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Child Welfare and Domestic Abuse: The Intersection of Safety
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Susan Penny Johnson

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**CHILD WELFARE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE:
THE INTERSECTION OF SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

By

Susan Penny Johnson

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Family and Child Ecology

2006

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ABSTRACT

**CHILD WELFARE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE:
THE INTERSECTION OF SAFETY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

By

Susan Penny Johnson

For victims of domestic abuse who are also mothers, social system interaction can have unintended and counter-productive consequences. Antiquated policies and practices based on patriarchal norms may hold her hostage within the relationship and further endanger those involved. According to the literature, society assumes that victims: 1.) Can escape if they choose, 2.) Are attracted to dangerous men, 3.) Choose their batterer over their children, 4.) Do not choose to protect or love their children, 5.) Are not successful in protecting their children, 6.) Are better off if they leave the relationship, 7.) Systems and resources are readily available to assist victims in leaving, and 8.) Children should be removed from their mothers in these cases. These assumptions are presumed to affect the policies and practices of the Child Protection Services as well as other systems with which survivors of abuse come into contact.

The overall purpose of the study was to explore the meaning domestic abuse survivors assigned to their interaction with societal and other systems. The study also examined environments in which those interactions occurred, the consequences of those interactions; what was helpful and not helpful to survivors, and how those factors shaped their decisions. The research questions were: 1.) How does the intersection of victim

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safety goals and perpetrator accountability expectations influence the consequences for women subject to domestic violence?, and 2.) How do ecosystem factors in the environments of women subject to such violence affect the outcomes for those women? Limited documentation of their lived experience exists within the literature.

Ten black and ten white women were interviewed in-depth, using the frameworks of Phenomenology, Neo-feminism and Human Ecology. Women in the study experienced a wide range of abuse, as did their children. In this study, although some participants received the help they needed, most did not. Systems as a whole denied, ignored, or minimized the abuse, failed to protect the victims, held them responsible for the violence and the exposure of the children to it, and often gave visitation and custody rights to abusive fathers. Many women in the study were sanctioned with extensive parenting plans, had charges filed against them, and received little help post-separation.

Many participants, unable to stop the abuse, were held responsible for it. Fear, lack of resources, family and religious pressures, a 'Mr. Perfect' seduction into the relationship, and isolation were found to be key factors in their inability to leave. Most women in the study were homeless upon leaving the relationship. Study participants offer specific suggestions in regard to what workers can do to effectively engage with abused women who are also mothers. The author proposes changes within and across systems that may begin to address the complexity and devastation of domestic abuse. It is hoped the study will inform policy, educate workers, identify alternative practices that help rather than hurt, and gives voice to the women as to their lived experience.

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SUSAN PENNY JOHNSON
2006

DEDICATION

To my parents, Don and Vi Stewart, who formed and modeled
a partnership based on love and respect.

To my husband, Phil Johnson,
for always treating me as an equal and valued partner.

To my sons, Jeremy and Jeff,
for being kind, loving and caring,
and of whom I am most proud.

To my good friend, Mary McDonald,
who never gave up on me.

AND

To a certain little black cat,
who sat patiently and silently next to me
throughout the entire creation of this document.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the product of many investors. I was challenged to think beyond my self-imposed borders by a gifted and giving group of professors. I have been fortunate to work with and under the tutelage of Dr. Cris Sullivan, a nationally recognized expert on domestic abuse, whose support and encouragement has been unwavering. Dr. JoAnn Keith, an inspiration and confidant, counseled me when I had tough ethical choices to make. Dr. Francisco Villarruel reinforced and reinvigorated my passion to speak for those whom society denies a voice, and spoke for me when I lost my own. Dr. Marsha Carolan patiently supported the qualitative component of this research, and afforded me collegial respect in the process. This work represents your collective and significant investments in me.

The women represented herein are amazing, inspirational and courageous. They patiently educated me, tolerating my simple attempts to understand their complex situations. They connected the dots for me, and did so for the sake of others in the hope that others might be spared those same experiences.

My family accepted my strange hours, my being away from home to attend classes and facilitate the research, and did my share of the household chores. They just believed in me, absolutely and unquestioningly. To all of you my heartfelt thanks!

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INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Social systems interaction, for victims of domestic violence, can be problematic and have unintended and counter-productive consequences. Policies and procedures intended to assist victims into a safer environment instead may be holding them hostage within the relationship, and placing them in even greater danger. If the victim is also a mother, both she and her children may be exposed to significant risk from the very systems expected to protect them. In most cases, this phenomenon stems from a patriarchal underpinning of assumptions upon which operational philosophy and resulting procedures of social institutions is based. Systemic response to domestic abuse is particularly important in the lives of those women and children effected, and the consequences those responses generate can have lasting and dramatic effects for all involved.

The issue of holding mothers responsible for the violent behavior of their partners is a trend apparent throughout the country (Treppicone, 2001). It is a common belief that by intervening with the mother on behalf of the children, the mother will act in a way that removes the children from the danger. However, the assumptions upon which this belief is based have questionable merit. These assumptions include the following: 1) CPS interaction is protective of children exposed to domestic violence, 2) CPS interaction is supportive of adult victims of domestic violence, 3) The non-offending adult will be better off if they leave the violent relationship, 4) If an adult victim of domestic violence who is also a parent or guardian stays within a violent relationship they are choosing her

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batterer over their children, 5) Mothers should be assigned almost exclusive responsibility for the welfare of their children, 6) Adult victims of domestic violence can, but are not making significant or successful attempts to protect their children, 7) Institutions are readily available and will support victims in leaving, 8) Current policies and procedures designed to address the safety of children living with domestic violence will result in the most positive outcomes, and 9) Systems are working cooperatively to safeguard both the adult and child victims of domestic abuse. Unfortunately, these assumptions may lead to a counter-productive set of consequences. To address the extent to which these assumptions are valid, the current study explored the lived experiences and perceptions of domestic violence survivors within the context of their interaction with Children's Protective Services (CPS) and other related systems.

Justification for the Study

Missing from the literature is documentation of the consequences, the lived experiences and meanings assigned to those experiences of families affected by the concurrent phenomenon of domestic abuse and interaction with Child Protective Services. This study focused on the perspectives of the adult victim. Speaking of adult female victims of domestic abuse who have had CPS intervention, Porter (2002) asserts that "We need a clearer understanding of how current policy and practice has affected their lives, and their relationships with family members. The only way to gain this information is to ask them about these needs and experiences, in a setting where they are free to speak their truth...and in a manner that allows them to create their own answers, rather than responding to narrowly defined survey questions. Such client focused research

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could ultimately lead to changes in policy and best practice standards that will result in more effective, efficient provision of services, in a manner that is both empowering and respectful of their reality” (p. 55-56).

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999) and McCracken (1988), the face-to-face in-depth interview is useful for uncovering participants’ perspectives, facilitates immediate follow-up for clarification, is effective in describing complex interactions, and can provide contextual data. The weaknesses of the strategy are that: data are open to interpretations on cultural grounds, it is dependent upon a small sample of individuals, it can give rise to ethical dilemmas, it is difficult to replicate, it is dependent on the honesty and openness of participants, it depends on solid research questions, and it is further dependent on the skills of the researcher. True to the foundation and tradition of phenomenology, it is the essence of the lived experience that is of foremost interest to the researcher. When interviews are considered social opportunities to construct and produce reportable knowledge, it reduces the tendency to consider this type of research as an unscientific, neutral conduit or source of distortion (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). The author identified interviewing as the most appropriate means of amassing the desired information, and believed that accurate information would best be gathered through asking those who lived the experience to describe it in their own words.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to give voice to domestic abuse survivors, inform policy, assist practicing human service workers in determining an appropriate course of action in cases of domestic violence, and to identify alternative means of addressing domestic violence cases that may be more helpful to all involved. It is intended to foster

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greater understanding between domestic violence victim service providers, child protective service workers, and related interacting systems.

Definitions

In order to frame the issue in uniform language, the author uses certain terms common within the field. These terms are described below.

Child: Person under the age of eighteen (Child Protection Law Act 238 of 1975, State of Michigan).

Child Abuse: Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare, or by a teacher or teacher's aide, that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse; sexual exploitation; or maltreatment (Child Protection Law Act 238 of 1975, State of Michigan).

Child Protective Services (CPS): The Child Protection Division of the Department of Human Services (formerly known as the Family Independence Agency at the time of the research); the agency mandated by law in the State of Michigan to investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, and is authorized to pursue custodial and legal action to provide for the protection of children found to be victims of substantiated abuse and or neglect (Author).

Circuit Court: The branch of Michigan's court system that deals with criminal law (Author).

Domestic Abuse: A pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, often including physical, sexual and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults and

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Exposure to Violence: Watching or hearing the violent event, direct involvement (intervening or calling the police), or experiencing the aftermath (such as seeing bruises, blood, vandalism to the home), or observing maternal depression (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999).

Failure to Protect: Knowingly allowing another person to mistreat or abuse the child without taking appropriate measures to stop such mistreatment or abuse and prevent it from recurring when the person is able to do so and has, or should have had, knowledge of the mistreatment (Michigan's Children's Protective Service Manual, 2002).

Faith-based Initiative Policies: The encouragement and financial support of the George W. Bush administration to churches and other faith-based organizations to conduct social services within their religious framework (Author).

Family Court: The branch of Michigan's District Court that deals with family law matters including custody, parental rights and guardianship. For the purposes of this work, the term 'court' includes all sworn officers of the court (Author).

Family Independence Agency: Formerly known as Michigan's Department of Social Services, and now known as the Department of Human Services; the branch of state government that includes and oversees Child Protective Services (Author).

Marriage Promotion Initiative Policies: Initiatives encouraging the process of, and financially rewarding non-same sex couples, who enter into a formal, State recognized marriage agreement, and to discourage the severance of the marriage contract by the couple as well as the courts (Author).

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Non-Offending Adult (NOA): The adult in a violent relationship that is not the perpetrator of the abuse (Author).

Offending Adult (OA): The adult in a violent relationship that is the perpetrator of the abuse (Author).

Structured Decision Making: The Family Independence Agency's system for assessing risk, safety, needs and strengths in child welfare cases (Michigan's Children's Protective Service Manual, 2002).

Termination of Parental Rights: Permanent and legally-binding removal of children from their parent(s), extinguishing all legal and physical relationships between the parent(s) and child (Standards for Termination of Parental Rights, State of Michigan).

Welfare to Work Policies: Those welfare reform policies that require work as a condition for social welfare entitlement programs including Medicaid, Food Stamps, and childcare stipends (Author).

Theoretical Framework

Although no one theory has been effective in explaining the complex issue of domestic abuse (National Center on Domestic Violence, 2002), the theories of neo-feminism and human ecology were selected for their respective assumptions and properties. Neo-feminism was selected over traditional feminist theory, which has been criticized for ignoring the unique experiences within the context of class and race, effectively grouping all women into a homogenous unit. Ignoring the variables of race and class may result in limited understanding of complex issues involving women, who experience and frame them differently (Armour, 1999; Cheung, 1991; Roberts et al,

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2000; Worden, 2002). Neo-feminism requires researchers to consider gender, class and race.

Given that the literature on domestic abuse and the intersection of class and race is limited, evolving values within the social sciences requires cultural sensitivity and the recognition of oppressive forces be considered in current research (Bograd, 1999). Anzaldua (1990) maintained that what is considered sound theory in the academic community may not be what is most appropriate for women of color. The principles and foci of human ecological models also require the consideration of environments that influence, and are influenced by demographic variables. According to Anzaldua (1990), theorizing for communities of color is created through narrative forms, in the stories that result from real lived experiences. Taking gender as a factor without the co-variables of race and socio-economic settings does a disservice to the concept of personal identity and the fact that a woman's identity is constituted by position (Cacoullos, 2001).

Ashcraft (2000) and Cacoullos (2001) maintain the silencing of women's voices within the context of gender, class and race is perpetuated by hierarchal patterns of white male privilege. The resulting adaptation to the oppression, by women of differing races and resources, has therefore been unique within those categories (Armour, 1999; Bell et al, 2000; Bograd, 2000; Cacoullos, 2001; Knight, 2000). The analysis of varied experiences within the context of race, gender and class is critical to balance against society's devaluing of marginalized individuals.

Human Ecology Theory allows researchers to investigate intersections and relationships with and interdependence upon their environments. The concept of humans and families existing as sub-systems within their larger ecosystems encourages the

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investigation of interplay and consequences of the dynamics within these relationships. The theory is particularly useful in investigating public policy, family intervention evaluation, and review of family structure, roles, and norms. These characteristics made the theory germane to this study.

It should be noted that this work references the victim as female and the assailant as male. This characterization is consistent with the research on the gender of perpetrators (Blum et al, 1993). All interviews were with adult female victims. The researcher acknowledges that this gender-based characterization does not hold true for all domestic abuse cases, but uses these terms for the sake of clarity, continuity, and in recognition that in the overwhelming majority of cases of domestic abuse, these gender references are representative and therefore appropriate.

Research Questions

The two research questions fit well within the framework of the selected theories:

- 1.) How does the intersection of victim safety goals and perpetrator accountability expectations influence the consequences for women subject to domestic violence? And
- 2.) How do the ecosystemic factors in the environment of women subject to such violence affect the outcomes for those women?

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CHAPTER II

SETTING OF THE PROBLEM

Literature Review

The literature specifically addressing CPS intervention into cases of domestic violence is limited (Kaufmann-Kantor & Little, 2003). In fact, no reference was even made to domestic abuse in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* until 1969 (Schechter, 1982). Children witnessing domestic violence were not addressed in research literature until the 1980's. Children, as a whole, were until recently overlooked by domestic violence service providers focused on the mother's crisis (Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Kent, 2001; Lehman & Carlson, 1988). The earliest reference to a Failure to Protect CPS policy found was in the case *In re Dalton* (1981). In that case and since, the term 'failure' implies circumstances that are within one's control, and the existence of an opportunity not to fail (Magen, 1999).

Of late there is a growing bank of literature on the correlation of child abuse and domestic abuse, and an upsurge of interest in the effects of domestic abuse on children (American Bar Association, 1994; Aron & Olson, 1997; Ayoub et al, 1999; Bancroft & Silverman, 2000; Carlson, 1996; Davidson, 1995; Dohrn, 1995; Edelson, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Holden & Richie, 1991; Jaffe et al, 1990; Mabanglo, 2002; Meuer & Webster, 1997; Wolf, 2002).

However, very little research exists on the experiences of domestic abuse victims with Child Protective Services, nor on policies such as Failure to Protect (Magen 1999; Porter, 2002). This is despite the fact that all but a dozen states have laws criminalizing

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omission of care in their state child protection code (Matthews, 1999). It is from the available literature, and through the filtering lens of theoretical foundation, that the research questions and this study evolved.

This study focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of adult domestic abuse victims who had recent interactions with CPS. However, domestic violence is an issue that is multi-systemic. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect the reader to place this study in context without an understanding of the inter-related patriarchal, institutional and societal philosophies, the barriers victims face in complying with institutional expectations, and how their actions are perceived within different but relevant systems having influence over the families involved. In addition, the reader must also understand how these systemic issues aide and perpetuate the practice of domestic abuse. For that reason, the review of literature is divided into: 1) The prevalence of concurrent domestic and child abuse, 2) Effects of domestic abuse on adults, 3) Effects of domestic abuse on children, 4) Child Protective Services response to domestic abuse, 5) Legal system response to domestic abuse, 6) Batterers' accountability and manipulation of systems, 7) Racial/ethnic issues in cases of domestic abuse, and 8) Related assumptions.

Concurrent Domestic Abuse and Child Abuse

The Bureau of Justice estimates that more than four million women are victims of domestic abuse each year in America (Bachman & Salzman, 1995). Between three and eighteen million children are exposed to domestic abuse each year (Holden, 1998). Felix and McCarthy (1994) and Wright and colleagues (1997) found significant concurrent incidence of domestic and child abuse. It is estimated that in thirty to sixty percent of homes where there is a battered adult, the children are also abused (Office of Juvenile

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Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000). Other estimates place the incidence rate between eleven and forty-seven percent (American Humane Association, 1994; Daro & Cohn, 1988; Jones, et al; Magen et al, 1995; McKibben et al, 1987). It is further estimated that between three and ten million children each year risk witnessing the abuse of one of the adults in their home by another (Stone & Fialk, 1997). Between forty-five and seventy percent of homes in which men abuse women, the children are also targets (Blum, et al, 1993; O'Keefe, 1995).

Stark and Flitcraft (1988) found that in more cases than not, children abused by the father in the home also had mothers abused by the same perpetrator. They also discovered that the children in these homes were far more likely to be removed from the home than children suffering abuse when the mother was not herself a victim. Beeman and colleagues (1999) found in their study of a Wisconsin county caseload of Failure to Protect files that three-quarters of the cases involved domestic abuse. Regardless of variations in statistics on the exact number, the concurrence of these issues is significant (Schechter & Edelson, 1999).

Effects of Domestic Abuse on Adults

“It is extremely difficult for people who have no personal experience with domestic violence to appreciate the economic, social and psychological factors that influence the decisions of battered women” (Phillips, 1992, p. 1554). Society judges each of us against a set of norms, on standards of perceived reasonableness. As individuals, we use our own experiences as points of reference to frame and understand the actions and attitudes of others. For someone who has not experienced the horror of abuse, the behavior and decisions of battered women may, at times, appear irrational.

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There have been numerous attempts to frame battered women's behavior in terms of pathology (Levandosky et al, 2000). Victims may display hyper-vigilance, exaggerated startle responses, irritability and seemingly unwarranted anger (Walker, 1993). Bowker (1999) and Fugate (2001) framed the issue in terms of variables that are more than just psychological, but also social, economic and physical in nature. Sullivan (2000) agreed, stating, "intimate male violence against women is far too widespread to be attributed to intrapsychic dysfunction" (p. 126). Domestic abuse exists in the context of an asymmetry of power in relationships (Mills, 1988). Without serious consideration of the context in which victims experience their lives and the assailants' violence, society struggles to understand victims' assertions, attitudes, behaviors and decisions, and instead looks for ways to conceptualize the issue in terms of psychological dysfunction.

"Since a common myth of domestic abuse is that the victim can stop the violence if she chooses, a woman who is abused by her spouse is also at risk of being labeled an abusive or neglectful parent" (Field & Cook, 1994, p. 922). This leads to the question 'If she really loves her children, why doesn't she just leave?' Perhaps the more appropriate questions are 'Why does he abuse her', and 'What are the barriers preventing her from accessing safety?' Both questions are key as women often have very compelling reasons for staying in the relationship.

Of all the factors that effectively bind women to violent men, fear is perhaps the most influential (Phillips, 1992). According to Edelson (1985), "It is living with a constant sense of danger and expectation of violence ...that brings about terror that is slowly constructed and eventually fills the women's environment" (p. 231-32). Adult victims of domestic abuse live in fear for themselves and their children (Myers, 2002;

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Walker, 1984) and are more likely to suffer increasingly severe injuries as the abuse escalates (Sutherland et al, 2000). Batterers frequently use the threat of death against the adult victim, their children, and their families as a means of controlling the victim's behavior and preventing them from leaving the relationship (Davison, 1995). FBI statistics (2002) reveal that victims have good reason to fear, as thousands of women die at the hands of their partners each year.

Leaving does not always solve the problem, and in fact may be less safe than staying (Fleury et al, 2000; Mills, 2000; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1998). According to Meuer and Webster (1997), the rate of attack against women who are divorced from the assailant is twenty times higher than those who remain married to their attacker. Further, Meuer and Webster (1997) reported "it is estimated that seventy-three percent of all emergency room visits, and up to seventy-five percent of calls to the police for domestic violence incidents occur after separation" (p. 219). Similar findings were reported in earlier studies (American Psychological Association, 1996; Harlow, 1991). When investigated, the factors found to influence the continuation of abuse, not surprisingly, were related to the decisions and behaviors of the abuser, not the victim (Fleury et al, 2000). When expecting the woman to 'just leave', it "implies that a woman should act even though her action exposes her [and her children] to risk of fatal retaliation by the abuser... battered women should take seriously the threats of abusive men who have demonstrated their violent potential" (Enos 1996, p. 255).

A diligent abuser is often able to force a battered woman back into the home by threatening and harassing anyone who attempts to assist her (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Goodkind et al, 2004). Adult victims face strong and sustained pressure from the

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assailant's family, and sometimes their own, to remain in a violent relationship.

Outsiders may perceive that the children, in spite of the violence, are better off with both parents, and may suffer from a divorce or separation. Religious ideology may prevent and discourage divorce; urging the victim to stay, become more submissive to her husband, and 'work it out' (Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 2006; Fortune, 2006). For instance, Catholicism considers divorce a sin, and only in 2003 did the church agree that in some cases of violence, separation might be warranted. However, even if granted, this activity would preclude the victim from a church sanctioned marriage in the future. Conversely, some data indicate spirituality may play a part in victim recovery and healing processes post-separation (Gillum et al, 2006).

Society as a whole ignores, and in some cases denies, the existence of domestic abuse, sending a message to the victim that the violence is an accepted part of our communities, and thereby excusing social systems from carrying out their responsibilities to the victim (Andrews and Brewin, 1990; Enos, 1996; Ewing & Aubrey, 1987; Sullivan, 2000). Neighbors and friends are reluctant to get involved (Dobash and Dobash, 1975; Zorza, 1998) for fear of violating the family sanctity within the home. Neighbors and family also express fear of the batterer, stating reluctance to incite someone who may turn violent against them. Friends may be unsure of how to help, and effectively cut themselves off from the victim. Batterers are often pathologically jealous, and will consequently isolate their partner from friends, neighbors and family (Ver Steegh, 2000).

Financial issues are also powerful factors for non-offending adults (Davis & Srinivasan, 1995). For those with limited resources, welfare assistance is meager and getting harder to obtain. Many women face the reality of having to choose between rent,

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heat, food, and medical care for their children. Although most are working, few have health insurance, and often work at jobs that do not provide adequate wages (Davis and Srinivasan, 1995; Rainford, 2004; Zorza, 1991). Transportation and childcare costs eat away at a budget that is already too small to sustain a family, if victims attempt to embark on their own. These issues have dire consequences for the family unit. It should be noted that domestic abuse is the primary reason for homelessness and punitive welfare sanctions among women and children (Rainford, 2004; Zorza, 1991).

Many assailants threaten kidnap, kill or seek custody of the children should the victim attempt to report the abuse (Jones, 1994). Although personal protection orders from the court forbid contact between the assailant and the victim, the children are not usually part of the order, forcing the victim to relinquish the children for the purposes of visitation and exposing them to the assailant without her protective influences. A victim knows that the order is simply a piece of paper, incapable of stopping a knife or a bullet from an assailant determined to get to her and harm her or her children (Jones, 1994).

Pets are not immune to the violence either, often being used as a tool to control the behavior of the victim and her children. It is a common batterer tactic to threaten, harm or kill pets in front of the adult victim and her children (American Humane Association, 1994), in order to ensure the assailant's control over the family continues.

Many victims have had past experiences with the legal, social service and law enforcement systems that have put the onus back on the victim to fix his problem (Davis, 1991; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Victims may have been disbelieved, suffered a dual arrest along with the perpetrator, or solely blamed for the assault. If the assailant is arrested, in Michigan they can be out of jail and free to return to the victim within

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twenty-four hours. There are often severe repercussions for the victim and the children once the assailant is released and back in the family home. These experiences, in aggregate, lessen the chances that victims will seek future help, create mistrust of social and legal systems, increase the danger for the victims and their children, and decrease their belief that there is help and hope.

Some victims may continue to proclaim loyalty and love for the perpetrator. This is not uncommon when individuals are forced to live in terror and survival mode for prolonged periods of time. Domestic abuse victims, both adult and child, are often held hostage within the relationship. Hostages in a variety of settings have experienced this phenomenon (Graham et al, 1994). In order to understand this phenomenon, one must consider the context of lived reality. The non-offending adult entered into the relationship with a desire for a long-term committed relationship. Many victims continue to believe in the power of love to 'fix' the behavior of the assailant (Mahoney, 1991). Some believe that they are at fault for the abuse. Assailants are quick to place the blame on the victim, using statements such as 'If only you wouldn't do that, this (the abuse) wouldn't have to happen.' This allows victims to believe they have the opportunity to fix the problem, and over time they may accept the abusers' arguments that they are to blame for the abuse, since they have 'failed' to fix the problem.

Some, although not all, victims experience the violence as a cycle with a distinct pattern. The cycle begins with a period of tension building, followed by the assault, and afterward the batterer expresses remorse, asks forgiveness, promises change, and institutes a period of tranquility, often characterized by victims as a honeymoon-type atmosphere. Tension then begins to build again, and the cycle repeats. The victim is left

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believing that they almost had 'fixed' the problem, and that if they try harder in the future, they may be able to make the violence stop and get to a period of sustained tranquility (Porter, 2002).

Societal norms play a significant role in helping to keep women with violent men. Many women continue to struggle with self-esteem and self-determination in a patriarchal society. Many victims become conditioned to believe that their place in life is subordinate to males (Kasl, 1990; Unterberger, 1989). Victims of domestic abuse are taught to receive and believe messages that they deserve lesser treatment and cannot expect a male-dominated society to assist them, or even care about their conditions. Society in turn, believes that inherent maternal instinct provides mothers with the ability to, and in turn expects that they can and will, protect their children even though they are unable to restrain the abuser or alter the situation (Enos, 1996). All these factors leave many victims feeling helpless, at fault and isolated (Hart, 1988; Mills, 2000; Stark, 1992).

The abused mother often makes her choices based on a cost-benefit analysis of the factors that are present in her unique situation (Pfouts, 1978). The sum of the variables, when the cost is perceived too high, results in holding women hostage to an abusive relationship. Bowker (1999) further asserts that when the variables of fear, retaliation, familial pressure, lack of resources, shame, identity loss, victim blaming and poverty are changed, women will be able to successfully escape and thrive.

Effects of Domestic Abuse on Children

Walker (1979) notes that like their battered mothers, children are often victimized in similar ways both within the context of the abuse, and also by systems designed to protect them. Davidson (1995) asserts that the exposure to a brutal environment is, in

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and of itself, an act of child abuse. However, Edelson (1999) asserts that “Defining witnessing as maltreatment is a mistake [in that] doing so ignores the fact that large numbers of children in some studies showed no negative development problems and some showed evidence of strong coping abilities” (p. 869). Mills (1988) agreed with Edelson, finding there is conflicting information on the consequences of children of witnessing domestic abuse.

Study results have shown both internal and external behavioral effects of witnessing domestic abuse (Carlson, 1996; Echlin & Marshall, 1995; Groves, 2001; Kent, 2001; Mabanglo, 2002; Malmquist, 1986; McCloskey & Walker, 1993; Ver Steegh, 2000; Wyndham, 1998; Walker, 1984), including depression, suicide, anxiety, fears, phobias, poor self-image, aggression, acting out, and anti-social behaviors. Cognitive deficiencies cited include poor concentration, and testing low on measures of verbal, motor and cognitive skills expected for corresponding age and developmental stages.

Emotional effects include fear and confusion, conflicted loyalties, hyper-vigilance, guilt, external locus of control, hopelessness and anger. Somatic effects identified are frequent illnesses, insomnia, bed-wetting, elevated blood pressure and increased heart rate (Pagelow, 1990). Children from violent homes are also more likely to be injured directly as a victim or indirectly, by either accidentally or purposefully getting in the line of fire (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988).

Socially, children from violent homes have been found, on average, to have lower levels of social competencies, ‘connectedness’, and interpersonal skills. However, research that considers socio-economic variables (Kent, 2001; Treppicone, 2001) disputes some of these findings. Adolescents who have grown up in violent homes are at

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greater risk of continuing the tradition of violence within their own homes and are more apt to run away (National Resources Center on Domestic Violence, 2002; Zorza et al, 2001). Finally, effects may include a lifetime of issues, including conspiracy of silence regarding the violence, substance abuse, poor self-image, anger, criminal behavior and depression (Zorza, et al, 2001).

Conversely, as Edelson (1999) and Mills (1988) indicate, studies have demonstrated that not all children appear to be adversely affected by domestic violence. Further, intervention, counseling, support and safety can reverse the negative influence of exposure to interpersonal violence. There is also evidence that resiliency in children to develop coping mechanisms allows them to survive and recover from even long term and extreme exposure to domestic abuse (Jaffe et al, 1990; National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2002; Wolf, 2002). As Sullivan and colleagues (2000) found, data on the father's level and quality of interaction with the children is absent in prior studies. This data, when factored in, presents significant findings relative to resiliency. With this key variable missing, some research on the influence of domestic abuse on children is flawed, allowing continued focus on the mother as primarily responsible. Adding to conflicting results, many studies have failed to examine victims' individual characteristics, parenting skills of the non-offending parent, variables of ethnicity, age, gender and available support system (Kent, 2001; Trepiccione, 2001).

Garbarino (1995) points out that children exposed to street and school violence are also at risk for many of the same effects listed above. Yet, there is no attempt by any agencies to hold parents accountable for the exposure to these other types of violence.

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situation, as the danger level is seen as something beyond their control. No one asks 'why don't you just leave', as it is accepted that they are unable to escape the economic entrapment of their situation. Focusing only on the violence and vulnerabilities of children in violent homes underestimates the coping strategies and other environmental factors that may increase or mitigate the effects of the violence (Magen, 1999).

Much of the previous research has been questioned on methodological grounds (Edelson, 1999; Fantuzzo & Lindquist, 1988; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Spaccarelli et al, 1994; Trepiccione, 2001; Wolf, 2002). Identified flaws include varying definitions, ignoring contributing or mitigating variables, and lack of comparison or control groups. Additionally, more researchers are encouraging future studies that include the input of battered women as to the effects of the policies and services they have experienced (Porter, 2002). She states "The voices of women who have experiences with domestic violence and child protective services have not been heard. In my numerous reviews of the literature, I have not been able to find a single study regarding mothers who have experienced domestic violence and involvement with the child welfare system. This represents a crucial gap in the literature" (p. 55). On a procedural note, many of the studies cited above are cross-sectional, and their results should not be misconstrued as causal in nature. Although more research is needed to clearly understand the effects and predict those children who are at greatest risk, the state's desire to safeguard children living in violent homes has resulted in policies created by legal and social service systems to address the issue.

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Protective Services Response to Domestic Abuse and Embedded Patriarchal Ideologies

Many common child protection strategies may actually increase the danger to both the mothers and the children (Spears, 1996). In most states, the child protection law clearly identifies one form of neglect as an omission to provide for the safety of children. In Michigan, the CPS manual states that “a non-offending caretaker will not be held responsible for Neglect, based on Failure to Protect if the child is not at imminent risk” (CFP 711-5), however in the next paragraph the manual instructs the following: “A caretaker who would otherwise be considered a non-offender but who...has a historical record that shows a documented pattern of domestic violence where the non-offending caretaker has been unable to protect the children must be held responsible for their abusive or neglectful behavior. In the above situation, the person previously referred to as the non-offending caretaker is also a perpetrator.” Because of her inability to make the violence stop, she is categorized as a co-assailant. No clear language exists that holds him accountable for choosing to be violent.

Women, who constitute an overwhelming majority of the victims of domestic abuse, are also expected by society to be the primary caregivers for children. Within that expectation has been assigned the role of primary protector (Aron & Olson, 1997; Roberts, 1993). It is of interest that as recently as the 1990's, Michigan child protective service case files were opened and maintained under the name of the child's mother, regardless of whether or not there was a father in the home. Forms used in 2004 continue to identify a 'primary caregiver,' and in all but a few cases, that 'primary caregiver' is the mother or the grandmother. The 'secondary caregiver' is, in general, the category

assigned to the father. If the adult male in the home is not the biological father, he may or may not be listed on the form as a caregiver of any sort. Most often, he is not.

It is interesting that other females, such as grandmothers, aunts, and babysitters are expected to have an inherent instinct to protect all children, including those that are not biologically theirs. Court cases described in this document attest to that fact. Yet there is no similar expectation of men, even though they are capable of fathering children. Indeed, even those males who have biological ties to children are rarely held to a standard of expectations as to their parenting skills.

Founded on the assumption by society that battered women will be best served by leaving the violent relationship, the legal and social service systems have viewed a victim staying within a violent relationship as proof that they are unwilling to protect their children (Jacobs, 1998; Magen, 1999). This may result in their removal from the home, including from the non-offending parent. Under these terms, a mother may lose her parental rights under a Failure to Protect charge. According to Lyon (1999), social service agencies routinely add allegations of domestic abuse to dependency petitions in order to strengthen the case for removal, and as proof that mothers, unable or unwilling to protect themselves, are also unable or unwilling to protect their children, thus making them parentally unfit.

When removed from a non-offending adult, children are often placed with the batterer or parent of the perpetrator (Aron et al, 1997; Waller, 2001). This is cause for significant concern, given that most batterers were themselves abused in their childhood home (Bacchi, 1999; Osofsky & Fenichel, 1996; Ver Steegh, 2000), and are abusing the children as well as the mother in over fifty percent of the time (Jones et al, 2000). The

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practice of placing removed children with the perpetrator or his family is obviously risky, though likely unintentionally so, as “perpetrators are often invisible in CPS records as well as the literature on child protection and domestic violence” (Stark, 1995). Batterers use the obvious limitations of this practice to maintain and increase their control over the victim, resulting in victims being hesitant to access social services for fear of losing their children (Bancroft, 2001; Carter, 1995; Waller, 2001).

When removed and placed with foster or adoptive parents, there is no clear evidence that children of abused mothers will find greater permanence or become safer as a result of the removal and placement. In fact, if the mother’s rights are terminated before the mother has the time to establish herself as a competent caretaker independent of the batterer, the child is in jeopardy of not establishing a positive parent/child relationship (Lyon, 1999). In Michigan, parents who have had their children removed are given only twelve to eighteen months to stabilize, rehabilitate, reunite and establish a safe household before their children are eligible for adoption. The assumptions regarding removal of children under the Failure to Protect policy are contrary to the policies of fast track permanency placement through adoption, in that the time limits prevent most mothers from establishing the autonomy and resources necessary to prove fitness (Guggenheim, 1995).

The assumptions of permanency placements are to provide, in as short a time as possible, a stable and permanent caregiver relationship for children. Yet, children entering the foster care system are placed in a home where foster parents are discouraged from establishing strong attachments to their foster children. Children who are not adoptable may find themselves in a veritable rotating door system of multiple foster care

homes, and no hope for a positive parent/child relationship. Guggenheim's study (1995) reveals that although there has been a sharp increase in parental rights termination, there has been no corresponding increase in adoptions. If not adopted, it must be assumed that the children are lost somewhere in an already overwhelmed foster care setting with foster parents who must be somewhat guarded in their attachment to the children in their care.

Huxtable (1994) and Porter (2002) found that practitioners received little training and relied heavily on their own beliefs and past personal history as assessment and case management tools when dealing with families experiencing violence. This reference base is often rooted in society's many myths on domestic abuse, including who is responsible for the abuse, and who is responsible for the safety within the family (Gordon, 1988). Gordon found that these workers blame the mothers for being battered and hold them responsible for exposing the children to violence. Gordon also found that workers demanded women leave the relationship in order to safeguard their children with little knowledge regarding the reasons why they may not be able to leave. Aron and Olson (1997) found that few caseworkers have the tools they need to address the complex issues facing them in cases of domestic abuse. They urged workers to consider that instead of seeing the mother as 'failing to protect,' they should consider that the same danger that threatens the children also threatens the mother, and that strategies that enhance both the mother and child's best interests be developed.

Most states have assessment protocols designed to assist workers in evaluating cases based upon categorical criteria. In Michigan for example, workers use a flowchart of possible responses and a system called Structured Decision Making (CPS Manual, 2003). This method assigns numerical scores in a variety of sub-categories, and the sum

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of the scores of all categories determines the perceived level of risk: the higher the score, the higher the perceived risk. The risk scale for neglect scores is: 0-4 low; 5-7 moderate; 8-12 high; and 13-20 intensive. The scale for abuse is: 0-2 low; 3-5 moderate; 6-9 high; and 10-16 intensive.

There are two types of caretakers that are considered within the Structured Decision Making process, a 'primary caretaker' (usually the mother), and a 'secondary caretaker,' most often the biological father. This in and of itself begins the process of holding the mother primarily responsible for the welfare of the children in the home. Within this system, a non-offending adult who is being investigated for child neglect could score a 1 for the call being a complaint of neglect, a 1 if she has more than one child, a 1 if she is less than twenty-nine years old, a 2 for the presence of domestic violence, and a 1 if she is poor. This totals a neglect score of 6 points, and she is already in the moderate score range.

If the complaint is for suspected abuse, the non-offending adult could score a 1 for the complaint being for abuse, a 1 if she has more than one child, and a 1 for the presence of domestic violence. This total of three points again places the mother in the moderate score range. Moderate scores will not result in the opening of a CPS file. However, there are other categories that often apply to domestic abuse victims that could further raise her score.

If the mother is perceived as taking the charges less seriously than the CPS worker, they will receive an additional point. If they are perceived to be poorly-motivated to improve parenting skills; if there is a prior CPS service history; if they are judged to lack self esteem; appear apathetic or hopeless; were abused themselves as a

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child; have a secondary caretaker that uses excessive discipline or appears domineering, they would receive additional points, placing them in the high range. Given the context of domestic abuse, their odds of scoring points in any of these categories is fairly substantial. When a parent scores in the high range, a case is opened and is placed on the central registry. With the onus on the mothers for the behaviors of the 'secondary caregiver' in the home, and the likelihood that they may be poor, appear exhausted, and have a domineering partner using harsh disciplinary tactics, they stand to have significant intervention by CPS. This system appears to be yet further evidence that the child welfare system does not take into consideration the complex issues of domestic abuse, holds the mother unreasonably accountable for her assailant's behaviors, and punishes the victim unjustly.

"Failure to Protect policies foster a web of conflicting interest" (Trepiccione, 2001, p.1498). The state has an interest in the welfare of the child. Mothers have a fundamental right to have custody and care of their children. Fathers also have a right to care and custody of their children. These three interests often clash in cases of domestic abuse. Both child protection workers and domestic violence victim advocates share an interest in ending family violence. However, there is a perception that to support the adult as a victim is to somehow ignore the needs of the children, and that the mother, through perceived inaction, must be complicit in their abuse (Aron & Olson, 1997; Kaufmann-Kantor & Little, 2002). This clearly is out of synch with research showing that the majority of abused women care deeply about their children and want to protect them from further violence, poverty, and isolation (Davies et al, 1988; Schecter &

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Edelson, 1999). In fact, abused mothers often cite their children as the primary motivator for their attempts to leave (Roberts & Burman, 1988).

There is a lack of constructive coordination and general mistrust between the initiatives of child welfare and domestic violence victim services (Carter, 1995; Davidson, 1999; Edelson, 1995; Schechter and Edelson, 1994) that can prevent an effective response designed to safeguard both adult and child victims. As Field and Cook (1994) discovered, the common myth that a victim can stop the violence simply by choice is at the heart of a mother's risk to be labeled an abusive or neglectful parent.

McCroskey and Meezan (1997) found that not only were one-third of the mothers in a Southern California family preservation program victims of abuse, but a majority of the workers in the program felt that family violence was an issue unlikely to be addressed by services. Workers also revealed their own fear of the abuser in the home (McCroskey & Meezan, 1997; Porter, 2002). This is consistent with research characterizing abusive men involved with CPS as being more dangerous, more pathological, and lower in cognitive functioning (Aron & Olson, 1997). When faced with dangerous abusers, many CPS workers quickly shift focus to the mother, who is perceived to be more manageable (Farmer, 1997). This may be due to the fact that male batterers, compared to non-batterers, exert greater negative influence on their children than do even aggressive mothers; are less involved in child-rearing; less physically affectionate to children; less likely to use reasoning in response to children's behavior; and more likely to use physical punishment and authoritative responses (Anderson & Cramer-Benjamin, 1999; Holden & Richie, 1991). In cases where mental health workers are involved, workers are more likely to classify the violence as mutual conflict rather than abuse (Dalton, 1999). This

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clearly defies the accepted definition of domestic violence. Given these misconceptions, it is easy to see how victims are more likely to be blamed for the abuse than assisted out of it.

Porter (2002) calls the abused mother “who is trying to convince an inadequately trained agent of the social service system that she is worthy of parenting her children is one of the most voiceless and disempowered members of our society” (p. 9). Ironically, women who kill their abusers are treated better by service systems than battered women who are charged with Failure to Protect (Lyon, 1999). Victims facing punitive policies, and workers who blame the victim for the situation and hold her accountable for the violence of her partner, ensure that they are less likely to call on social service systems for help, report the abuse of their children, or cooperate with workers investigating the abuse. Although adult and child victimizations are seen as separate issues by social systems, victims are nevertheless lumped together with the violent partner as a ‘parental unit’ of one by both CPS and the courts (Dohrn, 1995).

Legal System Response to Domestic Abuse and Reliance on CPS standards

The legal response to both mothers and children who are victims of domestic abuse is experienced as punitive by both sets of victims (Kopels and Sheridan, 2002; Lyon, 1999; Trepiccione, 2001). Lyon notes that the court often relies on battered women’s syndrome, traumatic bonding and learned helplessness theories in justifying the removal of children. These theories are based on pathological models that characterize the battered woman as delusional or irrational, fail to recognize the woman’s legitimate recognition of imminent danger should they attempt to sever the relationship with their assailant, and lack empirical support (Browne 1993; Dalton, 1999; Dutton, 1993).

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Patriarchal ideologies are particularly evident in the legal response to domestic violence (Czapanskiy, 1993; Delgado, 1999; Freeman, 1982; Jacobs, 1998; Myers, 2002). Dalton (1999) categorizes the obstacles in terms of naming the problem, identifying victims of abuse, and prioritizing victim safety. Stone (1988) also frames social problems in the context of larger issues, stating that the struggle over such things as definitions are more struggles over the structure of social organization. Courts may be guilty of demonizing a mother charged with failure to protect even though the mother herself is a victim of violence (Epstein, 1999; Fordham, 2000).

According to Epstein (1999), women are valued and judged against three maternal stereotypes: 1) The All-Sacrificing Mother, 2) The All-Knowing Mother, and 3) The Nurturing Mother/Breadwinning Father. In this structure, the All-Sacrificing Mother is to overcome any obstacle, no matter how impossible, to protect her young. In the All-Knowing Mother, society expects the mother will intuitively know everything about her children and therefore be held to a higher standard of blame in contrast to their male partners, whom society accepts as ignorant in the ways of children. The Nurturing Mother/Breadwinning Father is expected, as her sole activity, to raise children while the father is expected to provide the resources needed to sustain the family. These stereotypes hold women to a higher standard of care-giving responsibility than their male partners, who are viewed as having a supporting, but secondary role, and ignore the changed reality of today's multi-role mother. Further, it implies women should not aspire to and cannot succeed in financial independence.

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Dalton (1999) declared a lack of integration of theory and practice, the conflicting research, and superficial training has had a negative effect in the court system, allowing judges to continue operating within a faulty paradigm. According to Dalton, courts often disregard legislative intent, either intentionally or through ignorance, and cited problems in ensuring an assailant's violent history does not go undetected or unnoticed. Courts operate under other assumptions our society holds as it pertains to mothers who are also victims of abuse: 1) Mothers should have inherent knowledge of abuse and the ability to prevent it; 2) Battered women's fears are exaggerated and unbelievable; and 3) Parents should be treated as a single unit, but with child welfare responsibility as a maternal role (Enos, 1996).

In CPS investigations and court rulings, the responsibility to predict and prevent the abuse is placed on the adult victim, requiring mothers to protect children from fathers who are responsible for the injury to children as a result of their choice to batter (Enos, 1996; Miccio, 1995). In *State of North Carolina v. Aleen E. Walden* (1982), and again in *State of Wisconsin v. Terry Williquette* (1986), the courts found that leaving a child with someone who is known to abuse the child demonstrates intent by the mother to perpetuate the abuse. However, if a woman leaves and takes her children without the knowledge and permission of the father, the mother can be charged with kidnapping and ordered to return the children to the father, regardless of the reasons for fleeing. The attempted escape of the mother when financially unstable may cause a woman to lose her children due to being unable to provide for them (Dutton, 1993). If women leave without the children, CPS can charge them with abandonment. Many perpetrators take advantage of this information and ensure that the victims are never alone with all of their children at

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one time (Sisco, 1993). The adult victims and their children are in a legal no-win situation.

Courts often misconstrue the victim's inability or reticence to leave her abuser as proof of an unwillingness to protect her children. However, the court has historically failed to understand the reasons why it may be unwise for a victim to leave the abusive relationship (Enos, 1996; *In the Interest of CDC*, 1990; Lyon, 1999). Victims are seen as either pathological or complicit. In one case, the court ruled to terminate rights of the mother because it was perceived by a psychologist that she had a "passive personality" (*In the Interest of A.V.*, 1987, p. 781). The 'passive personality,' it was argued, would make her less likely to protect her children and more likely to accept abuse. In another case, an Indiana court convicted Bonnie Shelton of accessory to a crime because she "knowingly and intentionally allowed her son to die because she failed to prevent her son's father from killing the child" (Grossier, 1991). *In the Interest of S.D.S.* (1983), a Texas court held that it was not only the efforts of the mother to protect her children that should be considered, but also the relative success of those efforts.

In the Matter of Farley (1991), a Michigan court of Appeals refused to hear the appeal of a mother, Sharon Benn, whose rights had been terminated, even though she successfully left the relationship, had lived apart from the assailant for a period of over one year, had visited the children on a regularly scheduled basis, and had completed the parenting classes ordered by the Family Independence Agency. Testing showed her to be motivated to protect her children, but the concerns of two mental health workers that she may enter another abusive relationship or at some time might return to the abusive husband gave the court the justification needed to terminate her parental rights. Her

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assailant, Robert Benn, was not charged with child abuse and additional charges of sexual abuse were dropped by the prosecutor's office. He received no punishment, yet she lost her children. His parental rights were not terminated.

Fleury and colleagues (1998) found that victims also face barriers within the law enforcement communities. Perpetrators may rip phones from walls and threaten victims with additional violence if they attempt to involve the police. For some victims, past experiences with police that were unfavorable prevented them from re-contacting the police. A small number of participants within the sample cited embarrassment, shame, or love for the perpetrator prevented them from calling. However, victims often do not fare much better when the police are called. Law enforcement officers may side with the batterer, underreport episodes of domestic abuse, and like the mental health system, categorize them as 'fights, arguments, or miscellaneous non-criminal incidents' (Caputo, 1991). Saunders and Size (1986) found officers to be apt to blame the victim based on their own traditional perspectives of women's roles. This could be a significant factor in a woman's decision to call or not call the police.

Batterer's Accountability and Manipulation of Systems

According to Sosnick (1994), the most effective means of addressing domestic abuse the court can provide is to hold the offender, not the victim, accountable for the violence. This accountability should be equally assessed against both genders. Yet, "Ironically, no man has ever been prosecuted for his failure to protect his children from an abusive mother" (Davidson, 1995, p. 357). Perpetrators of domestic abuse are not held to the same level of accountability for children as the victim of the abuse (Appel, 1997; Dohrn, 1995; Enos, 1996; Frieze et al, 1984; National Council of Juvenile and

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Family Court Judges, 1994; Scott, 1996; Whatley and Riggio, 1993), and recent studies are calling for research on the parenting skills and strengths of victims as they strive to protect their children from interpersonal violence (National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, 2002). Society's desire for women to be good mothers and a need to punish them when they are perceived as not being good mothers is at the heart of the disparate treatment (McDonald, 1998). The reality, according to Lyon (1999), is that although the abuser is to blame and should be held accountable, more often than not, if a child is severely endangered, it is the child that is forced out of their home and away from their mother. This, then, punishes both the adult and child victims for the abuser's behavior.

A case in point is *In the interest of Brown* (1980). In *Brown*, the rights of a mother were terminated when her abuser, the children's stepfather, was convicted of killing one daughter and sexually molesting another. The court concluded that the mother, although she herself had been severely abused, had "as any parent, the obligation to protect a child against harm." The court was unable to excuse her failure to protect even though she had no control over her circumstances. However, the children's biological, non-custodial father was held to a different standard. The court sympathetically noted that he was unemployed, in significant arrears in child support, had no residence and therefore refused to hold him accountable of failing to protect his children from their stepfather. His parental rights were not terminated. The court, therefore, accepted his failure to protect his children by reason of his failure to provide for the children. Amazingly, in their decision, the court excused the father's lack of protection by stating that the stepfather was "a violent man and that any approach by the father would have been met with reprisals of demoniac variety" and that the father's

fitness should not be judged by his success at carrying out those responsibilities, or his lack of efforts to do so. This is clearly at odds with the standards expected of the mother, and is common practice in criminal and family courts across this nation (Miller, 1988).

More recently, in *Campbell v. State* (2000), a Wyoming court found Casey Campbell guilty of the felony of child endangerment. Campbell had returned from work to find her daughter had been badly burned. Her live-in boyfriend explained that he had tripped and spilled coffee on her. Because the boyfriend had been abusive in the past, she feared his response to her seeking immediate help for the girl. Instead, she waited until she could get away, and took her child to the hospital, where a doctor called police. Campbell was convicted in March, 2000 of a felony. The abuser received a conviction and very light sentence for a misdemeanor.

In a Massachusetts case, *Commonwealth v. Lazarovich* (1991), Janice Lazarovich was found guilty of committing mayhem and assault and battery on her 2-year-old child. The defendant related an extensive history of abuse including being hit repeatedly with a tire iron while pregnant with her daughter. After repeated requests for help from police that afforded her no help, her husband held the baby up with one hand and held a hunting knife in the other. He told Janice that the next time she tried to get help, he would cut off the baby's head. He threw Janice against the wall, dropped the baby, and beat an older child while Janice lay unconscious and the baby lay crying on the floor. Janice, afraid to leave the older children with her husband while she sought medical care for the baby, was unable to get away with the children and take the baby to a hospital until the next day. Still, the court ignored experts who testified in her defense, and she was

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sentenced to eleven to sixteen years in prison, roughly the same sentence her husband received.

According to Kent (2001), batterers need to not only be held solely responsible for the battering as criminal conduct, they must also be educated on how their behavior affects their children. Domestic abuse is justified in the mind of the abuser, and is a habit that is difficult to break (Goolkasian, 1986; Kent, 2001). It is clear that the problem is not the mother's failure but the father's abuse. If he were not abusive, no problem would exist (Enos, 1996; Stark, 1995). Czapanskiy (1993) describes the disparate situation as a "father who torments, threatens, and abuses his partner is the source of, and is thus responsible for, the harm to his children. Nevertheless courts, police, social service agencies, and healthcare providers routinely ignore the substantial interrelationship between women abuse and child abuse."

Batterers have used the systems of CPS, the courts, and law enforcement to their advantage (Zorza, 1998). Many batterers are master manipulators (Hart 1988; Pence & Paymar, 1983; Ver Steegh, 2000; Zorza, 1998), and are successful at putting the blame for their actions on others (Adams, 1989; American Psychological Association, 1996; Dutton, 1992; Goldolf, 1998; Pence & Paymar, 1993). They will often use their own children in order to continue to hurt their partners (Dutton, 1992; Liss, 1993; Pence & Paymar, 1983) through custody litigation, even when the assailant has no history of the slightest interest in parenting (Zorza, 1998).

Dalton, (1999) found that the courts' favoring of joint custody plays right into the hands of batterers. Courts are placed in the position of determining the better parent, and if possible, maintaining the parental rights of both individuals involved. They often turn

to expert witnesses for guidance. According to Zorza (1996), "Further complicating courts' understanding of the credibility and culpability of the parties is the fact that few therapists and custody evaluators have any (or sufficient) training in or understanding of domestic violence" (p.78). The problem goes beyond therapists. The American Psychological Association (1996) also cites that guardians ad litem and court-appointed special advocates are seldom knowledgeable about domestic abuse. The court is operating under misinformation from the very individuals accepted as experts. Interestingly, research shows that joint custody is no more or less beneficial than sole custody, and in fact is contraindicated in cases of domestic abuse (Dalton, 1999).

A majority of highly disputed custody cases involve a history of partner abuse (Ayoub et al, 1999). Research shows that batterers will use custody as a means of staying connected to their victim, and may use the threat of continued harm to them during visitations in order to continue to control the victim (Bancroft & Silverman, 2000). Custody battles are particularly perilous for victims. In this setting, they are judged based on a perspective that the domestic violence is mutual conflict, rather than criminal conduct by one person directed at another. Under this assumption, the mother is perceived as the problem (Dalton, 1999). With the court's goal of establishing joint custody and identification of a friendly, cooperative parent, the batterer comes out ahead. The batterer asks for sole or joint custody, presenting himself as the victim of a hysterical, diminished, conflict inciting, impulsive or over-protective, alarmist mother (Hart, 1988; Ver Steegh, 2000). He appears calm, endearing, logical, caring, concerned, willing to share custody fairly, and the more cooperative, attractive parent for joint, if not primary custody (Adams, 1998; Bograd, 1999; Geffner et al, 1999).

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In contrast, a battered woman often enters into court exhausted from the ordeal, fearful for her children, hyper-vigilant, inarticulate, hopeless, angry, disagreeable to the idea of having the batterer have access to her and her children, and therefore uncooperative (Dalton, 1999; Ver Steegh, 2000). Ironically, the mother's fight to protect children from the batterer is expected by the courts and CPS while the victim is in the relationship in order to avoid failure to protect charges, but is inappropriate behavior in court; where she is considered uncooperative, unfriendly, and her protective behaviors are considered grounds for decisions against her (Smith & Coukos, 1997; Zorza, 1992).

Batterers are also adept at manipulating mental health professionals (Gondolf, 1988; Zorza, 1998). The batterer once again may appear rational, cooperative and concerned about his children. He may admit to the abuse, seem contrite, and readily accept counseling or intervention for his problem. Studies show that assailants will use the counseling sessions to achieve their goals of having charges against them dropped, gaining joint custody of their children, and/or getting their partner to return to them. These studies also show they are likely to drop out once their goals are achieved (Gondolf, 1988).

The United States Department of Justice (2000) sponsored two studies to determine the effectiveness of batterer's intervention services. The first was a yearlong study of over four hundred batterers who were assigned to either an intervention group for six months of intervention and counseling sessions, or a control group. Disturbingly, there were no significant differences post-study between the individuals assigned to the intervention and the control group in attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. The recidivism rates were nearly identical. The second study involved a similar sample split into three groups:

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one assigned to a twenty-six week intervention program, one to an eight week intervention program, and one to community service alone. The results, once again, showed that the batterers stayed violence-free while in treatment, but the recidivism rates for all three groups showed no significant difference. This suggests that these programs hold little promise as a solution to the issue, and that batterers instead will use them to ensure that they are seen as reasonable and logical individuals, and to avoid consequences for their abuse.

Assailants also use cross or counterclaims and contempt charges in order to exact a financial and emotional cost to their victims (Edelson, 1992). Abusers frequently file retaliatory litigation around the issues of child support and custody, sometimes having the effect of driving the victims into financial instability, and then report them to CPS agencies as financially unfit (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Some women and their children actually end up penniless and homeless as a result of these tactics. Again, it should be noted that half of America's homeless women and children are homeless due to domestic abuse (Zorza, 1998).

Racial /Ethnic Issues in Cases of Domestic Abuse

The invisibility of minority and marginalized individuals in the research literature reflects their status in a majority and male-dominated society, and the perspective that they are somehow less a victim. Women of color, poor women, and women society disregard due to their sexual orientation have significant levels of domestic abuse, yet are virtually silent in the context of research (Bograd, 2000). Almeida and colleagues (1998) report that victims' barriers to seeking help are often rooted in issues of race and class. Asbury, (1999); Coley and Beckett, (1988); and West, (1998) cite methodological

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faults with most studies on cases of domestic violence because researchers failed to factor in the co-variables of class and race. Without understanding the influence of race and class, culturally competent services and research are virtually impossible (Hampton et al, 1998; Hampton and Yung, 1996; Neff et al, (1995).

Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) found that differences between races in the incidence of domestic violence virtually disappear when the variable of socio-economic status is controlled. Bograd (2000) found that domestic abuse is inversely related to socio-economic status. However, other studies have found no correlation between poverty or minority status and the occurrence of child abuse or neglect (Appel, 1997; Becker, 1995). This is significant for this study, in that the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (1998) reported that battered women who are also poor are particularly vulnerable to CPS interaction, including the loss of their children, when the community does not recognize and provide support services designed to address their poverty. With new lifetime limits and sanctions on welfare benefits, the National Council goes on to warn of increased vulnerability and involvement with the courts for poor families.

Bent-Goodley (2001) revealed that income has consistently been a significant factor for African Americans experiencing domestic abuse. Lacking sufficient resources effectively traps many women in the situation, unable to sustain themselves or their children without the resources of the batterer. In addition, unemployment or underemployment issues and having to 'double up' in housing situations may make leaving impossible (Sampson, 1997; Stets, 1991). Higher rates of unemployment and underemployment rates are evident within marginalized populations, and systems that

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Disparate treatment by social institutions against those who are poor or of color has roots in the fabric of society (Rainford, 2004). Stark and Flitcraft (1995) frame the issue as “The very problems caused by social inadequacies based on sex, class, race, sexual orientation or age propel women to seek help from a system that reproduces and stabilizes those inequalities” (p. 58). Social science research has shown that the courts and CPS target hundreds of thousands of women who are disproportionately poor and of color (Appel, 1997; Dennis et al, 1995). Issues such as being unable to secure adequate housing, not having access to quality educational opportunities, not being able to access culturally competent services, and stereotypical labeling prevent women from successfully escaping their violent partner (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Bograd, 2000; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994).

Sexism, racism and classism are all part of the social norms that permeate the social institutions charged with assisting women, children and families (Bent-Goodley, 2001). In cases of race, women of color may not report their abuse, are more likely to mistrust the social institutions, and may obstruct efforts to isolate the perpetrator from the family due to racial loyalty and out of anger for the discrimination their partners face in the courts of this country (Bachman & Coker, 1995; Franklin, 2000; Saunders & Size, 1986; Schechter & Edelson, 1999; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994; West, 1999).

Intersections of race, socio-economic status, and gender color the meaning and nature of violence differently in people along the margins. Numerous researchers have found that women of color are more likely to sustain severe and life threatening injuries

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from domestic abuse more often than their white counterparts (Fagan, 1996; Hampton and colleagues, 1998; Hampton and Yung, 1996; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). Joseph (1997) identified domestic abuse as the number one health issue for African Americans. Yet there are significant barriers to women of color getting quality health care (Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994). These inequities in services compound the already significant influence of domestic abuse on the poor and/or people of color.

Related Assumptions

Society assumes several things about parenting and child welfare as it pertains to domestic abuse. While the parenting skills of victims are the focus of research in this area, the research on the parental skills of perpetrators is virtually non-existent. This fact is more the product of societal norms than a lack of a researchable project. According to Sullivan and colleagues (2000), adult survivors are perceived to 'allow' children to be exposed to domestic violence, being unable or, even more judgmentally, 'unwilling' to protect their children. This places advocates in the role of defending their client's parenting strategies and resorting to safety planning as proof of parental stability and fitness. Ironically, the traits and skills victims develop to cope with daily life-threatening circumstances, including safety planning strategies, are not necessarily those that the court or social service workers may find valuable (Phillips, 1992). A case in point is the mother who must balance a jealous partner who will not tolerate her taking attention away from him and toward their children. If she attends to the child, she and the child are at risk of his wrath, and if she does not, she is seen as a neglectful parent.

The fact that the perpetrator's parenting skills are virtually ignored is the product of society's assumptions that the safety of children is a burden that is exclusive to women

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(Kaufmann-Kantor & Little, 2002). Yet research shows that when attention is focused on victims' protective skills as a test of fitness for parenting, danger increases not just for her, but for her children as well (National Resource on Domestic Violence, 2002).

Interestingly, gender bias in this context does not apply only to mothers. The accused can be any female with a relationship of care to the child. In *Phillips v. Diehm* (1995), a grandmother was successfully prosecuted on the basis of failure to protect her grandson from the sexual abuse by the child's step-grandfather, even though the grandmother professed no knowledge of the abuse. The grandmother was held to the same maternal stereotype of being all-knowing and all-sacrificing.

CPS and advocates for women have different perspectives on how to deal with the issues of domestic and child abuse. CPS works to preserve the family unit while protecting the children. Domestic abuse survivor advocates believe that by facilitating victim safety through services, advocacy and social reform, children become safer as their mother is protected from the assailant (Schechter & Edelson, 1999). The CPS assumption underlying this difference in perspectives is that to support children requires that the mother be held accountable for protecting her children from the abuser.

Society also assumes that battered women are somehow attracted to the abuse. This assumption may be based on the statistics of women who return to their abuser. It has been estimated (Strube, 1988) that as many as half of the women experiencing abuse return to their abuser. Inferences made about the meaning of this statistic could be considered poor science without first factoring in why they are unable to leave. In regard to a 'death-wish attraction,' Hoff (1990) and Walker (1993) found that battered women were not likely to enter into another violent relationship when able to safely leave.

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Additionally, Rounsaville (1978) found that most abused women had not been previously in a violent relationship. Sullivan (2000) found most women reported being surprised when first confronted with his violence.

Another assumption is that battered women do not help themselves by seeking available help or attempting to leave, which researchers have found to be inconsistent with the way that women deal with abusive relationships (Skinazi, 1997; Sullivan, 2000). Dutton (1993) presented several studies that show abused women seek both formal and informal sources of assistance, and use more creative and intense efforts as the abuse escalates. It is also assumed that for those women seeking assistance from outside sources, services are relevant, non-judgmental, easily accessed, and have the capacity to serve when requested.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study was to explore: 1) The meaning domestic abuse survivors assigned to CPS and other systemic interaction, 2) The situations in which interventions occurred, and 3) The intended and unintended consequences of the interventions. It was hoped the study would lend information as to how the interaction was experienced by the adult victim. It was intended to answer how the intervention helped or did not help the situation within the family unit and how and why the interaction shaped or did not shape the victim's decision making. The study was intended to discover the consequences of participants' interaction with related systems, both intended and unintended. The information on settings in which the intervention occurred allowed for cross comparison between cases, and along demographic variables.

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Through the application of qualitative methodology, it was intended that the voice of victims, as to their real lived experiences, would be heard, understood, and valued. The study explored the interface of CPS, other related systems, and policies that affect the ability of women to live safely with their children. Finally, the project sought to find responsible options for dealing with situations of concurrent child and partner abuse. It should be noted that the intentions of the researcher is not to be critical of any individual or systems, but rather to begin a dialogue around the situations in which the women lived. The desire is that this discussion will lead to policies and practices that both protect children and build capacity within the family unit, to promote an even distribution of power and resources within the family unit that supports the development of all concerned.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the rationale for a qualitative research paradigm, the selection of sites and population, the data collection and analysis procedures, the trustworthiness of the design, the biography and epoche of the researcher, and finally, the ethical and political considerations of the study.

Rationale

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to those actions—their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds” (p. 57). Women who have had their parental rights threatened because of domestic abuse are virtually absent in the literature. Their experience is minimized; relegated to documented court records, CPS statistics on complaints and removals, and as footnotes in law journals. Women who have significant interaction with CPS within the context of domestic abuse have not had an opportunity to describe to a listening community how they have experienced the interaction.

To understand an issue of such complexity, to understand the personal and societal cost and benefit of any policy, it is not enough to count the numbers and investigate the variations in those numbers between groups. This should not be considered a condemnation of quantitative methods of scientific research. In cases where the parameters of the issue are known, quantitative methods provide the most effective means to ensure validity and reliability. In the case of this study, the parameters for

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possible responses were unknown. Without understanding which questions to ask, what the range of responses might be, and what categories would be necessary to group and sort the data, the use of an inflexible, pre-conceived structure was indefensible.

Certain properties of qualitative methodology made it well suited to this study. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), qualitative methods effectively facilitate research that: 1) delves in-depth into complexities and processes; 2) focuses on little-known phenomenon; 3) seeks to explore where and why policy, scientific and local knowledge and practice are at odds; and 4) studies an issue for which relevant variables have yet to be identified. The concurrent experiences of abuse and CPS interventions are very complex issues when considered separately, but even more so when combined. The assumptions of qualitative design also made the process a good match for this study. The researcher's interest in exploring the process and outcomes; the emphasis placed on the lived experience and the participant's own voice, and the desire to accurately describe the phenomenon through participants' lived experiences, made it inductive by nature and appropriate for qualitative methodology (Creswell, 1994).

The power of qualitative methods as a good fit for investigating policy is well documented (Marshall, 1987; Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Qualitative methodology allows for the identification of unanticipated outcomes of policies. It can identify inconsistencies and conflict built into policies, and how policies may change as they are implemented at various levels. Qualitative methods also help find natural solutions to problems that may be outside of the boundaries of the policy (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

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The study methodology required that probing questions for the purpose of clarification be included in the design. Without the flexibility of qualitative methods to further probe the issue, the researcher was at risk of asking the wrong questions and assigning the wrong meaning to the responses. Additionally, the probes allowed for participants to expand on their answers. In completing the literature review, it was clear to the author that the voices of the victims were missing. The selected qualitative method allowed for the victims' own voices to be heard, and the responses to be probed in such a way that "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) would yield valuable explanations of processes, accurate meanings, and detailed analysis.

Within the qualitative method, several strategies were considered. The strategy selected for this investigation was phenomenology. Phenomenology has roots in philosophy, through the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and has been used in research within the fields of sociology, psychology, health sciences and education (Creswell, 1998). Pure phenomenology requires that researchers suspend their judgments about what is real until they are founded on some more certain basis, a process called 'epoche'. Also termed 'bracketing,' phenomenological researchers are required to identify and set aside all pre-judgments they may have about the phenomenon in order to clear the stage for the participant voices and meanings.

Pure phenomenological researchers have nothing more than general guidelines for a design, but are instead required to "develop plans of study especially suited to understanding the experiential phenomenon that is the object of their study" (Polkinghorne 1989, p. 44). The requirement that researchers enter their work with no preconceived notions or hypotheses was problematic early on for the author. My

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extensive experiences garnered while working with abused women and their children has left me with many impressions of system function, system policies, and an affinity for the target population. This knowledge and awareness of the issues precluded me from entering this study with a 'blank slate' of preconceptions. To address this issue, I turned to the work of Campbell (2002) and Lester (2006).

Pure phenomenological research is designed to be descriptive in nature, rather than to explain the phenomena (Lester, 2006). However, the model has several other qualities that made it the strategy of choice for the study. The ability to identify the phenomenon based in the perceptions of those experiencing it, through a thick description (Geertz, 1973) was the key purpose of the study. Also, phenomenology encourages the use of tools that are inductive in nature: interviews and deep discussion. The strategy is founded on the philosophy that personal, and therefore inherently subjective knowledge of phenomena allows those on the outside to assess and describe the experience as lived, not perceived.

The feminist perspective on this approach is to disclaim the ability of researchers to enter into any study believing that there is or can be no inherent bias. Our own lived experiences provide a framework for who we are, what we believe, and how we reference and perceive the experiences not just of ourselves, but of others as well. Indeed, even the use of some quantitative methods result in inherent bias. In the case of surveys using a Likert scale to evaluate satisfaction, for example, is subject to the rater's belief of what are reasonable expectations. In this case, a very large sample is required to get closest to the truth. When researchers use personal observation beyond counting of a studied behavior, they must interpret what they see accurately in order for the observation to have

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According to Lester (2006), the researcher engaged in phenomenologically designed research should not be required to only study those things about which they know little, but rather recognize the limitations placed on them by their personal references and make clear to the reader how the interpretation and meanings assigned to the data came to be. In this way, the researcher is able to present within the research, be part of the research, and act as an interested, subjected, and embedded part of the study. Campbell (2002) agrees with this perspective, and further believes that the empathetic responses and subsequent emotions of the researcher should be part of the analysis of the data. The lessons learned from such an activity can be most helpful in empathizing to the degree that the meaning is enriched, and therefore more likely to be closer to the actual experiences of those who are studied.

The power of phenomenology to challenge structural or normative assumptions and inform, support or challenge policy (Lester, 2006) was ideal for the study. Despite the ability to enter into the research without some preconceived notions, the author relied on the process of epoche; that is, to understand the potential and actual influence of the researcher as embedded within the study and empathetic to participants. The researcher's epoche is included later in this chapter.

Additionally, writing questions that explore experiences and ask for descriptions from participants as to the lived meaning of the phenomenon, collecting data from those who lived the experience, coding and clustering the data into themes, and reporting the data out in terms of an underlying structure is supported within the phenomenological

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structure (Creswell, 1998). Within this framework, the researcher arranged her work and remained true to the processes of phenomenology, although accepts that the pure phenomenological researcher may take umbrage with her experience as a bias.

Within the phenomenological approach, the sub-strategy of in-depth interviews is a good fit for this study. “A study focusing on individual lived experience typically relies on an in-depth interview strategy” (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 61). This technique lends itself to a set of preliminary questions that may be supplemented with additional probes and clarification requests in a semi-standard interview strategy (Berg, 2001; Levendosky et al, 2000). In studying issues of domestic abuse, Schwartz (2000) recommends the use of open-ended questions “as they increase the opportunity to build researcher-respondent rapport, allow respondents to qualify responses and reduce the hierarchical nature of traditional survey research” (p. 821). This strategy fits the criterion of flexibility within the data collection phase, and allowed the researcher to probe later interviewees on new and unexpected clustered data gathered from earlier interviews. As the study evolved, and themes emerged, more data on related systems outside of CPS became increasingly important, as did the suggestions offered by participants.

Method

Sample

The study involved a purposeful sample of self-selected women who shared a history of domestic abuse, were mothers, and who had experienced recent interaction with CPS due to domestic violence. The sample consisted only of African American (50%) and White women (50%). The criteria for eligibility were those women who 1)

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were no longer living with their assailants, 2) were recent domestic abuse survivors as well as mothers of minor children, 3) had experienced interaction with CPS within the past twelve months due to their being domestic violence survivors, 4) were not themselves accused of child abuse, and 5) were without a history of either substance abuse or mental illness. Beyond the obvious connection of desiring women who were both mothers and survivors of domestic abuse, the sample was limited in other areas for several reasons.

It was important from a safety standpoint that the participants were no longer involved with their assailants, as it was feared a good possibility that the survivor may suffer harm should the assailant become aware of her interaction with others as it pertains to his abusive behavior. Interactions of this type would most certainly be considered as a threat to his ability to maintain control over her. The result of this discovery by the perpetrator could be incidences of further and more intensified abuse.

Only those women experiencing interaction with CPS in the past twelve months were assured to have been evaluated using Michigan's revised Structured Decision Making tool. This instrument was revised as of March of 2003. By limiting eligibility in this manner, one would expect the sample to have been evaluated by CPS with a uniform, consistent tool.

Women who themselves experienced the potentially confounding variables of child abuse charges, substance abuse issues and mental illness were excluded from the sample. It should be noted, however, that women who were charged with child endangerment or neglect solely on the basis of children witnessing domestic violence were allowed to participate. The study centered on the actions by CPS and related

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systems as they pertained to safeguarding children from domestic abuse. When child abuse charges have been leveled against the mother as a perpetrator of the abuse, substance abuse is suspected or proven, or mental health issues are present, they may factor into CPS decisions of parental fitness. These factors may require a CPS worker to make decisions they otherwise would not in cases of domestic abuse where these other variables are not present.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were solicited through Michigan's network of domestic violence service providers and Legal Aid attorneys using advocates as intermediary contacts. Michigan has domestic violence service providers in all eighty-three Michigan counties. These sites employ counselors, legal advocates and case managers who are specialists in providing services to abused women and their children. They are trained to support women experiencing the trauma of abuse, as well as supporting them in the aftermath, and have expertise in safe interactions with their clients.

The researcher requested the assistance of service providers and legal aid attorneys to identify potential participants meeting sample criteria. The researcher asked them not to self-select those cases that were extreme, in order to avoid having a sample of outliers. However, it should be noted that those cases referred by the attorneys may have been more extreme cases, as the most severe cases may be those seeking help from this group of workers. This potentially less random group represents seven women in the study. Conversely, the group of service providers asked the women meeting the criteria that were in their shelters or receiving non-residential counseling services at that time. Most of them were also involved in legal services with an attorney, but were referred by

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the service providers. This group of women was more randomly selected, in that the group was available to all women meeting study criteria based on the fact that they just happened to be involved in services at that time.

The service providers and attorneys contacted eligible women identified from their service registries who met the criterion for eligibility, usually when they next presented themselves for service purposes. Those meeting the criteria were offered the opportunity to participate. A summary of the study was given to the service providers and attorneys, who were asked to read it to and discuss it with the clients they contacted. The summary is included (See Appendix A) at the end of this document. If the client agreed to participate, the recruiter notified the researcher, and the researcher then contacted the candidates according to the candidate's instructions, re-screening them for eligibility based on the above criteria. The seven screening questions asked of them are as follows: 1) Were you a victim of domestic abuse in the past twelve months? 2) Did you have children at the time of the abuse? 3) In the past twelve months, did CPS become involved because of the abuse? 4) Were you suffering from or charged with either substance abuse or mental illness at the time? 5) Were you yourself being investigated by CPS for personally abusing your children? 6) Are you currently living with your assailant? and 7) Are you interested in volunteering for this study? The use of an expert intermediary in the form of the recruiter was essential to ensure victim safety, as well as to build from an established relationship of trust. All participants signed an informed consent agreement and granted permission for the interview to be audio taped.

Service providers involved in the recruitment of participants were contacted using the state provider's computer network list-serve. Providers were asked to consider

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contacting past and present clients meeting the criteria. The group of providers knows the researcher, and the network of providers was informed that the researcher was interested in interviewing eligible participants for her dissertation to Michigan State University. They were told that the objective of the study was to gather information regarding the concurrent issues of domestic abuse and CPS interaction from the perspective of those who have actually experienced the phenomenon. Recruiters were informed of the confidentiality rights and considerations as outlined in the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C).

Recruiters from both the service provider and legal aid industries who indicated a willingness to contact former clients were trained to present the project to the potential participants in a cover letter (see Appendix A), attached to which was the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). Recruiters who were interested in continued participation were asked to call the researcher to schedule a time to go over the consent form and their role as recruiters. Recruiters were then asked to contact the client, read her the summary of the project from the cover letter, review the consent form, and ask if the client was willing to participate. If she was, the recruiter forwarded the participant's contact information to the researcher, and the researcher then contacted the participant to schedule the interview, as noted earlier. Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher again reviewed the Informed Consent form with the participant, gained the appropriate signature and demographic data, and provided the participant with a copy of the Informed Consent Form.

The strategy to interview participants in the offices of their local domestic violence service provider was selected to be the most suitable for two reasons. First, it

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allowed the participant to access the interview in a setting that she was familiar with and that offered her a measure of safety. Second, having the participant in a setting that could offer her counseling after the interview was important. By the participant reliving the traumatic events and recounting very personal feelings, the researcher risked additional psychological trauma to participants. This researcher is acutely cognizant and empathetic to the participant vulnerability in this area, and desired to ensure the participant was connected with post-interview counseling services sensitive to the issues, if the participant desired.

Michigan's network of domestic abuse victim service providers are required by the state Department of Human Services, as a provision of funding, to provide counseling services specialized to assist victims and survivors of domestic abuse. They are also required to meet quality assurance standards that include the employment of competent, well-trained staff to assist victim and survivors with free counseling services. These specialized workers were de-briefed on the study and topics covered based on the interview guide (see Appendix B) in order to ensure that participants had available to them, at no cost, highly trained, caring and supportive counselors.

Sample Size

The sample size ($n = 20$) included ten white and ten black women. The justification for having an equal number of interviewees from each ethnic group was to investigate experiences and perceptions along ethnic lines, and explore differences between the two groups. Data saturation began to be apparent at the time of the sixteenth interview, and subsequent interviews yielded little real new data. From the eighteenth interview on, no new data was collected, and new no themes emerged. The first ten

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white women and the first ten African American women agreeing to participate and following through with the interview constituted the sample. This was important, given the hope of achieving a balance between the two ethnic groups. The groups filled to capacity at about the same time. The segment on recruitment in Chapter Four discusses some unexpected challenges in recruiting.

Interview Process

Participants were scheduled for an in-depth interview that was approximately one and a half hours long, and the sessions were audio taped. The researcher asked the participant's permission to write field notes, for the sake of clarity and memory. These notes, when combined with the transcripts of the interviews were helpful in the analysis stage, by serving to document non-verbal observations of the participant and recorded reminders of probes asked of the participant at the appropriate time. The researcher recorded her field notes in a way that was unobtrusive to the participant, so that the participant was not left to assign meaning to them. The interview generally followed the outline of the interview guide (see Appendix B). However, participants linked their information in ways that were meaningful to them, in content and format. The questions asked of participants focused on these topics: 1) History of violence, 2) Their perception of the exposure to violence by their children, 3) Their attempts to protect their children, 4) Their interaction with CPS and other related systems, 5) The interaction of CPS and other related systems with their assailant, 6) The consequences of these interactive experiences, and 7) What actions by CPS and other systems were helpful to them, and what could have been more helpful.

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As mentioned earlier, the interviews, although guided by the interview guide, were somewhat unstructured to allow participants to frame the interview on their own terms. This strategy was critical in staying true to feminist theory by empowering participants to tell their story in their own words as they experienced it. Probing and clarifying questions further explored and helped to determine the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of the participant's recount. Participants were allowed, and in fact encouraged, to talk at length about their lived experience. If the participants' answers wandered away from a topic or probe, they were not diverted back to the question at hand, but rather were asked a similar question later in the interview.

The interview guide was created using research questions divided into aforementioned topics as a framework. The interview questions and sub-topics were developed from the experiences of the researcher and her peers working within the areas of domestic abuse service provision, legal aid attorneys, and CPS, using the formulation method suggested by Gilgun (1992). The researcher submitted her interview guide to a panel of Ph.D.'s who were familiar with doctoral-level research, qualitative methods, child welfare and domestic abuse, for review and critique. Their input was incorporated into the finished product.

Trust and a positive relationship between the participant and the researcher were critical to the success of gathering the data. In order to build that trust, the researcher was careful throughout the process to avoid language that would be perceived as judgmental or threatening. The initial introduction to the researcher involved explaining the purpose of the study, and placing the participant in the role of the expert, thereby downplaying the role of the researcher. This same tactic was used in the formation and delivery of

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questions. When a topic probe was offered, it was phrased in the same manner, with the researcher asking such questions as “Tell me about...” “Help me understand...” or “What was your experience with...?” Within this context, the researcher relied on her years of experience working with domestic abuse victims to present an empathetic, non-judgmental persona of both verbal and non-verbal cues.

Participants were reminded at the beginning and throughout the process that they could decide not to answer any questions that were too difficult or painful for them, and do so without penalty or judgment. With open-ended questions, participants were able to choose to spend more or less time discussing those issues that they found most difficult. The researcher attempted to be supportive of the stated efforts of participants to self-advocate regarding their interactions with related social systems, developing coping skills, and engaging in efforts aimed at protecting and advocating for their children within the experience.

Post-interview, the researcher provided all participants with the names of qualified counseling staff at the interview site that expressed a willingness and a desire to do follow-up counseling with participants should they desire. Participants were reminded that they could decline to continue the interview and not have her data used within the study. Additionally, they were reminded that they should contact the researcher, the Michigan State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) and/or the researcher’s doctoral committee chairperson if they had concerns or questions regarding the collection or use of their information. This information was also provided in writing on the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) that was signed by the

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participants, and all participants were given a copy of the form at the time of the interview.

In recognition and appreciation of their time, all participants were given the opportunity to select a gift certificate valued at \$25.00. These certificates were to local gas stations, department stores, bus passes, or grocery stores. I found it interesting that all but two of the mothers selected a necessity card (such as a bus pass, gasoline card, or food item). Without being asked, seventeen participants verbalized what they would do with the certificate. In those cases, all indicated that they would use it for a necessity such as school clothes, diapers, formula, food or transportation. Two indicated that they were looking forward to purchasing a birthday gift for one of their children.

The interviews were transcribed by a neutral, third party, confidential recorder with significant experience working with the target population, and used in the past by another local university for transcription work. The transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy by the researcher, reading the transcript along while simultaneously reviewing the audiotape and related notes. The audiotapes contain no personal demographic identifying information on it. However, the real names of the participants and their children are present on the tapes. When transcribed, those names were replaced by the pseudonym assigned by the researcher.

Data Analysis Procedures

The goal of data analysis is “to integrate the themes and concepts into a theory that offers an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of your research arena” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 226). It is the final stage of intensive listening and searching for meaning within the data. Data analysis is not a separate function from, but rather an

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ongoing process within the interview phase, allowing for redesign of questions to further explore central themes. “Phenomenological reduction is the process of identifying the essence of the phenomenon” (Patton, 1990, p. 408). The organization of identified topics within the data generated from this study was deconstructed into smaller categories and sub-categories and reconstructed into themes and concepts through the use of open and axial coding.

Open coding is described as “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 101). In this first of the coding phases, data is broken down into smaller parts, and explored for commonalities and differences. The author looked for nouns, adjectives and phrases that were repeated across the interview that seemed to hold special meaning or expressed an important idea for the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Those data that were similar in nature or meanings were then combined into categories. Categories that shared similar or related properties were later coded into concepts. In this study, the data from interview transcripts and the relating field notes were examined on a line-by-line analysis strategy. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), it is the most time consuming method of coding, but also the method likely to generate the most information.

Once the data were deconstructed in this manner from the first five interviews, the researcher proceeded to refine the process by adding new codes as they became apparent from subsequent interviews, using the list to compare across newly coded transcripts and returning to the earlier transcripts to recode based on the new information gathered. After deconstructing the data within each category, the author used axial coding to begin

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the process of connecting the coded categories into themes that were identifiable across the categories.

Axial coding is described as “the process of relating categories to their sub-categories, termed ‘axial’ because coding occurs around the existence of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Unlike open coding, it examines the characteristics discovered within open coding along a continuum of that theme or concept. An example within this study is the category named physical abuse. Within physical abuse, there are levels of intensity and frequency (types of dimensions) as well as types of physical abuse and resulting injuries (types of properties). These sub-categories were defined within the process of axial coding. Once the categories were established by open coding, axial coding further extrapolated the sub-categories for purposes of cross-case comparison, and resulted in core concepts. The steps involved in axial coding allowed the researcher to identify the properties of the categories, and characterize the categories to the subcategories by looking for cues in the data that denote how major categories might be related to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher sought advice on coding the interviews from a dissertation committee member known for her expertise in qualitative methods prior to undertaking any coding. Additionally, she shared with her committee chair the preliminary results of coding once the first five interviews had been coded. The author continued to share the coding process as it developed with a group of colleagues familiar with qualitative methods and domestic abuse as a means to check the work. When the coding process was

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complete, the researcher used the coded information to compare with the research questions.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness of data, gathered through qualitative methods does not escape the rigor of quantitative research in terms of reliability, validity and objectivity. Although reliability and validity take differing forms in qualitative research than in quantitative studies, there are clear requirements that qualitative research must meet. In qualitative research, “enhancing objectivity involves efforts to assure the accuracy and inclusiveness of recordings that the research is based on as well as efforts to test the truthfulness of the analytic claims that are being made about those recordings” (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 201).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four alternate but similar constructs to the scientific requirements for validity, reliability and objectivity. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is measured by the extent to which the inquiry was conducted in such a manner that the subject is accurately identified and described. This requires that the parameters of the study in terms of population, setting and phenomenon under study be clearly identified. The current study named the population, criterion for eligibility, setting for the interviews, and the stated problem.

The second construct, transferability, requires that the study have merit as to relativity. The specific methods and strategies used, along with the tools, have been made available within the document. It will be up to future researchers to determine its relative worth in similar, related studies, if desired. The theoretical framework upon which this study is based guided the research questions, data collection and analysis. Those who study theory will be able to track the specific assumptions as they relate to

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this work. The significance of the study for purposes of informing policy and procedures makes it transferable to other settings.

The third construct, dependability, requires researchers to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon and changes in the design created by an increased understanding while immersed in the data collection phase. These changes are reflective of the social reality of a changing world. They require researchers to adapt during the process of research in order to continue the learning as the realities of the phenomenon change. The flexibility required in a qualitative design addresses this need to respond to change as it becomes apparent so that the research remains timely and relevant. This study's design allowed for flexibility in interviewing to ask clarifying questions, seek additional information beyond the interview guide, and took into account that the experiences of the participants amounted to individualized, socially constructed meaning.

The final construct is confirmability. The data themselves are judged for their value. The questions that are asked of the qualitative researcher center on the degree to which the data confirm the stated findings, and if they indeed lead to the conclusions offered. Within this context, the researcher used a confirming group of five women who were survivors of domestic abuse and in stable situations to review general themes emerging from the data. They were asked to review the list of core concepts and compare them to their own experiences. This triangulation of the data increased the confirmability of the data gathered. Finally, the researcher will keep the data collected, in an organized form, for a period of seven years in a locked safe in case there is a need for external review of the data.

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The qualitative researcher should develop an in-depth understanding and empathetic respect for the participant. The author, having worked with the population for a number of years, and having conducted a thorough literature review, developed both the empathy skills needed and a solid understanding of the foundation of the social problem as represented in the literature. However, identification of the issues of bias and epoche were important to include and are addressed in the following section.

Researcher's Biography/Epoche

According to Creswell (1998) and Marshall and Rossman (1999), the phenomenological researcher has a duty to engage in writing a description of their own experiences regarding the phenomenon under study, and to disclose biases or perspectives that may be present as a result of those experiences. Although I have never experienced domestic abuse myself, I am the director of an agency that provides services to abused women and their children. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) warned, I have an inherent bias and affection toward the target population. In my work with women and children in this context, I have found them overall to be courageous, ingenious, intelligent, caring and very likeable. I have also experienced negative interaction with systems that have, at times, presented insurmountable barriers to victims attempting to be safe, and have witnessed victim blaming on all levels. This issue posed challenges for me as I sought to select a strategy for collecting data, as I described earlier in this chapter.

Campbell (2002) challenges the idea that researchers cannot or should not be emotionally involved in research. She argues that the pursuit of knowledge is always, to some degree, a personal experience and that our hope for our research is that it will be relevant to the lived experience. Emotions are, obviously, part of the lived experience.

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She describes our tendency to believe that we must suspend feeling in preference to thinking. Campbell challenges researchers to consider the role of feeling within our learning, and to consider the feelings as part of our understanding.

Campbell asserts that by distancing ourselves from the research in an attempt to remove biases, we may, in fact, be blinding ourselves to what is there deep within the data. She challenges researchers not to avoid emotions, but rather to be aware of them, and use them to better empathize and therefore become closer to the true meaning of the experiences of the subjects involved. Although her book deals with the research of rape, she supports the premise that her ideas are relevant in other studies of trauma. Within the context of rape, she believes that the academic world has under-conceptualized the trauma of rape in the attempt to distance from the emotion of the trauma. I would suggest that we have done so in the case of domestic abuse, as well.

The sterilization of traumatic subjects may prove to limit the communication of what the trauma actually means to those involved. The voices of participants in this study are no more important than the emotions of the individuals within the lived experience, for it is within the emotional responses to the trauma that the women's perceptions, attitudes and behaviors may be best understood. Without the empathetic positioning of the researcher within the communication between her and the participants, it is doubtful that I could express the meaning in the way that participants would value. Campbell (2002) calls this emotionally engaged research...a condition of empathetic neutrality. I consider this work the product of empathetic neutrality; that is, empathy toward those in the study, and neutrality toward the results that it fostered.

I recognize that my experiences have significant repercussions in terms of researcher bias. My perspectives, however biased, have resulted in the research questions at hand. They developed over a period of many years, and continue to frame my perceptions of the experience of domestic abuse. From working with victims I have developed empathy for their situation, respect for them as people, and admiration for them as survivors and fighters. Although this process results in a participant-favored bias, it also is helpful in the implementation of the interview stage, as I am inherently respectful and supportive. It hampered my ability to phrase interview questions that have a non-directional, neutral tone. This was my biggest challenge. These questions were submitted to a panel of Ph.D.'s outside of the domestic violence arena, with specific instructions to review for bias. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final outline.

I kept a journal that not only outlined process issues, but also personal challenges regarding my bias as I proceeded with data collection and analysis. This is consistent with Campbell's (2002) suggestions. The data are the most important pieces of evidence to either support or refute my claim to credibility in terms of the design and analysis, as I believe that the portrayal of the participants, their stories and my interpretations of their meanings is supported within the data. In this way, and true to phenomenological and feminist principles, I facilitated a process that enabled participants to speak their own truth, as they themselves experienced it. My many years of personal experiences, such as they are, indicate that that their stories are common, and deserve the weight and considerations that any common phenomena have earned.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Researcher bias as is only one of several ethical and methodological issues that were considered in the design and implementation of this study. “Considering the potential harm that can come in the study of violence against women, it is surprising how few researchers have taken this factor into account” (Schwartz, 2000, p. 822). Victims of violence require special care and considerations in research settings. There is a significant risk for future injury at the hands of the assailant for those women still somehow connected to the assailant, and the forced recall of past trauma can cause psychological harm. Schwartz further notes that the number of studies of violence against women that are actually reviewed and approved by Institutional Review Boards (IRB) is a very small percentage. Miller (1991) cautions “it is critically important for the researcher to do all that is possible to minimize harm and its threat” (p. 15).

To address this issue, one criterion for eligibility included only those women who were free of their abuser. In addition, this study was subject to a rigorous review and subsequent approval by the Michigan State University’s IRB (UCRIHS). Residual trauma as a result of recounting the history of the abuse, as well as reliving the events leading up to and including the loss of their children was addressed within this study’s design by providing immediate and ongoing free counseling services to participants desiring such services through their local domestic violence service providers.

Creswell (1994) advocates that in order for a study to be ethical “first and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)” (p. 165). There was an inherent intrusion in the lives of participants in this study. Participants were requested to meet face-to-face with the interviewer, and

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to describe very painful experiences. Creswell also advocates that safeguards include articulated research objectives, written and informed permission for the data to be used, IRB approval, and respondent confidentiality. In this study, participants were informed of the nature of the study, an informed consent process approved by the IRB was used, general themes were reviewed by experts from my committee as well as others that have expertise in qualitative research and domestic abuse, participation was voluntary, the ability to decline participation up to the time of publication was allowed, and all participants were given pseudonyms for their names. In addition, the records containing identifying information are secured in a locked safe, and will be destroyed seven years post-study.

Triangulation of the Data

The researcher used a confirmatory group in a focus group setting as a means of triangulating the data. The confirmatory group included five women who were at least one year removed from their abusive relationship, and who were participants in transitional housing programs run by domestic violence victim service providers. All five were stable, in that they were safely housed, employed, independent, not currently involved with CPS, and had no further legal action pending. None of the confirmatory group had been charged with child abuse, and none had a history of mental illness or substance abuse. All five had experienced prior interaction with CPS. This group of women spent two and one half hours with the researcher.

The confirmatory group was presented with core concepts that emerged out of the data collected from the interviews of the twenty women in the study. The core concepts were derived from themes emerging through the coding process. The group was asked

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by the researcher to comment on any concept that they had experienced. At least one of the women commented on every concept presented as having had some similar experience. It should be noted that the five women went through the informed consent process required of the twenty study participants, and many of their comments are included in this document.

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CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

It is imperative that readers recognize the intent of the study. The intent is not to place harsh criticism or blame onto any individual or system. Rather, it was designed to explore the ways in which human and civil servants organize their work, utilize the tools given to them, act on assumptions which may or may not serve intended purposes, and create dialogue between systems that facilitate the common goal we are all interested in: that of safe, supportive environments for families that foster their individual and collective opportunities for positive development.

Issues raised by this study are the result of a complex variety of factors resulting in some counter-productive consequences as they relate to this collective goal. It should be noted that participants had both extremely positive and some very negative experiences with all systems described. My hope is that all systems will collectively learn from the situations in which the women and children represented in the study were able to seek and obtain safety, self-sufficiency, and experience productivity in order to apply them to our work, and therefore help others like them. The desire to help others was overwhelmingly given as the reason participants chose to engage in this study.

Results of Recruitment

Of the one hundred thirty-seven recruitment contacts, thirteen did not meet the criteria for the study. Four originally agreed to participate and met the criteria, but

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contacted the researcher either personally or through an advocate to cancel the interview. Twenty-eight agreed to participate. Twenty of them made their scheduled appointment and completed the interview. Two individuals had a personal crisis that prevented them from being interviewed. Two others were no shows without explanation. Recruitment ceased when the twentieth interview was completed, as data saturation was evident. One hundred and fifteen contacts stated they were too frightened of CPS and/or the Courts and losing their children should they speak up about their experiences.

“I just can’t risk it. They are already looking for ways to blame me for what happened. If they were to find out, I’d lose my kids for sure. Please understand...I know I said I would talk to you, but I just don’t dare.” ---From a woman who cancelled her appointment with the researcher

“I know you will protect her. But she doesn’t. She’s scared. Every system has failed her so far. You are just an unknown she can’t risk or rely on at this point.” ---DV Service Provider, upon cancelling an appointment for her client.

The Setting

Nineteen participants were interviewed in the offices of their service provider, at the shelter in which they were residing, or in the offices of their legal advocate/attorney. In one case, the participant specifically requested that I interview her at her home. I did so, but left her a card with the name of a counselor nearby that she could contact for aftercare, should she desire. The interviews took place between January 3, 2005 to August 1, 2005. Participants received support services in eighteen different counties. Fifteen participants received services in more than one county. Seven of the participants were referred to the study by their legal counsel; and thirteen were referred through their domestic violence victim service providers. Attorneys who referred to the study were domestic violence specialists, having completed advance training on the issue.

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Introduction to the Sample

The women in the study ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-two years of age with a mean age of 33.1 years. Fifteen of the women had been married to their assailants, one had been dating the assailant and four had been in an intimate relationship that involved cohabitation. The length of their relationship with their assailant ranged from two months to twenty-four years, with a mean of 9.8 years.

Half of the sample (10) self-reported being victims of childhood abuse that included verbal/emotional abuse (9), physical abuse (8), non-incestuous sexual abuse (2), and incest (3). Three of the women reported coming from homes where they witnessed domestic violence. Nine of the women were either runaways or had been evicted from their childhood homes as adolescents. Two of the women reported having knowledge of the perpetrator's own history of childhood abuse.

The socio-economic status of the women varied substantially from pre to post separation from their assailant. The pre-separation income range was from under \$20,000 to over \$60,000, with a mean income of \$36,500. The post-separation range was from under \$20,000 to \$50,000, with a mean income of \$24,000. The educational level of the participants ranged from incompleteness of high school through a Master's degree. Four women with bachelor or advanced degrees accounted for 30% of the income reported by the group pre-separation, and 32% of the income post-separation. When these four individuals are removed from the sample, the mean income for the remaining women is \$31,875 pre-separation, and \$14,625 post-separation. The consequences of this phenomenon are discussed further within the results section under Theme Number Eleven.

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The sixty-five children, adolescents and young adults represented within the sample ranged in age from the unborn to nineteen, with a mean age of 8.25 years. One of the mothers had no children under sixteen, which skewed the data toward an older population of children. The number of children represented per mother ranged from one to eight, with a mean of 3.25. Ten of the mothers reported having their children removed and placed in foster care homes, another two reported having their children placed with the perpetrator's family, two reported their children had been placed with the perpetrator, and one reported that her children were cared for by a family friend. One mother had her termination of rights process completed during the writing of this document. An additional four were late in the process of termination proceedings, and five had children in foster care at risk of termination of rights. These five were attempting to satisfy CPS and the court requirements in order to regain custody. Additionally, four mothers had full custody and the remaining six had some custodial rights at the time of the interview. Fourteen of the perpetrators represented in the study had at least some custodial rights, up to and including sole custody, with the other six either having had their rights terminated or were at the time of the interviews, at risk of termination.

Five women in the study arrived for their interview armed with makeshift portfolios in which they stored official paperwork from the courts, CPS and law enforcement. Some were stored in a jumble of disorganization. Others were filed by type of document or issuing institution, with some stored neatly in their original jackets and envelopes. Included were items such as PPO's, court hearing notices, orders of custody, orders of divorce, parenting agreements, case plans, police reports, and other related documents. Women who brought their paperwork stated they did so because they

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were unsure if the researcher would believe their stories if they did not have supportive documentation. In addition, one other participant called the researcher after her interview and asked if it would be helpful to review her documents. In the case of the five who brought their paperwork, I did review and was able to confirm the documentation as it related to the stories they shared. In addition to adding confirmation weight to their shared experiences, this process seemed personally important to them.

Participant Profiles

Participants in this study were given aliases to protect their privacy, limit danger from the assailant and/or family, and to prevent them from experiencing any systemic retribution while their cases continue. Children's names were not used in this document. Data is reported by the pseudonyms given to the participants. A brief profile on participants follows using their pseudonym as the identifier.

A: Amy

Amy is a 40-year-old white female with 4 children. She is legally blind, and her husband was both physically and emotionally abusive to her during their decade-long marriage. She attributes his escalating violence to mental illness, however there is no diagnostic evidence that the assailant was or is mentally ill. Her husband sexually assaulted her daughter from a previous marriage, resulting in a pregnancy. Amy has cooperated with all investigations, divorced her husband, and is assisting in raising the child resulting from the incestuous attacks on her daughter. Her husband is serving a twenty-year sentence for raping her daughter. Despite having police intervention several times during their marriage for domestic abuse, no charges were ever filed against him as

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a result of the domestic abuse. Amy's life in a rural setting combined with her blindness contributed significantly to her isolation.

B: Barbara

Barbara is a white female in her early thirties, who has three children. She experienced significant physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband. Barbara was involved in two counties with CPS, law enforcement and domestic abuse survivor service providers. Her experiences relative to those counties were dramatically different. She had her children removed temporarily, but they have since been returned to her. She credits CPS in her current county of residence with saving her life and the lives of her children. Her husband is awaiting trial on multiple counts of child abuse and felony assault. Barbara suffered injuries so severe in the final assault that she remains under the care of her physician, and her prognosis includes life-long and serious health-related challenges.

C: Catherine

Catherine is a white female in her late twenties with two children. She related a ten-year history of abuse that began when she was dating, and escalated after her marriage to the assailant. Catherine experienced severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Her children have experienced marked developmental regression after visits with their father. Despite the use of weapons against her and a history of child abuse, no charges were filed against him. Her assailant remains free, and has unsupervised visitation on a scheduled basis. Catherine is successfully pursuing a law degree, and desires a career that is focused on helping children who experience violence in their home.

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D: Donna

Donna is a black female in her early twenties. She has two children from a three-year marriage. Donna related experiencing escalating physical and emotional abuse during and after her first pregnancy. Her children were removed from her as a result of the hospitalization of her oldest child. The child required hospitalization due to an intentional injury inflicted by her assailant who was caring for him while Donna pursued an employment opportunity. Donna is part of Michigan's welfare-to-work program through DHS. Donna's children were placed in the custody of her mother and remain there as of this writing. Her assailant was arrested and released within twenty-four hours. Charges against him were subsequently dropped. Donna is completing a parenting plan that she hopes will allow her to regain physical custody of her children. Her assailant has unsupervised visitations with the children, but sees them infrequently. Donna's visits with her children remain supervised.

E: Evelyn

Evelyn is a white woman in her early thirties. She has three children. Evelyn was married to her assailant for almost ten years. Her assailant attempted several times to kill her, choking her to unconsciousness on more than one occasion. Evelyn had her three children placed in foster care and faces charges that she failed to protect them from their father. Like Donna, her children suffered physical abuse by their father while she was working in a welfare-to-work program. Evelyn is currently completing her parenting agreement plan. She sees her children on a supervised visitation status, and her assailant is serving four years for felony assault with intent to do great bodily harm.

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F: Faith

Faith is a black woman in her mid twenties with three children from a previous relationship. She experienced a year-long marriage in which she suffered verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and her son experienced significant verbal and physical abuse. She attempted to get help from a variety of sources to no avail. She left the perpetrator, but was accused of not providing adequate medical care for her son post-separation. Although no longer involved in a violent relationship, the worker indicated that her past history of domestic violence placed her at risk of poor parenting. She is completing a parenting plan. Her children remain in her custody. No charges were ever filed against her or her assailant.

G: Geena

Geena is a thirty-year old black female with two children. After a three year courtship described as perfect, she married her assailant. Geena blames his substance abuse for his assaultive behavior. Although he never abused the children, Geena's attempts to get help for him and help for herself went unheeded over a period of ten years. Geena shot him as he attempted to break into her house to steal from her. Her assailant survived the shooting. He faces charges for breaking and entering. No charges related to the violence are pending. Geena's children were first placed in foster care, and then with her mother, while she completed a parenting plan. Her children were returned to her during the writing of this document. Geena has set a goal of becoming a foster parent someday.

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H: Helen

Helen is a black woman in her mid-thirties. She has four children. She related information about four different abusive relationships. Helen escaped an abusive home as an adolescent, moving in with a boyfriend when she was eighteen. When he was emotionally cruel to her, she left. Helen witnessed her own mother's murder by a boyfriend. Helen never knew her father, and she was without family. She married a man who was emotionally and physically abusive to her, and stalked her after she attempted to leave. She moved in with a family friend who fathered a child with her, and attempted to stab her while she was pregnant with her son. She left that relationship, fearing for her children, and moved in with another boyfriend. He was extremely abusive to her and the children. Her children were taken away from her, and placed in foster care. No charges are pending against her boyfriend, despite his known abuse of the children. She is completing a parenting agreement plan, but has little hope of having her children returned to her. Despite her work toward completing her plan, the children have been placed in permanency placement status.

I: Iris

Iris is a black woman in her mid-thirties with five children. Iris left a thirteen-year marriage that included verbal, physical and sexual abuse. She experienced a near-miscarriage from the sexual abuse that she endured while pregnant. Her child was born early, with complications. Culturally, Iris verbalized her struggle to balance her anger at having her perpetrator avoid any sanctions, and her loyalty to her race. Iris's children were never removed from her, although she was assigned a parenting plan, and has

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completed that plan. She divorced her husband. No charges or sanctions were filed against him. He enjoys unsupervised joint custody of the children.

J: Jackie

Jackie is a black woman in her mid-thirties. She has three children. She was in a two-year marriage with the father of one of her children. She suffered occasional verbal abuse. She minimizes this abuse as not important. She was charged with failure to protect using domestic violence as a factor in her charges after she refused to cooperate with police in an investigation into a shooting that potentially involved her brother and her boyfriend. Jackie's child was accidentally shot in the process. The child had minor injuries, and she has recovered completely. Jackie was required by CPS and the police to move her children into a shelter in order to keep them in her custody. One of Jackie's children, who had been conceived while in a previous relationship was subsequently abducted by the biological father, and even though Jackie has sole legal custody, neither the police nor protective service staff were willing to assist her in getting the child returned to her. Jackie was monitored by the shelter staff in terms of where she was going, who was attempting to contact her, and who she contacted. Jackie feels that CPS, the shelter and law enforcement were acting together to force her to reveal information about the shooting. CPS investigators and police told her young children that their uncle was trying to kill them. At the time of the shooting, she was at work, and claims no knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the shooting.

K: Kate

Kate is a white woman in her late forties. She has six children. She first related a seven-year history of verbal, physical and sexual abuse that escalated over time. Her

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second marriage lasted only a few months, when she was again the victim of severe physical abuse. The second husband was later arrested for domestic abuse on other women, and to Kate's knowledge, was jailed on at least four occasions for domestic abuse. When she attempted to leave the relationship, she was denied shelter at a safe house because they had no room. Her children have extensive developmental and anti-social issues. Kate experienced very different responses from CPS in the three counties in which she received services. Her children were removed from her and placed in foster care, but were returned to her after time. Her experiences with the police in all three counties were characterized as extremely helpful. Her oldest daughter and son both have run away. Her oldest daughter left behind an infant, whom Kate is now raising.

L: Linda

Linda is a black woman in her mid-twenties with three children, one of whom she voluntarily placed as an infant for adoption to spare the child a life of poverty and abuse in the home. Linda has a twenty-year history of abuse, including incestuous abuse at the hands of her mother's best friend, her brothers, and a cousin. Her mother was aware of the attacks, and explained to Linda that incest was common in many families. Linda's mother was extremely abusive to all her children. Linda was beaten, locked in the basement, starved, and eventually ran away. As a runaway, Linda found a place to live with a man she eventually married. Linda was suspicious that he may have molested her daughter and took her on three different occasions for a forensic exam. The results of the first two were negative but the third exam was positive. Linda contacted CPS and the police, filed for divorce, and waited almost six months for an official investigation by CPS. This fact is verified by the paperwork Linda brought with her to the interview.

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When the investigation was initiated, Linda cooperated with CPS. Linda was ordered to court on what she thought was a hearing on her husband's abuse of her daughter. At that time she was served papers indicating she was being charged with failure to protect her daughter. The children were placed in the care of Linda's abusive mother. Linda has not been given a parenting agreement or quarterly review. She remains in limbo, but does have limited supervised visitation. The assailant awaits trial, and is currently free on bond.

M: Michelle

Michelle is a white woman in her mid twenties with two children. She suffered an extensive array of abusive tactics at the hand of her then-boyfriend. Michelle was also abused as a child, and ran from the abusive home into the abusive intimate relationship. The abuse went on for two years before she was able to escape. Although Michelle had significant visible injuries on three occasions, which were documented by Michelle's brother (a police officer in another county), her assailant spent a total of only seven nights in jail. Michelle believes that her assailant only went to jail after intervention by her brother the police officer. CPS intervened when Michelle reported the abduction of her children by her assailant. Her assailant had earlier beaten her and threatened to drop her baby off a two-story landing. Michelle successfully left that relationship, but the assailant has used death threats, suicide threats, and the courts in an attempt to continue to control her. CPS dropped all charges against him, and the court allowed his early release, refusing to hold him to the jail time and diversion programs required of him. Michelle has a new boyfriend, whom the assailant dislikes, and she has been reported to CPS for failure to protect by the assailant and his family numerous

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times, as has her new boyfriend. The assailant is seeking custody of the children, claiming her new boyfriend is a sexual predator. No evidence exists that supports that claim. During the investigation process, Michelle had been forced out of her home and into a shelter for her own safety. Her experiences of late have been more positive after moving out of one county and into another.

N: Nancy

Nancy has a history of extreme child abuse from a mother who had significant, untreated mental health issues. She recalls being beaten and locked up in the basement of their home a great deal of time during her childhood. Her plight went unnoticed by adults in her life at that time, and as an adolescent she ran from that situation into a marriage to a man who had just been released from prison. Although incarcerated in another state for child molestation, he indicated to her that he had been incarcerated for minor infractions of the law. He was not then, nor at the time of this writing, listed on the Sexual Predator registry. They had two children together in their seven-year history. Nancy suffers from multiple health issues, including diabetes and physical disabilities that preclude her from working. She is dependent upon welfare to feed herself and her children. Although she attempted to live independently, her income was insufficient to be able to provide, and she went back to the relationship numerous times. When her daughter was four, she began to suspect molestation, and called CPS for assistance. The physical exam was negative for findings, and this process of suspicion, requests for help through CPS, and negative exams continued on for three years. At no time during the three years did Michelle or CPS become aware of his felony conviction for molestation. She eventually discovered that not only had he been molesting her daughter, but so had

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his older son. Although she cooperated with prosecution, is living independently, and sought both CPS and medical assistance for her daughter for the three years prior to the discovery, her children were placed in foster care. She currently is fighting to avoid termination of parental rights.

O: Opal

Opal is a thirty-year old white female with two children. She endured thirteen years of emotional abuse within a cohabitating relationship that culminated with one final, very severe assault. Her two children are the result of that thirteen-year relationship, which ended in separation. She entered another relationship, in which her daughter suffered sexual abuse by her new boyfriend. The physical attack by the children's father was a result of his anger over the molestation of his daughter and his blaming of the mother for not protecting the daughter. This attack took place in another state, where the father had taken her children in spite of a custodial agreement that prevented the children from leaving the state. The mother ended the relationship with the molester immediately upon knowledge of the assault, and is cooperating in his prosecution. The biological father, who had no legal custodial rights, abducted them. He took them out of state, and when the mother attempted to regain custody, he and several of his friends beat her. Her sister and the children were also hurt. The police in the state where this attack occurred promised her that they would take the father and his friends into custody and pursue legal action against them. Instead, they allowed the assailant to go free, and turned her into CPS for failing to protect her daughter. She believes that they allowed the assailants to go free due to their military status. She and her children remain in fear of this soldier-assailant, who has threatened to kill her. After vowing to

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stay in her own home, continuing death threats against her by her assailant forced her to leave her home with her children. She remains in hiding at the time of this writing.

P: Penny

Penny is in her mid-twenties and has survived two violent relationships in which she was nearly beaten to death in the first, and emotionally abused in the second. She lost her first child as a result of a beating when she was six months pregnant. Later, her son was taken from her when CPS informed her that her boyfriend was a child molester. He had not molested Penny's son. Although she terminated the relationship with her boyfriend, her past history of being a domestic violence victim resulted in CPS determining that they needed to remove the children. Amazingly, the court gave the children to her abusive ex-husband, even though the court was aware that he had been abusive to not only Penny, but to one of the children as well. The court cited their concern that Penny's 'repeated history' of 'attracting herself to violent relationships' was justified as a reason to place the child with the known abuser. Penny laments that they think they took her son from a monster, but instead handed him over to one. She is fighting for unsupervised visitation as this is written.

Q: Qui'Ana

Qui'Ana is a white female in her early forties with three adolescent children. She experienced twenty-four years of abusive experiences at the hands of her husband. She has had almost every bone in her body broken, was locked in her house except for going to work, and learned that the systems in place would not protect her. When her daughter told a school counselor what was going on, CPS became involved and the police were forced to arrest her husband. Prior to that time, police would simply give him a night or

two in jail, force him to walk home to cool off, or ignore the complaint altogether. Her ex-husband, soon to be released from prison after serving sixteen months of a 36 month sentence, once served ten days, got out, and the police were called five times in the immediate ten days following by family members and neighbors because he was beating Qui'Ana. He has a history of being arrested no less than twice a year for domestic violence. Qui'Ana's children were placed in foster care. She is scheduled to get her children back any day as this is being written. She is frightened that her ex-husband will find her and hurt her for testifying against him. She would like to move, but does not have the resources to do so.

R: Rita

Rita is a black woman in her late thirties, has seven children, and was married to her childhood sweetheart for nineteen years. Her husband was a substance abuser, and eventually became so ill from using that he was hospitalized in a long-term hospice facility. During the time they were together, he beat her, threatened her with death and suicide, and refused to work. Rita maintained the home, fed the children, and tried to get him into substance abuse treatment services. She requested help from a variety of social service organizations to no avail. When he finally beat her in broad daylight in her own front yard, the neighbors called the police. The police called CPS, and they threatened her with removal of her children for failing to protect them, based on the perpetrator's charges against Rita of child abuse and mental illness. Rita has never been charged with abuse, her children deny that they were abused, and she has tested free of mental illness. She continues working steadily in a highly-responsible position.

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S: Stephanie

Stephanie is a black woman in her late forties. She has four children, the result of a fourteen-year marriage. Her husband inflicted numerous beatings on her, and his deviant sexual behavior resulted in significant injuries to her. Several times he held a loaded gun to her head, he smashed four of her toes with a hammer when she objected to his sexual demands, and he forced her to drink his urine. She has significant health problems, and suffers from a long-term lung disease caused by the collapse of her lungs after a broken rib perforated the lung. Stephanie came from a home where violence was a frequent part of their lives, and she had no references of what a healthy relationship might be like. She lived the last five years in fear each and every day. She was being stalked by him, and received very little support when she asked for help. When she reached out for help, her husband would move the family. Her assailant received probation for the assault, and was never charged with anything by CPS. He is seeking partial custody of the kids. She is currently without her children and charged with failure to protect.

T: Terri

Terri is a black female in her late thirties. She has a history of a sixteen-year marriage to an abusive husband. The violence escalated from verbal abuse to the last assault, when he kidnapped her and the children, drove them to another state, and locked them in a warehouse. He also took his rage out on the kids. Terri stepped in between them many times, taking the beatings for the children. She was isolated from her family and her assailant would sabotage her ability to work if he thought she might be revealing what was going on at home. Terri has a Master's degree in Engineering, and works with

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a predominantly male cohort of workers. This resulted in significant jealousy on the part of her husband, and he would force her to quit her job and move if he thought she was getting too close to her coworkers. Her husband, a veteran with self-diagnosed Gulf War Syndrome, has been able to avoid prosecution of any type. Police reports and court documents clearly reveal their willingness to make exceptions for him, and there is no evidence that anyone has questioned his self-diagnosis. However, her rights as a parent were terminated because she was charged with exposing the kids to his violence. She is currently in hiding with her infant son in another state in order to avoid having CPS take the baby from her.

The Interview Questions

Introduction to the Interview Questions

The study's two research questions were 1.) How does the intersection of victim safety goals and perpetrator accountability expectations influence the consequences for women subject to domestic violence? And 2.) How do the ecosystemic factors in the environment of women subject to such violence affect the outcomes for those women? To investigate, interviews were semi-structured around twelve interview questions. Participants were encouraged to tell their stories in the way in which they organized their experience and were not restricted from discussing other topics they considered to be relevant to the question at hand. The results of this semi-structured interview were answers and themes that went beyond and across the specific questions and provided a more comprehensive picture of participant experiences. Participant responses are

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included in this document in bold print. Directly after the name of the topic raised is a listing of those individuals experiencing the factor.

The first question was intended to gather historical information about the violent relationship. Questions two through five were designed to elicit from participants the role their children played within their decisions and the context of the violence. Questions six through nine were designed to document the interaction between the participant and related systems. Questions ten and eleven were asked to separate out those interactions with CPS and related systems that found to be either positive or negative. This question resulted in participants expounding on what they themselves would offer as advice to service workers. These responses resulted in the suggestions by participants that are listed in Chapter Five. The final question was an opportunity for participants to add those statements that they had omitted, further expound on issues discussed, offer additional advice on systemic issues raised, to offer information that they felt was important that had not been asked, and finally to question the researcher, if desired.

RESULTS

The first interview question was “Tell me about the history of the abusive relationship.” This question was intended to document the abuse participants had suffered, and dispels the myth that domestic abuse can be correctly characterized as two individuals that are experiencing mutual conflict within their relationship. Some participants framed how they thought and what they believed about abuse from their own

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childhood experiences, as well as those of their assailant. In many cases, participants used this question as a means to explore and describe their own processes, decisions, and their attempt to make sense of the experience.

With one exception, all the participants reported suffering multiple types of abuse. The disparity in power within the dyadic relationship within their accounts is apparent. The following table depicts the type of abuse suffered and number of participants reported those experiences. Following the table, participants describe their experiences beyond the statistics.

TABLE 1: HISTORY OF RELATED ABUSE	
TYPE RELATED	NUMBER EXPERIENCING
Emotional abuse:	18
Threatened with weapon	16
Death threat to her pre-separation	16
Death threat to her post separation	15
Death threat to kids pre-separation	10
Death threat post kids post separation	09
Death threat family/friends pre-separation	11
Death threat family/friend post separation	09
Abduction/threat to abduct	15
Controlling victim's movements	15
Isolation	14
Locked up	09
Obsession/jealousy	11
Kept from family/friends	17
Property destruction	11
Animal Abuse	07
Verbal abuse: (name calling)	19
Suicide threat	03
Threatened by in-laws	03

TABLE 1 (Cont'd)

Increase in abuse post-sep.	13
Forced to eat/drink repulsive items	02
Physical abuse:	18
Hit	18
Kicked	16
Slapped	18
Thrown against wall	13
Slammed head against	11
Objects broken on them	09
Punched in abdomen when pregnant	07
Burned	05
Forced to stand/squat	04
Cut/Slashed	04
Shot	01
Increase in abuse post-sep.	12
Sexual abuse:	10
Stalking:	10
Increase in abuse post-sep.	12
PPO did not protect	08
PPO was not enforced (14 incidents)	06
Economic Deprivation:	15
Did not have the financial capacity to leave	19
Did not have the finances to provide if she left	19
Did not have access to/control over resources	19
Employment harassment/failure/poor record	10
Restrained from furthering education	05

Amy, who is quoted below, reported multiple examples of her husband's abuse.

He was not only physically abusive to her, but also to her children. He sexually assaulted her oldest daughter, and the pets in the family paid the price for his abusive behaviors, as

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well. This supports the findings of the American Humane Association (1994). Fifteen **of** the participants reported that their children suffered direct abuse by the perpetrator. **This** would support the findings of Stark and Flitcraft (1988), in which in more cases than **not**, when the mother was being abused, the children were as well. Amy's story is **representative** of the combination of abusive behaviors that the majority of participants **related**.

"My husband...I had to have the police out here because he struck my 17 year old. He would blow up and destroy things and throw stuff around, you know. He started smashing things, he put his whole foot through the wall, he smashed the cupboards, busted up the furniture... he took me down...and hit their sister and then he tried choking me. What he done to her was incest, as far as I am concerned. The day he married me she became his daughter. What I have, over the years, found out about my husband and his family...I know it's the way they were all raised. [My daughter] was sitting on the couch rubbing her guinea pig...it was pregnant at the time. He grabbed her and yanked her off the couch, and her guinea pig fell. He stepped on the guinea pig. All she was worried about was that guinea pig. She didn't realize that daddy was angry at her. He threw her across his lap to beat on her backside. My dog...when we first got my dog...he was a puppy...when my dog got a hold of [chewed] the sixth or seventh garden hose in a month he took and shoved the hose down my dog's throat, [and he] wouldn't let me take him to the vet." —Amy

Barbara experienced threats, as well as emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and economic deprivation.

"He threatened to kill me, he broke my nose, cut me with a kitchen knife, broke my jaw, broke something in my eye, he done something to my hearing, broke my ribs, called me filthy rotten names, liked to made me squat for like hours, and then want sex. He would say, 'Come on, bitch...' or ...'I'll get rid of the kids you and I will get it on'. Sometimes I would say I'm out of diapers, I need money for diapers, and he would say 'well I'm not going to use money for diapers if you don't do what I want you to'." —Barbara

Donna described what the years of abuse did to her self-image, and how her assailant characterized her to her son. She also provides a window on the anger of assailants when their victims attempt to get out of the relationship.

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“My self esteem went totally down the drain when I was with him because I felt I was...I’m not good enough. I felt like I was a failure. I was sad and upset all the time and crying all the time. I was stressed out. I couldn’t eat. I didn’t spend any time on myself. I always [tried] to make him feel good. [When I cried] he told my son ‘She’s crying because she’s a stupid bitch’. He tore up the house...broke the table...left yelling ‘this ain’t over, bitch’ [when she told him she was leaving him].” —Donna

Many of the participants, like Barbara, above, indicated that sexual activity was either intertwined with the assaults, or a conclusion of the assaults. Sometimes, as in the case of Qui’Ana, forced sex involved not just the perpetrator, but others as well.

“It seemed like everything I did made him mad. He just took to doing whatever with me...slapping, hitting me with his fist, kicking...[he] knocked me down, burned my back with cigarettes, he’s cut me, locked me up, just all kinds of things...just about everything a person can do, he’s done. [Afterward] he would say, you know, how he was sorry, and that he loved me, and then he’d want to have sex. All I wanted was to lie down, you know? I mean it hurt. I just wanted to lie down and rest.” —Iris

“At first, it wasn’t too bad...it was like slapping me or knocking me down or throwing something at me. That’s how it started. This has been going on for twenty-four years. I mean he’s broke my jaw, broke my nose, broke my collarbone. He’s put my face so black and blue you couldn’t recognize my face...cracked a couple of ribs. I was throwing up blood and guts ...he punctured my lungs. [He] forced me to have sex with other people. And if I did, I got my butt beat and if I didn’t I got my butt beat. You name it, he’s done it.” —Qui’Ana

Personal property destruction was a common theme, affecting not just the adults in the home, but the children as well. As is demonstrated later in this document, personal protection orders did not necessarily protect women and their children from further attacks.

“[He engaged in] hitting, smacking, pushing, shoving...one time he took a baseball bat and acted like he was going to hit me with it, but he ended up hitting the wall and breaking the bed up. Breaking things, losing his temper just like that [snapped fingers]... in a snap, I mean. He stole things and sold them, broke into my house [after] I had went down to the courthouse and got a PPO.” —Geena

Not only were the women and children the victims of attacks, but threats of even greater harm was a prevalent theme within the stories of participants.

“Me and my kids started getting hit about a year and a half ago [by] my ex-boyfriend. [He’d use] mind games, call me names, hitting me. Threaten and put his hands around my throat like he was going to kill me...punch me...slap me.” —Michelle

Many appeared to have narrowly escaped even more harrowing circumstances and serious personal harm, including the real possibility of death.

“He took the kids to a friend’s house and left them and I didn’t know he had made it back to our house before I got there. He had parked the car somewhere else [where I couldn’t see it], and I went in the door and he was standing behind [it where] I couldn’t see him. He slammed the door shut behind me and locked it and he...shoved me up against the door and started to punch the door [around her head]. He was scaring me really bad and he just punched and punched. There were fist marks in the door...in that metal door. He did that all over the house, and when we got to the back door, he had nailed it shut. I shoved him and he fell down and I jumped over him and ran out of the house and I called the cops. He was threatening...they [police] were holding him back...he even threatened to them that he was gonna beat me with a baseball bat. The cops told me that I should leave and not come back that day or a couple of days because he had told them he was gonna beat me with a baseball bat.” —Nancy Ed. Note: No charges were filed against the perpetrator as a result of this incident, even though the assailant was a convicted felon.

Terri’s abuser used particularly cruel and unusual means of emotional and physical torture.

“He held a gun to my head. He pulled the trigger but it just went ‘click’. Then he laughed because I cried. He broke seven ribs, both my arms and smashed four of my toes with a hammer. He smashed my nose flat onto my face, raped me up my ass and forced me to drink his urine. —Terri

All but one of the participants (Jackie) expressed the belief that their children either directly witnessed the abuse, or heard the abuse take place.

“My daughter seen him choking me one night. He had his hand over my mouth and my throat and he was choking me. She seen him hit me in the back with a TV tray.” —Barbara

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***“My oldest one, she knows all about it. She’s not stupid, I mean two and a half years later she still tells you what daddy did. It scared her, you know? She remembers when he drug me by my hair and locked me in a closet, you know?”
—Catherine***

“I think the only time they would miss it is if they were like at a babysitter’s house ...most of the time they were there so they saw a lot of it. And I hate that they saw it.” —Donna

“The older ones [witnessed the violence]. The younger ones did not see that which I am thankful for and I can see the differences between them and my older children. I can see the difference.” —Kate

Nine participants recounted their own history of childhood abuse. Many stated they believed that history made them more vulnerable to the abuse, and less able to leave. They were clear in indicating that they believed the abuse was normal, and were not as surprised by the abuse or the fact that they would not be believed or assisted if they reported it.

“[My first experience involving] sexual abuse started when I was six...my mom still does not believe me. She said that was normal between brothers and sisters. I knew nobody would believe me [this time]. I was staying at the woman’s shelter. I had become really good friends with one of the staff members and we had went out to the bar and she introduced me to her cousin. We talked and I...was just listening to him and kind of telling him what was going on and then we went to the beach [for a walk] and he tried doing stuff to me and I told him no. I tried fighting with him and it didn’t work and nobody believes me because [shelter worker’s name] works at the woman’s shelter” —Linda

“You know, my family always fought, so I thought that it was just part of the whole package, sort of just how it is. My mom used to catch hell from my dad, and he was always yelling at us about something or other, so I was just kind of used to it, I guess. My dad used to yell at my mom, saying if she didn’t beat us, he would. Sometimes you couldn’t move for a week after one of his [beatings], so she would tell us to yell like hell. We’d go down the basement where the neighbors couldn’t hear and she’d whisper, ‘now yell and cry like the Dickens’ and we would; she’d pretend to beat us. He was usually too drunk to notice anyway.” —Stephanie

“My parents didn’t give a rat’s ass about any of us, and that’s the honest truth. I grew up on a daily basis listening to my mother tell me that she wished I was

dead, because we were nothing but burdens to her. When she decided she'd had enough of us I got left to take care of all of them [ten siblings]. I don't want that [for my kids]. My mother stabbed my dad in front of us. My dad hit my mother....beating each other up....beating my dad's girlfriends up when they would show up at the house....our dad carrying on in the backseat of cars with his girlfriends. I never wanted my kids to see that kind of stuff." —Amy

"I know that to me, all this time, it wasn't wrong. It wasn't. I was still a strong person...to me it wasn't...it didn't bother me, it was just like I was in one abusive relationship [childhood home and two intimate but abusive relationships], left that one and into another one. [But] I didn't want to be hit. I didn't want to be with somebody that I felt didn't love me. My grandparents always stuck it in my head that I look like my mom...that I was going to be just like her. I never knew her. She was killed by her boyfriend when I was five years old. We were there the day she was killed...walking into a room full of blood. I remember laying on a couch with the man who killed her for two or three days because they didn't know who did it" —Helen

From these accounts, it is difficult for individuals who do not have personal references of the dynamics of domestic abuse to understand how anyone would enter into a relationship with such a monster. Phillips (1992) found that a majority of the general public could not understand the dynamics of domestic abuse. One of the assumptions that the general public, and some of the social institutions designed to assist victims make, is that battered women are somehow attracted to abusers, that they should have known better, and deserve what they get. The recounts of the women in this study show a pattern of purposeful seduction into a relationship strategically planned to engage victims and hold them in their situation. The following introduces this theme of seduction by an abuser who appears, at first light, perfect.

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Theme # 1 Batterers seduced women into the relationship with a Mr. Perfect persona.

**Amy, Barbara, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Opal,
Penny, Stephanie, Terri**

Fourteen participants described this phenomenon. They felt seduced into the relationship by someone almost too good to be true. They described a person who was kind, caring, doting, loving, smothering, thoughtful and gentle. Most participants also indicated being blindsided by the violence that was to follow, and to a degree blamed themselves for falling into a deliberate trap. This supports the research findings of Sullivan and colleagues (2000).

“I should have suspected something... he was so doting...almost smothering at first” —Amy

“Whatever I needed, he offered it...financially, emotionally. Um, he seemed to smother me a little bit in the beginning. I though you know, hey, he’s really digging me, so I guess that would have been the first little hint.” —Geena

“I mean, he was Mr. Perfect...I just never thought he would do it to me...and then he did.” —Helen

“The perfect guy... he brought a rose and put it on my desk. It was my first love. Eventually we moved in together. That’s when it really started...‘you’re cheating on me’...the third degree and looking over my shoulder. At the end I couldn’t even go to the bathroom without him coming into the room.” —Penny

“He was absolutely perfect when I met him. Everyone adored him. He sent me flowers, [he sent] my mom flowers, [he] took me out to eat. He said he’d love me forever. After we got married, he changed almost immediately.” —Stephanie

“Everybody loved [him]...my parents, my sister...I was so happy. He promised to take care of me, and I needed that at that time in my life. He seemed like the answer to my prayers. I would have done anything for him, and he took advantage of that.” —Donna

Perhaps one of the most difficult phenomena for most people to understand is that women in abusive relationships express concern and, at times, affection for their

assailant. Graham (1994) reported that hostages in other situations have also exhibited this phenomenon. But in addition to being in what society may consider a less traditional hostage situation, participants were clear in going back to the 'Mr. Perfect' theme and the fact that they believed that the man they adored was still available, somehow hidden or temporarily removed from them. This supports the work of Mahoney (1991). Although they recognized that the relationship was fatally flawed, eight participants expressed extraordinary remorse at, as Stephanie describes 'what could have been'.

"The man I fell in love with was kind, caring, loving... just everything I ever wanted. I wanted him back. I still want him back. I know he's never going to be that man again, but part of me just aches to think what we could have had...what could have been." —Stephanie

***"You don't just throw out somebody you had pledged your life to. And he was a great man...kind, loving, gentle; a great man. When he turned on me I couldn't believe what was happening. Things had been so perfect. I knew he was Mr. Right. I wish I could have that man back again, like he was at first." -
—Confirming Group Member # 5***

"It was like a death in the family for me...my divorce. It was not a person I knew, you know it was a person I was scared of. I still miss the man I married. I know he's not the same man, but I still think about that. I was so happy. How did we ever get this way?" —Geena

These women verbally demonstrated a hope that had been alive within them while involved in the relationship. All eight of the women indicated that at times, perpetrators played on these emotions to successfully entice them back into the relationship. The women related that they came to understand that the 'Mr. Perfect' persona was a ruse, but that recognition clearly saddened them.

Theme # 2: Batterers took advantage of participants' vulnerabilities. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Nineteen participants spoke of special vulnerabilities that they believed enabled the batterer to operate from a base of power, effectively holding them in the relationship. This supports Mill's (1988) premise that the context of an asymmetry of power is key to domestic abuse. In Catherine's case, she experienced a violent teen dating relationship in which she was ill equipped and inexperienced to handle. She, like eight other women in the study, either ran away from home, or had been evicted from their childhood home. Another participant reported being 'on the rebound' from a failed relationship. A confirming group member also experienced the 'rebound' effect.

"I was sixteen. It started with him just being really controlling...he threatened to kill my friends, and that put an end to that right there. It took him like two weeks before I had no friends at all... he had scared all my friends away. I couldn't go anywhere without him, you know, I had to tell him where I would be and how long I would be there and you know, if I went to the store, I had to tell him what I needed and he would give me X amount of money and you know, I would go to work and I had to call when I got to work and call before I left work and you know, check in...he was just 'in charge'. When I was 17, it turned physical. He would hit me, he cut my arm, throw things at me, throw me into things and there was hair pulling and slapping and punching...pretty much everything physical he could have done, he did. It just got progressively more physical ...where I was cleaning up broken furniture and covering up the bruises . Twelve days after I turned 17 my mother threw me out and I had no where else to go but [to] him and it ended when he pointed an assault rifle at me in front of my kids and... after that I left." —Catherine

"My husband had left me for someone else. I was lonely and looking for someone who would care for me...about me, you know? Here he came... Mr. Wonderful. He called me every day. He picked me up after work and took us to dinner so I didn't have to rush home after a hard day and cook for the kids. He bought us presents and took us on a vacation to Cedar Point. I mean, we thought we were in heaven," —Confirming Group Member # 1

“You can’t understand unless you’ve been there. I had nowhere to go. Mom kicked me out when I was 16, and I had to have somewhere to live. I thought he was my guardian angel. He gave me a place to sleep, food, clothes, and whatever I needed. He convinced me that even though the rest of my family hated me, he would always protect and love me. That was something I needed... something that would save me, or so I thought.” —Donna

All but Faith recounted that the abuse began only after a commitment in the relationship was solidly established. This commitment was also a form of vulnerability. The women stated that they had so much invested in the relationship by that time that getting out was far more difficult, in particular when children were involved. Three of the twenty experienced their first assault while in a serious dating relationship, six while cohabitating and having a child with the assailant, and another eleven after they were married. This ensured that for the participants, the ability to get out of the relationship would be difficult, at best, and offered the perpetrator a solid platform from which he could control and isolate her. His already established relationships with her family, in some cases, and the ‘Mr. Perfect’ persona that she and her family believed enabled him to operate without suspicion, and again, the element of surprise and evidence of her devotion to him was cited.

“It started just a little while after the wedding. I was really surprised...it surprised me. I didn’t think he would ever hit me. He was a pretty good man in my eyes...that really surprised me.” —Iris

“Looking back, I can see that his only goal was to make sure I didn’t have anybody but him around me... nobody to notice what was going on or help me... I couldn’t figure out why this man I loved had turned on me.” —Terri

“Everybody thought he was perfect...hell, I did, too. I thought I had just won the lottery. I loved the guy...still do...it’s just that I can’t seem to get the guy back that I fell in love with... the one I married.” —Evelyn

“Once we moved in together, he started working on me...trying to get me to turn my back on my family. Once he succeeded in that, there was nobody to

help me anymore. He was counting on that.” —Confirming Group Member #3

“I found out [that] one month after we got married he started molesting my 17 year old... I mean I just [recently] found out. But he had been molesting my daughter for about nine years.” —Amy

“After that [the wedding], it just seemed like the gates of hell were opened, and anything goes. He started pushing me up against the wall, choking me, slapping me, hitting me with his fist...just anything.” —Terri

In some cases, the commitment was further strengthened by a pregnancy; however, the abuse participants suffered did not abate with the pregnancy. Eleven of the women reported suffering abuse while pregnant. Of the eleven perpetrators represented within the group who continued to torture their victims while awaiting the birth of their children, it is of note that seven of them have non-supervised, joint custodial rights granted by the courts.

“I was pregnant with my son and he held a gun to my head”. —Barbara

“I almost lost my youngest son when I was carrying him. He [perpetrator] kicked me in the belly. I started bleeding.” —Iris

“He beat the crap out of me every day when I was pregnant...when I wasn’t pregnant.” —Linda

Interestingly, two women reported that other adults in the home viewed the pregnancy as a means of continuing and strengthening the control the perpetrators enjoyed over their victim. In both cases, it was the father of the perpetrator.

“His dad was in the same house with us for a long time. Okay. So his dad was right there. But he was gone a lot but a lot of the time... he was there and he would just, you know...he would find like...okay he found out I was pregnant, I don’t know what kid, but he said it more than once. But he would just say you know, my ex-husband would be out and dad would come and say, ‘Why are you pregnant again because you know he thinks that he can control you. He thinks that will keep you with him.’ His dad is my dad now [post-separation from her assailant].” —Rita

“In the beginning, he wasn’t very abusive...he was real kind and loving and nurturing and it started after I found out I was pregnant with my first child; then he started acting a whole lot different. Like he would start cussing at me and starting fights and ...it just escalated from there. He begged me to have a child, you know, which made it kind of weird for him to be, you know, acting out about it. I guess he wasn’t ready for a child. He begged me to have kids, then he didn’t want any of us. It’s just so nuts... he begged me to have kids, so I did... thinking that the next one would make him love me again...and even his dad told me ‘Don’t you see that by keeping you pregnant he knows you can’t escape’?” —Donna

In seven cases, participants believed that the assailant was jealous of the attention they paid to their children, or feared the diversion of attention away from the assailants and toward their unborn children once they were born. In these cases, the abuse appeared to have escalated once the children became a reality. This lends further credibility to the understanding that domestic abuse is not about a temporary loss of control, but rather a long-term, deliberate, strategic effort to control their victims with little regard for anyone else. In some cases, these assaults resulted in tragic consequences.

“Both my husbands had a problem with the fact that I think more of my children than I do of them. And I’m willing to put more time into my children than I am into them. The shit got worse when the kids came. And it wasn’t just the kids he was jealous of... it was my entire family...his family.” —Amy

“I was pregnant with my oldest son. I had been bleeding some...well not really bleeding, but I had some of the fluid from the sack that was leaking out. Not bad...but the doctor told me I needed to go home and rest, because he didn’t want me to go into labor yet. They had me in the hospital for a while and the leaking stopped, but I was supposed to be on bed rest. But he [perpetrator] said that it would probably be a while before we could have sex after the baby, and he was going to get what was his while he could. I tried to explain that the doctor said that we shouldn’t, and I tried to push him away. But he put his arm across my throat and then he just basically raped me.” —Terri Ed. Note: Terri’s child was born early and experiences developmental challenges.

“My first boyfriend was very abusive to the point where I actually was beat half to death and my daughter died. I was six months pregnant [with her] at the time. She was born early with massive injuries. I opted to turn the machines off to let her die. I was sixteen [at the time]. The cops didn’t do anything. They

came to the house three times...the third time is when they found me on the ground [unconscious], so I was told.” —Penny

Theme # 3: Participants struggled to make sense of the situation. Amy, Barbara,

Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Iris, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal,

Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Fifteen participants explained that the abuse began slowly, building to a crescendo over time. They described this process as facilitating their gradual acceptance of the situation. This supports the work of Sutherland and colleagues (2000).

“It started out small, you know. I mean it grew into this very slowly. At first it was small things... like yelling at me, or criticizing me. Then he just kept adding to it. The names got worse, then he started to push at me with his finger, then shoving me into things, slapping became punches... it was like started small then got gradually bigger.” —Kate

“It’s such strange thing. It was little things at first. The first thing I remember is him breaking a plate in the sink when he threw out the dinner I made. I’m not a very good cook. He said the dog wouldn’t even touch crap like that. I laughed... I thought it was a joke, I mean he knew I couldn’t cook. But when he turned around I saw something in his eyes. It scared me. From that day on, a day at a time, he just kept getting more and more violent. I can’t explain it. You get used to it, I think. It’s like he gets his fingers in there and he grabs on and you don’t even sometimes realize what is happening. It’s a slow, gradual process. You get like in this fog and you don’t think the same, you don’t feel the same, you don’t react the same. You kind of lose yourself. It blinds you. They say love is blind, well abuse is blinder.” —Evelyn

“It got progressively worse. It just seemed to get easier and easier for him. It was like I was worth less and less to him. I was trying harder and harder...I got my degree, I was earning good money...I had a good job, we have wonderful kids...but no matter what I tried, he would usually go after me. When he blew up at us, he would usually just go after me. Later on, he would hit the kids, too. Me first, always... but then the kids. But it was always my fault. I couldn’t make sense of it...I mean I just couldn’t think clearly enough.” —Terri

Seven participants continued their attempts to rationalize perpetrator behavior. They expressed their own shortcomings, outside pressures, and lifespan changes that they had apparently tried to use to make sense of his desire to abuse them.

“I admit...I’m no angel. I mean I can be moody and ornery. I’m not that easy to live with. I was concerned about him. I thought, ‘well, you know, he had to go through all this as a child’ [child abuse] and I was concerned about him, which you know, looking back on it...he was a grown man. He made his decisions. But at the time, I was brought down to the point where...with his verbal abuse I was not important. I was nobody. So you know, he made sure the focus was on him so I was concerned about him. But the last time he...he um beat me in my neighbor’s yard...then that was it.” —Kate

“He had so much pressure on him from work. They never gave him a full day off. Even weekends they’d call and he’d have to go in. It was hard on him. The kids and I didn’t make it any easier, but we tried.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“It was the drugs. I begged and begged him to get help. He wouldn’t go. I called his mom and she talked with him, I talked with him... but we could never get through to him.” Confirming Group Member # 5

“He didn’t realize I was going through menopause. He was lonely...that made me doubt myself. I can’t tell you the number of times I have gone over every single conversation I’ve ever had with this man...every single time. And I’d pick apart everything. I told my children that their daddy’s mind is broken because he’s got an illness that makes him do things that he shouldn’t say or do, that he has done things that are harmful and that he is never going to be able to come back here because I can never trust him not to hurt anyone again.” —Amy

Eleven participants described being told repeatedly by the batterer that the abuse was their fault, and that over time they came to believe it was true. Six participants continued to use language that would suggest at some level, they still accepted some responsibility for the damage that was done, or their inability to escape. This is consistent with the findings of Hart, (1998); Mills, (2002); Porter (2002), and Stark (1992).

“If you hear that it’s your fault long enough, you believe it. He was really good at twisting things around so that I was always to blame. I didn’t do this or I did do that... I made him angry. It was always my fault. So, after awhile, I thought it really WAS my fault.” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“Most times I thought it was my fault. That’s what he says... ‘you made me do this’ ...so I thought I did deserve it.” —Iris

“I thought it was something I was doing wrong. I mean, I thought I wasn’t trying hard enough. He said it was my fault, and I believed him. He convinced the kids that it was my fault. Everybody blamed me. I couldn’t understand it, but I accepted it.” —Evelyn

“What bothers me is I can’t give her [molested daughter] back what he took.” —Amy

“I’m not real comfortable with telling myself that I’m a victim or a survivor because it makes me feel weak. But I know I was in a situation that I couldn’t control. I just hate myself that it took me so long.” —Catherine

By convincing victims that the abuse was their fault, perpetrators led participants to believe that they had the ability and power to change the environment in ways that could prevent the abuse. Thirteen participants expressed a continuing hope that they could somehow “fix” the situation. Participants received similar messages through societal beliefs and expectations that they could and should protect their children, and system worker interactions that verbalized expectations that they could stop the abuse should they simply choose to do so.

“I kept thinking that I could fix it... I just had to figure out how.” —Stephanie

“You may think this is weird, but I really thought I could fix him. I thought that if I did something better, or faster, or longer or whatever, I could make him happy. If he was happy, then he’d treat us better. I held on to hope. There was hope...for a long time, there was hope.” —Linda

“The kids begged me not to leave. They were afraid. So was I. But they kept begging me. It was so hard to hear. So I stayed and hoped and tried to make it the best I could. It just wasn’t ever going to be like it should be. As hard as I tried, things just kept getting worse.” —Terri

***“You always think, okay this time it will be better. This time I’ll work a little harder. You do it for the kids. They deserve a family that loves them.”
Confirming Group Member # 2***

Believing that there was hope to fix the situation, and that they were to blame for it, fifteen of the participants acted in the role of peacekeepers, attempting to diffuse and survive the crisis by complying with demands of the perpetrator. This was an emotionally exhausting and difficult process for both the mothers and the children. The experiences related below support the findings of Schecter and Edelson (1999).

“Whatever he wanted... that’s what I did. I tried to figure out what he wanted before he did... that way I was ahead of the game.” —Donna

“I just agreed to everything and anything. It was the only way to survive. It was about survival... I lived in survival mode.” —Confirming Group Member # 4

“I walked on eggshells. I just tried to avoid him as much as possible. It was living on pins and needles most of the time. I knew I had to keep a low profile, and I kept the kids as quiet as I could.” Confirming Group Member # 3

Theme # 4: Traditional and cultural norms were at odds with participants’ realities.

**Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Linda,
Michelle, Opal, Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri**

Fifteen participants discussed their struggle to integrate the sanctity of the family unit with the horrific experiences embedded in their daily lives. Participants expressed their worry that their children needed two parents in order to be happy and healthy, and some used their own experiences and observations as a reference for this value. In one case, the children’s shared wishes for that ideal was strong enough for a participant to specifically identify it as a factor into her decisions. In eleven cases, the perpetrator used this argument to maintain control over their victims.

“You hear all this about how kids need both their parents. I grew up in a home without my dad. I can’t tell you the number of times we needed him, and he wasn’t there. I didn’t want my kids to go without a dad, even if he wasn’t a good person.” —Iris

“I was like trying to make it work because I’m pregnant again ...trying to make things better so the kids would have a better home and me and him would be getting along and this next baby would have a father there because, you know I am having all boys, so they really need a father there. I grew up to believe that a family was a mom, a dad and the kids. I didn’t want to be a single mom. I’ve seen too many mothers struggle to get by. I kept thinking, ‘if I can just get this worked out, we’ll all be okay. I got both of my parents...I am so blessed...and I see other people at school they only had one parent, you know... and they’re like ‘I wish I’d had my dad’. I felt like I would be a statistic if I was a single-parent home...like I would be like everybody else. I wanted to be different. I wanted to have a family. I wanted to have a mother, father and children [in her family unit].” —Donna

“They need their dad...well, not like this, but I mean kids should have two parents who love and care for them. I didn’t want to become a broken home statistic. I finally wised up, and figured out he would never love and care for anybody but himself.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“[My daughter] tells me when she says her prayers she wants us to be a family. She includes [the perpetrator] in her prayers.” —Geena

“You have to understand... my family loved him. My folks loved him, my sister loved him, and my brother thought he was absolutely the coolest thing. They all told me I was exaggerating... that things couldn’t possibly be that bad. Mom said all couples have spats. He choked me until I lost consciousness... that’s NOT a spat!” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“His parents and his brother called me everyday. They begged me to take him back. They begged me not to tell the judge what he did. They said they’d lie if they had to, but that they weren’t going to allow me to destroy him.” —Confirming Group Member # 4

“My mom always taught me you married a man, you stayed with the man. You have to have a father for your children.” —Qui’Ana

Religion may encourage some women to stay in abusive relationships, accept their oppression as biblically ordained, and resist seeking legal/support services from secular social institutions (Jordan, 2006; Williams, 2000). Religion is a founding,

guiding principle of the patriarchy... suggesting that women submit themselves to their husbands, that the marriage vow may not be broken, and that women are subservient and of lesser value than men (Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 2006; Fortune, 2006; Jordan, 2006). These norms factored into the decision-making process of seven of the participants.

“But when you have such strong feelings and you’re praying every night and you have God in your life and you have those feelings...you know, for any sign...you have to go with your gut and your heart and that’s what I did. I talked to my pastor and to my mother about everything and what should I do...I don’t accept it, I don’t agree with it, but God gives everybody a second chance and he was [supposed to be] rehabilitated, you know.” —Linda Ed note: Here Linda was explaining her reasoning for taking her assailant back into her home.

“I said for better or worse. That I would stay by him forever, whatever may come. I stood at the altar and promised God. I had to break a promise to God. It wasn’t something that I am proud of. What happens to people that break their promises to God?” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“My pastor and my dad sat me down and said that this was something women had to go through because of what Eve did with Adam. I remember thinking ‘how’s that my fault?’ But at the same time, I thought they could help me get him under control... that I had an obligation as a wife and mother to stick it out. I was taught that you make a vow under God... you know? You have an obligation to make it work. And when you’re in it... when you’re stuck there, you just kind of get lost in the fog. You keep trying, and it’s kind of like you love him, and he’s the father of your children, and you should be able to make it work for everybody. So then you think, ‘well, it’s got to be my fault’, so you work harder.” —Terri

“I prayed and prayed...I thought ‘how could this be happening to me’?” —Helen

“I was always taught that when you marry, you marry for life... the ‘til death do us part thing. I got married in the church, and I meant my vows. That’s one of the hardest things... I meant them. They weren’t just words. They were a promise. I was raised in the church. My parents were missionaries. They’re still disappointed in me. But I tried prayer. I prayed he would stop. Eventually, I started praying he would die... that God would just take him. I’m embarrassed to admit that. I’m still ashamed to think I couldn’t fix it. My

children have a monster for a father and a single mother. It's really a mess for them.” —Confirming Group Member # 3

In what appeared to be a mostly a cultural issue, four participants and one confirming group member indicated their unwillingness to participate in the incarceration process of their abuser. In all but one case, women cited the overrepresentation of blacks in our correctional institutions. This is consistent with findings of Bachman and Coker, (1995); Franklin, (2000); Jordan (2006); Saunders and Size, (1986); Schechter and Edelson, 1999; Sullivan and Rumpitz, (1994); and T. West, (1999).

“Without my testifying, they said that he would probably get off. So if I tell them what he did, and he goes to prison, then I'm going to be responsible, right? How do I explain to the kids that mommy sent daddy to jail?” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“The kids, they need their daddy. All kids need a daddy. I have a big heart. I couldn't send their daddy to prison...something inside me said that's just not right...there's too many of us in there already and babies need their daddy's...even if they ain't the best. I don't want to be the one that sends him to prison. I know that should probably feel good to me, given what he did to me, but it doesn't. I guess unless you have really loved someone, even though they do you bad, you can't like see it. But I got to live in a community...my community... where Black men go to prison every day for lots of reasons...some good, some bad. I'm not going to add to [that] problem. It would make me part of it.” —Iris

5: Perpetrators used isolation as a strategic tool to maintain their control. Amy,

Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Jackie, Kate, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Fifteen participants expressed being isolated from family, either through the family being fearful of the perpetrator, being exhausted from the stress of the victim's situation, keeping them geographically separated or because they were unable to believe that the abuse was real. This theme is in keeping with the work of Dobash & Dobash (1975), Ver Steegh (2000), and Zorza (1998).

“He was the kind of breaking point between my parents and I. [My mother felt] it was my fault. Actually, when I moved out, they [parents] ended up coming to court with me one day and I listened to my mom tell me how it was my fault, and that if I’d listened to her none of this would have happened. [The assailant] was very adamant about the fact that I needed to stay away from my parents. When I moved out he called and threatened my mom and dad over and over again that they were gonna die. And the State Police actually called me and asked me to call my parents and tell them [that I] was all right. So I do talk to them now, but we don’t touch on the subject because I can’t handle her telling me it’s my fault.” —Catherine

“I called my mom to see if I could leave and go back there and she hung up on me [frightened of the perpetrator’s response to helping]. He never let me speak to anybody anyway...I was locked in the house if I wasn’t working. I paid all the bills. I wasn’t allowed to go anywhere unless I was at work. Nowhere. Nowhere. If I went to the store, I had a certain amount of time to get there and home. And a couple of friends I did have, he wound up going to bed with them. I had no friends. I had no family. I wasn’t allowed to talk to my mom, my sister, nobody.” —Qui’Ana

“He hated my family. He made sure we were as far away from them as possible. I went two years without knowing one single soul well enough to say more than ‘hi’ to. Where was I supposed to get help? I didn’t KNOW anybody, and I wasn’t allowed a phone and couldn’t go anywhere unless he was with me.” —Terri

“I was alone here... three days drive from my friends and family. He knew that, and took advantage of the fact I needed him.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“Whenever I tried to get help from the cops he would just up and move us. We moved five times in one year. The kids were so angry at me because they had to move again. Their dad would tell them that it was my fault, that I called people who wanted to break our family apart, and that because of me we had to move. They hated me for that. I learned not to call.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“Once this caseworker lady came out and started an investigation. We were gone by the next morning. We never had a house... we would always rent someplace where we didn’t have no... like lease or anything. That way he could get us out of there in a hurry. I wonder what that caseworker thought when she came back and found us gone?” —Stephanie

“He had charges against him for parole violation when they arrested him for violence against me. They let him out the next day and he was supposed to appear in court, but we just left. The warrant for his arrest was still on his file

when they finally caught up with him, but the statute had run out or something. Anyway, it had been like ten years or something. Nobody even looked for him, I don't think. —Confirming Group Member # 2

Six perpetrators also were reported to have sabotaged victims' efforts to work, fearing that the workplace may provide an economic resource for her to leave, connect her to individuals to whom she could disclose, and prevent him from knowing her whereabouts.

"He didn't like that I was doing that [looking for a job]. He figured, if I get a job [I needed to] get a job that would keep me here at home so I could still help him and do what he wanted to and therefore I wouldn't be out in the world and...he just wanted me here where he knew what I was up to and could do stuff for him." —Amy

"He would call me at work all the time. My boss would tell me that I needed to get control over his calling. How could I? He didn't want me to work. If he could make sure I got fired, then I wouldn't have my own money. If I didn't have my own money, then I would have to go to him for everything. He counted on that." Confirming Group Member # 5

"He would sit outside the shop and wait for me to come out. If I didn't he'd blow the horn or come stomping in to the office demanding to see me. He called me off sick when I was too messed up [physically bruised] to go to work. He was always asking who I was with at work... who I was screwing. Nobody will hire me... I mean I've lost more jobs than most people ever have in their lifetime." —Qui'ana

Batterers could ill afford to have evidence of their assaults visible. Therefore, they inflicted wounds where they didn't show, and inspected the participants' clothing and make up to ensure that she would not be questioned about bruising. Four participants and three confirming group members reported this.

"Oh, he'd never hit me where nobody could tell. It was always, you know, my back or my legs or my shoulders. He couldn't take no chance that somebody might see, I guess." —Michelle

"I had to make sure to let him check what I was wearing before I went to work. He was always careful to make sure any bruises were all covered up. He never hit my face, where somebody might notice." —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I was careful to not let any bruises show. I became a wizard at makeup. I mean, I could cover up a black eye so you couldn’t tell. I also would wear scarves around my neck, things like that. If I didn’t, he’d make it worse.” — Catherine

“He never hit me in the face... not after the first time. He would always make the bruises where I could cover them up.” —Penny

Theme # 6: Batterers instilled fear and used threats to keep her in his control. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Batterers used a variety of tactics designed to keep all twenty participants living in fear. These threats served to keep the participants ‘in line.’ More often than not, these threats included a fear that the perpetrator would carry through on weapons-related threats. All twenty participants reported being fearful for themselves, their children and their loved ones. This supports the work of Davidson (1995), Edelson (1985), Myers, (2002) and Phillips (1992).

“I can’t remember for the last five years any day that I wasn’t scared. He leaves hints for me all over...at home, in my car, everywhere. Last week I found a knife in my underwear drawer. It was one of his hunting knives.” — Stephanie

“He left a dead rat in my dryer. He admitted it. He said that’s what happens to people who rat on others to the cops. He said if I went to court against him, I’d wind up like that rat, only naked in a dumpster.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“He broke into the house. He stole the food. Me and the kids didn’t stay at the house that night. So I went back to the house the next day...fixed everything up, secured the door. He broke in again. So about two or three o’clock in the morning, sure enough, he knocks at the door and I’m like, just leave. I says ‘I’m fixing to call the police’, and I told him about the PPO. He says ‘call the police...I still got six minutes to beat your ass [before they could get to her] and I can do anything in six minutes’.” —Geena

“I’ve had a knife held to my throat. He played Russian Roulette with a gun pointed between my eyes. He shot my dog.” Confirming Group Member # 4

“When he kidnapped me, they said it was contact [in violation of a mutual no-contact order] and that I didn’t try to get away hard enough. They said I had an attraction to him so strong that I could never be trusted to keep the kids away. They said it was evidence that I would not be able to keep away from him. It’s pretty hard to resist with a gun pointed at your head. I got away as quickly as I could...” —Terri

“Two summers ago in one of his moods, he started firing the gun off right outside of the living room window and he scared the crap out of us and I went outside and I told him that’s not funny, you don’t play with a gun. He picked the gun up and pointed it right at my stomach. He said he wasn’t playing with it. I said ‘Put the gun down. You don’t ever point a gun at anybody...it’s not funny’. He says ‘It depends on who’s holding it and who’s being aimed at’. I took that as a threat. [Once] he came into the kitchen and laid a rifle on the table. ‘I could take you out in a heartbeat and not even care,’ that’s what he said. He meant it. He wouldn’t hesitate, I’m sure of that.” —Amy

“He swung a baseball bat at me. He [had] nailed the door shut and came at me with the bat. I thought I was dead. Well, actually, I nearly was.” — Confirming Group Member # 5 Ed note: This women was in intensive care for several days following his assault with the bat.

“He threatened to kill me on more than one occasion...he had guns, knives, swords...he’s not supposed to have firearms... he’s been convicted on two separate felonies.” —Catherine

“He had a gun...well, more like three of them. He would take one out and clean it...sit right next to me no matter where I went in the house, he would wind up sitting right next to me. Then when he was done cleaning it, he would put it all back together and sight me right down the barrel. He would usually point it right at my face and then he would make a ‘pow!’ noise like he was shooting it. One time, he held a loaded gun to my head and pulled the trigger, but it just went ‘click’. Then he laughed because I cried.” —Stephanie

“I called people around here because I’m afraid. He’s in the Army. He’s come up here with guns and went target practicing. What’s to say he won’t do it again? I lived on a dead-end road and I’m scared to do anything. I stay away from home [and when I am there] I stay awake all night because I’m afraid to close my eyes, not knowing what I’ll find when I wake up...know whether he’ll be there.” —Opal

“He told me he’d kill me and my baby if I tried to leave. I tried to leave. I called the police...they wouldn’t help me leave. I wanted to go home [to my

parents]. The cop laughed at me and said there was nothing wrong...I could leave anytime I wanted and that he [the policeman] didn't have to be there. He left. He shut the door and left. I saw the light just flash and the hatred...the meanness, the monster... whatever you want to call it come out [of her assailant] and I screamed and he hit me. I tried to fight back but I was six months pregnant and he just kept hitting my stomach. And then he got the baseball bat and said he was going to teach me that not the police or God himself was going to take me from him. I fought back and the more I fought the more he kept hitting me and the cops came again and he shoved me in the bathroom and I was screaming, screaming [inside my head] but they couldn't hear me. All I heard was [her assailant] saying 'thank-you, we'll keep it down'. He left me locked in the bathroom for a while. I was bleeding everywhere. My arm was broke, my ribs were broke, my jaw hurt, my cheekbone was broke, my eye was cut open. I had a gash on my leg. Then he came in and I begged him to leave me alone. I begged him and I told him I wouldn't leave him and that I would be good. And he laughed. And this laugh was the ugliest laugh I had ever heard. And then I saw something in his hand. I pushed past him and tried to get up the stairs and he pulled me back down and I fell into the glass table and I lost consciousness and I woke up at the hospital...right after I had her [her daughter]. They told me the neighbor had heard the glass breaking and called 911. It's the only time that woman ever stuck her nose into anybody else's business, and it saved my life." —Penny Ed note: Unfortunately Penny's daughter died shortly after birth.

Six participants also stated that they were frightened to involve anyone in a support system for fear they would be harmed by the perpetrator. This supports the findings of Dobash & Dobash (1979) and Goodkind and colleagues (2004). Several reported continuing to be afraid, even after successful separation.

"He said that he'd take us all out...the kids, my sister, my brother-in-law—me. He's crazy enough to do it. I just can't put them in that position. If I testify against him, he'll find a way, I know it." —Catherine

"Nobody's safe from him. He'll do it. He said he'll kill my dad first, then my mom, then the kids, then me." —Faith

"He told me if I wanted to see a real shootout to call the cops. 'They'll never take us out of here alive. If you want us all dead, go ahead and call'." —Confirming Group Member # 5

"My kids have never been to daycare up to now [instead being cared for by family, but because of the assault] I'm afraid to take them to family members

because he knows where they live, so now I have them [kids] in licensed daycare.” —Opal

Some batterers made suicide threats to victims when they attempted to leave, sometimes threatening to do it in front of the kids. This was more troublesome to some of the six participants than others.

“He has threatened to kill himself on more than one occasion.” —Amy

“He called me twice and said without me, he had nothing to live for, and he was going to shoot himself. Both times I called 9-1-1 because I didn’t want him to do it and I sort of believed it. But the last time he said he was going to shoot himself in front of me and the kids. He said they needed to know that if he died, it was because of me, because I had broken up our family.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“He says if I don’t come back he’ll kill himself. I don’t care anymore... let him do it. That may sound hard to hear, but after all the hell he’s put us through, we’d be better off.” —Michelle

When other tactics did not seem to work, fourteen perpetrators vowed to fight through CPS and in court to obtain custody of the children. This is in spite of the fact that many of the abusers were also abusive toward their children, and to their mothers during the pregnancies. This finding supports the findings of Pence and Paymar (1983), VerSteegh (2000), and Zorza (1998). Amazingly, four of the fathers involved obtained primary custody.

“He said he’d beat me in court. He said I couldn’t fight him. He had money to hire a lawyer. He said that he would make sure I never saw them again.” —Penny

“He called CPS and told them I was abusive. ME! He convinced them enough that they did an investigation. They didn’t like charge me with anything, but it scared the hell out of me. He’s so convincing... he puts on such a great performance. He can charm a snake.”—Confirming Group Member # 2

“He called CPS and told them I had no food. The second time he called and said I had no heat. The third time he called he accused my brother of molesting

my oldest son.” —Barbara Ed note: Each time CPS investigated and found no substantiation for these claims.

Fourteen of the perpetrators used abduction or the threat of abduction as a tactic to instill fear, ensure her continued compliance and prevent her from leaving. Sometimes, the abduction resulted in an expensive and protracted legal battle to have the children returned to the mother, despite her having court-ordered primary physical custody. This supports the findings of Hart, (2006); Jones, (1994); and Saunders, (1998).

“He took the kids for his regular visit. When he put them in the car, he looked right at me and said, ‘Kids, tell your mommy goodbye’. Then he smiled at me and said, ‘Well, this is what you wanted, isn’t it?’... He didn’t bring them back. It took the police and the courts two months to get them back. I thought I would never see them again.” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“He said if I ever tried to leave, I could never take the kids. He said I’d never see them again. He said there are lots of places to hide if you’re willing to travel a ways.” —Amy

“He took my son when he was a baby and the law said there wasn’t a damn thing I could do about it... he took him out of state...went for a weekend visit and never brought him back. We had joint custody, and I had to wait six months to charge him with anything.” —Penny

“I tried threatening to throw him out...pack his bags and they always threaten you, ‘well, I’ll just take my kids...and you’ll never see them again’. He swore he’d take the kids and make them hate me. He would turn them against me...that he would make sure my family hated me.” —Qui’Ana

“I got a PPO and he came and physically took me out of the house, with the kids, and brought me back here. He kept me and the kids in his warehouse...holding us hostage. I mean we had a gun to our face for three days, until he finally fell asleep from exhaustion. Then I got out...I hid the kids with a lady I knew from when we lived here before, went to the cops and they arrested him. I went to a shelter and they [CPS] came and got the kids that same day [for failure to protect against witnessing domestic violence]. So I did what I thought I should to protect them, but I wind up losing the kids. So now I wish I hadn’t done anything. It cost me my kids. It cost them their mother.” —Terri

Theme # 7: Participants love their children, and attempted to protect them. Amy,

Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

All twenty mothers in the study expressed affection and concern for their children not unlike mothers who have not been victimized by abuse.

“They’re my everything. Without them I don’t think I could live...they’re everything I want, everything I need...everything, you know? They’re my all.”—Donna

“I love my kids. You have to understand before I had kids, I was out—in the streets...I was going...I mean I was free, so I was just basically doing whatever I wanted to do. And I was just doing a whole lot of stupid things. So when I found out I was pregnant with my first son, it was time. I couldn’t smoke any more...the thought of another being inside of me was just, you know...I couldn’t do it. They changed my life. I love them to death. I wouldn’t trade them for nothing.” —Faith

“I love my babies. They are my life. I get up and go to work...I cook and clean. Everything I do is just for them. Just because that’s what you do when you love your kids. You do everything for them. My people have always cared about our kids. My family has always been good to our kids.” —Geena

“They are the only thing that’s kept me going. My oldest...he is the best kid...smart, loving...just a great kid. My second, he’s more quiet. He’s a really good student. He loves video games. He’s a cuddler. The third child, she has ADD and school is really hard for her, you know? But she has the best heart. And my baby. He’s just one...just a good baby. They are the only reason I’m alive. I live for them.” —Stephanie

“He’s my son. I love him. [Without him] there’d be nothing for me. I wasn’t supposed to have... children, so when I found out I was pregnant with him, it was a miracle. I never wanted him to get hurt. All I ever wanted was a family.” —Penny

Eight participants whose children were removed had understandable difficulty in discussing their experience regarding the time their children physically were removed from their care. They cried and most had difficulty in speaking. This question seemed to illicit the most emotional moments of the interviews. I believe Qui'Ana's depiction of

that moment was representative of most participants who were able to respond to the question.

“I thought I was gonna die. The hardest thing I’ve ever had to do was pack my eleven-year old son’s clothes. Pack him up and hand him over. I’ve made better choices. I still think it’s my fault that they got taken away...I could have protected them better and sooner. I felt like I did something wrong by turning him in because now my kids are gone. Without my kids there... I would have rather taken the beating than turn him in...at least if he hit me, my kids were [still] there [had she not turned him in].” —Qui’Ana

Six participants reported taking beatings for their children. It was apparent that the abuser had little understanding or concern for the well being of their children. This is consistent with findings of Zorza (1998).

“Sometimes, he’d tell me to shut them up or he’d do it. But kids are kids... they need to laugh, roughhouse, play, you know? You can’t just lock them up somewhere until they are adults. Anyway, when they’d get a little loud or whatever, he’d beat the shit out of me. Just because I couldn’t keep them quiet.” —Qui’Ana

“Once he handed me a belt and said either you shut them up or I’ll use it on you. I told him that he wasn’t going to hurt those kids. So instead, he used it on me. I got used to that.” Confirming Group Member # 3

“My oldest one, we kind of had an understanding. I worked third shift and in the morning when I would come home from work she would get up and he would still be asleep and she knew not to talk at all, not to make any noise, because you didn’t want to wake him up, that was just not a good thing. You know, I would do my best to defend her...if he was getting mad at her I would step in and take the fall for her. But you know, it’s hard with someone like that...he’s hit us both, it didn’t matter...as long as he hit somebody. My youngest daughter, he wouldn’t let her out of her bouncy seat...he couldn’t stand to hear her cry so I would get, for the lack of a better word ‘punished’ for her crying. My oldest one, she wasn’t allowed to walk in front of the television...you know he would sit there for hours and play Nintendo. She knew what happened if daddy got mad, and that’s how I think it was strictly out of fear that she didn’t make any noise in the morning. She still doesn’t make a lot of noise. She’s a very quiet child. But what do you do? ” —Catherine

“I always stepped in for their sake and they knew that their mother was going to fight for them always.” —Faith

Eleven participants reported stepping in between the abuser and the children to prevent their abuse. Some children were reported to also have intervened or threatened to intervene.

“I can’t tell you the number of times I had to physically pull him off my son. That’s no small task for me...he outweighs me by about 100 pounds. But you can’t just stand there. I hit him with a lamp one day to get him to leave [son] alone. I paid for that one!” —Stephanie

“I would have to physically get between him and the kids. Sometimes that meant that I took the punishment. It was worth it.” Confirming Group # 2

“I heard like shuffling around like he was messing around with my son [in son’s bedroom] and I walked in there and he had shoved on my son and I got in between them and told him to keep his hands off my son and he went to hit me and my son hit him back. Hit my husband... and he told CPS that if his dad ever hit me again he was going to kill his dad.” —Barbara

Twelve participants adapted to the danger by attempting to arrange daily tasks and children’s schedules in order to prevent the children from being confronted by the abuser. Mothers reported that they would use safe places, such as the homes of relatives, for the children in an attempt to safeguard them from the violence.

“I made sure that before he got home, I had the kids fed and bathed, and working on their homework. That way they were quiet and didn’t interrupt his evening.” —Qui’Ana

“I would keep the baby up until a certain time so I knew she would sleep when he was sleeping. Otherwise, if she woke him up there was hell to pay.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“I would try to have them bathed, fed and asleep by the time he came home from work. And I had them at my Mom’s house, you know, just away from everything that was going on at the house.” —Faith

“I would take my children to different people’s houses you know, like my family or friends and try to get them away from home more...instead of having them be at home all the time because it was like the more I stayed home, the [worse it got]. I really had no way of getting away from the situation...I would try to walk away and get the kids and to play with them and try to change the subject

like that and you know, change the environment because I didn't like arguing in front of them [the kids].” —Donna

“I made sure the kids didn't have free time in the mornings on weekends. I gave them chores to do in the barn. That kept them away from him when he was most likely to explode. He just wasn't a morning person!” Confirming Group Member # 2

“I tried to make them go to bed before he got home, I tried to make sure supper was on the table so that way he could come in and eat and pass out sometimes. Or just whatever he said, okay... just agree with him.” —Barbara

“I used to send them in their room when I knew he was getting...you know...when his anger was escalating. And I...you can see the signs you know...there's always signs. But I would send them to their room or to do something so that they weren't right there seeing that [the attack].” —Kate

Nine participants also indicated that they attempted to train their children to avoid the abuser, be attuned to small cues and respond appropriately in an attempt to keep them safe.

“I would tell the kids to play quietly downstairs or outside. That way they were less likely to get in his way. They learned in a hurry to follow my cues. If I suggested they play outside and I gave them the look, they knew enough to get out.” —Donna

“My daughter learned quickly that quiet meant safer. If I gave her the look, she would scoot to her room. I look at her now, and she's such a little mouse. She never makes any noise... she doesn't laugh. She doesn't yell and run like most girls her age. He took that from her... he took our joy.” —Confirming Member # 3

Fourteen participants described a constant state of hyper-vigilance as a protective measure. They phrased this in terms of not being able to rest or relax. This is consistent with literature that explains why victims may sometimes appear hysterical or over-reactive when interacting with the police, CPS and the courts. It is not unlike the responses of hostages in other settings.

“I lived on the edge. I was always aware of how he was... always watching for the telltale signs. I kept an eye on him no matter what.” —Stephanie

“I had to learn to be very careful. I learned to be sensitive to his moods. Even got good enough to predict the next beating. Pretty sorry, huh?” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I just never let my guard down. I didn’t dare. If I had any hope of survival or keeping my kids alive, I needed to know exactly where he was and how he was thinking.” Confirming Group Member # 5

“I protected them by getting them out of the situation, maybe having them stay at my mom’s or a girlfriend’s house. I would walk on eggshells just to keep him toned down so that we would...if they were in the house we wouldn’t have to get into that situation” —Geena

Thirteen participants extended this hyper-vigilance to knowing where their children were, where the assailant was, and expressed selectivity in their choice of surrogate caregivers.

“I never let my kids out of my sight. I always knew where they were and who they were with. I didn’t trust anyone to watch over them for me except my mother. I had to keep a close eye on them.” —Terri

“I was one of those mothers who had to know everything about her kids. I didn’t let them alone. Maybe I did that to make up for bringing him into our lives.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I was especially careful about knowing where he was in relationship to where my kids were. He told me he’d take them away from me in a heartbeat. I couldn’t take any chances. That seems so strange... the judge just handed them over to him. Now I have that to worry about without being able to control who they’re with or what they’re doing.” —Faith

“She didn’t go anywhere without one of us [designated safe persons] except to Girl Scouts or for FFA and both places she had to call me when she got there and she had to call me when she was leaving so I would know exactly where she was going, how long it was going to take and if the car broke down I’d know where to find her.” —Amy

Six participants used outside activities not just as a means of keeping the kids away from the violence but also to engage them with positive role models.

“The kids are active in sports, Scouts, after-school club, stuff like that. I sign them up for anything I can. For years, I knew they were safe if they were at

those kind of things—plus the fact that they learn good lessons from the coaches and the group leaders. They get tutoring from the mentors in the after-school club. That's all positives in their lives, and something they sure wouldn't get from their dad.” —Qui'Ana

“They spent a lot of time with my folks and at my sister's. My whole family likes to go camping. They're good about taking the boys with them, and the boys love it. It gives them a sense of normal family.” —Confirming Group Member # 4

All the mothers expressed that their children were a constant a source of concern, and major factors in the decisions that they made. They believed that they were protecting their children from the perpetrator to the best of their ability, given the circumstances.

It is clear from the actions taken by participants that they desired that their children be safeguarded. The above statements and the passion participants emoted when talking about their children is evidence that these women are little, if any, different from mothers not exposed to violence in their devotion and extreme connection to their children. This supports the premise of Field and Cook (1994) and Porter (2002).

Theme # 8: Participants desired, and were often proactive in seeking, outside help despite their fear. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Seventeen participants were proactive in seeking help for themselves and their children, and went to extended lengths attempting to prove their statements were true. These strategies were not always rewarded, and participants were not always believed, consistent with the findings of Dalton (1999) and VerSteegh (2000). Moreover,

participants expressed confusion at what more they might have done to protect their children.

“I’m like what did I not do that needed to be done? When my daughter did tell me who was responsible for her pregnancy. I came home, I sent them someplace safe. I called the police. I called the family doctor. I took her to get her medical help. I set up the appointment to see you people, and now you’re telling me that I’m not capable of doing what needs to be done. I’m the one that called the police and told him [abuser] to get out of here. I think I have a right to be angry.” —Amy

“I was seeing a counselor at that time [at a domestic violence service provider] and I told her ‘I’m going to tell him to leave because I can’t...I’m not going to take that anymore’. ‘Well, she said, make sure someone else is there so that he doesn’t go off on you’. But I thought, I don’t want to involve anyone else. So I didn’t and I told him to get out and he said okay. I couldn’t keep up the [house payment] so I called to get into a safe house...you know, a woman’s shelter, but there was no room anywhere. I actually had to live in my car until I came to this shelter. I had a few restless nights. I used to have a lot of trouble with [my son]. He would run away from school, that kind of thing. At that time, he was a teenager getting very tall and very aggressive...he would run away from home for three days at a time. You know, I tried to get help. I called the FIA and told them I needed a caseworker [and some help]. [CPS worker]...she said that I could be charged with neglect if I didn’t supervise him right. I told her I needed some help...so what did she do? The woman came with a police officer, got him out of bed, put him in handcuffs and dragged him off to a foster home. He was only doing what he saw done to me. [In Juvenile Court] the judge says, ‘there is no such thing as a bad kid...only bad parents’. They were going to try to put me in jail.” —Kate

“I turned him in to Protective Services. I got a PPO. I got the parenting plan, and the kids spilled everything that had been happening to them. I told them everything too...not realizing it would be used against me [in court]. I was pregnant at the time. I went to counseling. I did everything I could think of. Nobody could make him stop. I finally had to move out of state. If they find me, so be it. But for now we’re safe.” —Terri

“I did everything I could. I got into the shelter, I filed papers with the court, I cooperated with the police. What more could I have done? How can you say I didn’t protect them?” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“I took my baby to the doctor...my youngest to get him checked. The doctor noticed the marks on him, so he had me call protective services. [Perpetrator] had hit him with a switch [because] he wouldn’t sit down in his high chair. I told [the doctor what had happened]. It was just too much. I wasn’t thinking

that they'd take the kids away from me, you know? I just thought maybe if somebody else told him he'd stop and think about what he was doing. [CPS] came over to the house and sat down with me, told me that it was abuse, and that kids that little couldn't know enough about punishment and why they couldn't act up, and that we was wrong to do that. I though 'we'? I didn't do nothing. I mean like why would I call them if I was guilty of hurting my kids? That just doesn't make sense, does it? I tried to keep him from doing it, you know...I told them that I was at work and that I didn't do it, but they said I was still responsible. They knew he [perpetrator] wasn't doing right by me. I mean they knew the cops had been out when he would get to yelling and throwing things...busting up the place. So they said that by me staying there I was hurting the kids. So they said I didn't do what I should to protect them." —Iris

"I even requested a drug tether so I could prove to them I wasn't using drugs. [Perpetrator] had told them I was a drug addict. They believed him and he got the kids. The only way to prove my innocence was to do it through testing and the tether. It was embarrassing to have to wear it, but at least that was proof enough for them. He still has joint custody, but they live with me most of the time." —Confirming Group Member # 2

"He accused me of doing drugs and they [CPS] wrote down that I was doing drugs and I told [CPS] 'well, why don't you give me a test then...if you think I'm doing drugs why don't you test me?' [CPS] accused me of lying and I said 'well, why don't you give me a polygraph test? Anything she come up with I would come up with an answer to try and resolve and she didn't want to resolve no issues." —Barbara

"Everything I've done is for my kids. I moved out, took all the money I had and I got a place to live...and I tried as quickly as possible to normalize life and I got pushed from every direction. [CPS said] I needed to go to a shelter [because he continued to stalk her]...and if I didn't they were going to come and get my kids." —Catherine

Nine participants sought safe shelter through service providers or use of family/friends. Shelter providers and family members willing to take the mothers and their children in were clearly valued as a safety valve by the women in this study. Seeking assistance and a safe place to be was a safety strategy also recognized by Dutton (1993), Skinazi (1997) and Sullivan (2000).

"I went to the shelter twice. I stayed with my mother and my aunt I don't know how many times. You know...anywhere I thought we were safe." —Evelyn

“I got help from the shelter to go into hiding. I needed out of the county, and they got me out fast. CPS says I have to go back there so he can see the kids. I’m going to fight that for all I’m worth. I have a good friend that lives outside of town. [Assailant] doesn’t know her. She’s my safety valve. I can stay with her whenever I need to. We’ve been with her for three months now.” — Confirming Group Member # 5

“If I had to work [second shift], I couldn’t leave them [the children] with him when I wasn’t there. It was too risky. So I had a secretary at the office that would babysit for me. I would tell her that he was working or out of town, or whatever, and she would take them.” —Terri

Shelters may have been seen as a haven by some, but nine seeking their services didn’t want the stigma attached to shelter residency, and some believed that their children would be exposed to poor conditions, restrictive environments, stereotypical marginalizing, and be forced to leave during the day. Some faith-based shelters serving the homeless in Michigan do require their residents to be out of the shelter during the day (presumably to seek employment), and that may have factored into misconceptions about shelters for victims of domestic violence. Assailants also fed these misconceptions in some cases, preventing the woman from seeking services earlier. In one case, fear of the shelter environment seemed warranted.

“I pictured this real run down place, your poor kids had nothing to eat and had to be on the streets all day, you know. People look at them funny because they’re in a home like that. I heard that shelters have mice and lice, and bad food. That’s the word on the street. I know different now, but back then I believed it. [The assailant] told me that’s how it was. I’d see people hanging around the doors of the Salvation Army, and thought ‘I can’t do that’ [to her children].” Qui`Ana

“My sister said the shelter was full of bugs and rats and stuff. No...I’m serious... and you know, now that I think back how would she know? But you just can’t think clearly about those things when you’re under attack all the time.” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“When he got up to go to work, I packed me and the kids up. I called my stepfather and he came and got us and I stayed with them for a while. Then we started looking for shelter, someone to go to. I didn’t want to stay at my

mother's house because he knows where they live, but I didn't want to stay at a shelter, either. I had my mom and step dad, but didn't want them hurt." — Faith

"I had no where else to go, and I didn't want to go back to the shelter in [city]. They testified against me to the judge, and [from that testimony it was apparent that] they had been opening my mail and monitoring my phone calls and sharing that information with CPS." — Terri

"I thought long and hard about where we would go. I had no money. I had no job. I was a thousand miles from my family. I had to choose to enter a shelter, which I heard was infested with lice and rats, or stay and do the best I could. I decided I would take a chance on the lice and rats (there weren't any, thank God), but who asks to be put in that situation?" — Nancy

Other system personnel also sought help for participants' children. Of the participants who knew who had reported them, CPS had been contacted by: a teacher in three cases, the police in twelve cases, a neighbor in four cases, a relative of hers in one case, and by the victim herself in six cases. In cases where she herself reported the violence, some participants reported being stunned at the responses that they received by the investigating CPS worker. All but four expressed amazement that they were blamed immediately for the perpetrator's violence. This is consistent with the Enos, (1996); Miccio, (1995); and Trepiccione, (2001).

"Tell me what I did wrong!" —Catherine

"I'm not the enemy!" —Terri

"I tried to get someone there to help me...[explaining that she had been seeking assistance from DHS prior to the report]." —Linda

"Why would I call them if I was guilty of hurting my kids? That just doesn't make sense, does it?" —Iris

"They treated me like I was a monster mother who hated her kids. Hell, why would I ask for their help if I was the one hurting them?" —Evelyn

"I told them [CPS] 'I didn't have to call you. I could have ignored it like some people would. But I didn't, because that is my daughter'... My kids have

always been more important to me than anything or anybody. [Yet] they told me if they thought I was blaming my daughter for anything that they would also then be under the consideration of taking my children.” —Amy

In an additional and related area, six women indicated that they had hoped for help from the medical professionals they had encountered. Insurance requirements also presented problems for participants seeking help for themselves and their children. Some medical personnel also inadvertently assisted the abuser in harassing their adult victim.

This finding is supported by the literature (Gondolf, 1988; Zorza, 1998).

“Last year I got cut while docking the boat. It was pretty bad, and I needed stitches. He [perp.] took me to the hospital. I went to the ER with bruises all over me. He stayed with me the whole time. I had a handprint that ran all the way around my upper arm. The nurse who gave me the tetanus shot put the needle in right over the handprint. I am just thinking, please, please help me. But she didn’t.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“[CPS] said you have to check with your insurance company. They couldn’t give me [a referral]...all they can do is tell you to call your insurance company [to get service authorization]. If I didn’t know every one of my insurance agents by name, [phone] number and family associations, I guess I probably wouldn’t feel so bad about it. But by having to speak to an insurance company that means that many more people know about the details [of the incest]. And some details I would have preferred [to not] be out there because that is that much more ammunition that people can use against my little ones...I don’t want my kids hurt.” —Amy

“We were flying kites and the string of the kite slashed across [my son’s] neck and left a welt. He went back to playing right away. I didn’t think nothing of it...it was nothing. [During the son’s visit with his father that weekend] I got home and I had this police card on my door. I had no idea what was going on, so I called him [police officer]. He came out the next day with two CPS workers. The accusation was that I cut my son with a knife. At that point, I was just hysterical. I was crying. He [perp] had taken him to the Emergency Room. He stated to the policeman and the on-call physician that I had cut him with a knife. [Later my son] talked to the lady [CPS worker and] he said two different stories.” —Helen [Helen’s children were removed from her and placed with the perpetrator’s sister. They were returned some days later after her son recounted to police that he had been told by his father to tell the doctor that his mother had cut him with a knife. No charges were filed against the father for this false report].

Theme # 9: Most participants seeking help were disbelieved, devalued and subject to victim blaming. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Fourteen participants reported that when they called 9-1-1 for help, police did not believe them, but were more often fooled by the explanations of the perpetrator. In eight of these cases, police ignored PPO's and parole violations in their investigation of the call. Caputo (1991) and Saunders and Size (1986) found similar issues in their studies.

"When the police got there, he told them I was bi-polar and had been off my medication. I have never had any mental illness. He said that's why I was 'confused and hysterical.' From that day on he'd say 'go ahead and call the cops...you know what will happen.' Then he'd laugh. Sure enough, when I called them again, he told them the same thing. They believed him. I heard an officer tell another that 'It's that nutcase again.' I am not mentally ill. I have never been bi-polar or anything else. But he convinced them I was." — Stephanie

"The police automatically believed him when he said I was the problem. I had a PPO. He was at my house. Four people saw him. But they said they couldn't arrest him because it was my word against his. Even though others had seen him and told the cops. What good is the PPO?" —Confirming Group Member # 2

"They [police] didn't do nothing to help. My sister called them because she thought that he was going to kill me. She called them once and the neighbor called them twice. My sister just lives two houses down from our apartment. The guy downstairs is the one I think called them the other two times. They just said we needed to quiet down. My husband said it was nothing...just a little argument. They didn't do nothing." —Iris

"I didn't have a separation order and divorce papers in the process and without a PP order they [sheriff's deputies] said they would not do anything to remove him from his home and there was no way that I could keep him from his home. I was told in turn that I would be better off... that I would be better if I just tried to work it out with him." —Amy

"They pulled him over and let him go...they said I was crazy. When he would come to my house they said there was nothing they could do unless he hits me...I have a PPO but there is nothing they can do unless he hits me." — Barbara

“He didn’t want my daughter to leave. Basically, I tried to put my daughter in the truck and he came around, grabbed her [and] grabbed me. [He] threw me to the ground, and threw my sister to the ground when she was trying to assist. Three other people [his friends] jumped in and it was just an all-out brawl between five adults and two children watching everything. I was put in chokeholds twice and my sister was put in a chokehold twice. We had bruising, cuts, scrapes...bleeding from head to toe...I had trouble breathing. My kids had bumps on their heads, and bruises on their arms. And in the police report, [none of this] ever happened. There is nothing in the report. He didn’t put in there [the police report] that there were any injuries at all...not even a scrape. We have pictures to prove it.” —Opal

Eleven participants believed that CPS workers thought that they had mental health issues. This is consistent with themes that somehow women experiencing domestic abuse are, as Amy related below, defective. This is also consistent with the idea that it is easier to blame the victim than accept that some men are violent and that society bears some responsibility for the plight of victim and to correct the behavior of the assailant. Levandosky and colleagues (2000), and Sullivan (2000) found that societal perceptions and policies regarding adult victims of domestic abuse are often based, incorrectly, on a model of pathology.

“They treated me like I was abnormal... the caseworker said he thought I needed help because I was too weak to leave, to protect the kids.” —Stephanie

“They called me dysfunctional. I had to have two psychiatric evaluations. I passed both. When they couldn’t get around the fact that I was sane, they started testing me for drugs. When I passed those, they didn’t have much. So they said I was probably ‘one of those women who are just naturally attracted to abusive men’. Yeah... like anyone signs up voluntarily for that!” —Terri

“[CPS] said that people that have been abused tend to be abusers or choose more people who are like the people who abused them as kids. I think it makes me look weaker or more ‘defective’ as one lady [at CPS] put it. They try to point out that in your lifetime now where this may have made it where you missed this [signs of incest] because of this reason or with you having been abused, you wouldn’t notice an abuser as quickly because you are automatically drawn to [an abuser]. No, you’re NOT automatically drawn to those people! They said for me to get into counseling... that I would not be

able to help my children. They told me if I didn't get into counseling I would not be able to do what my children needed done. I am just scared for my daughter...stressed out...I am NOT crazy". —Amy

"It [loss of children] drove a knife through my heart. I mean, my people have always cared about our kids. I was scared. I panicked. I was embarrassed and disbelieved. I hollered out and begged, and the judge had to tell me to sit down or he'd have the police take me out. I just wanted to know when my kids would come home. Besides, what mistake did I make? I go to support group, and I know this was not 'my problem'. I am not broken. I don't need to be fixed. I am just fine." —Iris

Seventeen participants described being questioned about why they reported the abuse to CPS, what role they played in the abuse, and many times, despite evidence to the contrary, were not believed. All expressed being surprised at the fact that they were being blamed for something over which they had no control. Field and Cook (1994) had similar findings.

"The CPS worker told me that I was under suspicion because I should have known that he [perp.] was molesting my daughter. I never suspected anything. It happened when I was at work. But she said that if he was violent to me, I should have known he would do something to the kids. But I didn't know... if only I had! But nobody would believe me. I was judged guilty right then and there." —Linda

"I called them to report his treatment of the kids. Nobody would help me, but I thought maybe they would at least help the kids. So I called... I made the decision to call and followed through on it. Then when they show up, they accuse me of being part of it. I wind up having my kids taken away. I am NOT the enemy! If I was, why would I have called them in the first place? I'm NOT the enemy! The court papers say that 'I failed to protect, that I probably would return to him (yeah, right), and that in spite of the fact I'm an educated woman I could not be trusted to act in the best interest of my children. " —Terri

"There is never going to be a time where I doubt my children or where I am 'going to pick' somebody else over them. They have to know that! Protective services has done nothing but question where my motives are: Am I going to side with him eventually? Am I going to pick him later over my kids? When he is let out of prison, will I talk to him again? Even after everything they have been told [and everything I did to make sure he went to prison], they are still threatening me." —Amy

“I had my children at my friend’s house, where [they could] catch the school bus in the morning [participant had moved out of county]. I couldn’t make the house payment. I got another house [through the domestic violence service agency]. But I didn’t want to take my son out of school so I had him go over to [friend’s] house in the morning to catch the school bus. The case worker got really mad saying that [my friend] wasn’t a daycare provider and [I] shouldn’t have my kids there overnight to catch the school bus. The judge goes, ‘well if that’s the case, then that means that grandparents can’t have their grandchildren, that means that aunts and uncles can’t have their nieces and nephews, [and] I’m not going to use that, and that [complaint against the participant] is going to be stricken from the record’. So the judge actually did—sided with me about [it] because it didn’t make sense.” —Barbara

“[CPS] and the police officer automatically made me feel like I did this even though I kept stating to them [I hadn’t]...and even though I kept stating this is what happened...this is what happened...I have witnesses. That same day they went out to see [the witnesses] and they came back and said, ‘well, are you related to any of the witnesses or...?’. I mean they, this man tried to make me feel like ‘you’re lying I don’t care what you say. I believe that you did this” [cut son with a knife]. —Helen

“When I was doing my drops [drug screens], she [CPS worker] would say there’s no way I could drop clean all this time [a year and a half] and [accused me and the workers at the clinic] of covering up my screens. She switched my days for drops ..she wouldn’t let me drop at night [she worked during the day], so I almost ended up losing my job, I almost lost my apartment because I had to cut my [work] hours and so I said I can’t do this no more, so I called her back to court. I called her into court and said obviously you don’t believe [the results of] these drops...we need a new system. So I asked the judge for a tether. So I wore that for three months.” —Qui’Ana

Seventeen participants voiced their frustration and confusion when faced with expectations that they should have been able to make the violence stop, and that their efforts to protect their children were ignored. Many verbalized that they had done everything they could, and expressed that if they could have made it stop, they would have. This finding is consistent with the patriarchal underpinning of role expectations and subsequent victim blaming delineated by Czapinski (1993), Delgado (1999), Epstein (1999), Freeman (1982), Jacobs (1998), and Myers (2002).

“They (CPS) said I failed to protect them. Well, they weren’t there when I arranged for them to stay at mom’s because I knew it (the beating) was coming. They weren’t there when I hid them out at a friend’s to prevent him from killing us all. They have no clue what I did... where were they when I needed their help?” —Catherine

“Nobody understands that feeling when your kids are taken from underneath you for something you know in your heart and you know in your mind you did not do but you are still accused and people look at you. I mean the whole world was against me.” —Helen

“What was I supposed to do? I couldn’t make him stop...no matter what I tried, it didn’t work. He did what he wanted, and nobody could help me. I got the PPO. I called PS and the cops. I took the beatings to spare my kids. I tried to keep peace in the house. I tried to protect them, and now they blame me? The caseworker (CPS) said it was my job to control him and my kids. How could I do that? Sure my kids have problems. But so do lots of other kids. I resent somebody judging me when they don’t know... when they aren’t offering any help. They just come in and say I have a problem. Well, I’m here to say it wasn’t my problem. They could have helped, but instead they just blamed me and took my kids. The judge said he expected me to do whatever it took to protect my children. I’m telling you I did just that. Whatever it took...”—Terri

Four participants who had their children removed reported being threatened by workers if they called CPS too often or objected to their treatment, and eleven indicated they had critical information withheld. Six others were refused information on their rights, and were asked if they were considering taking back the perpetrator. This is despite the fact that the victims in those cases had filed for divorce, were cooperating with police and prosecutors, and had no intention of allowing the perpetrator back into their lives. CPS suspicion of victims is expected, given Trepiccione’s findings (2001). In Jackie’s case, CPS, the police and the prosecutor’s office were forcing her to live in a shelter, refusing to enforce her order of custody, and scaring her children in order to get her to give them information about a shooting involving her boyfriend. Jackie was at work at the time, and claims no knowledge of the particulars surrounding the shooting.

This is consistent with the reports of Aron and Olson, 1997 and Kauffman-Kantor and Little (2002).

“They said if I didn’t quit calling them all the time it would be worse for me and the kids. They said that if I knew what was best for me, I would just let them do their job and show up for court and the judge would take it from there.” — Jackie

“I tried several times to get them to tell me what rights I had or what options I had... you know, what could I do to fight the removal of the kids. The guy [CPS caseworker] said ‘the best thing you can do is wait for us to contact you. You no longer have any rights. To make a big fuss will only make things worse. We’ll be in touch’. Then he hung up on me.” — Evelyn

“They told me that if for any reason that they think I’m in the process of forgiving him or trying to take his side they are going to consider me as culpable as he is and that they can remove my children. I didn’t do anything wrong. Why am I being threatened now? I’ve done everything that I know to do. I’ve done everything that you’ve [CPS] told me to do. I didn’t doubt my daughter...I never questioned what she said. If they [CPS] open their eyes, they’d see that I’ve already followed their line.” — Amy

“They [CPS, police] said that they had allegations that my brother was looking to kill my children and me. [He was being pursued for allegedly shooting the participant’s fiancé and her daughter was hurt in the incident]. They said that since I had domestic violence with my boyfriend, they wanted me someplace here [shelter] until my brother turns himself in. The thing is, they think I know something about this, but I don’t. I think they want me to stay here because it makes me uncomfortable. Because my family...we don’t do guns, we don’t do knives, we don’t do that...so this is a really big shock. Oh my God! Where did this come from? What has happened to my family? My daughter... her dad took her from me and I went to the child support building and I got copies of my custodial papers showing that I have full custody of her. I called the police and went over to his house, asking if they would meet me there so that I could get her back. He had called CPS. And CPS told him he could keep her. They are not letting me have any contact with her. [CPS] said ‘we can’t keep you from going over there and get your daughter because legally, you still have full custody of her’. [But] if I go over to his house to pick up my daughter they will call the police and I will go to jail. Meanwhile, CPS told my daughter their uncle was trying to kill them.” — Jackie

“[Male CPS worker] said ‘we have allegations you cut your son with a knife. I want to see every knife in your house’. [I said] ‘that’s fine. Everything is right here’...I never once stopped to say you can’t do this, you can’t do that. I mean it was really hard because they tried to take [daughter’s] clothes off to see if she

had bruises or whatever. She just automatically started crying...she didn't want nobody touching her or anything and it was just really hard. At that point...it wasn't the lady [Female CPS worker] that was doing this to her...it was the man and I was like, 'I don't think you have a right to touch her...I think that if somebody is going to it should be the CPS lady'. And he was like 'well, if you're not going to let me touch her, open up her shirt'...I said 'fine, do what you have to do'. Like I said, it was very hard for me and her.' — Helen

Ten participants had been implicated in his violence. Most of the white women, but few of the black women voiced anger or surprise over that implication. All ten women expressed being confused over what more they could have done to protect the children. This finding was consistent with those of Epstein (1999) and Fordham (2000).

"[When he was finally charged] they charged me with failure to protect. We were charged at the same time. Every court date we had to go together you know because the court they ran concurrently so when he showed up, I had to show up. [Sarcastically] It was fabulous." —Catherine

"Failed to protect... That's what they say I did. I weigh 137 pounds and he weighs 260. I stepped in between him and my kids. I took the whipping for them. How is that not protecting them? How can they say I don't love my kids? They are the only reason I stayed and took it." —Stephanie

"I don't understand how I could have done anything differently at that time. The cops wouldn't arrest him. PS wouldn't talk with him. They just said I needed parenting classes. I said, 'trust me, I'm not the one who needs parenting classes'. They told him I said that. I paid for that comment for a long time. They were the ones who failed. They failed to protect any of us!" —Terri

Five of the women in the study were charged with child endangerment or neglect, specifically on the presumption that they made a conscious decision to expose their children to someone they should have known was violent. This was a finding of the court in the case of *Campbell v. State* (2000). Participants expressed not understanding how their assailant's actions were their fault. Participants' attempts to get help from the very systems that accused them of endangering their children were ignored. This left the

women confused, hurt, angry and frightened for their children. Many women expressed being devastated by charges that they were an unfit, abusive or neglectful parent.

“Child endangerment, that’s like saying I was the one busting up the furniture, shooting off a gun in the house. I called the police. I tried to get him out of our lives. What more was I supposed to do?” —Barbara

“Being accused of, you know, hurting my own child. That hurt me because I would never hurt my own, you know... I would spank them, if they did something that they wasn’t supposed to, a simple spanking I will do. But as far as hurting my own child like that, I would never do that. I love my babies too much.” —Faith

“They said I was a bad mother. They might as well have taken a gun and shot me dead. A bad mother! I love my kids. They’re everything to me. They said I was responsible ‘cause my son got into fights at school. Well, that’s what he saw his dad do to me. Yet I’m the bad one. I didn’t teach him that. I taught him better. But when that’s what he sees...” —Confirming Group Member # 3

“It’s like they’re saying all these things and I just want somebody...somebody just explain to me that if I was doing everything to protect my children... I mean it got to the point where I wouldn’t leave my children home with him [perpetrator]... I felt I was protecting them. I felt it when I went down there and got that PPO...that I was protecting them. You think of neglect [she was later charged with endangerment]...I think of barefoot, dirty kids unattended to...don’t nobody care about Mama doing off in the streets, nobody looking after them...that’s neglect. But they are telling me I neglected my children because I didn’t leave a domestic situation...I was trying!” —Geena

“[After having her daughter checked for sexual abuse three previous times with negative findings]...I took my eight-year-old daughter into the hospital because I was concerned [returning redness, swelling in genitalia] ...the CPS worker told me I was under suspicion because I should have known that he [perpetrator] was molesting my daughter. It happened while I was at work! I tried to get someone to help me figure it out [the three prior negative examinations]. I should have known he would do something to the kids? I didn’t know...if only I had! But nobody would believe me. I was judged guilty right then and there. That happened in May...she [CPS worker] didn’t even come out until this last October to do a report. [The children were removed three months later, in January.] I had the kids with me the whole time up until January. She told me they will be wards of the state because of what he did to them, and because of [the fact that] my decisions flipped-flopped a lot” [in regards to staying with him in the absence of any evidence of molestation or charges being filed against him]. —Linda

Despite having no history of substance abuse, five participants were required to successfully complete drug testing regimens that sometimes went on for years, despite a history of negative tests. Sometimes, perpetrators were successful in creating this situation, by filing false substance abuse claims against her. In some cases, his substance abuse was reason enough to have her tested, and tested repeatedly. This finding that she is somehow defective in her assigned role as primary protector is supported by the studies of Field and Cook (1994) and Levandosky and colleagues (2000).

“I had to go to testing once a week. My ex told them I had a drug problem. They gave the kids to him based on his assertion that I used drugs. I don’t use drugs and never have. I have never flunked a drug test. I went once a week for eight months. They took his word for it. He beats me up, accuses me of being an addict, and gets the kids. How is that right? It took me a year of parenting classes, drug testing, counseling and work-first requirements to get my kids back. Meanwhile, he’s living with his mom and my kids.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“I have to do a random drug test ...every week I have to call and tell them my name and tell them I’m [calling about] the drug screen and if I get picked that day I have to go down and take a drug test. I’ve taken four and they have all come back negative, you know.” —Geena

“I had to go four times a week for a year...never had a dirty test. I don’t do drugs. I don’t do that.” —Qui’Ana

“I had to go to drug and alcohol screening, I had to go to [get] a psychological evaluation. Child and Family Services...came and watched me parent. I didn’t mind any of it...that wasn’t the point. The point was that there should have been some sort of punishment involved [for the perpetrator] and there wasn’t. That was like a joke to him and he knew it. You know, every court date when it was supposed to be, you know, things were supposed to be completed, they weren’t, he’d give some excuse and they’d give him some more time. Meanwhile, I got more time [under supervision], for that extended time even though I had done what I was supposed to do. [The reason for the drug testing was] the CPS worker said that he couldn’t do anything to my husband [sanctions] he didn’t do to me.” —Catherine

Some plans included requirements that appeared to have little or no connection to her fitness as a parent. Consider Qui’Ana’s report, below.

“I used to have bad teeth. But I knew that Medicaid didn’t pay for dentures. So I couldn’t get my dentures, so she court-ordered me to have my teeth pulled. I had thirty days to get them pulled. I was told that I had to have my teeth pulled because they were unhealthy, and if I was unhealthy, I couldn’t care for my kids right. I was doing drops [drug screening] so I couldn’t take medication for the pain. I didn’t dare take the chance of dropping dirty. I was in drug testing at the time, even though I have never used drugs. I got tested twice a week for a year and a half. With having to get tested, I had to have my teeth all pulled without any pain killers after. So anyway, I had to go to work and tough it out...you know the holes where the teeth were, I had gauze wads in my mouth...couldn’t talk...the smell of food made me sick. I had to go to work after because I needed to prove I could work and provide for them. I had the surgery, got an abscess...I mean my face was out to here and I had to go through that surgery. It was very painful. The poor people at the dentist’s thought the guy was killing me. That was two rough weeks... but I did it. I’d do anything to get my kids back.” —Qui’Ana

One participant (Catherine) and one confirming group member reported that she was arrested along with the perpetrator because the police believed that the crisis was a matter of two people fighting. Police were oblivious to her defensive wounds. In addition, reports filed by police defined the incident as something other than what it was.

“You know in the [news] paper when they list all the arrests and burglaries and stuff? There we are... cops responded to a ‘domestic dispute’ at [address]. I couldn’t believe it. What the hell is a domestic dispute? Is it a man swinging a baseball bat at his wife...the mother of his children? Because that’s what happened. When the cops got there, I had a fencepost in my hand. I had to keep it in front of me to keep from getting hit. I was using it to fen[d] off the blows. Thank God he was drunk or he’d have killed me. His aim was a little off. But because I had the fencepost, they arrested us both. What was I supposed to do? Let him beat my brains in? He goes to the hospital to get a detox and is released with a warning. I went to jail.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

Although she was expected to care for and about her children as a mother, when the children were removed from her care, little concern was given to the emotional trauma she experienced as a result of losing her children. Five participants expressed their panic and grief over not knowing how their children were, whom they were with, where they were, or if they had what they needed to comfort them.

“I was beside myself. My kids were God knows where. God knows who they’re with, if they’re alright...my son didn’t have his medicine... the baby didn’t have my breast milk. She’d never had formula. Did they know that? I called and called. No one would tell me anything. Sometimes they would thank me for my concern, like I was reporting a missing stop sign or something. Most of the time they never even called me back. I begged them to tell me if they were all right...to come pick up the breast milk I’d saved. I begged them to come and get his medicine. He has seizures without it. No one would listen. It was like I was talking to a brick wall.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“For the first like month and a half I had no clue who she [CPS worker] was...the first time I went to court...I didn’t know who she was...never met her. She was supposed to do a home study [but didn’t].” —Qui’Ana

“I did everything possible to get myself where I needed to be. [I] was calling three and four times a day and leaving messages. I wanted to know what [was] going on with my kids.” —Helen

Eleven participants believed that they were deliberately kept in the dark about their cases, and were given conflicting information from their workers. This resulted in many surprises in court for the families involved. Porter (2002) found similar issues in her work.

“She [the CPS worker] told me that she thought I was doing a great job with my parenting plan. Everything she told me to do I did. So I went into court feeling really positive. When she got up on the stand she said I would probably seek out another batterer and so my ability to parent my kids was unlikely. I said to my lawyer, ‘that’s not what she said!’, but I never got a chance to question it.” —Confirming group member # 2

“The first time I knew I was being charged with neglect was when I got to court. They handed me the papers right there just before the hearing. My attorney acted like he knew, but no one ever said anything to me. I thought I was going to testify about the assaults. I knew nothing about losing my kids until right then and there. The second time I went to court I’m showing my attorney the paperwork for the PPO, I showed her I was in domestic violence counseling, I got the kids enrolled [in counseling] and she’s like ‘good...that will look good for the judge, maybe they will do a planned parenting agreement and this will be all over with’...and I’m thinking planned parenting...it must be that they’re going to send the kids home and let me start this thing. It didn’t work out that way.” —Geena

“I found out he had been molesting my daughter in the courtroom. The CPS worker testified that she had taken my daughter to the doctor, and real-matter-of-fact-like she said there was no question that penetration had taken place and that [my daughter] said it was her daddy. They gave the judge a report from the doctor while I was sitting there, destroyed, [in] disbelief, stunned. My attorney just sat there. I said ‘did you know about this?’ but he didn’t answer me. No mother should ever have to go through that. I will never forget that moment...never.” —Evelyn

“They won’t tell me anything but ‘that will have to do for now.’ I have no rights in her [daughter, incest victim] medical care, his punishment, anything. I do however, have to continue to clothe her, feed her, take care of her child and make sure that she has insurance and everything else to pay for her bills. But I have to help them put my husband behind bars for the rest of his life but I have no rights to know what has gone on.”—Amy

Sixteen participants described the failure of their attorneys to adequately represent them in court, and being told by both attorneys and judges that they may not speak on their own behalf. The examples they gave regarding the behavior of the attorneys was nothing short of appalling. This devaluing of women as property of the patriarchy is well established in the literature (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Stark & Flitcraft, 1995). Their voices and presence were suppressed in the court.

“He was MY attorney. He was supposed to represent me. He played solitaire on his laptop in court. He told me not to say anything. He said all this was preliminary. He told me I’d be a fool to testify. I’d write things down for him that I thought would be helpful. He put them in his briefcase. None of that was ever presented in court. I actually pushed them into investigating [a charge of molestation by her ex-husband]. And now, they’re trying to put me on the registry as a physical sexual abuser [despite the fact she has never been charged with anything]. Hell, why would I ask for help if I was the one abusing them? They treat me as if I was a monster mother who hated her kids. I love them more than anything. I couldn’t believe it. My [new] lawyer acts like I’m bothering her every time I call her. One time after court, me, my parents, my lawyer, and what was supposed to be my kid’s lawyer...we were on the elevator. She [guardian ad litem] says ‘well, I think I know what comes next and it starts with a t and ends with an n [termination of parental rights]. And my lawyer turned to her and said, ‘well, I could have told you that three months ago’. I snapped. I said ‘I’m doing everything I’m supposed to do. My goal is to get my kids back...don’t you tell me you’re going to terminate my rights’. And my lawyer didn’t say anything more. She should have defended me...she should

have said 'that's inappropriate'... I mean it was totally unethical. I couldn't believe it." —Evelyn

"My attorney told me the best thing I could do was to sit quietly. I asked him if I should ask others to testify on my behalf. He told me it wasn't necessary. I asked him if I could write a letter to the judge. He said that was the worst thing I could do. I had to just sit there. He never did anything to help me. The judge was making decisions that affected my kids... me... and he knew nothing about us. I felt so helpless." —Donna

"Got to the last hearing and my attorney...she didn't want me to speak... the judge asked me if there was anything I wanted to say and I told him no because I was listening to my attorney." —Geena

"I fell out in the courtroom. The judge told me to sit down and be quiet. When we went back they gave me a lawyer...but he didn't do nothing for me. He just told me to sit there and be quiet. But he never, like said anything to defend me. Nobody defended me. He was just there to collect his money." —Iris

"When we first started going to court [perpetrator] was there. They'd bring him in and I'd be there sitting close to him. At that time, I would be afraid to speak to anybody...how I felt, because I was never allowed to. I would just shut up...I could have told them that this man was very abusive...but I couldn't say that with him sitting in front of me at first. And when I finally got the guts to say something...I kept telling my attorney 'say something!'. My attorney said 'shut up...don't talk in this courtroom'. My attorney told me that. He would tell me to be prepared when I come to court, and I would get there and he wouldn't want to hear anything I had to say. [I thought] okay...." —Qui'Ana

Other issues with attorneys were described. Eleven participants reported that attorneys did and said little to represent them, ignored information that could have helped them, and seemed to lack education about domestic abuse. Often, perpetrators were able to hire lawyers that were quite competent. Participants reported that the public defenders they were assigned were less prepared, did less to represent their clients, seemed distracted and were interested only in getting paid for their work.

"I met my attorney for the first time the day we went to court. He told me to sit quiet and let him do the talking. So I did. He just sat there, playing solitaire. He never made any objections, never called any witnesses [even thought I had given him all kinds of information and contacts]. My husband hired his own

attorney. How could I fight that? He has all the resources. I had nothing. I guess you get what you pay for.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“I tried to contain...keep my composure and all that stuff and not, you know, lose it in court. And the attorney...he was supposed to be MY attorney. He was supposed to represent ME. He played solitaire on his laptop in court. He told me not to say anything. He said it was all preliminary. He told me I’d be a fool to testify. I’d write down things for him that I thought would be helpful. He put them in his briefcase. None of that was ever presented in court. —Geena

“My attorney fell asleep in court. I mean sound asleep. He apologized, and said he had been on duty to the court all night. Well, that’s not my problem. Meanwhile, I’m being made out to be this maniac that can’t be trusted to raise her own children. I might as well have gone in without an attorney, for all the good he did me.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I got a court-appointed attorney. I honestly didn’t think she believed me. I don’t think she gave it her all. I know I made a mistake. I got into abusive relationships [2]... but [it was with] the [very same] people [to whom] they gave custody of my kids!” —Helen

Seven participants had similar complaints about the court-appointed attorneys hired to represent their children. The most common complaint was that the attorneys spent no time with the children, and made assumptions without speaking to the children in any meaningful or developmentally appropriate way. This is consistent with the findings that most court workers are operating in a faulty paradigm or do not have enough training to represent victims appropriately (Aron & Olson, 1997; Dalton, 1999; and Gordon, 1988).

“The kid’s attorney never even talked to them until 15 minutes before court. He didn’t know them. He fell asleep in court and had to be woke up. Were we boring him? This was important stuff. The kids said he asked them their names and age, if they loved me, loved their Dad...did they get along with me, with him...if they loved their grandpa & grandma. That was it. What kind of representation did they get? They didn’t know him. He didn’t know them. How could he speak for them?” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“The kids attorney spent less than twenty minutes with them. My daughter asked me who that guy was. He never had even met them until the day we went to court. How can they say they know what’s best? I found out near the end of

our protective services case that he was supposed to see the kids once a month, well he never, he never did that; he was supposed to come out to our house, he never did that; he was supposed to have an interview with them before our final court date, he called me the morning of the interview and said, "Lets just do a phone interview." At the time, my oldest one is six, my youngest one is two, do you get a lot out of a child on the phone? You know what I mean, thanks, it did a lot of good (laughs). I don't mean to laugh, you know what I mean, the, it's, the whole thing has been such a joke. It's no wonder women go back." — Catherine

"The attorney assigned to my children was answering his e-mails in court. Right there, in the courtroom. My sister was sitting behind him and watched him do it. He wasn't paying attention. He never talked to me, never talked to the kids about what they wanted. That's not right. He just took his check, and went to the bank. I wonder how he can sleep at night." —Confirming Group Member # 1

"They [guardians ad litem] come over and see my son two days before court. We go to court every three months and they don't see him at all during that three months. Two days before court they go over there and then when they go into court they act like they know him and they don't. They're 'acting in the best interest' of a child they've never even really met. My son calls her the chocolate lady... he doesn't even know her name." —Penny

Theme # 10: For most participants, things got worse when they left the relationship.

Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Opal, Penny, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

It is assumed by the general public that women will be safer if they leave the situation. Research (Enos, 1996; Fleury et al, 2000, Meuer & Webster, 1997; Mills, 2000; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 1998) does not support that assumption, and seventeen participants in this study and three confirming group members indicated that they were not safer just because they left the relationship.

"Oh, yeah... it got worse. I didn't think that was possible. This last time, when he almost killed me, I had been gone for almost six months. He broke in to the house and was waiting for me. If it hadn't been for the neighbor, I'd be dead. It wasn't the first time since I left he got me. He knows where I am and has said he can find me anytime he wants. Well, let him try it from prison." — Confirming Group Member # 1

“He came over to my sister’s house. He knew that’s where I would go. I thought he might not dare to come there, but that didn’t stop him.” — Confirming Group Member # 4

“You know, I never thought he was capable of killing me until I left. Now I know he’s capable of anything. What used to be a beating became attempted murder.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

Batterers continued to threaten, stalk and harass thirteen participants and three confirming group members after they managed to escape the relationship. This is consistent with the findings of Meuer and Webster, (1997).

“He’d sit in his car across the street. One day I came home to find the cat dead...he’d hung it in the tree in the backyard. He hung it on the same rope the kid’s swing is on. I got it down before the kids got home, but you know, it just broke my heart. I knew what the message was...we were next.” — Confirming Group Member # 2

“He’s made like nine phone calls here [from prison] and I’ve talked to him twice and both times he’s been told not to call here again. The police told me there is nothing they can do to prevent him from calling his home. I went and got a personal protection order. I went to the detective and I told them this is going on...I cannot have this because this is not going to be helpful to my children. Obviously, calling the police does me no good. I’m getting letters from him that he is sending through other people, wanting me to forgive him of stuff and I’m turning them over to the police.” —Amy

“He followed me to work, the grocery store, whatever. As soon as he heard on the police scanner that I had called in for help, he’d leave. They never could catch him.” Confirming Group Member # 4

“He still follows me. I have to ride the bus to work, and he follows the bus. I have complained, the bus driver has complained, but his attorney says he has a right to use public streets. The judge is supposed to hand down his decision next week. I hope he makes him stop. I know one of these days, he’s gonna find a way to get me. I’d move, but the judge says I am not allowed to, until the custody stuff is all figured out.” —Catherine

“He slashed my tires again just last month. My Mom saw his car around the corner. When we went back to check it out, my car had two flats, and his car was gone.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

In ten cases, the perpetrator filed false reports in order to retaliate for her leaving, or to try to threaten her with the loss of her children if she did not return to him. In three additional cases, the perpetrator enlisted the assistance of his family in this effort. These reports sometimes led to charges against the mother for kidnapping. This is consistent with the findings of Edelson (1992) and Pence and Paymar (1993).

“He had his mother call CPS and tell them I was abusive to my kids. Me! I don’t even believe in spanking. I have never hurt my kids. But he knew this was a way to get to me. They came out and investigated, and said everything was fine. But then when I filed charges against him, she called them again. They didn’t take my kids, but she let me know it was one of her options. His mom and dad kidnapped me, took me in their van to their house, and kept me locked up for six days. They called CPS and said I had abandoned the kids. They said I never came to pick them up after the visit with their dad. The worker never even bothered to check to find out where I was. They just gave temporary custody to my ex-husband. That took about six months to straighten out, and they never got into any kind of trouble because they said it was my word against theirs.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“When my son’s father was mad at me and trying to get custody, they were doing whatever it took to get me in trouble. They would call CPS and make a report...I would get wind of it and call them and tell them, ‘come on out’ my door is open’...you know?” —Linda

“His Mom called them [CPS] on me because of where I was staying at [boyfriend’s home]. Because she don’t like him...so she called.” —Michelle

“When I left him, he claimed I had kidnapped the kids. He called the police and they [CPS] found me at the shelter. They took the kids from me and gave them to him. I tried to explain that I was leaving him because of the abuse, but the officer just said that a judge would sort that all out. Another time, my husband’s dad physically put me in the van and took me up to my mom’s house and said [told CPS that] I abandoned my children. So they ended up getting guardianship over them. Last year my husband was choking me, my daughter seen it and it scared her so I left and I went to the shelter and my mother-in-law pressed kidnapping charges on me so I had felony kidnapping charges on me.”— Barbara

Two moms and two confirmation members were charged with kidnapping when they left the relationship with their children. Participants saw this as a “Catch 22,” where

whatever they did was judged to be wrong. If they stayed in the relationship, they were failing to protect their children. If they left, they could be charged with kidnapping, and in some cases, they lost the custody of their children to the perpetrator. This issue has been identified in the studies of Dalton (1993) and Sisco (1993).

“He had filed for kidnapping charges against me for taking the kids out of state without his permission. He called the police [where he thought I might try and hide] and CPS to report me as an abusive mother who had kidnapped her children, and they gave him my address. He showed up and took us from the house at gunpoint. He came to the house, showed me the gun, said ‘get packed what you have to for a few days.’ I asked him to leave, that we didn’t want to go, but he said if I wanted to live, and I wanted the kids to live, I would do as I was told. I believed him, and he forced us into the van. He held a gun to the head of my three-year old in the front seat, and he had me sit in the farthest seat in the back. He told me to keep quiet and nobody would get hurt.” —Terri

“I left in the middle of the night while he was asleep. I had everything I dared packed and hidden in my sister’s garage. My older son was at a sleepover at my sister’s. I quietly took the baby out of the crib and slipped out of the back door, down the alley and into her car. She drove us to a shelter in [an adjacent county]. He had four counts of domestic violence, and two of assault and battery. I was told by CPS that if I didn’t leave, they would take my kids. I did leave. Within two days, he had filed some papers with the court, and I was charged with kidnapping. Can you imagine? Kidnapping. So I was damned if I did and damned if I didn’t [leave].” —Confirming Group Member # 2

Joint custody orders were commonplace, and were characterized as another ‘Catch 22’ situation for the women in the study. They indicated that they were being held responsible for protecting their children when in the relationship, but the judge was giving the batterer access to the children without having her there to protect them. For ten of the women, this fact created incredible guilt and anxiety. Some related they wished they had not left the relationship, in that no one was present to defend or protect the kids. Five reported significant health and emotional issues with their children when they returned from visitations with their father. Joint custody provided the abuser full and unsupervised access to the children in more cases than not. Dalton (1999) found this

to be the case, as well. In the case of Kate, her abuser was willing to have his son arrested to gain his testimony in court.

“The only way I could protect them is if I am there. When the judge granted him joint custody, my heart just sank. I was their only protection against him. I thought if I left, if I got rid of him, I was doing what was best for all of us. As it turns out, I handed the kids over to him on a silver platter. I let those kids down. I should have stayed with him.” —Stephanie

“How can I comfort them? They come home from visits with him all messed up. My son has stopped being potty trained. My oldest cries for three days before visits. They beg me to go with them. They beg me to let them stay home. It rips my heart out. But the court says he deserves to see them. What about their right to a safe place to be?” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“My ex-husband and my five-year-old’s dad...they worked together. They were trying to get the boys away from me and used the domestic violence cycle that I had been through with each one of them against me [in court, seeking custody]. Why can you just walk into someone’s life and take their kids away when...I thought I was doing everything right to protect my kids. You’re going to sit there and let this man hit me but yet when I get up and feel like I am doing the right thing...I am moving out of this home away from these abusive men and taking my children to a safer place...they gave him [my son] to the very man who was hitting me. I know they heard all the testimony in court. I know the judge did and I know that everything on paper was the truth...[it] is what happened in my life. I didn’t lie about anything on that paper. I didn’t lie about being abused by these men. I didn’t lie about moving to three different places within my kid’s life and no...I wasn’t stable. But how are you going to be stable and be with someone that is abusing you? You can’t. So I felt like I was doing the right thing by getting up and moving...but yet all this was being used against me in court. My parental rights were taken away and then they gave custody to his father [the abuser].” —Helen [This perpetrator currently has a warrant out for his arrest for beating his new girlfriend and burning down her house]

Theme 11: Available resources limited participants’ options and perpetrators often ensured that resources remained unavailable. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy, Opal, Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Resources, whether to be able to leave, provide for the kids, protect them from the abuser through legal options, or get them the help they needed were slim to non-existent, according to the participants. Nineteen women (all but Jackie) and all confirming group members stated a lack of resources limited their ability to leave safely, sustain independence, access services or get quality representation in court. This finding is supported by the work of Davis & Srinivasan (1995) and Zorza (1991).

“It’s so hard to think your kids may not have enough to eat. I imagined myself at soup kitchens. What Mom wants that for their kids? I didn’t. So without the money I needed to provide for them, I was stuck, and he knew it.” — Confirming Group Member # 3

“It took me six months to save up pennies to be able to leave...to get my driver’s license without him knowing....get my money put away where he couldn’t find it. If I just could have left a week sooner, my daughter would still be alive. How can I fight him in court?... He has all that money and I can’t afford a lawyer, and the one assigned to me just collects his money and never does a thing to help us.” —Penny

“He [perpetrator] is in contempt of court because I have supervised visits but he [perpetrator] is not letting me see him [son]. I don’t have the money...that’s the whole thing. If I had \$150 every time I [have to] walk into court I would do that...but that’s the only thing holding me back [from seeking legal action to see her son]. I try to turn to the resources that I know could help me but there is not a lot out there. They [CPS] says ‘do you want to take a budgeting class?’...A budgeting class ain’t going to help me. I mean Legal Aid...’oh, you make too much money!’...I make \$17,000 a year. I pay \$128 every two weeks in child support. I pay \$75 every two weeks for medical for all my children. (They don’t qualify for Medicaid). So I’m working. I have barely enough to pay the rent and [electric] bill and the phone. I don’t have cable...I don’t have luxuries I can’t afford. If I go out and get another job, they will probably take my daughter because I’m not spending any time with her. I work 8 to 5...I don’t know what else the system wants.” —Helen

“When it came to [daughter] getting help [special education services] for her problems, [he refused]. In our school system, you have to have both parents’ signatures to get help. When we found out that both of our girls were legally blind [like I am], he said that he was ashamed that he ever brought them into this world. There is so much out there for them now. I never knew [prior to escaping the relationship] about half of the stuff that I am finding out about. It was his intention that I not get the help.” —Amy

“You come to a point where you just say you [have to] try [to make the relationship work] but you can’t do anymore but you stick because you got nothing else. It doesn’t seem like you got a whole lot else to do, you know? By that time, I had gotten to the point that I knew the marriage was over, but I was stuck in South Dakota with no family, no nothing...alone. [But] it was normal for me.” —Nancy

“He had a lawyer, he had a car, a place to stay, and his parents paid his bills. Anything he needed they gave him. I had to beg him for money to buy school clothes.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I had no home, no car, no job, no money, no anything. I couldn’t just up and leave. How would I take care of the kids?” —Donna

“I didn’t have any place to go...no money, no house, no anything. I was trapped.” —Faith

The women in the study feared not being able to provide for their children if they attempted to leave. Housing was the most frequently mentioned resource that participants listed as most important to them. They feared that without being able to provide shelter for their children, they could lose their children under charges of neglect. For domestic abuse victims, their ability to escape is influenced significantly by available resources. The lack of safe, affordable and decent housing was the reason cited most by women (nineteen of them) both as a reason to keep them living in the relationship, as well as a barrier to them after they left the relationship. When participants were successful in escaping, they often lost their home, their apartments, and entered shelter. One woman returned after having spent a night with her children in a car. These facts are depicted in the following chart on the housing issues encountered and the number of participants experiencing the situation when they separated from their abuser:

TABLE 2: HOUSING POST-SEPARATION

SITUATION	NUMBER EXPERIENCING
Lost house couldn't pay mortgage	6
Lost apartment (couldn't afford)	7
Entered shelter	9
Entered TSH through provider	6
Moved in with relative/friend	5
Kept house	2
Moved to cheaper apartment	2
Lived in car	1

These data underscore the critical influence on housing that results from separation from the batterer. Neglect charges against the mother may result from her inability to provide adequate shelter post-separation.

"I had nowhere to go. I was isolated from anyone who used to care about me. He made sure of that. I had three small kids. Was I supposed to live on the streets? When you live in farm country, there are no shelters just around the corner." —Barbara

"They basically said I was a bad mother for not leaving him [perpetrator]. They said that if I cared about the kids that I would have left. I told them I did leave...lots of times...but that I didn't have no where else to go. I told them I couldn't pay my bills if I left. They said there was ways to help people like me, and that if I had tried I could have gotten out. They didn't understand that it just isn't that easy." —Iris

"I left with literally the clothes on our backs and that was it. He destroyed everything of mine, busted up the furniture, trashed the house. He has a job and gets paid every two weeks. I had a part time job that pays \$5.75 an hour. I had no car, no place to live, no way to buy food, and if it hadn't been for the shelter, I would have been living on the streets. What mom wants her kids to have to live in a shelter? Who wants to raise their kids on the streets or at the Rescue Mission?" —Confirming Group Member # 5

"We spent one night in the car. I went back the next morning [to perpetrator]. I couldn't put the kids through that. I didn't know we had a shelter here in town. I wish I had." —Confirming Group Member # 1

“Where was I supposed to go? I had no place. The kids shouldn’t have to live in a shelter. I wasn’t going to put them on the streets. We had a home. It wasn’t great, but it was home. They deserved to live in their own place.” – Nancy

Theme # 12: Batterers were able to successfully manipulate systems. Barbara,

Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Helen, Iris, Kate, Opal, Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Six participants originally believed that the batterer’s felony history and/or the PPO they had obtained would be enforced and would provide them with some measure of security. In more cases than not, participants reported that police did not protect her in spite of having a readily available history upon which to rely. Nineteen of the batterers had firearms in their home, six of them illegally, due to a criminal history. Fifteen of them used a weapon to injure/threaten the survivor. This is consistent with the findings of the FBI (2002), Phillips (1992) and Myers (2002).

Police were sometimes oblivious of the danger she was in, and her attempts to escape. In the cases of six of the women, parole status and PPO’s were ignored. In the case of Catherine, police provided information to the abuser that allowed him to find her when she tried to leave with her children.

“When the police came out, I told them he was on parole, that he had weapons in the house when he wasn’t supposed to, and that he had threatened me with them. [I said] ‘you need to help me. He is calling my work, he is threatening the people I work with, he is a felon and has a house full of guns, you need to help me’. The officer’s response was that he has a right to bear arms. I basically was in hiding...under an assumed name...I called the State Police, and they took a report. They [State Police] put in the report where I was right down to the room number and gave a copy of the report to him [perpetrator].” – Catherine

“He just keeps violating his parole. Like he won’t show up and they will send him back...off and on for twenty years this has been. He was going to trial and

he wanted me and the kids there to testify for him. We were all subpoenaed. She [CPS worker] snagged my oldest son right out of school and put him in handcuffs and [brought] him to court because she thought he broke his subpoena, but we didn't know we were subpoenaed. I don't know...maybe because I had such a hard time [with CPS] but I've always told people at work if it was to ever happen again, if I had the choice to get hit or turn him in, I would get hit. Because it hurts [a lot more] getting your kids taken away than it does a couple of bruises on my body." —Qui'Ana

"I felt like there were two sets of rules... one for me and one for him. He was freakin' on parole. But they did nothing." —Confirming Group Member # 3

"He come over a lot. He wasn't supposed to...I got a PPO. He threatened me, my sister, everybody...acting like a fool. Tell us he's not letting me go, and that I won't ever leave him. I called the police at first but they always say he's got a right to be in the neighborhood. Far as I know they never even talked to him. He got to keep the apartment. He makes more money than I do. He can afford it. I was the one had to move [in with her sister]." —Iris

"The neighbor called the cops, he'd [perp.] say I was hysterical, that I was crazy, and they [police] would tell him to get me some help. Of course I was crazy! Who wouldn't be after nineteen years of that kind of treatment? But I NEVER gave up trying to protect the kids. I did everything I could. Who was supposed to protect US against him?" —Rita

Four of the twenty perpetrators had formal military or police training. It appeared that this was a factor in determining whether or not he would be subject to sanctions. It also provided the perpetrator with techniques he used to abuse his victim.

"When the police found out he was a Marine and had served in Kuwait, it was like, 'hey, he did his time... he served his country... he's a hero'. He had all this training about how to handle prisoners. He knew how long to make me squat against the wall until my legs would just burn and I would scream from the pain. He knew I couldn't get away... I couldn't even stand or walk for hours after. The one time he caught me packing up the kids he left me there so long I passed out. Then he threw water on me and I'd come to. He'd put me back in the squat until I passed out again. This happened four or five times in a row." —Catherine

"He was a policeman. Who was going to arrest him? His buddies? I don't think so. He'd get a quiet warning to hold it down...that neighbors could hear us 'argue.' That's a pretty one-sided argument. The most help I got from the police was an officer [who] slipped me a card to [a domestic violence shelter] while they were talking to [her husband]. He whispered 'memorize this number

and call these people.' I did. I guess looking back, he may have saved my life. Nothing happened to him, no charges were ever filed but at least I got out." — Confirming Group Member # 4

"They [police] treated me like I was the one that beat him up. He's in the Army. Obviously, I'm not as good as him or something. That's the way they made me feel. They didn't arrest him. He's Army. He's too important. They took his word over mine because he's Army...he's been through all this training and of course, you know, he can't lie." —Opal

The courts, in their effort to encourage relationships between children and their fathers, are sometimes unwitting accomplices to the batterer in his desire to control and stalk the victim and the children. In the case of both Barbara and Penny, court-ordered visitation was ended when the abuser became aggressive with visitation center staff. Yet the court forced the women to accommodate the abuser to allow visitation, and in the case of Catherine, awarded his parents the role of supervisors during visitation. Seven others indicated that the abuser had shown no prior interest in establishing a relationship with his children until it became apparent to him that seeing the children was the only way left for him to continue a relationship with the mother. Sometimes, the abuser used the visitation as a means of threatening her with harm to her children, or an attempt to convince her to return to him. This is consistent with findings of Dalton (1999), Paymar & Pence (1983), and Zorza (1998).

"When we were kicked out of the visitation center [due to his violence], I was told I had two choices: drive [80 miles one way to another center], split the cost [in order for him] to see his kids, or agree on a neutral third party. The CPS worker called me up and says [my ex-mother in law] is going to supervise [his visitation]. That's a neutral third party? He fought me for parenting time [again] this summer [and won]. [But] he hasn't seen my kids in three months." —Catherine

"He sits there and says his kids are everything to him. Since when? He hadn't paid any attention to them since the day they were born. He tried to get me to have an abortion when I was carrying them. He told them they were stupid... that he wished they's never been born. He told my daughter that

he did everything he could to make sure she didn't live to take her first breath. Now that we have escaped from him, he says he needs them, and that they need him. Yeah, right." —Stephanie

"He went seventeen months without seeing them. When they were little, he would scream at me to keep the 'fucking little bastards' quiet. They cry when they have to visit with him. They don't want to go. They begged their attorney to get them out of having to go, but he told them it wasn't up to him. In court, he stated that all kids deserve a father. But that's what they didn't hear. He isn't a father. He's a monster." —Confirming Group Member # 5

Batterers used the court system to continue to threaten and control participants.

Nine women in the study reported being forced to go to court numerous times to answer motions filed by the abuser. Some reported having what few financial resources available to them depleted by the court and attorney fees associated with having to answer the motions. Others expressed the belief that he enjoyed having her forced to respond, and four believed it was his way to continue to see her. These issues have also been found in the work of Ayoub and colleagues (1999), Bancroft and Silverman (2000) and Paymar and Pence (1983).

"He's had me in court seventeen times in the last six months. He challenges everything, files all these motions. He's an attorney, so he knows exactly how to do that. Anyway, I have to pay my lawyer (which I can't afford) and show up. He knows my funds are about gone. It's just another way or a new way to make me miserable." —Penny

"He's always calling me back into court for one thing or another. It's always something. He tries everything he can to keep controlling me." — Confirming Group Member # 1

"He was supposed to be wanted by the court...he had an arrest warrant out for him, and he and his attorney are right there on the phone [a conference call] in the courtroom. The judge never said anything, except that he was exercising his right to be present without turning himself in. Is that right? Is that legal? Anyway, the judge lets him make a statement that he agrees with the court that our rights should be terminated because of our 'up and down' relationship. He made it sound like I had a choice, and liked being beaten up. He played the mentally ill card again. My attorney asked if he was under medication or

treatment for it again, and he just said he wasn't at that time. He's NEVER been under any treatment. There's nothing wrong with him except he's evil.
—Terri

Fifteen of the participants reported legal sanctions against their abusers that seemed to be insignificant in relationship to the seriousness of the abuse. They certainly were less than what one would expect for non-domestic assaults. Sanctions such as anger management classes, batterer's intervention services, and probation had no lasting effects toward changing their behavior. Further, the sanctions imposed on her give strength to the premise that she is being held more or less solely responsible for not only her children's well being, but his violence, as well. This is supported by findings of Dalton (1999). Dalton attributed this issue to the court not understanding the dynamics of domestic abuse, and the court not taking the crime as serious. In Donna's case the perpetrator received sanctions; not for his beating of her, but for preventing her from making an emergency 9-1-1 call. In Barbara's case, her abuser attacked her in the courthouse, with bailiffs having to restrain him. No charges for that attack ever occurred.

"He got probation. Six months. SIX MONTHS! He had three counts of domestic violence [and a weapons charge]. Me and the kids went through eight years of hell, I got minimum of a year of [proof of positive parenting] services I gotta do, [CPS] handed my kids over to foster care, and he gets probation... Last week he asked the judge if he could go hunting up north this Fall. 'Sure', the judge says... but I can't go to my aunt's funeral three counties away. Where's the justice in that?" —Confirming Group Member # 2

"[After being in jail for a few days on a second offense for domestic violence] He changed his ways for a period of time and then he went back to the way he was before. [On his second domestic violence conviction where he broke several of her bones] he got sentenced to 90 some days in jail and he was released early. My husband attacked me in the courthouse. It took six guards to get him off me. Nothing happened to him. My kids were to be at a supervised visit at the [Social Services] building. My husband had come up there drunk and all coked up and was arrested there at the [Social Services] building. Right then, she [CPS worker] should have [stopped the visitations], but she just kept letting them go on like nothing ever happened. And then, she

comes to the house and she was screaming at me...she was really upset that he was drinking... and I'm like, 'it's not my fault that he was drinking'... — Barbara

"After he [perpetrator] beat me so badly on the front lawn and I had a bruise from here to here (demonstrated a ten to twelve inch area from her jaw to just below her breast)... it was purple from him kicking me. I had a lump on my face from where he had hit me. I went to the police and filed a complaint and after a while [when] I didn't hear anything so I went to the prosecutor's office and I said is anything being done about this and they said no charges are being pressed. I [asked] why and they said they didn't think there was enough evidence. [But the other district attorney] he saw...I showed him [the bruises on] my arm and he got [me] a personal protection order and this is a lifetime one. He got it for life, so he can't come near me...isn't that awesome? [When asked if she was sure there were no charges filed, she repeated that there were none]. Although, I found out before me, he was with a women...I mean he just did this over and over and over again...before me he was with a woman and he did the same thing to her and he was put in jail four times for this same thing...but not, it never happened because of what he did to me." —Kate

"He had to go to this program for batterers. It was once a week for six weeks. He was good during that time, but beat the hell out of me two days after his last class. Think it did him any good?" —Confirming Group Member # 1

"They called it [assault with intent to do great bodily harm]...it's one step below attempted murder. It was his second offense. He choked me to unconsciousness, cracked my ribs...he got three and one half years." —Evelyn

"The prosecutor charged him with assault with intent to do bodily harm this time. That's why he got prison. The times that he was arrested before that it was for domestic violence. He never got nothing for those charges except he got ordered to a class for people who do that. It didn't help. He still just kept on doing what he always did." —Confirming Group Member # 5

"Well, at first they wanted to give him ninety days and I told them no. I told the prosecutor this man has to do at least a year. He broke my nose, my ribs, my cheekbone, my collarbone...so they sentenced him to one to three years." — Qui'Ana

"He went to jail last summer for pushing me and throwing the phone down as I was trying to call the police...that's like a felony. They sent him to jail for one night [for throwing the phone] and he got out and then served nine months probation...not for hurting me, but for throwing the phone. He had to go to anger management classes. They didn't help." —Donna

“When they first charged my ex-husband he got charged with felonious assault, domestic violence,[being a] felon in possession of a firearm, and habitual [offender] second [offense]. That was the original four charges. For some unknown reason the day before we were supposed to go to trial (keep in mind I went and testified like I was supposed to [at the original hearing] and made myself available to them), the day before trial I called the prosecuting attorney and I said do you want me to come in early so we can review the case or whatever and he said ‘oh, no...you don’t even have to be here, I offered a plea and they accepted’. Fabulous. The only charge that he got stuck with [was a] felon in possession of a firearm. They didn’t even keep the habitual second [offense] and he served eleven months on a tether.” —Catherine

Ten abusers were granted at least partial custody, even when the court was aware of his violent tendencies. Women in the study were confused over why the court would allow custody to someone who had not only beat them, but also abused their children.

The court cases listed in the literature would support that this practice is not uncommon.

“So get this... he beats me, beats the kids, and the judge says he has a right to be in their [the kids] lives. Well, he was in their lives. He yelled at them, beat them with a belt, and locked them in the basement. Yet he has rights? What about their rights? What about my right as a mom to know that this monster will never be alone with those kids? Who will protect them? This whole system stinks. It’s bad for the kids, it’s bad for me, and it’s good for him. The judge wants to make sure his rights are protected. Well what about ours? Who protects us?” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“He beat my daughter pretty severely. It took her probably a month after I moved out to grow the clumps of hair back that he had ripped out of her head. I fought visitation the whole time. The [supervised] visitation center threw us out, he violated his PPO, the police came and refused to take him to jail and the visitation center [director] told the CPS worker that he was going to snap and when he did it wouldn’t matter who was there, so we were dismissed from the visitation center.” —Catherine

“He’s educated and just puts on the charm and everybody just looks into his eyes and it’s almost as if they’re under his spell. You know he’s up to something, and you know you have to get ahead of him but nobody will let you. He has all this power and he loves it...telling me when I can talk to my son, when I can’t...when I can hug him...when I can see him. He has me on a chain that nobody else can see but it’s there.” —Penny

Fifteen participants were involved with CPS in more than one county. This is possibly due to socio-economic issues or perpetrators moving their victims and the children to avoid being investigated or charged. This was a theme presented by eight of the participants. It was another example of how perpetrators manipulated systems, and isolated their families from getting assistance.

“Whenever the law or FIA or somebody would start ‘snooping around’ as he called it, we would move. He’d quit his job, spout off with some crazy plan and off we’d go. One year the kids were in three different schools. I went two years without knowing one single soul good enough to say more than ‘hi’ to. Where was I supposed to find help? I didn’t even KNOW anybody, and I wasn’t allowed a phone and couldn’t go anywhere unless he was with me.” —Terri

“We moved around a lot. As soon as he thought somebody was suspicious, he would pack us up and we would be out of there. It didn’t take him long to realize where he wasn’t going to get into any trouble if the cops showed up.” —Stephanie

Theme # 13: Disparate treatment by systems between the mothers and their abusers was evident. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Iris, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Opal, Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Seventeen of the women in the study stated being perplexed by the extensive requirements systems placed on them, while their perpetrator escaped responsibility. They saw this as evidence that there were two sets of rules, and they were on the short end of the deal. All but three of the women in this study were required to complete substantial corrective plans designed by CPS, resulting in the loss of their children should they not comply. These were legal agreements made between CPS and the participants, and were used to evaluate their fitness to continue parenting their children. No such plans were required of the abusers, despite in most cases, the perpetrator enjoying joint custody. This finding is supported by Kaufmann-Kantor and Little (2002). Women were

placed in a situation where they had no choice but to sign the agreement or lose their children. They expressed feeling being punished for something the batterer did, and angry at his lack of any meaningful sanctions to change his behavior.

"I had all these things I had to do. I was accused of being a bad mother. I had to 'earn' my kids back. Nobody from CPS even talked to him about what he did. If I failed to protect my kids, then he is responsible for putting us all in that situation. Wouldn't you think somebody should tell him it's his fault? They ordered me into counseling. I don't mind that, because I'm learning a lot. But they acted like there was something wrong with me. What the counseling class is teaching me is that there isn't anything wrong with me. There's something wrong with him...but to be told that I was not in my right mind wasn't fair to me. Where's his counseling? He's the one with the problem. Where was he when I was ordered into a parenting class? He has the kids every other weekend and two nights a week. I have to prove I am a good parent, but he doesn't. I took classes, I did my homework, I reported into my caseworker like I was supposed to. I have my records laid out in court for everyone to see, and he just sits there. I'm obviously a more knowledgeable parent now than what I was. But I have always loved my kids. I protected them when furniture was flying all over the house. I was the one who made sure I was getting punched around and not them. Who watches him when he's with the kids to make sure he's caring for them like he should? The only thing I don't understand is if we both have equal rights as parents, which is what the court said, and he beat them and I didn't, why am I ordered into a parenting plan in order to have them in my home. He has to do nothing, and gets them without question." —Stephanie

"I feel like I'm being punished for something somebody else did. It was like [systems] turned around on me instead of my husband. Nobody looked at my husband. The whole court thing... nobody ever questioned my husband." —Donna

"I have this parenting plan, see? I have to go to counseling, I have to have my house visits by the caseworker. I have a wrap-around program. I have all these things that I have promised to do in writing or I lose my kids. What did I do? You know what he got? An anger management class. He went three Saturday mornings and then he was done. He's the reason we're all in this mess. I'm jumping around all over town to prove I'm a good mom, and he goes to a Saturday class. Unbelievable. I had all these things I had to do. I was accused of being a bad mother. I had to 'earn' my kids back. Nobody from CPS even talked to him about what he did. When they [kids] would see him for a weekend, they were not the same little girls I dropped off [for the visit]. At daycare, ...my daughter had a nervous breakdown. Prior to the [last visit], she [daughter] talked to her therapist and things were fine. After the visit, my

daughter wouldn't say a word. Wouldn't look at her, wouldn't get off my lap. Neither one of my kids will sleep in their room with the door closed. I had to go get brighter night lights because they didn't want to be in the dark. I was in the process of getting my oldest to stop wetting the bed at night...not anymore. You know, and I can't get anyone to understand that this is all related. [After the visit] my oldest daughter, she was potty trained...she went back to wetting the bed at night. I had to put her back in pull-ups. I had to re-train my four-year-old. And people [CPS] are just 'oh, you know it's just a stage.' No, it's not a stage. It's been a stage that she stares off into space and locks up her legs...like the lights are on but nobody's home? It's not normal." —Catherine

"He held the baby over the stairs like he was going to drop her...he ripped her out of my arms and took him from me and when I called the cops, he brought them back. And a year and a half ago he hit me and went to jail for it and he was supposed to go back to jail and he never did. They just slapped him on the wrist and sent him to his mom's. Nothing....he went to a weekend class. You know it was like one weekend that he had to go to a domestic violence class...[he was] supposed to go to therapy...never went to therapy. He was ordered into an anger management class...[according to the facilitator] the reason they let him pass the class was that he had quit complaining about his ex-wife. He went through less than what my daughter and I did. They [CPS] said I failed to protect them. They [CPS] weren't there I arranged for them to stay at mom's because I knew it [a beating] was coming. They weren't there when I hid them out at a friend's to prevent him from killing us all. They have no clue what I did...where were they when I needed help?" —Michelle

"What I don't get is the fact that nobody even talked to him. I mean nobody ever said, 'hey you shouldn't do that'. Why is that? Why am I the bad guy here? If he is wrong, why doesn't somebody tell him that? The caseworker never even talked to him once." —Confirming Group Member # 2

"She [daughter, a victim of incest] started showing like and I came home from the hospital and she was throwing up and so I asked her 'is she pregnant'? I thought it was a boy from school or something, but she don't date. She told me it was my husband...then I called our family physician and I told him she was raped and needed to be seen. They told me that as far as protective services, the Child Abuse Council and the police...they all told me that as far as they were concerned all the proof they has was his words against hers." —Amy Ed note: Amy facilitated a paternity test that proved her daughter was a victim of incest. At the time of that test, no charges were pending against the perpetrator, and no investigation was ongoing. Because of the results of the test, the perpetrator was tried and convicted.

"The CPS worker, she bounces back and forth. She tells my husband [the perpetrator] she wanted to take the kids from me because I 'can't seem to stay

away from abusive men' and she tells me it's because of my ex-husband's past and she tells everybody else something different." —Linda

To make matters worse, thirteen of the workers never even confronted the perpetrator regarding his violence and effect of that violence on the children or adult victims in the home.

This failure to confront the abuser further condoned the abusive behavior and supported the victims' belief that they were alone and without support.

Theme # 14: Workers exhibited varying levels of understanding of domestic violence.

Barbara, Catherine, Evelyn, Faith, Helen, Iris, Kate, Linda, Qui'Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Twelve women recounted statements and actions of some CPS workers that clearly indicated a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse of some of the workers. Aron and Olson (1997) came to the same conclusion. However, some workers performed admirably.

"My caseworker asked me why I thought my husband beats me up. When I told him that he didn't need a reason, he said that I must be missing something." —Stephanie

"They took my kids from my house after he left me for dead and gave them to his parents. Where do you think he learned that stuff? My parents begged to have the kids while I was in the hospital. All the time the police are waiting to interview me until I got out of intensive care. His dad showed up at the hospital and said if I gave them any evidence against their son they wouldn't let me see my kids." —Confirming Group Member # 2

"You know, I don't think they really understand or maybe they just don't care. Don't they get that if I'm in danger, and I'm the mom, the kids aren't safe either? How about if we punish the guy that's responsible?" Confirming Group Member # 1

Eight participants experienced different, often opposite responses to their situation depending on which worker was providing the services. This was particularly true when

it came to accessing resources required to live. This finding was also supported by the work of Davis and Srinivasan (1995) and Zorza (1991).

“The two workers I worked with were just the opposite of each other. The first one did absolutely nothing but harass and threaten me. She never offered me anything but more grief. The second one... the man I have now, he saved me. I’m serious... he literally saved my life. He offered me all kinds of help and support. Without him, I’d probably be dead. He had come to my home and he had told me there was abuse going on and he recognized it...because I’m the type of person he studied in school...I’m a classic case or whatever. And so him and two officers had escorted me out of the house and they went and told my mother-in law that if she was to file any police reports against me or get me for kidnapping [again] that they would get her for child endangerment, failure to protect, neglect and some other charges, and she would get it for filing a false police report...and she is not to bother me or my children. ” —Barbara

“In [county name] I had a worker who wouldn’t return my calls, wouldn’t answer any questions...just no help at all. When I got here, the case was transferred to this county. My new caseworker is really fabulous. She’s fair, she listens, she offers encouragement, and whatever help she can get for us, she does.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

[In the first county] “the CPS woman came to the hotel where I was staying under a different name [for safety purposes] and she said ‘I’m going to take your kids.’ I mean that was the first thing out of her mouth. By the end of it, though, she had completely changed her attitude. With [second county] that’s a whole ‘nother story. He was a lunatic. He constantly compared myself and my ex-husband to himself and his ex-wife. I don’t think he beats his wife so I don’t see the similarity but he did. They gave him [perpetrator] an enormous amount of time to complete some very simple things. He used to get a once a week phone call with my oldest daughter and [he] told my daughter that I was going to put him in jail, that I was bad, and how did she feel about that and putting her in a terrible spot. I took the tape of that conversation to the CPS worker and it was like...nothing...it didn’t matter. He [CPS worker] wants me to help him with his master’s thesis [about how no harm is done] when in my situation. Oh Lord, he has no business being a PS worker!” —Catherine

“They’s much better here [than in another county]. All the trouble I had was in [the first county]. I got an apartment, I got my kids back, the judge says I’m doing good and I’m getting my parenting program finished. The caseworker here is pretty nice, too. She encourages me. She treats me like a person. She doesn’t like blame me or anything. They’s much better [here].” —Iris

“[In this county] they gave me referrals to different agencies to help me...so it wouldn’t be such a financial burden. Because, I’m a single parent, and they’ve just been very helpful...it’s been very positive.” —Kate

“[This new CPS worker, she understands]. She told me about other cases. Not names, or anything, just familiar cases that...and I could...why do people I guess don’t believe me and I guess, you know, I’ve been watching a lot of different...I’ve talked to people and they say most moms don’t do what I done in this short amount of time [completing her parenting plan]. I was in classes seven days a week...did what I had to do.” —Qui’Ana

“The problem is that I’m supposed to leave him, but without the money to pay the rent, pay the bills, feed the kids and all...I couldn’t leave. But he [CPS worker] just doesn’t seem to understand. We have nothing. All I am asking for is that if you require me to leave, how about getting me what we need to survive?” —Evelyn

“My worker is fabulous. If I need something, he is right there. He helped me get into transitional housing, he hooked me up with employment counseling, he made sure we knew where to get food if we needed it. He’s just super!” —Barbara

“[CPS worker}...promised me, you know...we’ll help you financially, we’ll help you with anything you need but she never did it. ..never once bothered to help me after she made commitments to me that she would help...with my rent, food stamps and Medicaid and stuff... you know, I had eviction notices and all that plus court. I’ve had all those decisions by myself and nobody was there to help me like they said they would.” —Linda

Five participants had dissimilar responses from caseworkers, the courts and police within the same county. Some of the women indicated that when their worker changed, they received almost opposite levels of support and understanding.

“I used to have a really great caseworker. She took the time to help me think through things with my kids. She would encourage me when things were tough... just really great. But she moved. The one I have now is so cold and crabby. She keeps telling me she can’t wait to retire. I wish she’d hurry up, because I can’t wait, either.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“I have had a total of four caseworkers in three counties. I can tell you that they are all different. Some are just about blaming... they never seem to get anything [understand]...some just want to get the cases closed. Then there are some really caring ones who get what’s going on, and want to do whatever they can.” —Confirming Group Member # 5

“He [assailant] broke into my home on Mother’s Day...I was working two jobs and I come home and my kitchen table was in the trees, my clothes were all over the yard...I had clothes in the trees. My brother was at the house and my husband had threatened to kill him and take my children, so my brother went out through the back yard and went to the neighbors and called the police. [He told them my husband was] breaking into my house and [that] I had a restraining order and the cop told my brother there is nothing they can do unless he hits me. [In this county] they arrested him out of the house. He was arrested for second offense domestic violence and third degree child abuse and felonious assault.” —Barbara

“When she [CPS worker finally did] come to the house, and she looks down and says ‘don’t get too comfortable here, you’re not staying.’ I said, ‘okay, why?’ and she said it wasn’t big enough. It was a two bedroom apartment. [But] each kid had their own bedroom. I [slept] on the couch. She said it wasn’t acceptable. The judge threw that right out. He said as long as the kids have beds and dressers and lights and gas, leave her alone. But she brought it up every time that she wanted me out of there.” —Qui’Ana

Theme # 14: Participants eventually lost faith in systems to assist them. Amy, Barbara, Catherine, Evelyn, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris, Jackie, Kate, Linda, Michelle, Nancy Penny, Qui’Ana, Rita, Stephanie, Terri

Eighteen participants indicated they had no faith in systems to assist them. Six of the ten participants of color were included in this group. Three African American participants made their decision to cooperate with prosecution based on racial loyalty. According to Jordan (2006), “A key contributor to the high intra-family homicide rates in the African American community is the negative relationship between them and the criminal justice system” (p. 15). Jordan goes on to explain that racism is a higher priority issue than domestic abuse for many within the community, and women may choose racial loyalty over assailant accountability for that reason. This is in line with the findings of Fagan (1996), Franklin (2000), Hampton and colleagues (1998), Hampton and Yung (1996) and Sullivan & Rumptz (1994).

“I couldn’t send their daddy to prison...that’s just not right...there’s too many of us in there already and babies need their Daddy’s...even if they ain’t the best. How would that look... how would I explain that? They [CPS] don’t know me. They don’t know my family. We’re good people. They treated me like I was the reason the kids got hurt. They should have taken it out on him, not me.” — Iris

Others attributed their lack of faith in systems to their prior, poor experiences with those systems. This lack of faith was due to their seeking and being denied assistance in the past. This issue resulted in many of the participants believing that it was best to avoid asking for help. They not only viewed it as a waste of time, but also believed that the ‘assistance’ they received, at their own request, ended in more pain and suffering than what they experienced in the relationship. This is consistent with the findings of Bancroft (2001), Carter (1995) and Waller (2001).

“I knew nobody would help me. I had called the police, asked for help in removing him. They would always say that he had rights to the property. They never believed me when I tried to explain the danger he was to all of us.” — Confirming Group Member # 2

“Just don’t trust anybody. If you find yourself in a position where you need help, don’t call CPS...don’t call the police. I would have to be three-quarters dead before I would call anybody for help...the police, a judge, CPS, anybody. I don’t trust any of them. Look what they did to us. I wouldn’t call them if my life depended on it. I should have gotten a gun and shot him. We would have all been better off if I had made that choice instead. The Congress or somebody has got to stop these people from making innocent people out to be the bad guys. The judges need to send [perpetrators] away so they won’t hurt anyone anymore. Instead of him getting sent to prison, my kids got sent to a foster home. From there, they go to a home where they have a new set of parents. I lose my kids and have to hide out in another state so I can keep the one last child I have. We got punished...the kids and I. He didn’t get anything. Where’s the justice in that?” —Terri

“I had a PPO, and he was in my face the whole time. The police said there wasn’t anything they could do about it because they never saw him. It took them two and a half hours to send out a car the last time I called. Why bother?” Confirming Group Member # 1

Women in the study were fairly consistent (thirteen of twenty) in stating that their experiences with systems would lead them to encourage other women to avoid contacting these systems for help. They attributed their mistrust to workers expecting them to fix his behavior. Terri advocated for women to arm themselves and kill their abusers. She indicated to the researcher that since her children were removed from her and being raised by a stranger anyway, she wished she had killed her husband. Had she killed him at least she could feel that she really did everything she could to protect the children. The findings of Lyon (1999) indicate that women who kill their abusers are more likely to be believed, treated with empathy by police and courts and more likely to be viewed sympathetically by jurors than those who are perceived to have stayed in the relationship out of choice.

“I learned not to ask for help. I learned that through asking and not getting. When I asked the judge for help, I got a PPO that no one would honor. When I asked CPS to help me deal with him, I got a parenting plan laid out for me as if I were the problem...he got nothing. I asked the police for protection. They blamed me or said they couldn’t do anything. I asked the Friend of the Court for relief from making my kids go to see him. They said he had rights. I’m scared and leery of protective services. [But] this worker I have now...he’s really helpful...and I’m not as frightened as I was. But would I refer anybody to them? Not a chance.” —Catherine

“They came in and told me I should try to keep him calm...that I needed to keep my kids from him when he was having one of his ‘spells’. They said I should get him mental health services and keep peace in the house. I would tell women in my situation not to ask for help except for the Center [domestic violence service provider]. I would tell them if you can’t or won’t kill him, get up and disappear with your kids. Go to another state. Find somebody that will take you in someplace where he can’t find you. Change your name...do whatever, but don’t trust nobody.” —Terri

“I was very fearful because I didn’t know what they could do to me and they [during an earlier investigation] threatened me with jail [on why she didn’t call CPS for help]. I needed help. I needed some kind of support...some kind of help to protect those kids. They were horrible...nightmares. If someone was the least bit intrepid about going to get some help...if they were fearful at all, they

would just compound that. I just gave up on them...they were no help whatsoever...none. They were useless. I'd hate to see somebody go through the things that I had to go through. When they say they are there to help, that's what they're supposed to be doing.” —Kate

“When the police got there, he [perpetrator] told them I was bi-polar and had been off my medication. I have never had any mental illness. He said that's why I was 'confused and hysterical'. From that day on, he'd say 'go ahead and call the cops...you know what will happen'. The he'd laugh. Sure enough, when I called them again he told them the same thing. They believed him. I heard an officer tell another 'it's that nutcase again'. I am not mentally ill. I have never been bi-polar or anything else. But he convinced them that I was. He [also] claimed he had Gulf War Syndrome...post-traumatic stress disorder from the war, and that he had flashbacks. Believe it or not, that worked. He claimed I agitated him and he had trouble knowing where he was. The police were all sympathetic, and instead of arresting him for beating me up, they told me I needed to be more understanding and try to keep things calm for him. Yeah...unbelievable, huh?” —Stephanie

“My daughter called the police on him. He was released on jail from a domestic violence [charge]. He wasn't there [in jail] for ten days and we called the police [after he attacked her upon his release] and told them he was on probation for domestic [violence].. 'he's done it again' and they wouldn't arrest him. Or [at other times when she called for help] they'd take him down the road and say 'okay, just walk home and cool off.' But he should have been arrested. Five times out of ten times we would call on the police and that's when protective services finally jumped in and my daughter had the courage to tell them first. I was afraid again...I said 'no, he didn't hit me, but then I though 'unh-unh', and I finally told them that yes, what he's been doing. Then [CSP] took me to court the next week and said I failed to protect my children and they took my kids away.” —Qui'Ana

Theme # 15: When participants were appropriately supported, they were able to leave

Amy, Barbara, Donna, Evelyn, Geena, Helen, Iris, Kate, Michelle, Nancy,

Qui'Ana, Rita

Participants listed validation of workers from all systems as critical to their ability to escape the situation. The five women who indicated that their workers believed and supported them indicated that support was a critical factor for them.

“The most helpful thing was this last worker, he believed me. Just to hear him say he believed me... that was the most help ever, because then I knew there was hope that someone would be able to help us. He was the first person... of all those people I told... he was the first to believe me. I can trust him. He trusted me. That was the beginning of our healing process.” — Rita

“They were really good. I couldn’t have asked for anything better from the police department.” —Geena

“The detective that arrested my husband...now he was wonderful. He was really good with us. He worked with us fair and I have a lot of respect for him.” —Qui’Ana

“My caseworker placed the kids with my mom. I was worried that she would let him see the kids because she never did believe that [perpetrator] would ever do that to me. But the caseworker, he explained to her that lots of times the family doesn’t really know the person. They may think they do, but they don’t. It’s all part of the lie. After that, mom’s attitude changed. That was really helpful, because I needed her, and she finally was able to see it.” Confirming Group Member # 4

Participants were grateful to workers from all systems that confronted the abuser with his responsibility for the situation. Three women and one confirming group member indicated that workers who confronted the abuser bolstered their belief that there was hope for them.

“Just to hear someone stand up to him... tell him he had no right to treat us like he did. That was so healing. Nobody ever challenged him before. My worker actually said ‘Mr. [husband], your behavior toward your wife and these children will not be tolerated. You can and should go to prison, and if I have anything to say about it, you will.’ Wow, that felt so good... it made me think that maybe there was hope. She gave me hope.” Confirming Group Member # 4

Participants were successful in safely escaping the situation when workers and judges acted on a clear understanding of her entrapment within that relationship. Four of the women indicated that when a police officer, caseworker, judge or attorney recognized the dynamics of her situation, they felt supported and able to act.

“The caseworker, she knew I was trapped. She sat down with me, said she knew I was scared, but that she could help. She didn’t wait for me to tell her that I didn’t have any place to go. She just said ‘let’s talk about some options you have that will break down all the reasons that you can’t be safe.’ We went through all the fear stuff... where I could go for shelter, what kind of help they could get us, what kind of protection I could expect... all that stuff. I felt like she would stick with me through it all. She did.” —Confirming Group Member # 4

Ten participants expressed appreciation for being offered information on services available in the community, and two participants felt very supported by two particular services provided by DHS: wrap-around and family reunification. Wrap around is a coordinated, community-based case management program that engages services in a systemic manner that are specific to the issues that clients present, and ensure all service workers are on the same page with expectations. Family reunification programming is a systematic, graduated process of re-integrating the mother and her children into a family unit.

“I have wrap around services. They come right to the house and everything. They make sure I know about things in the community that can help me get back on my feet. I’m learning a lot and getting better every day. They put me in two classes... the support group and the parenting class. The support group is more like talking to a counselor because they have all been through the same things I have so it helps a lot. ” —Donna

“What was most helpful to me is that he made sure I knew about the shelter and the woman’s center. Without them, I wouldn’t have made it.” —Confirming Group Member #3

“The best thing is my wrap around program. It makes it easy. I have all these services and only have one person I have to deal with. He arranges for everything. He wants us to succeed as a family. I know that I have learned a lot, and I think in cases of wrap around, the program works really good.” —Rita

“I went through the family re-unification program. That was the best thing that anybody could ever go through. They help you with anything you need.” —Helen

“They steered us in the right area for counseling...but what was not helpful was they took and shoved it down my throat.” —Amy

Four participants and all five confirming group members identified human service workers who assisted in securing housing resources and credited them as essential to their ability to escape the relationship.

“I needed a place to stay, and they got me into the shelter. They worked with me to get an apartment I could afford. They saw that I got childcare money so that I could work without leaving the kids alone.” —Barbara

“I needed everything... a house, a car, food, everything. They made sure I got what I had to have. I’m still working on the car, but until then, they give me bus passes when I’m short.” —Confirming Group Member # 4

Three participants appreciated transportation assistance, both to a safe place in an emergency, and also those that led to their independence.

“He picked me up, drove me to the school where we got the kids, and took us to the shelter. He didn’t have to do that. But by doing that, he saved my life.” —Barbara

“I needed a way to get to work. My caseworker found a donated car that I am driving now. She helped me get the insurance. It isn’t a Cadillac, but it gets me where I’m supposed to be!” —Confirming Group Member # 2

Three participants were grateful to those workers who advocated on her behalf with law enforcement, and believed that the intervention was key to having the perpetrator held responsible for his violence, and safeguarding the woman and her children.

“He [CPS caseworker] talked to the police. He explained that I was in danger and needed to have police protection. He asked them to do whatever with patrol cars to keep a watch on the house. He told them I got a PPO and that he hoped that they would make sure that if he [perp.] came to the house, or tried to contact me in the shelter, that they [police] would arrest him.” —Barbara

Two participants also described caseworkers that assisted them in seeking legal remedies leading to their safety.

“My FLA worker...she took me over to the courthouse and helped me get the PPO. When we went in to talk to the judge, she came with. He listened to her talk about how I am in danger, and the kids are in danger, and he believed her. When I had asked him by myself the year before, he said no. With her there, I got my protection order. I was scared to go to the court. I felt like it would just make him more angry and that he’d get to us and maybe even kill us. My caseworker drove me to the court and she told the judge that she needed him to grant me temporary sole custody and to do whatever he could to have the police keep an eye on my house, in case he tried to get back in. She was terrific.” — Confirming Group Member # 2

Two participants appreciated those workers who advocated with in-laws to ensure her protection from harassment and threats as a result of her cooperation with CPS and law enforcement.

“My caseworker actually went with the police to them and said that if they continued to call and harass me, keep threatening me, he would see that they were prosecuted. The calls immediately stopped. No more calls in the middle of the night... no more calls at work... they just stopped. That was the extra mile. He’ll never know how much that meant to me.” —Barbara

Three participants who received information on what they could expect and the steps in the processes of CPS were far more likely to cooperate with services and experienced significantly less anxiety and mistrust.

“The hardest thing is that things happen that you might not know about. Like they have these steps that they have to go through, and I have these things that I need to do. If he didn’t explain the steps to me, you know, the things that we would be doing, I’d be lost.” —Rita

Six participants expressed being unsure of themselves and their ability to provide with limited resources, and stated they were often exhausted from the processes. Those workers offering encouragement and support were seen as partners in safeguarding the children and a source of strength and hope.

“She said that I wasn’t a bad mom. She said she knew I loved my kids. In group, I hear other women talk about how they were told how bad they were...what a failure they were as moms. I was just so lucky that she got my

case. She's never accused me or said I was bad." —Confirming Group Member # 4

Two participants whose children were removed expressed being relieved when their children were placed with those individuals they themselves had used to safeguard the children from the abuse. Additionally, these women indicated that made them more likely to work cooperatively with systems as a result of the consideration.

"The best thing they [CPS] did was to let my mom and dad take the kids. You know, at least it was with people they knew and a place they were familiar with. I understand that they needed to like figure out what happened, make sure I wasn't hurting the kids and stuff. I was just so thankful that I knew they were with people who cared about them." —Confirming Group Member # 5

Two participants who had regular contact with workers regarding the placement of their children, and their related well being were significantly less anxious, and were able to cope with the situation far better than those who were kept in the dark.

"She was really good about taking my calls. She also called me to let me know the kids were going to school, that she had talked with the teachers, and that they knew not to let him [perp] take the kids without their permission. She brought me out some pictures they drew, and took some presents to them from me. That meant a lot to us." —Confirming Group Member # 4

"He let me know about all the hearings and stuff. He was pretty good about that. I felt like he wanted to make sure the kids and I stayed close." —Rita

When workers supported women in court, women reported better outcomes for themselves and their children. Barbara had such help, and believes that made a significant difference in her experiences.

"My caseworker is going to testify for me in court. He says that he will do whatever he has to in order to make sure that my husband never sees those kids or me again. He's been on my side every step of the way. I couldn't ask for anything more than what he's done. I guess I'm really lucky." —Barbara

When law enforcement officers recognized the danger participants were in when they attempted to get help, women felt supported, safer and better able to escape.

Barbara and four others expressed that police officers who protected them and held the batterer accountable allowed them to relax from their hyper-vigilant state.

“They just said, ‘Buddy, you’re going to jail. That was it. I showed them my PPO and that was it. The policeman asked me if I was all right, looked at the bruises on my arms, checked on the kids and took him off. No question... no hassle. Just took him off. After his release, they made sure they kept an eye on the house. That made it easier to sleep at night.” —Barbara

Participant advice for workers

Participants offered advice to workers who will face women like them in the future. They firmly believe that these suggestions will assist workers who will interact with women in their situation in the future.

1. Don’t assume I’m the enemy. Amy, Faith, Iris, Terri

Participants were unanimous in stating that they felt at times, as if CPS workers believed that they condoned, and in some cases, contributed to the violence of the perpetrator. They indicated nothing could be further from the truth. They asked that they be considered partners in the effort to safeguard their children. They expressed the fact that they wanted the same thing: what was best for their children.

“Please don’t treat me like I’m the enemy. I’m not. I want everything good for my kids. If you do, too, then we should be able to work together. That’s what’s helpful. I’ll do what ever you say I need to...just don’t think I’m against you, I’m not.” —Faith

“If they really want to help people, they really do need to work in a partnership. They need to say ‘Okay, we’re here to help you find the right pathways, not to introduce you to another stumbling block’.” —Amy

2. Don’t issue threats up front. Amy, Barbara, Faith, Geena, Helen, Iris

Threats issued up front made participants believe that they needed to defend themselves, and some expressed that feeling led them to keep from cooperating with CPS. They expressed the concern that decisions were being made without workers

having critical information that may trigger a different result. Five participants expressed this was critical to gaining the trust and cooperation of adult victims.

“Right off the bat, it was ‘we’re going to have to take the kids. They didn’t know anything about what was going on. I just panicked... I mean, it was like ‘wait a minute... do you even want to know what’s going on here for real’? They need to step back and get some truth first.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

“I would have done a little more investigating...talking to family members, really to get a gist of how the family is or how they operate. To be charged with neglect...that’s worse than having robbery or murder on your record. That means you can’t provide for something you gave birth to.” —Geena

“I wouldn’t have started off with the threats. I would get my information first.” —Amy

“I would question. I would question a lot of things. You can’t go in there with one frame of mind and say, ‘okay, lady you did this.’ You have to be two-sided. You should go in there with two frames of mind and say ‘okay, this is what we have...this is what you’re telling me. You can’t automatically accuse someone and say you’re guilty.’ —Helen

3. Gather information before making your decisions. Amy, Barbara, Catherine,

Faith, Geena, Iris, Michelle, Nancy

Eight participants encouraged workers to investigate more fully before acting.

They believed that workers automatically assumed that they were complicit, if not responsible directly for the abuse.

“Don’t just automatically think, ‘well, if she’s in the same house with him, she must be in on it.’ We need help. We need support. We don’t need to be treated like a criminal.” —Catherine

“The threats, intimidation, not offering any services...[she] already had her mind made up before she even...it’s like she already made her judgment, so whatever...” —Barbara

4. Show some empathy. Faith, Iris, Michelle, Nancy, Qui’Ana

Five participants expressed the importance of CSP workers recognizing that she was also a victim, and that she needed help. An empathetic response was important for women to be able to experience hope that she could escape safely with her children, and receive support along the way.

“They [CPS] need to realize the woman is in this... the children aren’t just the only victims and if the woman is having it hard, that’s gonna make it hard on the kids. The last thing you need is somebody to blame you... to act maybe like you’re just dirt. I did protect my kids. They have a good Mom. I just need somebody to understand that I had no choices. I was stuck. I needed help and support to get out, not a lecture.” —Nancy

5. Do no more than is absolutely necessary. Amy, Faith, Geena, Iris, Michelle, Nancy

Six participants stated that workers not do anything more than what is absolutely necessary to provide immediate safety for the children.

“Maybe if they just took enough time to find out what’s really true. Maybe if they have to take the kids away until they figure it all out, okay, but then put them with somebody that they know. Maybe if they only do what they have to until they figure it out. It’s so upsetting to everybody when they have to go to... with strangers.” —Geena

“I believe what I would have done, because I’m going to school right now for social work...and I believe what I would have done was went in and spoke with the parent [and find out] what happened. Make sure you have something to back that [accusation] up, you know? I wouldn’t have went right [and] accused the parent of doing anything wrong to the child. I believe I would have let the parent stay with her child because that’s what the kids want...they want to be with their mother or whoever. They want to be with their parent when they are hurt. They don’t want to be with nobody else, especially someone who is not familiar to them. So that’s what I think I would have done... ask questions before I went in and accused.” —Faith

6. Don’t label me or my children. Michelle, Nancy, Qui’Ana

Participants were further victimized when described as defective or dysfunctional.

At times, these labels were used in front of their children. This was cited by three

participants, all of whom were offended by the adjectives used to describe them and their children.

“In court and in the reports there were all kinds of names for us. We were ‘confrontational, dysfunctional... ineffective’. We were labeled like meat. I mean, that’s so hurtful to hear your kids and yourself... your family life described in labels. We’re people. We’re not problems.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

7. Please respect my culture. Amy, Geena, Iris, Linda, Rita

Four of the ten minority participants and one white participant requested that cultural considerations be made when placing their children, and indicated that services need to be individualized according to each family’s situation, and not using a cookie-cutter approach.

“Being black, there are some things that are what we do. It’s not that I think I know better than anybody else, but I teach my kids to be proud of who they are. When they went to another family, they was white. I’m not saying that they was bad, but they didn’t fix foods my kids was used to. They missed our Christmas family dinners and church. They missed Kwanza. Those are important things. They mean something to us as a family... a black family. I don’t think that a white family could give them what they was used to.” —Confirming Group Member # 1

“They are judging everybody by one standard. Not everybody is the same. They’re just putting me into [a] classification, [yet] they have never been through it and [say] this is how we’re going to proceed. They can’t understand every single thing according to this one little guideline.” —Amy

8. Explain CPS processes. Michelle, Opal, Qui’Ana

Participants believe an understanding of the processes involved with CPS allows women to cooperate, make decisions that are best for themselves and their children, and limit mistrust and misunderstandings. This was an issue cited by three participants, one of whom was illiterate in written language, and one was blind.

“Here you are... you think you might lose your kids. You don’t understand what the meetings [CPS hearings] are about. You don’t know why you’re going

to court or what will happen. Somebody says ‘sign this or you lose your kids.’ You sign it, but you don’t know what it means. If they can just take a few minutes and say ‘Okay, this is what will happen... or this is what might happen’... at least then you can be prepared.” —Confirming Group # 1

9. Explain legal processes. Amy, Evelyn, Michelle, Opal

Legal processes are difficult for lay people to understand. Participants were unanimous in expressing confusion about what was happening within the legal setting, what the consequences of the processes may be, and what rights they had or didn’t have. The issues for those that offered this advice were literacy and blindness. Evelyn, however, voiced concern that she was unprepared for court, and believed that proper preparation may have resulted in a different and better outcome than what she experienced.

“Okay, so you get this paper that says you have to go to court. You don’t know what will happen. Will you get to see the kids? Will they decide where the kids will live? Do they decide who can see them? It was a guessing game...a horrible guessing game. I never knew from one time to the next what was going to happen.” —Evelyn

“There are parents out there that don’t know where to get the help or they are expected to just do everything right. If you don’t know where to go...how are you going to get that help? As far as the legal stuff, they [need to tell you] this is what’s going to happen. This is what’s going to happen during that hearing. They don’t explain to you what’s going to be the long-term thing if it’s done this way [or that]. I showed up at this hearing and the judge looks at me [and asks] ‘do you understand what a respondent is and that you are not a respondent’? I have never even heard the word. I say ‘no, nobody explained that to me’.” —Amy

10. If you have to remove my kids, place them with my family or those I know I can trust to care for them. Donna, Evelyn, Michelle

Three participants described a strategy of seeking out safe individuals with whom they could leave their children at times when the perpetrator was most likely to assault the women and her children. The women in the study indicated that if children needed to

be removed, that workers consider placing the children with those individuals who had provided a safety net prior to CPS intervention.

“Sometimes they don’t think they have a choice. They think it’s best to take the kids until it all gets worked out. I understand that’s their job. But when there’s family that are willing to take the kids, do that. If they go into foster care then they lose all their security...family’s a security for them. I had a worker rip my baby from my arms. No bottle, no blanket, none of her toys. She went someplace with people who didn’t know what she liked, what her routines were, how she did things. She wasn’t even a year old. She must have been terrified. I cried and cried for her. I knew she had to be scared to death. She didn’t trust people she didn’t know... you know, she was at that age where they don’t want nobody but their mama. Now why would they do something like that? Who does that help?” —Confirming Group Member # 1

11. If you need to remove my kids, keep me informed of how they are. Donna,

Evelyn, Michelle

Three participants requested that workers who do remove children stay connected to the mothers, giving them periodic information on how the children are, and the status of their cases. Mothers who had that type of relationship with their workers reported less anxiety and more incentive to cooperate with services.

“Just don’t leave me in the dark. That’s the worst thing...not knowing. I got to know that my kids are okay... that they are eating, sleeping, going to school, getting comfort and love. They are with people they don’t know. What is being done to comfort them? How are they? Are they okay... are they sick... do they know what’s happening? Are they crying? Are they together? It was the worst kind of nightmare...the wondering. If they can keep somebody from going through that... that would be good.” —Confirming Group Member # 2

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Fitness of the Theories:

This study was inductive in nature in relation to the assumptions within the theoretical framework of the two foundation theories: Neo-feminism and Human Ecology. Neo-feminist theory assumptions include

Oppression: Women in the study described being oppressed by their assailant and ecosystems designed to protect them and their children.

Gender as a basic organizing concept: Women in the study were held to different standards and received disparate treatment as related to their expected roles and behaviors.

Class and race as organizing concepts: Women in the study responded to their situations in ways that were framed by racial experiences and access to resources.

Centrality, normalcy and value of female experiences: Participants reported having their experiences ignored, denied, devalued and were silenced across systems.

Gender relations as a component of analysis: The women in the study had little support from workers not educated on the dynamics of abuse within the family.

Women and family are inseparable: Women in the study were held almost solely responsible for the welfare of their children, to the exclusion of the male in the family unit. They were expected to act in all-knowing and all powerful in their parenting.

Women are valued only for their contribution to the family: When women in the study behaved in ways that defied the norm that they always can and are expected to protect their children, they were viewed as defective.

Human Ecological assumptions include

Systems are interdependent: Women and their children represented in this study were reliant on systemic support. They fared poorly when those systems experienced disconnect in philosophy, perspectives, and awareness as they related to the reality of domestic abuse.

Systems are interrelated: The interaction with one system often resulted in the intervention services of other systems. In the case of the women in the study, related systems sometimes joined forces against her, using similar faulty paradigms.

Families are systems: As the families represented in the study responded to the violence by their assailant, they acted as systems would be expected. They processed feedback, adapted, and acted based on cost-benefit analyses.

Environments change: The nature of the relationships recounted by participants changed over time, as did their belief that systems would support them, and their ability to access such services.

Systems purposely adapt: As the environment changed for families represented in the study, they adapted using cost-benefit analysis, purposeful decision-making, and adjusting their behaviors, perceived realities and expectations accordingly.

System interaction occurs at a variety of levels: Micro, meso, exo, and macro: As individuals each player within the family assessed and adapted to the violence, using coping mechanisms that either were based on surviving the violence, or in the case of the

abuser, perpetuating it. At the meso level, the family members interested in living free of the violence attempted to interact with the abuser in ways that would limit or avert the negative consequences of the violence. At the exo level community systems became involved for the sake of eliminating the issue, as they perceived it to be. At the macro level, women were faced with societal norms that did not fit with their lived reality. That clash of norms and perceptions had extensive consequences for them and their families.

Ecosystems with more resources are better able to adapt and thrive: Women in the study expressed that the lack of resources and support determined the quality of their outcomes. Their decision-making processes were so adversely effected by limited, non-existing, or non-functioning resources that their decisions, to an outsider without personal references, appeared illogical. However, when given access to adequate resources, the women in the study were able to function in a more 'logical' manner.

Summary of Themes:

It is clear that the women in the study were unable to stop the violence, and at the mercy of systems that often failed them. They were placed in a 'Catch 22' situation, faced with societal norms that did not fit their realities, and left to fend for themselves.

"I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't... either I am abusing my kids by staying with him, or I am abusing [my kids] when I can't feed them." — Stephanie

"I think that's a social issue, because so many women are basically told to run a household. That's what I did. That's what I wanted to do, you know? And I think that when I, when I left—what people don't realize is that women like me have been beaten down for so long, we have no self-respect...no self-worth...more self-loathing than anything and if you've spent all these years fighting all of this, you haven't been out getting a career, you haven't been studying or whatever and you walk our the doors of home and all of a sudden you are a mother of three with no place, no car, no this, no that...trying to make it in a world where there's no jobs, and housing is expensive. There needs to be more like...more things to help. That's all." —Nancy

“I don’t trust the system. You know, I’ve raised the question more than once...if I send my kids for visitation and he beats the crap out of them, are they going to charge me with failure to protect again? I guess my biggest peeve is that they threatened to take my children away from me for failing to protect them and then they turn around and give my ex the same rights as any divorced father. How is that fair? How is the system working for the kids? I just don’t see it.” —Catherine

Women in the study were exposed to intense, multi-faceted and ongoing abuse. Their stories may seem extreme to lay persons, but statistics provide evidence that their experiences are all too common (Bachman & Salzman, 1995; Browne, 1993; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002). Their experiences have been ignored or denied within the patriarchal systems and resulting values (Andrews & Brewin, 1990; Enos, 1996; Ewing & Aubrey, 1987; Sullivan, 2000). The experiences of the researcher over the course of the past twenty years of service also underscores the prevalence and severity of abuse expressed by the participants. The resulting effect of this concept in practice is that women are often the victims of severe, prolonged, and deliberate abuse perpetrated against them by men and condoned by a patriarchal system of oppression.

Women in the study described being courted by a perfect person who was kind, caring and invested in the relationship, and were surprised by a changing environment when he turned violent. Perpetrators exploited the vulnerabilities of women who were often alone and lonely, without resources, often subjected to prior abuse, sometimes with special conditions that limited their ability to access and receive support, and only after a committed relationship had been established. This is consistent with earlier findings (Sullivan, 2000) and disputes the assumption that she is somehow attracted to abusive men and knows exactly what she is getting into. Participants had also developed within

that relationship an intense love for the assailant. This is not an uncommon adaptation in other hostage situations (Graham et al, 1994). In most cases, the abuse began slowly and escalated over time.

Women in the study attempted to make sense of his behavior, and internalized this confusion in the form of self-blame. This self-blame was found to be present in earlier work (Mills, 2000; Porter, 2002). Participants attempted to adapt to the situation, and integrate the reality into established norms. They expressed difficulty in establishing congruency between society's beliefs and their own reality. Family and religious values added to this confusion. This confusion has been documented in prior works (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Ver Steegh 2000). Society ignored their plight, and denied the existence of the violent situation (Zorza, 1998). This left participants little references applicable to their situation. In addition, perpetrators were deliberate in using isolation and hiding the evidence of their battering to prevent her from receiving assistance from those who would be willing to intervene.

Fear was a major reason that women could not leave their situation. Perpetrators used a variety of oppressive techniques to keep the women living in fear. Threats of death and injury to her, him, her children, her family and her friends were primary. Participants expressed the belief that the safety of those they loved was solely in their hands. This supports the findings of Davidson (1995), Dobash and Dobash (1979), Edelson (1985), Goodkind and colleagues (2004), Myers (2002), Phillips (1992), and Walker (1984).

Second to the fear of death or injury, women feared that the assailant would abduct the children, and perpetrators were quick to use this threat as a solid strategy to

prevent the women from challenging them or attempting to leave. This also is supported by the literature (Jones, 1994). Women also feared for their pets, with good reason (American Humane Association, 1994). They were clearly cognizant that they faced increasing danger when they tried to leave, as Sullivan (2000) found, as well.

The assumptions that women can and should just leave or that they could stop the violence if they chose ignores the reality of their situation, and assumes they can secure their safety simply by leaving. This clearly is not the case (Enos, 1996; Sullivan, 2000). The fact that perpetrators used abduction would seem to discount the assumption that mothers who are also victims do not love or care about their children, else they would not find that particular threat as powerful as it was. Women were unanimous in expressing their devotion to and love for their children. This is consistent with the findings of Davies, et al (1988) and Schechter and Edelson (1994).

There is an assumption among workers and court personnel that mothers minimize their children's exposure to the violence, or deny that the children knew of the violence. This is seen by systems as proof that women in abusive settings are defective. In this study, all the women interviewed knew that their children had witnessed the violence in some way, and expressed the concerns they had regarding the consequences of the exposure. They readily described feeling somewhat at fault for the exposure, and included in their concerns post-separation exposure to the perpetrator as being of greater concern than that which occurred before they left the relationship. This was expressed as fear for the children, who up until their leaving the relationship had the protection of the mother. Their fears generally centered on whom would protect them from the abuser when they enjoyed joint custody rights.

Many of the women described feeling that they had somehow failed the children not just during the violence, but even more so after the relationship ended. They described being overcome with grief when their children were removed, and also when they were exposed to the perpetrator legally by the courts. Ironically, they believed that by forcing their children to be further exposed to his violence under court order, their children were being punished for something out of their ability to control. This fear of post-separation abuse is consistent with earlier studies (Lyons, 1999). It would seem to dispel assumptions that mothers were oblivious and/or ambivalent to their children's exposure to the violence.

Women also verbalized that their children were paramount in their considerations and decisions. This is consistent with the findings of Roberts and Burmans (1988). They made considerable efforts to make peace in their home, and used a variety of strategies to adapt their environment toward that end. Most of the women described using compliance as a means to assuage the perpetrator. They related that they did what their assailant said to do, walked away to avoid confrontations, and remained agreeable. They scheduled their daily routines to fit the moods and schedules of the assailant, and accordingly arranged their children's schedules in an attempt to keep the children from contact with the abuser and out of harm's way. They also attempted to train the children to stay out of the assailant's way and limited contact between the children and the abuser.

The women described being hypervigilant, watching for signs that the assailant might become violent, and paid intense attention to where the children were relative to the abuser's whereabouts. This is consistent with the findings of Walker (1993). Several of the women used outside activities as a secure place for their children. These included

after-school curricular activities such as Scouts, clubs and sports. Some of the women described their belief that these activities not only protected their children during their involvement, but also provided a learning setting with mentors that would introduce their children to a non-violent lifestyle.

The participants used other outside resources to secure safe care for their children, including family and friends, and some described knowing the signs of his escalating violence to the degree that they could remove the children to one of these safe houses prior to the violent episode. These strategies clearly show significant attempts to safeguard the children involved. It should be noted that the perpetrators did not take into consideration the children in their behavior. This supports the findings of Anderson & Cramer-Benjamin (1999) that abusive men are less likely to exhibit positive parenting behaviors than non-violent men.

Contrary to the assumptions that women in violent relationships either do not attempt to access services, the women in this study repeatedly sought assistance, even though they were fully aware that to ask for help and not get it placed them at increasing and significant danger. They were often the reporting individuals to CPS. They called police numerous times. They sought provider services and acquired PPO's. However, when these services were unable to decrease the danger, and when they were blamed for the abuse, participants reported being reticent to seek further assistance. Participants, in fact, adapted to services that placed them and their children in greater danger by not calling on them again. This would appear to be protective of the children, and a logical response.

The assumption that services are readily available was challenged by a number of participants' statements. Some were denied safe shelter due to capacity. Some participants lived in remote areas where services were either unavailable or difficult to access. Others were so isolated by their abuser that they were unable to access services. Many were stalked and monitored to the degree that they were unable to get all the children out of the house at one time, or were placed under such surveillance that they didn't dare seek outside help. Some women were fed misinformation about services that frightened them away, often told to them by perpetrators as well as those they trusted. These women, trapped by their situations, still attempted to get help in other ways... through physicians, family members, friends, teachers, and religious institutions. These efforts to get help are consistent with the findings of Dutton (1993), Skinazi (1997), and Sullivan (2000). Interestingly, these attempts at non-traditional means of safeguarding children were not only devalued, but sometimes were viewed as dysfunctional behavior by the courts. A discussion of that phenomenon follows later.

It should also be noted that women stepped between their assailant and the children, causing injury to the mother, as they advocated for the child and often took the beatings intended for the children. Participants also revealed that these efforts to protect their children resulted in escalating the violent behavior of the perpetrator. The strategies the women in the study reported using seem clear and convincing evidence that they attempted to safeguard their children albeit in what may be considered non-traditional means, but were successful to some degree in protecting their children. This supports the findings of Sullivan (2000). In addition, participants suffered personal injury and

suffering to prevent their children from being hurt. These actions do not seem to be those of women who aren't dedicated to protecting their children.

As Phillips (1992) explains, people who have not experienced domestic abuse often find it confusing and difficult to understand the economic, social and psychological factors that limit her options and influence her decisions. Pfouts (1978) describes victims of domestic abuse as having to process their options and base their decisions on a cost-benefit analysis. This was clearly the case with the participants in this study. They discussed having brainstormed options, weighing the potential consequences of their options, considering the historical context of those options, and foremost in their minds was the well being of their children first, their family and friends next, and finally, themselves.

Access to adequate financial and sustaining resources was key to the experiences of the women in the study. Only one woman in the study was able to escape without incurring financial obligations she could not handle. Poverty was the result of leaving for all but this one participant. Most lost their homes, many were forced into shelters, and some were unable to provide adequate food for their children. All but three of the participants who retained some custody of their children spent considerable time on welfare to provide for the basic needs of their children. This supports the research of Bent-Goodley (2001), Davis & Srinivasin (1995), Sampson (1997), and Zorza (1991). Transportation issues were present in the lives of all but three of the women in the study post-separation. Participants anguished over these issues prior to successfully leaving the situation, and after, as well. They voiced the fear that their children could be permanently removed from their care if they were unable to provide for them. Some

were unable to get custody of their children back, or experienced significant delays in getting them back, even though they had successfully completed their parenting agreements, because of their inability to provide adequate shelter, food, heat, and clothing. Their fears in this area were well founded therefore, and support the research of Dutton (1993).

Family and religious values placed in the context of the patriarchy also were profound factors in the women's decision-making. Some participants expressed that family members (both their own and the assailant's) put pressure on them to keep the family intact. Additionally, the assailant's family often did what they could to prevent participants from seeking legal recourse, including threatening the participants. In the cases of some of the women, religious tenets that positioned 'good' females as subordinate to males were used to convince participants to stay and try to work it out. In these same cases, divorce was seen as an act against the family and God. These factors are consistent with the research of Kasl (1990) and Unterberger (1989).

Several of the participants were influenced by the stigma attached to single parent families. Seven of them voiced the belief that children needed two parents to be successful. In a few of the cases, participants expressed sympathy for childhood friends that had grown up without the benefit of both parents. Some believed that children without two parents were looked down on. From a cultural aspect, one black woman expressed that the number of black children growing up without a father in the home placed them at a disadvantage, and she didn't want that for her children. Another believed that because she had two boys, she could not teach them what they would need to know to become men.

Another issue that was particular within racial considerations was the statements of some black women, who believed that to seek legal recourse against their black assailant would be evidence of racial disloyalty. Social structures, in particular law enforcement and the legal systems have been shown to be much more punitive toward men of color (Franklin, 2000; Schechter & Edelson, 1999; Stark & Flitcraft, 1995; West, 1999). Sullivan and Rumptz (1994) had documented this phenomenon within their earlier studies of women of color. Hill (2002), in his meta-analysis of overrepresentation of minorities within the child welfare setting, found that children of African Americans, as well as those of Native and Hispanic Americans, were more apt to be removed than their white counterparts. Another observation made by the researcher was that black women in the study were far less apt than their white counterparts to be surprised or angered by their treatment, victim blaming, oppression or lack of systemic support.

Participants, despite their dire situation, were women of hope. They sometimes made decisions based upon the desire to make their relationships work and to save their families. They believed the assailant's claim that the violence was caused by the victims' behaviors. Participants expressed that they thought if they just did something a little more or a little less, a little better, a little differently, the violence would stop. This is the same message that they received from society, the courts and CPS: that they had the ability to fix the situation, that it was their obligation to do so for their children's sake, and there were opportunities to prevent failing. This supports Mahoney's research (1991).

Participants also were concerned about the threat of abduction. Their assailants assured the victims that they would take their children from them if they attempted to

escape, and that they would do so either legally through a custody fight or illegally by filing false reports with CPS or taking the children and disappearing. Some participants had this happen to them, so their fears appear to be well founded and supports the research of Jones (1993). The threat also resulted in some mothers being reticent to seek social services. This supports the research of Bancroft (2001), Carter (1995), and Waller (2001). It is also another example of how perpetrators were able to manipulate systems into unwittingly supporting their abusive behavior, ensure isolation of the women, and kept both the mothers and the children in danger.

These factors effectively entrapped women into staying in the relationship, and surviving with their children in the context of their reality. When taken into consideration within this context, the decisions of participants not only seem less confusing, but in fact, appear rational and appropriate. This makes training an issue of critical importance for all individuals who have power over these families, in order to give them the tools they need to make decisions that result in the women and children being safer, not more imperiled.

Women expressed the variance in understanding and subsequent services between workers. This is a key concept, in that it underscores the randomness of decisions regarding participants depending on the personal references and beliefs of the worker to which they were assigned. Earlier research by Huxtable (1994) and Porter (2002) would support this finding. Workers are enabled to operate under faulty paradigms by the societal view of who is responsible for the abuse, the safety of the family, and the quality of the dyadic relationship (Gordon, 1988).

The conflicting responses by workers to the same case is cause for concern that indeed, as Gordon (1988) found, workers are arbitrary in their approach to cases, and are in need of education on the dynamics of domestic abuse. For women lucky enough to have been served by a worker who had a solid understanding of their realities, the results were positive for them, and in particular for their children. For some that were not so lucky, the results had catastrophic consequences for all involved. It should be noted that the gender of the worker made little or no difference in how they responded. It would seem that it is a matter of education, not gender.

Nearly half of the women in the study sought assistance from CPS to safeguard their children. Other women reported being referred by police, physicians and teachers concerned over their welfare, and that of the children. Regardless of how they became connected with CPS, all of the participants reported being blamed by the helping system for the abusive behavior of the assailant. They were met with threats of removal of their children from their custody, intimidation, charged with Failure to Protect and in two cases, child endangerment. This was highly unexpected by most of the white participants, who believed in the system to support them until after the first encounter. Given those experiences, participants overwhelmingly stated that they would not advise a woman in their situation to contact CPS or to trust them if connected through another source.

Participants reported that the actions of workers, who seemed unaware of the reality of their situation and acting on their own misperceptions, further endangered their children, and themselves. Some perpetrators moved their families very quickly to avoid further contact. None of the workers save one confronted the perpetrator with the

responsibility for the violence. All of the women received some sort of sanctions for their efforts to get help, and all but one indicated that they and their children were in greater distress and danger due to the interaction with CPS. This is consistent with the findings of Spear (1996).

Many participants indicated that their worker was less than supportive in scheduling services required in the parenting plan. Four of the women indicated that they themselves researched and sought out the services that would meet the requirements of their plan. The reason for this is unknown, but could be related to beliefs that the women were lost causes for whom services would not make any differences. This would be consistent with research of McCroskey and Meezan (1997), and would be further indication of personal references and beliefs of workers being the basis for decisions. It could also be evidence of believing that the women were somehow defective.

Many women reported being called dysfunctional, defective, and abnormal. They were told that they were 'the type' drawn to abusive men, disbelieved, required to take psychological exams, ordered into counseling and screened for substance abuse. One participant reported her worker indicated that her assailant must have had a reason to beat her. It was clearly easier for workers to address her using a framework of pathology rather than accept the fact that the assailant's abuse was deliberate, calculated, and cruel. Bowker (1999), Fugate (2001), Levandosky and colleagues (2000), and Sullivan and colleagues (2000) all question a pathology-based framework for assessment of victims of domestic abuse as scientifically sound. Yet clearly, most women in the study were assessed based on the belief that they were somehow defective and illogical.

Some participants reported that their motives and intents were questioned. Some workers indicated that they believed that they would 'choose' their batterer over their children, and that they had not and would not be able to protect them. Participants reported that they were accused of being complicit in the abuse of their children. In some cases, women were expected to have known and condoned things that happened to their children when they weren't even home at the time. This happened to women who themselves called CPS to request their assistance.

These findings are supported by the research of Field and Cook (1994), who found that victims are often accused of being able to stop the violence if they wanted, and of choosing their batterer over their children. Aron and Olson (1997) and Kaufmann-Kantor and Little (2002) found that victims are sometimes seen as complicit conspirators in the abuse of their children. Sullivan and colleagues (2000) also reported that victims were perceived to have 'allowed' their children to be hurt. This complicity conspiracy is the result, according to Dohrn (1995), of society and helping systems viewing the victim solely as being part of a parental unit, rather than another victim of the assailant.

Most CPS workers held participants responsible for the abuse of their children. This assumption of guilt was based on the fact that workers apparently believed that they should be able to control the assailant and if they didn't it was because they chose not to. If they 'chose' not to, then they were further perceived as sacrificing their children's welfare, and deserved punishment. Within this framework, then, CPS workers threatened and intimidated the participants, and treated them as co-assailants. The experiences of the women and the CPS framework for assessing victims has been documented by Davis (1991), Dobash & Dobash (1979), Enos (1996), Gordon (1988), and Miccio (1995).

Several participants were charged with Failure to Protect. As Magen (1999) described this phenomenon, the underlying assumption of the word failure is that circumstances are within one's control and there is an opportunity to succeed. The results of this study would indicate that the circumstances of the women were not within their control, and there was no discernable way in which they could succeed. Although one may argue that the word 'failure' is just a semantic, it would appear rooted in the greater societal misconceptions about the dynamics of domestic abuse and the expectation that victims will always be able and should protect their children (Enos, 1996).

Participants expressed being devastated at the charge that they were unfit parents, unwilling to protect their children, and willing to sacrifice them to their assailant. This was clearly a personal blow to the women who had, by their accounts, spent most of their waking moments in fear and struggling to find a magical combination of strategies that would 'fix' the issue, and safeguard their children, as society would expect of them.

Two of the participants were charged with child endangerment. This was the result of what was perceived as the participants knowingly placing their children in danger from the abuser. This also goes to the misconception that women will choose a violent partner over her children (Jacobs, 1998 and Magen, 1999). Interestingly, CPS, and law enforcement have been shown to treat women who killed their assailants with greater kindness and empathy than those who remained in the relationship (Lyon, 1999). In fact, two of the women in the study lamented that they had not resorted to homicide.

Participants were required to complete parenting agreement plans that included counseling (further evidence that she is defective), parenting classes (proof that she was

seen as unfit as a mother), extensive drug screening (an indication that she is in an altered state) and psychological testing (indicating that she is mentally deficient). At the core of the plans were the assumptions that they were abnormal and needed fixing.

The plans were required only of the women in the study, even though in most cases, the father was the assailant and still involved with the children. Assailant motives and fitness, however, were not perceived as requiring a parenting plan. This could be due to the fact that CPS workers see the victim as more manageable and less of a threat to their own safety than the assailant (Farmer, 1997). However, McDonald (1988) may argue that it fulfills society's need to punish the women for not living up to roles expectations set in patriarchal norms. The fact that fathers were not confronted or sanctioned, by CPS requiring them to complete similar plans, supports earlier research by Appel (1997), Dohrn (1995), Enos (1996) and Scott (1996).

Some of the plans seemed extreme, with components that did not necessarily correlate with parenting skills. Qui'Ana was forced to have her teeth pulled before having her children returned to her. The worker indicated that her teeth were unhealthy, and therefore a health risk to her children. Qui'Ana had no money for the procedure, and endured excruciating post-operative pain without the benefit of analgesics. Her dentures do not fit her, and she has had no money to return to the dentist to have them fitted.

Many of the women were forced into drug screening regiments even though they had no history of substance abuse. For some, it meant passing a drug test every week for over a year, despite the fact that their tests in that time were never positive. One CPS worker told a participant that the reason she was required to be tested was that her assailant was being tested (due to documented substance abuse). Participants reported

that sometimes their plans were extended when perpetrators and/or their families filed false claims against her with CPS. Participants experienced delays and additional requirements as a result of the false claims. According to the women and the paperwork they shared with the researcher, none of these claims were ever substantiated. Pence and Paymar (1993) reported that this is a common tactic of batterers who use it as a tool to continue to stalk, harass and control their victims.

Women in the study who had their children removed reported consistently that they were extremely worried about their children, frightened over what may happen to them, who was caring for them and how they were doing. Some participants went over three weeks without knowing where their children were, if they were all right, and what they could expect in terms of a legal ruling on their rights. This is an example of another 'Catch 22' women expressed. They felt blamed by CPS for not caring about their children while in the abusive relationship, yet were punished and ignored when they attempted to gain information from CPS regarding their welfare. Two women met their worker for the first time in court.

Some women reported that they were told by CPS workers not to call, to wait for information, and to 'stop bothering the staff.' One worker told a participant that if she continued to call, 'it would go very badly for her.' Sometimes, the first time that the women knew that they were being charged with anything, or even that charges were possible, was when they got to court on what they believed was the assailant's hearing. By withholding information, CPS again displayed the belief that the women could not be trusted, and punished her for behaving as one would expect a concerned parent to respond.

Bograd (2000) and Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) found that women of color were more likely to have children removed than their white counterparts. In addition, black women are known to be more likely to have their children placed in homes with white foster parents. However, in this small study, there was no difference found in that regard. This may be because of the small sample size or because both the black women and the white women in the study were, for the most part, poor. The work by Bograd and Tjaden and Thoennes regarding poor women being more likely to sustain sanctions by CPS than those of middle to upper class means may have more to do with the women in the study than race. However, the sample did not allow for any considerations in this regard, due to small sample size and no comparative group. The findings of Bent-Goodley (2001), Bograd (1994) and Sullivan and Rumptz (1994) as to being labeled as poor parents and defective in some way applied equally in both racial groups.

Some participants indicated that when they contacted police for assistance, law enforcement officers believed the perpetrator's excuses for the crisis. In eleven cases, participants reported that they were believed and felt supported by law enforcement. In four of the cases in which participants were not believed, the perpetrator was able to convince the officers that the victim was to either to blame or was somehow defective. Some assailants were successful in claiming that the participant was mentally ill, on some kind of medication, or that they had started an altercation. Additionally, three participants were arrested, either with the assailant (a dual arrest) or alone as a result of a false claim against them. This is consistent with the findings of Caputo (1991) and Saunders and Size (1986).

In many cases, probation and/or PPO's were ignored or discounted. Many of the perpetrators had weapons in the home, and some participants recounted that in spite of the fact that assailants possessed firearms illegally, the police ignored that violation. In addition, PPO's were not honored in more than half of the cases. Participants in four cases believed that in their case, the fact that the assailant had a military record, or had police training allowed them to manipulate law enforcement officers or escape sanctions.

In several cases however, participants reported that the police were helpful, understanding and were instrumental in their being able to successfully escape. In two cases, the women reporting this indicated that they credited the police officer with saving their lives. Of note is that these officers are from jurisdictions in which there has been a concerted effort to educate officers, leadership from the chiefs of police, and a cooperative relationship between service providers and law enforcement.

In three cases officers and CPS workers blamed her for his violence to the degree that charges were filed against her for child endangerment or neglect. In all three cases, the charges stemmed from the perpetrator's violence, and her 'involvement' through not being able to stop the violence or protect her children from him. Again, this victim blaming is centered in the definition assigned to the circumstances based on a belief that they could and should have stopped the abuser from being violent (Dalton, 1999). It is centered in failing to identify them as victims, as well as the children. This mischaracterization of victims and the process of lumping them into a parental unit with their assailants results in injustices.

Participants overwhelmingly reported being silenced and sanctioned by the court and their own attorneys. They reported their court experience as one of terror, confusion,

powerlessness, and oppression. Their attorneys told them to sit quietly and to show no emotion. The attorneys were reported consistently as having said or done little to assist their clients. Three attorneys played solitaire or answered e-mails on their laptop computers during hearings. Prosecutors dropped charges and accepted pleas without informing the victims. In two cases, judges threatened mothers when they displayed emotion. The fact that the mothers were in jeopardy of losing their children at this time was apparently discounted. This is another “Catch 22” that women identified, and is supported by Smith and Coukos (1997). They were expected to be all-concerned and all-powerful in order to protect their children from the assailant, yet those same instinctive emotions and activities expected outside the court were sources of discipline in the courtroom.

In court, attorneys, judges and the assailant indicated that they believed she was over-reactive, hyperemotional, vindictive, unfit, unreasonable and illogical. Some were accused of having mental health issues, abusing illegal substances, and neglecting their children. Meanwhile, the perpetrator appeared calm, described by the women as smooth, charming, and ready to do what ever it takes to be a good father to the children. This is also a documented phenomenon in the work of Smith and Coukos (1997). Court-appointed attorneys rarely represented the women in the study with any vigor, and in some cases, the attorneys were involved in behaviors that would be considered highly unethical. In two cases, attorneys fell asleep. In one case, the woman’s own attorney engaged with opposing counsel in making fun of the victim while riding down with the victim in an elevator after a hearing.

Guardians ad litem were similarly ineffective in supporting the children. Most women reported that the guardian only met their children right before the hearing, asked them nothing of any significance, and in three cases, the guardians either didn't speak to the children prior to custody determinations, or interacted with them in developmentally inappropriate ways. In one case, the guardian determined that they would interview a three year old over the phone. Interviewing three year olds face to face is difficult enough. They typically divulge information in experiential means, given their lack of language skills. Obviously, this guardian did not have the education needed to effectively speak for the child in court.

Women who had the advantage of an attorney who specializes in domestic abuse cases, and who exhibited a clear understanding of domestic violence fared much better in court. None of the seven women who had services from these specialists had complaints about their representation. This concept is supported by the work of Enos (1999), who described the issue as one of patriarchal ideologies, and the belief that mothers could stop the abuse if they chose, and that parents are perceived not as individuals, but as a single parental unit (Delgado, 1999, and Myers, 2002).

When they were sanctioned at all in the court, most perpetrators were ordered into batterer's intervention and anger management programs. These programs were often short, with attendance and compliance in the classroom all that was needed to complete the program successfully. This is problematic, given the United States Department of Justice report that these types of programs have little to no effect on the future behavior of batterers (2000). This is most likely due to the fact that batterers are master manipulators, and they find it easy to appear logical and compliant (Pence & Paymar,

1993). In all but four of the cases, the mothers received significantly more severe sanctions than the perpetrators, and given less time to comply.

Assailants often used father's rights arguments to further their manipulation of the courts and continue to control their victims. As Pence and Paymar (1993) found, assailants were masterful in using, and usually convincing with this tactic. Participants overwhelmingly reported being hauled back into court repeatedly to answer petitions, complaints and custody challenges. This is consistent with the findings of Bancroft & Silverman (2000) and Zorza (1998). These challenges were in spite of the fact that a majority of the perpetrators had shown little or no interest in parenting prior to the separation, as found by Zorza (1998). The women in the study, already under financial duress, had little or no money to pay attorneys and court fees, and often endured ineffective representation in court. This was the finding of Edelson (1992), as well.

The courts bought into the father's rights arguments for these men, in spite of the fact that abusive fathers are less involved in their children's lives, less affectionate and more punitive than non-abusive fathers (Anderson & Cramer-Benjamin 1999; Holden & Richie, 1991). It is well documented that batterers will use their own children in order to hurt and control the mother (Dutton, 1992; Pence & Paymar, 1993), and will blame the victim in court for keeping them from their children (Adams, 1989; Gondolf, 1998). These were the experiences of most women in this study. Women voiced their lack of faith in a justice system that failed her, her children, and supported the batterers in their ability to continue their control over them, continue to expose the children to violence, and allow batterers to escape sanctions. These findings are consistent with those of Appel (1997), Caputo (1991) and Dennis and colleagues, (1995).

Women in the study indicated that workers who blamed them for the abuse, accused them of not caring about their children, and system failure to recognize the assailant's behavior for what it was and hold accountable were the issues that often kept them and their children in peril. They believed they were in a 'Catch 22' which many described as a "damned if I do and damned if I don't" situation. They were confused as to why they were seen as part and parcel of the violence, and frustrated at not getting the help they needed to protect their children. Their frustration is well founded, according to Aron, et al (1997), Dalton (1999), Porter (2002), Stark (1995) and Waller (2001).

The women in the study adapted over time to system failure by giving up hope that anyone would or could help them and their children. They expressed feeling powerless and isolated. Over time, they believed that the only power with influence over their situation was the perpetrator. This is consistent with the reports of Bancroft (2002), Carter (1995), Porter (2002) and Waller (2001).

Women were supported differently according to the different workers to which they were assigned. This is consistent with the findings of Huxtable (1993) and Porter (2002), and the quality of assistance seemed to be directly related to the training workers had received in the dynamics of domestic abuse. One participant indicated that the worker whom she credited for saving her life had expressed to her that he recognized her situation as a direct result of a class that he had taken in college on domestic abuse. This was a tool that he had found outside the realm of orientation training for his position. This is consistent with the findings of Aron and Olson (1997) in which they found most workers have few tools and references that enabled them to be effective in helping women and children safely escape the abuse.

The women in the study indicated that helping workers did the following things: Believed them, confronted the perpetrators, recognized their entrapment, offered services and referrals, provided resources they needed to escape and provide for their children, engaged with and advocated for them with other systems, protected them from harassment from the assailant's family, helped them get a PPO, provided information on processes and expectations, offered encouragement to them, placed the children with those they trusted if they had to be removed, maintained contact with them after removal, testified as to the dynamics of abuse in court, arrested the perpetrator, honored PPO's and enforced parole and weapons violations.

Women who were fortunate to have the support of educated system workers indicated that the support of those workers was the primary reason they were able to successfully leave the relationship, and some credited these same workers with saving their lives and the lives of their children. It is from the background and actions of these workers that this research may benefit those in the helping fields.

Participants in the study gave the following advice to workers that may interact with women in their situations:

- Don't assume I'm the enemy. Chances are excellent that I want and need your help. Treat me as a partner that wants what you do...what's best for my kids.
- Don't issue threats up front. Find out what's really going on in the home. Be wary of the assailant. He's charming, convincing, and probably already successful at manipulating others more experienced than you are.

- Show some empathy for us...we've been through a lot. I may seem hysterical and maybe illogical to you. That's because I've been terrorized for so long, I've had no one to rely on but myself, and I'm trying to protect my children in the middle of an all-out assault.
- Please don't do any more than what you know is necessary. If there's a way to limit the stress on Mom and the kids, try to pursue that path.
- Please don't label my children and me as dysfunctional, defective, abnormal or problematic. We're people, not pathological problems.
- Respect my culture. I have a unique blend of experiences, beliefs and realities. I may not do things exactly as you would, but that shouldn't mean that it's wrong. There are things about us that you don't know. Ask me, and I will tell you my reasons for why I do things they way I do.
- When you require things of me, please require them of my assailant, as well. I'm not the only caregiver in this process. If there is fault with my parenting skills, certainly there must be fault with his, as well.
- Make my parenting agreement reasonable and related to the issues at hand.
- Please explain your processes and expectations to me. I do not understand them, I do not work in your system, and sometimes I am unable to read the materials you give me. I know it takes time, but the future of my family depends on my understanding of these things.
- I believe that I have been a good and protective parent within the context of my situation. Please note those things that I have done that are evidence that I have tried my very best to care for my children.

- If you have to remove my kids, please place them with someone I trust. I know where they will be the safest because I have had to find them safe places in order to protect them in the past. Recognize my experiences in this area can be of help to you, and limit the trauma to the kids.
- Keep me informed as we go through the process. You may have to explain things to me more than once, as I am frightened that you will take my children, and I may not ever have them again.
- Make resources that help my children and me leave safely available to me if you can, or give me suggestions where I might find them. I need not to just survive this ordeal, I need to provide for my kids.
- Recognize that what may appear as hysteria on my part is actually a sign that I love my children and am beside myself over the prospect of losing them. I may seem illogical and over-reactive. I may call you a thousand times. It is further evidence that I love my kids, and am scared to death that I will lose them.
- Don't take it as a sign that I cannot be trusted or believed if I am wary of you. Systems have failed us in the past, workers have disbelieved us, and I know that when you leave I may very well be alone with him. I have to think ahead and plan for the best way to avoid us paying dearly for your intervention.
- When you give him custody rights, you remove my ability to safeguard them. Please ensure that someone is checking on how he is interacting with the kids. Listen to my children and my concerns about their well

being while with him. Remember, this is a person who has done some really terrible things to us.

- Above all, his violent behavior is a choice on his part to hurt us. I didn't make that choice...he did. I cannot control him, just as I cannot control you. I do not wish to be hurt, and I certainly don't want my kids hurt either. Don't lump me into a group with him. I am a different person, and I deserve to be considered as an individual, not another passive assailant.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no argument that some adult victims of domestic violence also abuse their children (Magen, 1999). It is also accepted that some women choose to return to a violent relationship although they have the means to leave and financially sustain their family without fear of their assailant. In these extreme cases, if the child is endangered, removal for the sake of the children is warranted. Some of the participants in the study were themselves victimized by an abusive parent, and one wished that she had been removed from her childhood home. However, a mother's ability to care for her children has been shown to dramatically change when the abuser is removed from the home and she is protected from him and supported in her effort to become self-sufficient (Enos, 1996; Humphreys, 2000).

Additionally, as Enos and Humphreys (2000) found, the availability and comprehensiveness of services that are based on batterer accountability and assist women to support their children post-separation were key to their ability to safely leave. Women in the study also related that as a significant issue. CPS must develop language that accurately explains and frames the issue of domestic abuse within the complex content of

the issue, to ensure workers make informed choices and decisions (McGill et al, 1999) that hold the perpetrator responsible for the violence, and engage the resources and support victims need to change their situations. In addition, other systems that have dramatic influence on the welfare of these families must also review those policies and procedures that hold women hostage to their assailant, that are born of a patriarchal and oppressive perspective of women and their roles in society.

Results of the Exploration of Underlying Assumptions Regarding Domestic Violence

“When the variables of fear, retaliation, familial pressure, lack of resources, shame, identity loss, victim blaming and poverty are changed, women will be able to successfully survive and thrive” (Bowker, 1999). Women in this study, as evidenced by their answers, certainly agree with Bowker.

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of domestic abuse survivors assigned to CPS and other systemic interaction, the situations in which intervention occurs, and the intended and unintended consequences of the intervention. The significance of the study was to give voice to domestic abuse survivors, inform policy, assist practicing human service workers from a variety of systems, and identify alternative methods that may be more helpful to all involved. Within the meaning assigned to their experiences, the women’s stories in the study found the following assumptions to be faulty.

To assume that the interaction of systems is protective of children is clearly challenged by the experiences of the women in this study. Systems repeatedly failed the women who requested assistance numerous times in the history of their abuse. Most of the children in the study are currently having unsupervised custodial relationships with

someone that society expected the victims to protect them from during the relationship. It is ironic that mothers were expected and required to protect their children from their perpetrator, yet the assailant was given access to them without anyone present to protect the children during their visits with him. It begs the question, if he was considered a threat then, why isn't he now? If he wasn't really ever a threat, why was she and in some cases is still being punished?

The assumption that systems are protective of adults experiencing domestic abuse is also suspect given the stories of the participants in the study. Interventions sometimes were not only unhelpful, but in most cases exacerbated the danger the women and their children were experiencing. Many were disbelieved, blamed, threatened, ridiculed, silenced, and discounted. They were left to endure additional beatings that resulted in near death because police officers did not recognize the danger. The women were left sitting next to their assailant in court, with attorneys that did little to protect them or the interests of their children. They were, in effect, alone and endangered.

Society also assumes that women subjected to abuse are better off if they leave the relationship, and assumes that they can, if they choose. Women in this study revealed their multiple attempts to leave, and the systemic barriers that made a successful escape impossible. The women discussed the extraordinary fear that lived with, and the knowledge that without the resources of affordable housing, gainful employment, transportation, childcare and quality legal assistance they were unable to feed and house their children, and risked losing them to a perpetrator who had the resources to provide. Many reported extreme pressure from the batterer, his family, their religion, and at times even their own family to stay in the relationship. The cards were stacked against them.

The women in the study related their all-consuming efforts to protect their children. Yet they are assumed to be choosing their batterer over their children if they are unable to leave. The women reported a purposeful seduction by the assailant, which effectively entrapped them in a relationship only after there was a significant commitment that was not easy to undo. Once successfully committed to the relationship, women struggled to make sense of the science fiction novel that became their day-to-day life. Their resources were limited as they were isolated progressively each day, and sealed off from those who may otherwise have offered them hope.

The mothers in this study were held almost exclusively responsible for the welfare of their children. Women in the study were expected to protect children from another caretaker in the home. It was a source of confusion for the participants: the lack of understanding for the fact that if they aren't safe, the children cannot be, either. Participants wondered out loud in their interviews what they should or could have done, and why social services, law enforcement and the courts could not or would not recognize that they were also victims.

Society assumes that if victims want to leave, there are supports that allow them to do so just through their choosing to access them. Clearly, this was not the experience of the women in the study. Shelters were full, personal protection orders were ignored, assailants escaped sanctions, attorneys failed to adequately represent the women or the children, and resources that would allow them to feed and shelter their children were scarce, at best. To add insult to injury, the very systems that were expected to be available and support them blamed the victim for the abuse, and levied sanctions including legal charges against them when they did request assistance. There were two

consistent exceptions to this finding: domestic service providers and specially trained attorneys.

All but three women expressed gratitude to their domestic violence service providers, and credited them with their ability to leave and garner the resources that they needed to survive. They described support and services that were relevant, non-judgmental and safe. Likewise, those women who had attorneys with specialized training on the dynamics of domestic violence fared better in court, and regardless of the outcome of court hearings, felt supported and well represented. It would seem that the quality of support is dependent upon the degree to which workers understand the reality of domestic abuse and the victim's ability to access affordable, but high quality legal representation.

Women in the study also challenged the assumption that mothers in abusive relationships do not make significant or successful attempts to protect their children. Participants described making decisions based on the welfare of their children. They stepped in between the batterers and the children to protect them. They took beatings for their kids. They used what control they could exert over daily schedules, routines, and outside activities to keep the children from contact with the assailant. Participants trained their children in safety strategies. They chose surrogate caregivers with the kids' safety in mind. They used coaches and teachers as mentors for their children. They attempted to leave...repeatedly.

Significance for systems

Beyond giving voice to survivors, this study attempted to identify issues that may assist workers from a variety of systems to support survivors and their children in ways that lead to their safety, self-sufficiency, productivity, and ability to create and thrive in a

healthy environment. The women from the study clearly identified suggestions that they felt would assist women and children needing and seeking safety.

They asked to be treated as a partner in securing a safe environment for their families. They asked not to be threatened, and that systems understand that batterers can and do manipulate workers and systems. They identified the need for empathy for themselves and for understanding of their situations. They requested restraint and that they not be labeled. Participants asked for understanding of their cultural realities. They asked that they not be subjected to sanctions that their assailants were not, and that parenting plans be reasonable and relevant. They also requested explanations of processes and expectations. They asked that they be credited for those things they did to protect their children, and placement for their children with individuals that they knew could be trusted. Participants requested that they be kept informed, and have access or referrals to resources that would allow them to escape. Additionally participants asked for understanding of their hysteria, and their lack of faith in systems to help them. They also asked that courts review the policy of giving custody rights to assailants. Above all, they requested individuals in systems understand that the person who should be held responsible for abusive behavior is the individual that chooses to abuse.

Potential solutions

- **Education:** It is clear that those workers, police officers, attorneys and judges that had extensive training in the dynamics of domestic abuse responded in more helpful and just ways to both the victimized mother and their children. Domestic abuse is a complex and difficult issue to understand. The training of these groups must be comprehensive and

ongoing, and allow for opportunities to practice integration into mock cases, with feedback and support of specialists in the field of domestic abuse.

- **Legislative Action:** The Violence Against Women Act at the federal level, and child abuse laws both on a federal and state level need to be expanded to require minimum mandatory sentencing guidelines for perpetrators, requirements to safeguard children and their mother post-separation from the abusive father, and reasonable time for women who are attempting escape to stabilize before their children are removed. In addition, guardians ad litem must be required to become licensed and pass training on domestic violence prior to being assigned to children's cases.
- **Legal Sanctions:** If a woman is to be accused of not protecting children from the danger that is the assailant's violence, the abuser should first be convicted of endangering the child. Any failure by the courts to sanction him serves to reinforce the ability of the batterer to continue to abuse. The author advocates mandatory sentencing requirements for domestic abuse convictions that match those of non-domestic assaults.
- **Joint Custody:** If courts believe that mothers should have protected their children from the abuser's violence, courts should also be held to the same standard, and protect the children from the abuser, as well. Joint custody or unsupervised visitation places the children in the same danger that the victim was expected to prevent. It should be expected of the courts that they act in the matter of protection based on the same standard

upon which they hold the mother. Therefore, courts should not grant unsupervised visitation rights to abusive fathers.

- **Removal from the Home:** Rather than remove the children, the assailant, who is the source of the violence, should be the one displaced. Once the assailant is removed, strategies to contain him from further accessing and damaging the children are essential. If the victim is safe, the children will be, as well.
- **Termination of parental rights:** If the assailant is so dangerous as to be a threat to his children, his parental rights should be terminated, not hers.
- **Affirmative Defense:** Some states (Iowa, Oklahoma, Texas and Minnesota) have already adopted this legal option. It would allow mothers to legally argue under this defense that to have intervened beyond her attempts to protect her children would cause greater, retaliatory harm due to the domestic violence. Michigan is not one of the states that has adopted this defense.
- **Assigning Responsibility:** Battered women cannot, nor should they be expected to, stop an assailant's violence. Only the assailant can do that. Expecting anything else further traps the victim and her children, and significantly decreases the odds that they will ever safely escape. All systems must adopt processes that assign responsibility to the assailant, and sanction him within the context of that responsibility.
- **Supporting the Successful Escape:** Services and resources that fill in the gaps of those assets victims lose when they leave the relationship are

essential for their ability to provide and thrive. Emergency shelter, affordable housing, capable and competent legal services, gainful employment, transportation and childcare are all critical factors. Funding for these services at levels that ensure no women is forced to stay for economic reasons will allow them to leave and still provide.

- **Cultural Considerations:** Systems workers need education on the cultural issues that factor into the decisions that abused women make. These factors, including concern over racial disparity in the correctional system, and over-representation in helping systems require that all systems be under greater pressure to hold the assailant responsible through their own systemic functions, policies and procedures.
- **Societal Considerations:** The public needs education on the dynamics of domestic abuse, in order to change their belief that somehow the victim is to blame for the abuse. Communities need to be aware of what services are available, why they are important, and how to support those who are in the situation in ways that are helpful. Violence awareness education for young adolescents will give them references upon which to base a healthy relationship.
- **Patriarchal Norms:** The patriarchal norms that allow and sanction women to be seen as subordinate, hysterical, illogical and defective contribute to systems' failure to protect and support the women and children in abusive settings. These norms are detrimental to the ability of women and their families to succeed. Unrealistic, disparate and unjust expectations and

beliefs regarding women's roles, equality, familial hierarchy, and inherent worth must be challenged and changed at all levels.

Limitations of the Study

The sample in this study was small, and with all qualitative research, has inherent difficulties with replication. Recruiting was difficult, and many declined the opportunity to be part of the study. Absent in this work is the voice of the batterer, the children, and workers from related systems. It is unknown what their contributions may have meant to this work. The women were of only two races, and so results cannot be even slightly generalized to women of other races. Women experience domestic abuse within the context of their ethnic communities. Since more women of minority ethnicity are socio-economically disadvantaged, the literature supports the fact that they will come to the attention of social service institutions more frequently than their wealthier counterparts.

The number of individuals who refused to participate in the study appeared to be linked to their trust that they could and would be protected by the researcher. In the case of the study population, women expressed mistrust in systems that had failed them numerous times before. It is very possible that the population believed that like others within a 'helping system', the researcher would also fail them. It is unknown what their contributions may have meant to this study.

The methodology required that the researcher understand and be able to relate with accuracy the meaning of the words of the women in the study. Within that concern is the researcher's own experiences in serving women in abusive relationships. The epoche in this document outlines the concerns this issue raises.

The questions asked of participants were those designed by the author in an attempt to gather relevant information. To what degree that the questions were the 'right' ones, or the manner in which they were delivered could influence how participants' stories were told. The facilitation of a semi-structured interview and use of participants' own words, as told by them, was designed to address this issue. Beyond that, it is unclear if indeed the questions were the 'right' ones.

The accuracy of the information provided by participants was dependent upon their ability and willingness to be honest in telling their stories. Likewise, the author had to rely on recruiters from victim services to avoid hand-selecting those cases that are not representative of most abused women and their children. To what degree they did not hand-select cases, I cannot attest.

The art of recall is problematic, as humans tend to conceptualize events and circumstances in ways that allow them to cope and at times, memories are faulty. Many of the women in this study were at the time of interview, fighting for their children. They would be understandable defensive and under duress, given their situations. What influence these factors had on the responses of the women is unknown.

This study was situated in Michigan. Other states may have statutes and procedures that would facilitate very different results than those reported in this study. In addition, as this study was completed, the Michigan Department of Human Services was revamping the Structured Decision Making tool. This may change the way in which victims of domestic violence are assessed. The department has also rolled out a new program that structures the decisions made on families within a community roundtable.

This program has had mixed reviews, and is too recent an endeavor to know what effect, if any, it will have on victims of domestic violence.

Women experienced services in several different counties, and reported that their experiences changed between counties and indeed, within counties. The degree to which their experiences are typical across the state is unknown. Recently, Michigan's state workers were offered early retirement, in an attempt to reduce state payroll expenses. This created a CPS workforce that was restructured, streamlined, and vastly devoid of more experienced workers. It is unknown what effect, if any, this had on the cases represented in the study.

High profile cases of child abuse resulting in the death of children have caused the Michigan Department of Human Services to come under public scrutiny and criticism for failing to adequately protect children in its services. To what degree that has influenced the decisions made by workers involved in the representative cases is unknown.

Opportunities for Future Research

First and foremost, research on the role of personal experiences and perceptions that may color the decisions of workers in their response to domestic abuse victims is essential if we are to take faulty paradigms out of the equation for survivors and their children. Further, research that delves into these perceptions as they relate to patriarchal norms is important. Researchers interested in the extent of issues raised in the study may wish to expand the sample to other racially diverse groups, and include batterers and their children, as well. A larger sample may yield other important results.

The effects of policies such as Joint Custody, Structured Decision Making, Permanency Placement, Failure to Protect, placement of removed children with

perpetrators and/or their families, Dual Arrest and Affirmative Response are of interest, and little data exist regarding these options. Included in that research may be discussions with adults who as children experienced the consequences of some of these policies.

The quality of legal representation the women in the study experienced was of significant concern to the researcher. It would appear that access to quality representation, either through their financial ability to hire quality representation, or through access to a network of free or low-cost specialized attorneys determined the outcomes for the women in the study. Reports of attorneys falling asleep, playing solitaire and answering e-mails on their laptop in court raise the question of competency. Studies that would allow observation of attorneys and guardians ad litem in court settings and record the quality of representation they provide for victims of violence may yield answers to the concerns this study raises. Likewise, studies that track and report judges' decisions may yield data on the degree to which judges understand and respond appropriately to victims of domestic violence and their children. In a related issue, research that documents the degree systems interact with parents as equally responsible for the well being of children, and not just in cases of custody, are warranted.

In this study, I was amiss in not collecting more information as to why participants were unwilling to participate in the study. Were more white women reticent to participate? Were more black women less likely to participate? If either are true, what is the reason for the differences in the willingness to participate?

Studies on the batterer's strategy of purposeful seduction and that of seeking individuals who may be particularly vulnerable may yield information on the ways in which perpetrators seek their victims. More studies are needed that determine the degree

to which perpetrators are diverted into programs that have been proven largely ineffective with this population, such as anger management and batterer's intervention.

Research that would document the degree to which PPO's, weapons and parole violations are ignored also may be merited. More research on the effects of joint custody and weapons-related violence by perpetrators may yield data on the extent to which perpetrators of domestic violence are involved in the use of weapons and to what degree the women and children are affected by the presence of threats they may bring.

Research that would outline the training judges, attorneys, law enforcement and service providers are provided as part of their career preparation may indicate gaps between what is provided and what is needed. Additionally, there are materials provided to these groups to be used as guidelines. For instance, the National Council of Family Court Judges has produced a benchbook for judges on cases of domestic violence and custody decisions. How many judges have read these materials and/or use them?

Studies that would explore the ways in which different courts share information, for instance, between criminal court and family court, may provide a clearer picture of what judges know in each court about behaviors that are addressed in another court, and how they integrate this information into their own rulings. Are domestic violence charges entered into another court made known to judges making custody decisions? What weight are they given, if they do factor into custody decision?

The women in the study reported being assisted by some workers to which participants credit as having saved their lives. A study of workers like those who were so effective in assisting victims may tell us what they know, or how they operate. This

information would be invaluable to new workers coming into the field, and to those that may not be effective in supporting domestic violence victims.

Policy Implications

As Trepiccione (2001) stated, “Children cannot be protected without protecting their caretakers as well (p. 10).” This study firmly convinces me of that fact. I also agree with Scott (1996) who indicated that the answers to this complex issue is in the elimination of patriarchal norms that prevents an honest look at the power struggle that exists in male-female relationships. To correct this problem, the first move rests firmly in the courts. Alksnis (2001) asserts that the failure of the courts to facilitate just outcomes only serves to foster the practice of male violence. In addition, I believe that violence will continue to be perpetuated, as children observe systems that ignore or discount the violence they experience. These children are the next generation of potential abusers and future victims. By ignoring the person responsible for the violence, we teach children that it is all right to abuse, and we teach future victims that they may expect to be abused, and that there will be no help for them, when it happens. Courts must assume and carry out their responsibilities to “hold fathers accountable and punish them for their abusive behaviors” (Enos, 1996, p. 263).

CPS workers must change their paradigm, as well, recognizing that “it is particularly shortsighted to remove children from the care of their battered mothers without first trying to remove or change the source of the domestic violence risk, the batterers” (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), 1999, p. 19). The NCJFCJ added that service providers have a responsibility to ongoing internal fact-finding to determine whether diverse families are served with fairness and respect.

Confidentiality and privileged communication are sacrosanct to the women who suffer the abuse. All systems must pledge to understand and act in a way that protects the safety of adult and child victims of domestic abuse. Private information in the hands of a batterer who is relentless in stalking his victim is a weapon that we can ill afford to give him.

Attorneys must be diligent in their defense of battered women, and seek the knowledge that will enable them to understand and represent them in a way that is just. Police officers must continue to make strides in their informed and just response to victims of domestic violence. Training for these workers is essential, and must be uniformly part and parcel of their preparation for their careers.

The practice of victim blaming so prevalent in the stories of the participants, and well documented in the literature must stop. Children must not be placed with individuals who are known to be violent, or their relatives. CPS further must require the male caretakers in the home to successfully complete and comply with parenting agreements at the same level as their female counterparts, if they are to have future contact with the children.

All systems should review their practices and policies to ensure that women and their children are not labeled as defective or dysfunctional. Attorneys need to be educated in the dynamics of domestic abuse, and represent their clients with the vigor and expertise that anyone in our legal system deserves. So, too should guardians ad litem be expected to understand and represent their young clients in ways that support their safety within the context of their lived experiences. Additional research with adults effected by

domestic violence as children may provide information on what is best for children witnessing domestic abuse.

Prevention programs that teach young people the characteristics of supportive vs. abusive relationships is key for young people with poor references to what a healthy relationship looks and feels like. We owe the next generation no less.

Domestic violence victim service providers are encouraged to discuss the issues surrounding victim responses to their abuse and how those behaviors are conceptualized within community systems. I would posit that by insisting that their behaviors are logical without educating other systems as to why they behave in the way they do decreases credibility. In my opinion, it does a disservice to merely claim that victims are not defective. I believe that framing victims' experiences in terms of hostages is a way in which to frame their behavior that fosters greater understanding.

Additionally, I would respectfully argue with my colleagues that the behavior of victims and survivors is outside of normal expectations, but that it also should be expected. What individual subjected to their experiences would not have some negative consequences? What person would not have some psychological affects from such treatment? I believe that we need to acknowledge that in some terms, that do not blame victims, but provide a reference as to the logic in their choices and behaviors. In this way, victims are less likely to be perceived as simply defective, but rather deserving of understanding and support.

Finally, for those who suffer in isolation and silence, we owe an array of easily accessible services to assist them in their desire to escape. The services must include the resources necessary for them to survive and thrive beyond the separation. They will be

reticent to leave if they think their children will suffer as a result of a decision to separate from the abuser. We can continue to blame them unfairly, or we can support them in a way that ensures they can care for themselves and their children. Just like the abuse, victims do not have the power to change our choice of behaviors. Just like the batterers, we are the only ones who can.

Appendix A

Dear Colleague:

I am asking your help in locating former clients from your agency that may be interested in participating in a research study that is the basis for my doctoral dissertation. The study will examine the concurrent issues of domestic violence and failure to protect. The research is designed to explore the lived experiences of women who had their parental rights terminated under failure to protect charges. Specifically, participants must be: female, victims of domestic violence, mothers whose rights were terminated as a result of failure to protect charges, and interested in participating in a study on their experiences. The goal of the study is to lend victims' voices to the growing cache of data being collected on the intersecting issues of child witnesses to violence and domestic abuse. Currently, there are no studies that provide data from the perspectives of the women involved.

I would like to interview a total of nine women statewide, of various ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds. The interview, with your permission, would take place in your facility, and would take about two hours. Participants in the study would receive a small token gift in recognition of the time spent in the interview.

The study is authorized by Michigan State University, and has been reviewed and approved by my doctoral committee (of which Dr. Cris Sullivan is a member). If you are willing to assist me in locating these women, or have questions regarding this study, please contact me at (231) 894-6236 and leave a message, or contact me via the coalition listserve. As your part, you will be asked to contact the client, verify eligibility, share the purpose of the study, get permission to share her contact information with me, and pass on that information if she agrees. In addition, I have enclosed a University approved Informed Consent Form that you would be asked to review with the participant prior to her agreeing to participate. I will also review again the consent form, answer any questions she may have regarding the consent process, and will obtain the required consent signature prior to the interview. Thanks for your help in this matter.

Sue Johnson, Every Woman's Place, Muskegon

APPENDIX B

Interview Topic Guide

Tell me about:

- **The history of the abusive relationship?**
- **How you feel about your children?**
- **What your children knew about the violence?**
- **What you did to protect them from the violence?**
- **How your children influenced your decisions at that time?**
- **Your experience with Child Protective Services?**
- **Your experience with the police and the courts?**
- **What happened to your assailant?**
- **How the interaction with CPS affected you and your family?**
- **What was helpful to you in your interaction with CPS?**
- **What was not helpful to you in your interaction with CPS?**
- **Anything else would you like to say about this subject that I haven't asked you?**

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Introduction: My name is Susan Johnson. I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University, and am doing a dissertation study as my final examination prior to being awarded a doctoral degree. A dissertation is a research project that results in a published document. You are being asked if you would like to be part of this study. You probably have questions about what it would mean to you to be part of the study. This form may answer some of those questions. I will be glad to answer other questions that you may have that this form does not. Please read it carefully. If after reading this, if you would like to be part of the study, you will be asked to sign it. If at any time after the interview, if you would like to speak with me, you may contact me at (231) 759-7909, or at home (231) 894-6236, or by e-mail at ewpmuskegon@hotmail.com.

Interviewer Credentials: In my current position, I have worked with survivors of domestic violence for eight years in both a counseling and administrative role. In my four years of graduate classes at Michigan State University, I have been prepared by my professors to be caring, supportive and sensitive to the special circumstances that you have experienced.. You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. I will honor that right.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gather information on the experiences of women who are victims of abuse and have had contact with Child Protective Services. Interviews with women who have personal insight and stories to share about their experiences will be used to gather the information.

Time Commitment: The interview will take about two hours, and will be tape-recorded. The tape recording will be written into a report that will be given to you to read. The report will state exactly what questions you were asked, and how you answered them. It will take about a half-hour to an hour to read it. The tape recordings will be kept locked in a safe until after the study is finished, and the review process is complete. Once that occurs, the tapes will be fed through a shredding machine. By signing this form, you are giving me permission to tape record our interview.

Volunteering for the Study: Women are being asked if they would like to volunteer for this study. You have the right to choose to be part of the study, or decide that you do not wish to be part of the study. If you choose to be part of the study, you can change your mind at any time before the dissertation is turned in to the University. If you change your mind, the answers you gave would not be used in the report. There is no penalty for deciding not to be part of the study. If you decide to be part of the study, you can choose not to answer any question that you feel you do not wish to answer. Again, there is no penalty for choosing not to answer a question.

Privacy: Your name, address, phone number or any other personal identification will not be given out to anyone in the written report. You will be given a false name in the

document to protect your privacy. I am the only one who will know who you really are. I am required to protect your privacy to the maximum extent allowable by law, and I will do so.

Contact Persons: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the primary investigator Dr. Cris Sullivan. You may reach her at Room 130, Psychology Building, Michigan State University, Lansing, MI 48824. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonynously if you wish—Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at (517) 355-2180, fax (517) 423-4503, e-mail: ucrihs@msu.edu, or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Risks to you: Sometimes telling your story can bring back painful memories. If that happens to you, you can get help. The staff, here at this agency, has promised to provide you with free counseling, if you ask them for it. Below is a statement on other types of injuries and protections:

Costs to you: Your participation in this research project will not involve any costs to you or your health care insurer.

Awards: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be given a \$20.00 gift certificate to a local store.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study:

Participant name

date

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