a better experience with Asha than they did with mainstream services. This was for several reasons. Survivors indicated that Asha actually provided the tools necessary to leave abusive relationships, understood the process of leaving an abusive relationship and were non-judgmental. The staff at Asha were supportive, made time for survivors and served as role models inspiring hope in survivors. Survivors were able to relate better to staff and group members and gained more helpful knowledge from Asha than from mainstream services. Asha actively extended their services and provided practical assistance to survivors, including transportation for participants to and from support group. It also offered a place where survivors could go to talk about problems and receive helpful feedback.

For example, we look at the story of respondent number eight:

Respondent number eight had previously received services from one other domestic violence program. She attended a domestic violence support group that was run through a local community program...For the most part the respondent feels that the group made her feel comfortable...She states that although the group helped her to some degree, it was not enough. The group only partially met her needs. In addition, she felt as though she was being judged by the program because she was still in a relationship with her abusive partner. She was feeling pressure from the group to leave her relationship when she was not quite ready to do so and did not feel she was getting the help she needed from this group to help her with the process. She also felt as though the staff did not really have enough time to assist women on an individual basis...She also felt that there was not enough time for group. She indicated that this was a very large group having sometimes as many as thirty or forty participants for a one-hour session and that it was not enough time to get to everyone and the group often felt rushed. The respondent also felt that she was in some way upsetting the people in the program by staying in her abusive relationship and got the message that they were telling her they could not help her if she continued to remain in her abusive relationship. She also felt that the program did not understand the process of leaving an abusive relationship and how difficult that process is. Eventually the respondent left that group...

When comparing her experience with this support group to her experience with Asha, the respondent referred to the Asha program as "...the best one I've ever been to..." She indicates that she feels more welcome at Asha, that she likes the group better and feels more comfortable with Asha...That she looks forward to being around African

American women and being able to bond...She also feels that the staff at Asha are more available when you need them...She said that at Asha they don't judge you and they don't pressure you to leave your abusive relationship, they accept you where you are and support you in working at your own pace. They extend an invitation to you to let them know when you need help and what you need help with. The respondent indicates that she likes this better than her previous experience. She states that Asha understands that leaving an abusive relationship is a time consuming process and that it doesn't happen overnight. She also states that Asha is closer to her home, which is more convenient for her. This respondent feels so positively about the group at Asha that she believes she will stay with the group for a while and that she will continue with the group even after she leaves her abusive relationship for good so that maybe she "...can help some other people down the line."

In sum, women appreciated and benefited from mainstream services but were able to identify more ways in which these services fell short of meeting their needs and Asha better met these needs and in the end, they all told essentially the same story, they had received domestic violence services from mainstream agencies, these services were helpful to them in some way but they had a better experience with Asha and found it more helpful, identifying it as the best agency they had been to. Complete within-case analysis can be found in Appendix D.

**Research Question Number Four: What culturally specific intervention components, if any, do survivors and staff identify as desirable that do not yet exist?**

Neither survivors nor staff identified culturally specific intervention components which they desired that did not exist at Asha Family Services. This is probably due

largely to the fact that, as we saw in research question number one, Asha incorporates all culturally specific components of intervention services identified in the literature.

Survivors and staff did identify a number of non-culturally specific programs or services that they would incorporate into an intervention like Asha if it were their program. Staff indicated that they would include self-esteem workshops, have a shelter and enhance the children's program by including such things as anger management in schools and a recreation center. Survivors indicated that they would include such things as meals for the women, shelter, educational programs for women, job skill training for women, daycare, after school program for children which would include tutoring and meals, additional resources including bus tickets, social outings for them and their children, domestic violence education in schools, sexual abuse support group, literacy programs for children and stress-management for children.

## DISCUSSION

This research has found that in many ways Asha Family Services is successfully meeting the needs of African American women who are survivors of intimate partner violence. Now, how exactly is it doing this? We start by looking at Asha as an agency.

### Asha as a Culturally Specific Domestic Violence Agency

As indicated in research question number, Asha successfully incorporates many of the components cited in the literature as being necessary components of culturally specific interventions. In addition, as we see from research question number two, the results of this research specifically tell us that African American survivors are especially benefiting from these culturally specific components. First, survivors spoke highly of the fact that Asha hires predominantly African American staff to work in the agency. Many

survivors spoken to for this study identified this as something particularly helpful and important to them. They felt as though they were better able to relate to African American staff and appreciated Asha for providing employment opportunities for African American women. Survivors also indicated a feeling that African American staff were better able to understand them and their experiences. Having representative staff was one of the components identified in the literature as important for implementing culturally specific interventions (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2001).

Secondly, survivors spoke to the fact that Asha is located in a predominantly African American neighborhood, which for some was even close to their homes. Additionally, Asha has created an Afro-centric environment within the agency which made it feel more comfortable and safe for African Americans seeking service there. Some even indicated that this helped them to feel free to open up and talk about their experiences. The Afro-centric environment created by Asha helped African American survivors to feel welcomed and that the services Asha offered were truly for them. Conducting services in an environment comfortable for participants was another element identified in the literature as important to implementing culturally specific interventions (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Young et al., 2001).

As also indicated in these results, Asha incorporates cultural values, norms, expectations and attitudes of African Americans into the intervention (Alcalay et al., 1999; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000; DeLamater et al., 2000; Erickson & Al-Timimi, 2001; Gondolf & Williams, 2001; Nicholson & Kay, 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988;

Pruett et al., 2000; Robinson et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2001; Young et al., 2001) in a number of ways. This included the incorporation of spirituality in the provision of their services, taking a family centered approach to services, utilizing an Afro-centric curriculum and taking a holistic approach to the treatment of individuals who seek services there, all of which survivors identified as both helpful and important to them.

Asha Family Services was developed in collaboration with the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; Pruett et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2001; Young et al., 2001). The fact that an African American woman who is a survivor herself founded Asha meets this very basic criteria of culturally specific interventions. In addition, survivors themselves discussed how important this was to them and how the founder is then able to serve as a role model to other survivors. According to many of the survivors in this study, the founder at many times came to the support groups to talk about her experiences and to motivate other survivors and they appreciated and respected her for this.

A fifth criteria, use of language familiar to the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; DeLamater et al., 2000; Young et al., 2001) was also a criteria met by Asha. One may think that language would not be an issue with this population in that the primary language of those who seek services from Asha would be English. However, those who argue such would be missing a very important aspect of language and African American culture. For decades scholars have identified the existence of an African American or Black English (some have termed it "Ebonics") that some assert is spoken by as much as 80% of the African American population (Dillard, 1972; Poplack, 2000; Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Others have specifically documented its use among African American women (Lanehart, 2002).

Rickford & Rickford (2000) argue, “The fact is that most African Americans do talk differently from whites and Americans of other ethnic groups or at least most of us can when we want to (p.4).” They further argue that the use of this form of English is important to African Americans because: it marks Black identity; it retains the associations of warmth and closeness for the many Blacks who first learned it from their mother and fathers and other family members; it expresses camaraderie and solidarity among friends; and it establishes rapport among Blacks (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Bearing this in mind, it is therefore important that the African American staff at Asha, by nature of their cultural environment and history, are familiar with and able to use Black English, which is the language familiar to individuals seeking services from the agency. They are therefore better able to relate to clients, communicate effectively with them, and build better rapport with them than white service providers could. The use of Black English among the women in the group also builds a sense of connectedness and camaraderie and builds rapport among participants.

Lastly, using channels of dissemination which would successfully reach the target population (Alcalay et al., 1999; Peterson & Mañin, 1988) was a final component that Asha was able to successfully put into action. By participating in the “It’s Your Business Campaign,” a domestic violence awareness campaign specifically designed to reach the African American community, Asha was able to advertise itself in a way to reach out to this community. In addition, some survivors had heard about Asha thru referrals from other African American survivors.

Additionally, Asha incorporates a number of components for intervention which have been identified as important and helpful to healing for African American women.

Support groups for example have been found to be particularly important for African American women in the healing process, especially for those leaving abusive relationships, as these groups represent community, an important healing element of African American culture (hooks, 1993; Taylor, 2002). Asha's support groups for survivors, the Sister Circles, fill this need in the healing process. In addition, the importance of the incorporation of spirituality into groups for African American women has also been documented (Williams, Frame & Green, 1999). Asha specifically incorporates this into their support groups by concluding the groups with a prayer and hugs given among the participants and facilitators.

The support of other African Americans women has also been identified as helpful for those working on overcoming and remaining free from substance abuse addictions (hooks, 1993). More generally, this is important in that survivors sometimes turn to alcohol and/or drugs in order to self-medicate themselves from the abuse they experience (Csoboth, Birkas & Purebl, 2003; Rogers, McGee, Vann, Thompson & Williams, 2003). Asha is very unique in that it not only provides multiple sources of support for women overcoming addiction (i.e. resources and addictions counseling), the agency actually does outreach to women who have relapsed, at times going to their homes and inviting them back to the agency indicating that it was alright, that recovery is a process and everyone strays sometimes. This was a particularly powerful thing for one participant in the study who emphasized how important this was to her and that she actually returned to Asha for services after this home visit. This specifically highlights Asha's willingness to reach out to those who need help and are often neglected, missed or turned away by traditional programs who often have agency rules which discourage the



participation of women who are addicted to substances or previously/currently incarcerated.

Asha also provides services to women who are incarcerated (via Sister Circle groups) and to previously incarcerated women (via Sister Circle groups, a prison release program, substance abuse counseling and sometime even employment at the agency). This is particularly noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, many women in prison are there as a direct result of being involved with abusive partners and many incarcerated women have extensive and often severe histories of abuse (Browne, Miller & Maguin, 1999; BJS, 1999; Richie, 1996; Richie & Johnsen, 1996). Secondly, women of Color represent the largest percent of incarcerated women in this country (BJS, 1999; Richie, 2001). If our shelters fail to meet the needs of incarcerated or previously incarcerated women, they are leaving out a large subsection of women impacted by domestic violence and particularly, women of Color. Additionally, women upon release from incarceration have multiple needs as they attempt to reintegrate themselves into society. These needs include treatment for substance abuse problems, health care, mental health treatment (including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), education and employment services, housing, and child advocacy and family reunification assistance (Richie, 2001). Richie (2001) specifically indicates that much needed reintegration services could play a critical role in decreasing women's recidivism and increasing their chances of successful re-entry into their communities. Asha's services are playing an important role in survivors' post incarceration success.

As these results clearly indicate, there is a high degree of convergence between what Asha seek to do, as indicated in its mission statement, and what survivors are actually experiencing. Asha, as an agency, appears to be meeting its self-defined goals.

#### Asha as a Helpful Resource for Survivors

Beyond its culturally specific components, Asha is helpful to African American survivors in another very important way, by providing good, quality, necessary services which specifically meet the needs of women who are attempting to cope with abusive relationships, leave abusive relations, and/or remain free from abusive relationships. As indicated in research question number three, many of these things were lacking from other mainstream agencies and programs from which these women sought services. Research has demonstrated that leaving an abusive relationship is long and difficult process for survivors which may take many years to complete, with many women returning to abusers often multiple times before leaving for good (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Horton & Johnson, 1993; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Mills, 1985; Taylor, 2002; Wuest & Merritt-Gray; White, 1994). Yet, many women felt that the mainstream agencies from which they sought services were insensitive to this process by engaging in such practices as requiring women to provide evidence of abuse, denying or refusing women services for repeated returns to abusers and abusers tracking women down at safe houses, and being judgmental of women who remain in their abusive relationship, indicating that they should just leave, without dealing with the complexities of being involved in an abusive relationship.

In contrast, survivors felt that Asha was sensitive to this process, making their experience with Asha better than with mainstream services. Important to the process of

leaving an abusive relationship is reinstating oneself within a larger social context of family and community beliefs, norms, resources and services and reestablishing social networks (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Taylor, 2002; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999). Asha provides the space for survivors to engage in this action. Also important to survivors during this process is having a “refuge,” a safe place where they could think, reflect, problem solve, and receive feedback. Asha provided this space. Survivors spoke of Asha as a refuge and a space where they felt safe to discuss their problems without feeling judged, something that is needed by all survivors. Survivors felt supported by Asha whether they had decided to leave their abusive relationship or not and regardless of what point they were in the process of leaving.

Important to the process of leaving an abusive relationship as well is the empowerment of survivors by such means as building survivors’ self-esteem and self-worth and providing diverse resources to meet their multiple needs of survivors (Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995; Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999). Survivors indicated that mainstream agencies tended to have too few services to meet their multiple needs, while Asha had many more resources and was able to provide them with referrals for services that survivors needed but Asha did not have. Many of these additional services, such as transportation, housing and employment assistance and physical protection to obtain survivors’ personal belongings from their homes, were noted as particularly helpful for women as they sought to leave their abusive relationships. Survivors also identified Asha as emotionally supportive during this process by providing them with a safe place to talk and providing a context in which to assist them in building their self-esteem and self worth. Much of what Asha incorporates, which mainstream

services seemed to lack, were things that were simply helpful to and necessary for survivors to be able to leave abusive relationships.

Survivors found it especially helpful to them that the women who led their support groups were themselves survivors of intimate partner violence and that they freely discussed this experience. This was helpful to survivors in a number of ways. Survivors felt that they were better able to identify with staff since many had been through similar experiences and that staff understood them better and they were able to see staff as role models for moving forward in their own lives. Survivors valued the fact that the women leading their groups were once in situations similar to their own and were now staff at an agency such as Asha, running groups for other women who have experienced intimate violence. For many survivors, this element was particularly powerful, enhanced their comfort level and encouraged their sharing and candidness with their stories. As one survivor stated, she wasn't telling her story to anyone who didn't know the experience, these women knew her pain, knew from experience how she felt. This challenges many policies of mainstream agencies today which either do not hire survivors or require a certain number of years free from the relationship before they would consider such a hire. These women are stating that they need, prefer, and can better relate with group facilitators who are survivors of intimate violence and who are free to discuss this experience in the group.

Another powerful element of the support groups at Asha, for many of the survivors, was the fact that often following groups members and staff will exchange hugs as an additional sign of support and encouragement. In addition, facilitators told participants that they loved and cared for the survivors. This was very important for

women as they spoke fondly of this in their interviews. For one survivor in particular, this was especially helpful to her because she was hundreds of miles away from family, as a result of fleeing her abuser, and the women in the group and the staff at Asha were the closest people she had to family. This also challenges traditional service standards of distancing oneself from clients and setting boundaries to any form of intimacy.

### Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size. Related to this is the fact that the experiences of these fourteen survivors are not generalizable to all survivors who receive services from Asha. However, this study did recruit a sample of survivors who had varying lengths of involvement with the agency and who received a diversity of services such that this is not a purposeful sample of women who had long histories of positive experiences with Asha.

Another related limitation of this study was the inability to access the sub-population of African American survivors who initially received services from Asha but were dissatisfied and left. It would be helpful to talk with some of these survivors as well. However, the purpose of this study was not to evaluate the services of Asha. The goal of this study was to explore the extent to which African American survivors experience the culturally specific services that Asha provides.

In addition, those who did not receive services from Asha on a frequent basis were less likely to be represented in this study. It is possible that these individuals would not have been included on the list provided by advocates and may not have been on the recent support group rosters used to recruit some of the survivors for this study. On a related note, those survivors who were not available to be interviewed during the weeks

that I traveled to Milwaukee were also not included in this study. Due to the fact that I had to come in from out of state to conduct these interviews, my sample was limited to those women whom I could interview during the few weeks that I traveled to Asha. There were women whom I contacted that I was unable to interview because my scheduled time in Milwaukee conflicted with their commitments during that time.

A final limitation of this study is that these findings are not generalizable to all culturally specific intervention, domestic violence or otherwise. The goal of this study was to specifically identify the culturally specific components of Asha Family Services. However, the themes identified by this study do provide feedback for future program development in working with the African American community, highlights implications for service providers and provides implications for future research.

#### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

The results of this study indicate the success of culturally specific intervention with African American survivors and highlight the need for more culturally specific programs of this nature in communities that are predominantly African American. Survivors expressed that the services provided by Asha were more beneficial to them in many ways and for many facilitated the process of their leaving abusive relationships and remaining free from them. This is exactly what we would like our domestic violence interventions to do for survivors. And, witnessed by the survivors in this study, African American survivors clearly benefit more from culturally specific interventions. The services were better able to assist these survivors in particular, because they were culturally specific. Bearing this in mind, the ideal situation would be that until the problem of violence against women is eradicated, predominantly African American

communities should have their own culturally specific domestic violence intervention programs. The reality is that this would take many years to become established, if ever, and not every community has the resources or African American survivor womanpower to start them. Therefore, what can other domestic violence programs do to better serve African American survivors? They may start by becoming culturally competent, then continuously evaluate, improve and sustain this cultural competence. Although, by definition, not every currently functioning agency can be culturally specific, all can be culturally competent, incorporating culturally specific elements, if the commitment is put forth.

Vinh-Thomas, Bunch & Card (2003) have synthesized a definition of cultural competence which reads: a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies, including a consideration for logistic, socioeconomic, and functional concerns that influence behavior, that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals, thus: enabling the system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively with the target population, and; resulting in services that are accepted by the target population. Mainstream domestic violence agencies can incorporate elements of culturally specific programming in order to make their agencies culturally competent. For example, they may use channels of dissemination which will successfully reach African Americans and other racial ethnic group in the community. This would begin to make survivors aware that the services even exist and extend an invitation to seek services there. Agencies can learn from other culturally specific and culturally competent interventions, from reviewing the literature, and from engagement in the target community what the best channels of dissemination are for reaching the target population. For example, popular culture has

been identified as a successful channel for advertising to the African American and Latino/a communities. This includes using such media as video, music, television, and magazines (Alcalay et al, 1999; DeLamater et al, 2000; Oliver, 2000). If an agency is seeking to advertise its services to these communities, these would be successful outlets.

Domestic violence agencies can also hire representative staff in their organizations. Agencies should have staff who reflect the target population to which the agency is seeking to do outreach. Survivors specifically spoke on the comfort created by receiving services from someone who looked like them. It may involve some creativity and extensive search to recruit these individuals but if an agency is committed to this goal, it will pursue the added steps to make this happen. In addition to hiring such staff agencies should support these staff by not overloading them with the sole burden of initiating and sustaining culturally competent programming, supporting their work with the target populations and creating a comfortable and nurturing environment facilitating their professional development.

Third, agencies could create environments that are more inviting to target communities. For example, posters and artwork on the walls, items located on tables and literature located in racks should not reflect only of European-American culture. This environment is not inviting to people of Color. Survivors spoke highly of the comfort created for them by going into Asha and seeing themselves reflected in the environment.

Fourth, agencies may also incorporate cultural values, norms, expectations and attitudes of target group into their intervention. Agencies should read relevant literature and engage in dialogue with members of the target population in order to gain knowledge of their values, norms, expectations and attitudes. The agency should then assess the way



it is providing services and see how it can make these services friendlier to the target communities so that they are more responsive to the services provided. For example, if the community to which the agency seeks to provide services has a strong religious faith, services providers may seek to work with influential religious leaders in the community. If the community the agency seeks to target places high value on spirituality, the agency may look to incorporate spirituality in the provision of services to this community. Likewise, if the target community values family, the agency should seek to provide services in a way that incorporates the family.

Additionally, agencies should have regularly scheduled cultural competence training. Many state domestic violence coalitions offer this as a service, when requested, by their member programs.

Mainstream domestic violence agencies also need to work on making their services more useful for survivors. Agency staff need to be more aware of and sensitive to the process of leaving an abusive relationship and the multiple needs, emotionally and practically, that women have when embarking on this difficult journey. They also need to be understanding and accepting of those women who choose to remain in their abusive relationships whether temporarily or indefinitely. Agencies that did not embrace this practice were perceived as less helpful to survivors.

Agencies should also work on the process of empowering survivors. This includes providing a context in which to build their self-esteem and self-worth, which has sometimes been destroyed by abusive partners. This was something particularly powerful that Asha was able to do for its survivors. Additionally, assess the practical assistance that women need to successfully leave an abusive relationship and work on

equipping the agency to assist women in obtaining such resources. This can be done by the agency expanding its own services and programs or partnering with agencies in the community which can provide relevant assistance.

Having staff who had also experienced domestic violence, and were free to discuss this, was also a powerful component to the healing of survivors in this sample. Agencies may look to recruit and hire staff who have experienced domestic violence, particularly to lead support groups. This may help women to feel more relaxed and be more open with their experiences when they feel they are speaking with someone who truly understands their experience. These women can then serve as role models to survivors in these groups as did the support group facilitators at Asha.

Also key to the healing process for survivors in this sample was the exchange of hugs among group member and facilitators and expressions of love, care and concern by the facilitator. When dealing with a population that has been so hurt by other individuals in their lives, agency staff can look to lower some of the professional boundaries they set on intimacy and express genuine care and concern for participants instead of maintaining the appearance of a strictly professional relationship. Survivors often need that hug and reassurance that somebody cares about them.

### Implications for Research

This research with Asha provided useful information on what makes a culturally specific program, what benefits African American survivors the most, and how mainstream domestic violence services fell short of meeting the needs of these women. Similar research also needs to be conducted with other culturally specific domestic violence interventions which target other communities of Color to see if these

interventions are working as successfully with the target population and to assess what is most helpful to those survivors to inform existing services and to develop culturally specific agencies. Also, future research needs to be conducted to see that if the themes identified as helpful to the survivors in this study are useful to other African American survivors. Future research could also compare the results of this study to a sample of African American survivors receiving mainstream domestic violence services who have not received services from a culturally specific domestic violence agency.

In addition, we need to assess the ways in which these programs potentially help batterers who receive services at culturally specific agencies. It would be important to examine these programs and talk with involved men and group facilitators to assess if and how these programs are working for men of Color who are abusive.

Overall, this research has: contributed to the literature on culturally specific domestic violence interventions; defined and exemplified a culturally specific domestic violence intervention which specifically targets the African American community; provided insight in the utility of such a culturally specific domestic violence intervention for African American survivors; provided insight into the needs of African American domestic violence survivors, and; provided implications for domestic violence service providers and future areas for research.

## Appendix A

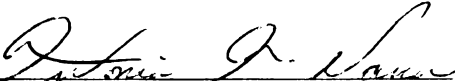
Administrative Agreement  
between Tameka L. Gillum and Asha Family Services, Inc.

Tameka L. Gillum agrees to:

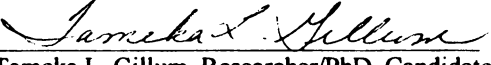
1. assume full responsibility for the design, implementation, analyses, and publication of this research.
2. acknowledge Asha Family Services for their participation whenever any findings are presented whether verbally or in writing.
3. follow University procedures for ensuring the confidentiality of information from participants in the study.
4. follow University procedures to maximize the safety of those participating in this research.
5. compensate interviewees, except for staff members, with \$20 for their time invested in this research.
6. provide Asha Family Services with a written report of the results of this research when the work is completed.

Asha Family Services agrees to:

1. provide Tameka L. Gillum access to clients and ex-clients for the duration of the study so that participation can be explained to them and they may make a decision of whether or not to participate.
2. provide permission for Tameka L. Gillum to interview relevant staff, at their convenience, for the duration of the study.
3. assist Tameka L. Gillum in recruiting clients and ex-clients into the study, at the convenience of the staff, throughout the duration of the study.
4. provide Tameka L. Gillum with space in which to recruit and interview women throughout the duration of the study.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Antonia A. Vann, Founder and CEO  
Asha Family Services

x   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Donna Pitter, M.D., Board Secretary  
Asha Family Services

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tameka L. Gillum, Researcher/PhD. Candidate  
Michigan State University

## Appendix B

## **Staff/Leader Interview Protocol**

First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me today. As I stated earlier, I am interested in finding out about Asha as an agency and the women who seek services there. The information that you provide today will increase people's awareness of domestic violence interventions and help to improve domestic violence services and programs for African American women and their families. So, let's get started. First, I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about the history of Asha?

1. In your own words, why do you think Asha Family Services was founded? (For the founder, why did you found Asha Family Services?)
2. How long have you worked for Asha?
3. In what capacities have you worked at Asha?
4. How do women come to receive services from Asha Family Services?
  - a. What do you think draws women to seek services at Asha?
  - b. How do you think women hear about Asha?

**Ok, now I would like to ask you a few questions specifically about the type of involvement that women have with Asha.**

5. What programs at Asha do female survivors utilize most frequently?
  - a. For each program listed, in what ways do you feel they benefit specifically from this service?
6. I know that Asha identifies itself as a culturally specific intervention, which seeks to design their services specifically to meet the needs of African American women and families? In your experience, what would you identify as the culturally specific components of Asha?

For each component listed:

- a. How is this implemented?
- b. Do you feel this component is important? Why or why not?
- c. How do you feel that African American female survivors particularly benefit from this component?

For each culturally specific component not listed (holistic approach, spiritually

based, family centered approach, representative staff, culturally appropriate images in setting; etc.):

d. Do you feel that the X component is necessarily culturally specific? Why or why not?

e. Do you feel this component is important? Why or why not?

f. How do you feel that African American female survivors particularly benefit from this component?

- g. Are there any barriers to implementing these culturally specific components?
1. If so, what are they?
  2. What do you do to address these barriers?

**Now let's talk overall about Asha as an agency.**

7. What do you think are Asha's strengths as an organization?

8. What do you think makes Asha unique compared to other domestic violence interventions?

9. What do you feel are Asha's shortcomings or weaknesses?

**Now, let's talk about your experience with other domestic violence agencies or programs.**

10. Have you worked at other domestic violence agencies?

a. If yes, how do you feel that Asha is different from that agency?

11. What other domestic violence agencies/services are available in the area?

a. For each agency/service listed - How is Asha different from that agency/service?

12. How do you think women feel about their experience with Asha?

a. What aspects of women's experiences at Asha do you think they find to be the most helpful?

b. In what ways do you feel women and their families have benefited from their experience at Asha?

c. What specific things do you think women like most about the services offered at Asha?



d. What type of things could have been done to improve women's experience with Asha?

13. If you were to design your own culturally appropriate domestic violence intervention targeting the African American community, what things would you include? (For the founder, are there other components or programs you wish or hope to add to the services you already offer at Asha? What are they?)

## Appendix C

## Survivor Interview Protocol

First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I know that your time is valuable and I appreciate your taking the time to talk with me today. As I stated earlier, I am interested in finding out what your experience with Asha has been like. The information that you provide today will increase people's awareness of domestic violence services and help to create domestic violence services and programs for African American women and their families. Also as I stated prior, your agreement to participate and the responses you provide will not affect the services that you receive from Asha. So, let's get started. First, I'd like to start by asking you a few questions about your history of involvement with Asha?

1. How did you come to receive services from Asha Family Services?

- a. What drew you to seek services at Asha?
- b. How did you hear about Asha?
- c. Why did you decide to come?
- d. How long have you been coming to Asha?
- e. How often do you come?

**Ok, now I would like to ask you a few questions specifically about what type of involvement you have had with Asha.**

2. What programs are you and your family currently participated in at Asha?

- a. What programs have you participated in in the past?

3. What types of services have you received from Asha?

4. Tell me about your experience with Asha, what has it been like?

**Probe:** How do you feel about your experience with Asha?

- a. What aspects of your experiences at Asha have been the most helpful to you?
- b. In what ways do you feel you and your family have benefited from your experience at Asha?
- c. What specific things do you like about the services offered at Asha?

- d. What aspects of your experiences at Asha have been the least helpful to you?
- e. What have you found disappointing or not helpful?
- f. What type of things could have been done to improve your experience with Asha?

5. Asha identifies itself as a culturally specific domestic violence intervention. In other words, they seek to design their services specifically to meet the needs of African American women and families? In your experience, what parts of Asha's services do you believe are culturally specific?

For each component that woman names:

- a. How has this component affected your experience at Asha?  
Do you think that this is an important component? Why or why not?
- b. Would your experience with Asha been very different if this component weren't included? Tell me about that.
- c. Are there any other components you would identify as culturally specific?

For each component unnamed:

- d. Asha considers their X to be one of their culturally specific components, have you experienced this component here at Asha?  
1. If so, have you found it to be helpful to your experience here?
- e. Do you feel that this is a culturally specific component? Why or why not?
- f. Do you think that this component is important? Why or why not?
- g. Would your experience with Asha be very different if this component weren't included?

**Probes: Holistic approach** (inclusion of mental health services, substance abuse services, advocacy, Sister Circles, prison release program, etc.); **Spiritually based approach; Family centered approach** (services for female survivors, children, and male abusers); **Representative staff; Culturally appropriate images in setting; Curriculum; etc.**

**Now, let's talk about your involvement in other domestic violence agencies or programs.**

6. Have you received services from other domestic violence programs?

**If yes:**

a. What was your experience like with that agency/program(s)?

**Probes:** Do you feel that this agency/program met your needs? Did you feel welcome at this agency/program? Did you feel comfortable seeking services from this agency/program?

b. How has your experience at Asha been different from that experience?

c. How has your experience at Asha been similar to that experience?

d. Do you feel that Asha's culturally specific components make their program distinct or very different from that agency/program?

**If no:**

a. If Asha didn't exist, would you have sought services from other domestic violence programs in the area? Why or why not?

b. What do you know about other domestic violence programs in the area?

**Probe:** What do you think about other domestic violence programs in the area?

c. What concerns, if any, do you have about other domestic violence agencies in the area?

7. If you were to develop a culturally appropriate domestic violence targeting the African American community, what things would you include? Why?

\*\*\* If woman discusses her or her abuser's involvement in the legal system, probe. \*\*\*

## Appendix D

**Research Question Number Three: What are women's perceptions of mainstream services and how is their experience with Asha different from those perceptions?**

*Case Summary for Respondent #2*

Respondent number two had previously received services from one other domestic violence program. She attended a domestic violence support group that was run through a local women's center. At one point in time the respondent was attending both the support group run by this other program and the Asha Sister Circle but indicated that she had not been to the other group in a long time. As she described her experience with this other domestic violence support group she indicated that she felt it was nice and that they talked about some of the same things the Asha group does. She indicated that they also fed the women at the other support group. The women would eat and then go to group. She said they would sit around and talk about their problems at this group as well as do other activities such as play bingo. Respondent number two indicated that she felt welcome and comfortable at this support group.

When comparing her experience with this support group to her experience with Asha, the respondent indicated that the program at Asha better met her needs. She indicates that she got a, "...better understanding coming to Asha than I did there." She further indicates that, "...I got more out of Asha than I did at [other program]. That makes a difference...it makes a difference." She also talked about the fact that Asha provides transportation to and from their group and that that was something that stood out about Asha for her as well. She indicated that the other support group would take you back home after the group but they won't also pick you up like Asha does. She also talked about Asha having potlucks at times and would show movies on occasion.

### *Case Summary for Respondent #3*

Respondent number three had previously received services from two other domestic violence programs before receiving services from Asha Family Services. Both of these services experiences occurred outside of the state of Wisconsin. Her first encounter was when she sought services from a domestic violence agency in New York. This shelter offered multiple services not limited to but including shelter (EAU), transitional housing (Tier 2) and relocation services (Victim Services). This survivor sought services from this shelter on several occasions. Three times Victim Services had obtained bus tickets for her to flee the state and her assailant and go to North Carolina where her mother lived. Three times this survivor decided to stay and try to make it work with her assailant. She states that after she sought this service three times they kicked her out of the program. She says that she believes they felt that they (the shelter) couldn't help her since she kept going back to her assailant. She also felt as though the shelter didn't extend services or really seem interested in helping. This survivor got the impression that this service was saying we have help if you are willing to come get it but they would not actively go out of their way to help you. This survivor attributed this shelter's lack of outreach to the great turnover of survivors who seek services at this agency and the large potential population that this shelter must service. Overall this survivor felt that the service was there if she needed it and sought it and if she had been really ready to leave her assailant they would have been helpful.

Respondent number three then later relocated herself to North Carolina and sought services from a domestic violence shelter there as well. Services offered by this shelter included but were not limited to shelter, counseling, advocacy, and resources such as bus tickets, food, clothing, etc. This survivor initially felt as if this shelter met her needs. She felt welcome, comfortable and supported there. This all changed when her assailant followed her to North Carolina from New York, found out the location of the shelter and went there to find her. At this point they (the shelter) kicked her out saying that she was endangering the other women. This survivor later returned to this shelter when the violence again escalated with her assailant and they told her that they could not help her. They refused her service for the same reason they had kicked her out initially. This survivor expressed great feelings of betrayal by this agency because of these actions. She felt as though the actions of her assailant were beyond her control, that they were not her fault but that the agency was in essence punishing her for his actions. Overall, she felt as though this agency met her needs in the beginning but later slammed the door in her face.

When comparing her experience at these shelters to her experience at Asha, this survivor felt her interaction with Asha has been more positive. She was initially hesitant to seek services there because of her negative experiences with the other two shelter programs. So, when she was first told about Asha, she did not go. However, several people began referring her to Asha, including her Social Services worker and she shortly thereafter decided that she would give it a try. She expressed that she had a very positive first experience with Asha and that kept her coming back. This survivor expressed that Asha actually extends their services, "You know I'm, when I say it's not, I mean, like I



said I benefit more from the services that they offer here because I get people that really want to help you here, you know, they really want to, you know, extend you these services if you need them,” and gave the feeling that they actually want to help you, “Yea, you know, it was there, it was just, you know, like here, you know, it’s like they want you, you know, they want to help you here”. She expressed that Asha was the best facility that she had been to and that their services had benefited her the most. She felt as though she could relate to the facilitators there. They also made her feel comfortable. She felt as though these characteristics drew people back to Asha. Overall, she expressed a very positive experience with Asha. She expressed that if she even needed anything other service she would seek Asha first, “I feel like I probably be more, if anything, I would rather ask somebody here about, you know, if I wanted to know about any other service, if they had it here... You know, um. Or if they had someplace that they could refer me... You know, rather than going to another program”.

### *Case Summary for Respondent #5*

Respondent number five had previously received services from one other domestic violence program. She attended a domestic violence support group that was run through a local women's center. The respondent heard about this group from her older sister who had been attending the group for some time. She states that this group was housed in a Catholic church in Milwaukee and was founded and run by a white nun. The respondent expressed that she attended this group for well over ten years, starting when she was seventeen years old, but had not attended the group in about a year. She did, however, express plans to return to the group in the future. This program also ran a children's support group concurrent with the women's support group, which the respondent's two daughters attended while the respondent was in her group. She expressed that this was a very good and well structured domestic violence support group, but that she really didn't receive any useful or helpful recommendations to assist her in leaving her abusive relationship. She expressed that she remained in an abusive relationship throughout the time that she attended this support group because she didn't know how to get out and the group didn't give her the tools she needed to get out. She did, however, feel that the group was supportive and welcoming. She expressed that although she liked the group, she wasn't really getting all that she needed and attributed this partly to the fact that the majority of the other participants in the support group were Hispanic and Catholic and that it was run by a white nun. She stated that at one point the program did attempt to increase outreach to the African American community and bring things to the group to help the African American women who were attending by bringing in a Black assistant director but that the program remained predominantly white and Hispanic. Therefore the group, for this respondent, was just a place to go and vent, get a little feedback and get away from her abusive partner for a couple hours, but it did not meet her needs.

When comparing her experience with this support group to her experience with Asha, the respondent stated that Asha actually gave her the tools and resources she needed to leave the abusive relationship that she was in at the time she started receiving services from Asha. She stated that she wishes she had known about Asha earlier. She expressed her belief that if she had know about Asha, maybe ten years ago, she would be in a better situation than she was today. She stated that she receives the nourishment she needs from Asha. She also expressed an ability to relate to the staff because they are also African American and because they have also experienced domestic violence in the past. She states that the staff are down to earth and real and that this helps her because she feels she can be real, that she "...ain't got to fake it". She also expressed that she looks up to the staff at Asha, that they have experienced domestic violence in the past but are now free of abusive relationships and now have careers where they help other women. She states that this is inspiring, that it boosts her up and helps her to know that she can do it too. She states that overall she received more guidance, assistance and direction from Asha than she did from the other program, "Um, I'm receiving more, I've received more from Asha in the short length of time that I was with them from all the years I had put in with [other program]". Practical assistance from Asha included referral to shelter and providing bodyguards to assist the woman in obtaining her and her children's belongings from their home upon her decision to leave the relationship. She also stated that Asha

had more to offer African American women than the other program, particularly in reference to Black women being able to relate on the same terms at Asha.

### *Case Summary for Respondent #8*

Respondent number eight had previously received services from one other domestic violence program. She attended a domestic violence support group that was run through a local community program. This program also offered daycare for the children of group participants while the group was in progress which the respondent took advantage of. For the most part the respondent feels that the group made her feel comfortable. She also indicated that the other attendees were predominantly African American. She said they had lots of informational brochures on a wide variety of topics. She states that although the group helped her to some degree, it wasn't enough. The group only partially met her needs. In addition, she felt as though she was being judged by the program because she was still in a relationship with her abusive partner. She was feeling pressure from the group to leave her relationship when she was not quite ready to do so and didn't feel she was getting the help she needed from this group to help her with the process. She also felt as though the staff did not really have enough time to assist women on an individual basis. The respondent expressed that often times when she went to staff expressing a need to talk, they would tell her that they only had a minute, they were in a hurry, they were in the middle of something or they would have to talk to her another time. The respondent expressed frustration with this stating that sometimes she needed to talk then. She also felt that there wasn't enough time for group. She indicated that this was a very large group having sometimes as many as thirty or forty participants for a one-hour session and that it wasn't enough time to get to everyone and the group often felt rushed. The respondent also felt that she was in some way upsetting the people in the program by staying in her abusive relationship and got the message that they were telling her they couldn't help her if she continued to remain in her abusive relationship. She also felt that the program did not understand the process of leaving an abusive relationship and how difficult that process is. Eventually the respondent left that group for several reasons: the program discontinued daycare when they started doing some remodeling and she didn't wish to leave her children with her abusive partner; she felt as though the program wasn't really helping her, that she still ended up in the same situation (the abusive relationship) so there was no point in her continuing to go; it wasn't helpful for her to be going to group and then her abusive partner would be outside waiting for her; she felt as though they were brushing her off; and, she was feeling pressured and judged by the group.

When comparing her experience with this support group to her experience with Asha, the respondent referred to the Asha program as "...the best one I've ever been to..." She indicates that she feels more welcome at Asha, that she likes the group better and feels more comfortable with Asha. Respondent #8 also expressed that she feels as though it is easier to bond with the people at Asha and that it is more of a "bonding type group". That she looks forward to being around African American women and being able to bond. She looks forward to Monday night, which is the night she attends the Asha group. She also feels that the staff at Asha are more available when you need them. That if you really want to talk you can pull them aside and they will make time for you. She said that at Asha they don't judge you and they don't pressure you to leave your abusive relationship, they accept you where you are and support you in working at your

own pace. They extend an invitation to you to let them know when you need help and what you need help with. The respondent indicates that she likes this better than her previous experience. She states that Asha understands that leaving an abusive relationship is a time consuming process and that it doesn't happen overnight. She also states that Asha is closer to her home, which is more convenient for her. This respondent feels so positively about the group at Asha that she believes she will stay with the group for a while and that she will continue with the group even after she leaves her abusive relationship for good so that maybe she "...can help some other people down the line."

### *Case Summary for Respondent #10*

Respondent number ten at the time of the interview was receiving services from a domestic violence shelter in addition to attending the Sister Circle group at Asha. She heard about the shelter as a result of seeking a restraining order against her abusive husband who she had just put out of the house. There was a woman down at the restraining order office that asked the respondent if she wished to be in a shelter until things boiled down. The respondent indicated that she would and subsequently went to the shelter. It was a worker at the shelter that referred the respondent to the Asha Sister Circle. This respondent had mixed feelings about the shelter. She stated that being at the shelter helped her to learn a lot about people. She learned how to deal with people and how people “really are.” She said that this interaction helped her to learn how to stand up for herself. She said it was nice, that she liked it there and that it was a blessing. She said that the staff were nice and identified a couple staff persons there that she liked and considered to be helpful, one in particular that she could do one-on-ones with and she would listen. She also identified problems she had with the other residents and residents that had caused problems for her since she had been there. The respondent indicated that there were a lot of “negative people” at the shelter. She also expressed great dissatisfaction for the support group at the shelter. She indicated that attending the groups was a requirement at the shelter but at one point she was asked not to attend group for a while because during one session she decided to tell the group how she really felt. She indicated that it was hard to talk about your problems to that group. She indicated that the people there didn’t want to hear certain things and got an attitude if you expressed them. The respondent felt as though she couldn’t talk about her feelings in this group. She also expressed that the people in that group never seemed to be getting better, that they seemed stuck in the past and weren’t moving forward and that she was trying to move forward. She indicated that she only went to that group because she had to go. She also expressed that the people who ran the support group at this shelter, a White woman and a Black woman were not shelter staff but people that came in from outside the agency just to run the group. Therefore she felt that the shelter workers did not know what was going on in the group. She said that she felt welcome and comfortable at the shelter but also felt that it was best that she stay to herself there.

This respondent expressed that because of the above problems with the shelter support she looked forward to coming to Asha on Mondays. She said that she gets to talk about her feelings at Asha. She also expressed that coming to the Asha support group helped her to deal with the problems she was having at the shelter. She stated that coming to Asha helped her learn how to cope with people and to stop being afraid of people. The respondent also expressed that between the two groups, she liked the Asha group better. She felt as though the other support group wasn’t getting it, that it was “...not hitting me like this [Asha] group do” and that is why she liked coming to Asha. She felt that if she weren’t coming to the Asha group, “I’d be lost.” She expressed that the Asha group was better for her and that it’s “...helping me a whole lot.” The respondent also expressed her fondness for the Asha group because she said, “...Black women understand other Black women. Ain’t no way a White woman understands what

a Black woman going through.” She expressed that Asha was good because “...it’s good for Black women to be together...to talk about their problems better.”

### *Case Summary for Respondent #13*

Respondent number thirteen had previously had experience with two domestic violence shelters. She stayed in each of these shelters for a period of time. The respondent indicated that she had a good experience with the first shelter that she went to. She learned of the shelter from the police who took her there after an abusive incident in her home. She said that she felt welcome there and the agency met her needs for what they were at the time stating, "...I was safe...till he got through his rage. It sufficed for what I was using it for...At that point I was just trying to get him a couple of days to blow over his temper...and for me to go home...(p.22)." Her problem with the shelter, however, was that they were too focused on just telling her to leave the relationship. She stated, "...their key thing was leave him alone...They didn't deal with the fact that you was in love with that man that was your abuser (p.21)." She indicated that although she felt welcome there, she didn't feel comfortable due to the pressure to leave her husband when she was not ready to do so.

In comparing her experience with this shelter to her experience at Asha, the respondent indicates that Asha actually dealt with the fact that she was in love with her abuser and offered her options which took this into consideration. The fact that Asha actually offered these alternative services made a difference to her.

The respondent's experience at the second domestic violence shelter was not a positive one. She expressed that it was "...very, very cold (p.25)." She explains that at that point in her life she was ready to do something different, to make some changes in her life. However, she was so uncomfortable in this shelter that she only stayed one night, then went back home. First, she was the only Black woman in this shelter at that particular time and felt that she couldn't relate to the other women in the shelter. She was questioned about the paternity of her children who were of mixed race and she felt as though the women were discussing levels of violence that were a lot less severe than what she had experienced. Another issue for her was that she felt this program was not designed for her. She states of her experience, "...I couldn't get my needs met there because it wasn't for me what I needed. If cultural environment probably would have been more supportive of me...I would have probably been able to look at the eyes of another woman who I could...feel could identify with my pain. Them women, I couldn't even look at (p.26)." She indicates that another part of this feeling could be attributed to the "sterile [White] environment" of the facility.

In comparing her experience with this shelter to her experience at Asha the respondent stated that at Asha she felt welcome. She felt this from the time she was picked up by the Asha van through her experience in the Sister Circle group. She also felt as though she could relate better to the Asha staff member who lead the Sister Circle group on the nights she attends. She indicated that the facilitator was a "down-to-earth sister" who wasn't playing this "I'm the staff person" role but that Asha supplied an atmosphere which made participants feel that they need the survivors there in group just as much as the survivors need the group. She also stated that she felt as though the Asha



program was designed for her, that it was “designed for women of Color” whereas she feels the other program “...may have not been designed for me.”

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