EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF LEAVING: EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE SURVIVORS WITH CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

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The majority of the existing theories on the process of leaving tend to be focused on individual level factors. However, we know based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory that, in addition to individual level factors, a person is influenced by many other layers such as the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels. Hence, there is a need to uncover how ecological factors beyond the individual level impact the process of leaving for survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Additionally, very few studies on the process of leaving actually pay attention to child(ren) related factors. Consequently, this study sought to uncover the mechanisms by which ecological factors beyond the individual level influence the process of leaving for survivors of IPV with children. The study utilized 20 qualitative interviews with IPV survivors who had dependant age children, and who were residing at a domestic violence shelter. The results from the study illustrate the ways in which, at the microlevel, the behaviors of friends, family, children and the abuser, and at the mesolevel, the interactions between them, influence the process of leaving of the survivor. The results also illustrate how structural entities at the exolevel, along with the gatekeepers of those entities impact the process of leaving of survivors of IPV. In being a study exclusively on survivors who are mothers, the study results also highlight the unique relationships between the ecological factors that are related to children and the process of leaving. And finally, the results exemplify the dynamic relationship between micro, meso, and exolevel factors and a survivor's self defined needs and its impact on the process of leaving. The

findings from this study provides us with much needed information that can be utilized to inform the development and improvement of interventions geared towards aiding survivors of IPV with children during the process of leaving and to influence policy decisions that impact survivors of IPV.

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Introduction

Many survivors of interpersonal violence attempt to end the violence in their relationships through physical separation. They sometimes physically separate with the intention of terminating the relationship, and sometimes simply to find temporary safety or to send a message to their abuser (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). Many women leave and return to the relationship several times regardless of whether the relationship is eventually permanently terminated (D. Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Hence, the process of leaving in the context of abusive relationships is neither linear in its progression, nor does it always end with a permanent termination of the relationship.

The majority of the theoretical frameworks on the process of leaving focus on individual level changes that survivors internally experience as they go through this process (e.g. Prochaska & DiClemente's model used by Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001). However, we know based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) that in addition to individual level factors, a person is influenced by many other layers. EST partitions the layers based on proximity to the individual and refers to them as individual, micro, exo, and macro levels. Focusing solely on the individual, internal level processes that influence human behavior fails to take into account the factors from the other ecological levels, which too have an influence on survivors during the process of leaving.

A limited number of studies have identified links between the process of leaving and discrete external factors. These factors have included financial resources, community resources, social support, and interactions with public agencies. Lack of access to financial resources has been found to not only prevent survivors from leaving, but often

contributes to their decision to return after having left (Aguirre, 1985; Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Scott, London, & Myers, 2002; Walker, Logan, Jordan, & Campbell, 2004). With regards to community resources, studies have explored the specific types of resources survivors seek help with (Allen, Bybee, & Sullivan, 2004),the quality of the resources that are availed by survivors as they go through the process of leaving (Abel, 2000; Davis & Srinivasan, 1995; Fleury, 2002; Fugate, Landis, Riordan, Naureckas, & Engel, 2005), the link between survivors' use of community resources and their ability to leave abusive relationships (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Raghavan, Swan, Snow, & Mazure, 2005), and whether women's use of community resources correlates with the severity of violence they experienced (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Gordon, 1996; Henning & Klesges, 2002). In addition to studies on the use of resources and the process of leaving, researchers have also explored the impact of social support on decisions to stay or leave (Barnett, 2001) and the risk of re-abuse (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Goodman, Dutton, Vankos, & Weinfurt, 2005). Finally, survivors of domestic violence, in their attempts to leave, often have to interact with governmental systems (e.g., welfare, child welfare) and criminal justice and police. These interactions are sometimes by choice and necessity and at other times they are involuntary. The responses they get from these public agencies have also been found to be of importance in the process of leaving (Barnett, 2000; S. Johnson & Sullivan, 2008; Tolman & Raphael, 2000). While past studies have demonstrated how discrete factors from the microsystem (e.g., social support) or from the exosystem (e.g., community resources) are linked to survivors' risk of re-abuse or ability to leave abusive relationships (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Raghavan et al., 2005), they have for the most

part has failed to comprehensively examine how multiple factors across multiple layers of the ecological system interact to help or hinder survivors.

Additionally, the process of leaving for survivors with children has been shown to be impacted by issues unique to the presence of the children. The role children play on the process of leaving has been specifically documented by a handful of studies (Henderson, 1990; Hilton, 1992; Irwin, Thorne, & Varcoe, 2002). However, these studies focused only on the influence children have on survivors' decisions to stay, leave or return. They did not explore how children facilitate or hinder survivors' process of leaving, based on the unique needs that are created as a result of child-specific factors such as childcare, custody and visitation regulations, and child welfare system mandates.

The majority of the existing theoretical frameworks on the process of leaving are focused on individual level factors (D. Anderson & Saunders, 2003), and studies to date only link discrete external factors to the process of leaving. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks for the most part do not pay attention to the unique intersections between children and non-individual level ecological factors during the process of leaving. Hence, it is appropriate to carry out an exploratory study to uncover how ecological factors beyond the individual level affect the process of leaving for IPV survivors with children. Doing so will provide us with much needed information that can be utilized to inform the development and improvement of interventions geared towards aiding survivors with children as they go through the process of leaving.

In this study I sought to uncover the mechanisms by which non-individual level ecological factors influence the process of leaving for survivors of IPV with children. I utilized in-depth, in-person, qualitative interviews with survivors with children who were

residing at a domestic violence shelter to answer the following research questions:

- What are the ecological factors beyond the individual level that influence IPV survivors' process of leaving, either positively or negatively?
- What are the intersections between children and these ecological factors?

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The following review first presents literature on the prevalence of intimate partner violence and the extent of children's exposure to it to illustrate who and how many are impacted by this social problem. It then illustrates the complex nature of the "process of leaving," and addresses the limitations of the existing theories on this process. This is followed by highlights of the current literature linking particular ecological factors to the process of leaving. Finally, it presents how the current study aims to fill the gaps in the existing literature on this process.

Prevalence

The prevalence rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the United States have been documented in a wide variety of studies. Data from a Bureau of Justice Statistics report based on a nationally representative household sample documented that 20% of all non-fatal violent crimes against women in 2001 were committed by an intimate partner (Rennison, 2003). Additionally, data from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) indicated that 29% of the 6790 women surveyed had experienced physical, sexual, or psychological IPV during their lifetime. Approximately 50% of the women raped by an intimate partner and about two-thirds of the women physically assaulted by an intimate partner reported being victimized multiple times by the same partner. Among these women, up to 60% of those who were raped and 70% of those who were assaulted reported that the victimization had lasted a year or more. The women who were raped multiple times reported that the victimization lasted an average of approximately four years. The women who had been assaulted multiple times reported it happening over four and a half years (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Though domestic violence does not

always involve female victims, the overwhelming majority of cases involve violence against women. For example in 2001, 85% of the victimization by intimate partners was against women (Rennison, 2003).

In addition to being assaulted and raped by intimate partners, many women also die at the hands of their abusers. Between one thousand and sixteen hundred women are killed by their intimate partners each year (Fox & Zawitz, 1999). Intimate partner homicide accounts for 40 to 50 percent of US femicides, with femicide being the seventh leading cause of premature death for US women (Greenfield et al., 1998). The estimates from the Bureau of Justice are a little lower, with reports of approximately 33% of female murders being perpetrated by an intimate partner (Rennison, 2003).

National survey approximations of intimate partner violence tend to underestimate the prevalence rate, and assessments based on probability samples actually suggest that anywhere between 2 to 3 million women are physically assaulted by male partners each year (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus, Smith, & Gelles, 1990). However, these rates are also probably an underestimated count since many women do not reveal that they have been abused because of the stigma and shame that is associated with family violence (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997). Additionally, Browne (1993) argues that national survey statistics tend to under-report the prevalence rates of IPV because they do not include, among others, those who are very poor, and individuals who are hospitalized, homeless, or institutionalized at the time of the survey. Hence, the actual prevalence rates are likely much higher as is evidenced by smaller studies done with more specialized populations. Prevalence rates have been found to be as high as 92% among low-income housed and sheltered homeless mothers

(Bassuk et al., 1996), 50% in emergency room patients (Abbott, Johnson, Koziol, & Lowenstein, 1995; Stark, 1981), 54% within a sample of family practice clinic patients (Coker et al., 2000) and 75% among incarcerated women (Browne, Miller, & Maguin, 1999).

The incidence of intimate partner violence not only impacts women, but also has some hidden victims – the children in the homes where interpersonal violence is taking place. Carlson (2000) estimates that approximately 10 to 20% of American children are exposed to domestic violence each year. Additionally, in a national survey of battered women in the US, approximately 40% of the women reported that their children had witnessed domestic violence incidents (Thompson, Saltzman, & Johnson, 2003). Edleson and colleagues (2007) point out that these numbers are only rough estimates because they rely on ill-defined conceptualizations of "exposure to domestic violence" (p. 963). However, they do point out that these numbers give us insight into the pervasiveness of children's exposure to intimate partner violence. Furthermore, in a meta-analysis of studies on outcomes of exposure to domestic violence, Evans, Davies, and DiLillo (2008) reported a strong connection between childhood exposure to domestic violence and negative outcomes such as trauma symptoms in children.

Based on the empirical evidence, it is fair to say that IPV is a widespread problem in the United States and impacts women from all walks of life. It is also evident that IPV exposure is a significant problem for the children of women experiencing IPV. In light of these statistics, it is important to learn about the experiences of survivors with children in order to develop strategies to address the issue.

The Complexities of the Process of Leaving

When speaking of women in abusive relationships, there is much conversation about why she stays or why she leaves. Women in abusive relationships vary considerably on what they do with regards to staying versus leaving based on the complexities of their specific situations. Some never leave, some leave temporarily and return, some leave several times and eventually do not return and some leave just once and never return. Often some or all of these actions are driven by the pursuit of gaining safety for themselves and their children.

Most people in the general population think that for survivors of intimate partner violence leaving is quite simple and that they could easily leave if they just wanted to (Nabors, Dietz, & Jasinski, 2006; Worden & Carlson, 2005). However, in reality, the process of leaving for survivors is quite complex. One of the main factors that complicates the process of leaving is the non-linear and non-progressive relationship between leaving and experiences of violence. Many survivors leave as an attempt to end the violence when the violence (both physical and psychological) is more frequent or severe (Campbell et al., 1998). However, some women experience more physical and emotional violence when they leave or attempt to leave (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Fleury, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2000; Kurz, 1996; Sev'er, 1997). Furthermore, a batterer frequently makes repeated threats to kill a woman if she tries to leave or end the relationship and there is evidence that women's risk of being killed is much higher when she has separated, or when she tries to leave the batterer or ask the batterer to leave (Campbell et al., 2003). For example, of the 119 women killed in North Carolina between1988-1992, 92 were killed by their male partners, and 41 of those had

documentation of ongoing battering and the impetus for the killing was separation from the perpetrator (Morton, Runyan, Moracco, & Butts, 1998). On the other end of the spectrum, some women who have left the abuser several times for short periods, have reported that after reconciliation the abuser became non-violent (the relationships of the women in this study had been violence free on average for six years, ranging from less than one year to 28 years) (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 2008). For these women, the leaving served as a threat to their abusive partners and caused them to pay attention, back off, and cease the physical abuse in the relationship in the long run. This demonstrates the diversity of survivors' experiences of violence as it relates to leaving and hence speaks to one level of complexity within the process of leaving.

Given the complex nature of the relationship between leaving and experiences of violence, it is not surprising that for many women the process of leaving involves numerous attempts at leaving before the relationship is fully terminated. It has been estimated that approximately half of all attempts to leave an abusive relationship ultimately results in a reunion with the batterer (Hilbert & Hilbert, 1984; Strube, 1998). Also, most survivors leave and return several times before they are able to leave permanently (Bowker & Maurer, 1985; Campbell, Miller, Cardwell, & Belknap, 1994; Okun, 1988; Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988). Hence, the larger number of previous attempts a woman has made to leave, the more likely she will actually be able to end the relationship permanently (D. Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Studies have also shown that three quarters of women come into shelter with the belief that they will be permanently separating from their abusive partner. However, about one third of them actually end up returning to the abusive partner directly after leaving the shelter (Griffing et al., 2002;

Martin et al., 2000) and within two months, that number rises to approximately 60% (Campbell et al., 1998). Since many survivors leave several times and return several times, one can see how the decision to stay or leave is part of an ongoing process of leaving.

Current Theories on the Process of Leaving

Theories focused on why IPV survivors stay or leave have evolved significantly over the decades, with major shifts in how they are viewed in relation to their behaviors in the context of abuse. This evolution has spanned quite extreme viewpoints starting in the sixties with theories claiming female masochism as the rationale for women staying in abusive relationships (e.g. Shainess, 1979) to more recent theories that are based on perspectives that survivors are active agents influenced by a variety of factors as they strategize ways to end the violence. The contemporary literature frames leaving as a process rather than a singular event, and conceptualizes the process of leaving as decisions to stay, leave, and return several times over varied time periods

Anderson and Saunders (2003) reviewed studies on the process of leaving and found that most had produced their own descriptions of cognitive and emotional stages that survivors go through on the way to their eventual physical separation(s) from the abuser (e.g. Campbell et al., 1998; Kearney, 2001; Merritt-Gray & Wuest, 1995). On the other hand, several others had applied Prochaska & DiClemente's Transtheoretical Model of Change (TMC) to the leaving process (Burke et al., 2001; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). Regardless of whether the studies developed their own stage theory or applied an existing one, the main focus within these frameworks has been on women's internal emotional and cognitive processes. These frameworks are briefly summarized below to provide a

snapshot of how the "process of leaving" has primarily been conceptualized.

Campbell and colleagues (1998), based on their interviews with 31 survivors, developed a framework that describes the process of leaving as consisting of (a) responding to turning points; (b) negotiating with self and with the abuser; and (c) trying different strategies to improve the relationship and decrease the abuse. The turning points were identified as being specific incidents that were pivotal to survivors' decision to leave. Some women had one turning point while others had several. The different turning points identified were: survivors becoming violent or having violent thoughts; survivors gaining financial independence; abusers' infidelity; increased violence by the abuser or changes in type of violence; survivors' views of self; and the abuse starting to affect children. Negotiations with self and the abuser involved convincing oneself that the abuse was a problem, often with help from others (shelter advocates, friends, family, support groups or therapists) and bargaining with the abuser to end the violence. The strategies to decrease the violence included: calling the police, seeking advice or help from others, fighting back, leaving, financial actions, self-talk, acts of finality, avoiding or hiding, and subordinating the self.

Merrit-Gray and Wuest (1995) interviewed rural survivors to develop a theory about the process of leaving. They identified "reclaiming the self" as the central feature of the process of leaving. Reclaiming the self includes the stages of counteracting the abuse and breaking free. Counteracting the abuse involves relinquishing parts of self, minimizing abuse, and fortifying defenses. The breaking free stage is a transitional stage between counteracting the abuse and not going back and is a gradual process in which

women are initially reluctant to leave and then slowly begin to take steps towards leaving.

Kearney (2001) analyzed 13 qualitative research studies using grounded theory and identified a process of leaving consisting of four stages. These stages progress starting with discounting the early violence for the sake of their romantic commitment ("this is what I wanted"), and moving to immobilization and demoralization ("the more I do the worse I am"), and then to shifting perspectives and redefining the situation as unacceptable ("I had enough"), and finally moving out of the relationship ("I was finding me").

The studies discussed so far all developed their own frameworks about the process of leaving based on information gathered from survivors about their experiences. The next studies sought to assess the fit of an existing theoretical framework to the process of leaving by applying it to survivors' narratives of their experiences.

Brown (1997) applied the Prochaska and DiClemente's TMC and its process of change to survivors of domestic violence as a framework for their process of leaving. She illustrated, drawing on existing literature at the time, how the major constructs of the TMC (stages of change, processes of change, decisional balance, and self-efficacy) can be applicable to the process of leaving that survivors of domestic violence go through. The stages of change according to the TMC are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Precontemplation is when a person does not perceive they have a problem and/or do not intend to change; contemplation is when a person recognizes the problem and considers changing; preparation is when a person is actively planning to change; action is when the person makes overt changes; and

maintenance is when the person solidifies the change and resists temptations to relapse (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). The model does not expect people to move linearly through the stages, but rather to progress in a cyclical manner, in which individuals relapse to previous stages several times before reaching the last stage. The model was originally applied to changes in problematic individual behaviors such as smoking, cocaine addiction, and alcohol abuse.

Burke and colleagues (2001) built on Brown's suggestions and applied the TMC to the process of leaving through 78 in-depth interviews with survivors. They found that survivors reported five stages of behavior change that were corresponding to the stages of change from the TMC. They identified these stages as: nonrecognition (precontemplation), acknowledgement (contemplation), consideration of options (preparation), selection of actions (action), and use of safety strategies to remain free from abuse (maintenance). As can be seen, the process of leaving when using the TMC, as was done here, includes only the internal and individual behavioral changes of survivors, without acknowledging the impact of external ecological factors including the effects of the abuser's behaviors on the process.

More recently, Khaw and Hardesty (2007) took the application of the TMC to the process of leaving a step further by incorporating turning points and trajectories into the process. They built on the stages women move through by looking at how and why women move from one stage to another, and paid special attention to the influence of children on the how and why. They too found that the TMC applied to the process of leaving described by the mothers they interviewed. Furthermore, they proposed three turning points and three different trajectories that survivors might follow through the

stages, which addressed the non-linear and sometimes cyclical manner in which they found survivors often move through the stages. At all of the turning points children seemed to play an important role in women's decision making. However, their conceptualization of the impact of children on turning points was limited to concerns survivors have about the impact of the violence on their children and how this influences their process of leaving. Furthermore, Khaw and Hardesty (2007) utilized a very narrow sample of women, who were all white, had all been married and were currently divorced, and had all reported experiencing physical violence. A sample such as this automatically excludes the experiences of survivors with children who engage in the process of leaving outside of the formal civil legal system. Additionally, their framework was developed through the analysis of secondary data, which had been gathered with the purpose of learning about the post-separation parenting experiences of survivors and so the questions the women were asked were designed accordingly. Hence, the information gathered about survivors' process of leaving was incidental and not purposeful.

Cluss and colleagues (2006) also attempted to explore the applicability of the TMC to the process of leaving through interviews with survivors. Their study, however, found that the TMC was inadequate for fully capturing the process of leaving experienced by survivors. First, they found the model's focus on a single target behavior (leaving) was too narrow since survivors frequently reported many different behaviors other than leaving which were positive actions towards decreasing the abuse. Also, the model's conception of progress that is based on discrete stages did not apply either, because survivors often engaged in what might be seen as preparatory actions in the process of leaving, but these did not always occur as part of an intent to leave. For

example, they found that women often engaged in actions such as secretly putting away money, which fits into the preparation stage of the TMC, to be actions that were not part of their preparation for leaving, but rather were actions they took to stay safe while in the relationship. They also found it difficult to put women in a single TMC –based stage at any given moment, because survivors moved in one direction with some actions and a different direction with others, simultaneously. Hence they were in multiple stages depending on the domain (e.g. they could be in the action stage with regards to themselves, but in the contemplation stage with regards to their children's interests). As a result of the inadequacy of the TMC, Cluss and colleagues developed an alternative framework called the psychosocial readiness model of change based on internal and external factors that significantly affect women's actions in the process of leaving. The internal factors are awareness, perceived support, and self-efficacy. The external factors are interpersonal interactions and situational events. The psychosocial readiness model suggests that women's process of leaving can be conceptualized as movements along a continuum of readiness that is affected by the dynamic balance of the internal and external factors. Readiness is described to be a continuum along which survivors move toward and away from change.

Limitations of the Current Theories on the Process of Leaving

Anderson and Saunders (2003), in their review of the process of leaving literature, outlined some of the overarching limitations of the body of work. First they pointed out the conceptual failure of most of the studies in terms of focusing on internal explanations for women's decisions and a lack of consideration of the external structural constraints that impact survivors in their process of leaving. Also, by not taking into account how

ecological factors like social support and community resources play a role in the process of leaving, the literature appears to place the burden for change completely on the survivor. In a more recent study, conducted since Anderson and Saunders' review, Cluss and colleagues (2006) did present a model for the process of leaving that did bring in external factors. In their model, the external factors of interpersonal interactions with the environment (e.g. access to community resources) and situational factors (e.g. change in employment status) can negatively or positively impact the position of the internal factors on the continuum, thus impacting a survivor's readiness to change. However, even their model places the survivor's readiness to change at the center, hence continuing to focus on individual level internal factors. Also, as the authors of the model point out, there is a need for further qualitative research that directly questions survivors about the specific factors impacting their process of change, probing explicitly about the effect of the internal and external factors on their movement along the continuum.

Anderson and Saunders (2003) also highlighted how most of the literature assumes that the only way for a survivor to get back her agency is to leave and that staying is always detrimental. This is a problematic assumption especially since it implies that women who eventually decide to stay are lacking agency even though survivors sometimes do achieve non-violence within a relationship in the course of their previous attempts to leave. Hence, even women who might eventually stay in the relationship frequently engage in a process of leaving and it is important to include their experiences in any conceptual framework that is descriptive of this process. Another limitation of existing theories on the process of leaving brought up by Anderson and Saunders (2003) is that the large majority of the literature appears to view the physical separation as the

end of the process of leaving and post-separation experiences of the survivors are rarely considered. In light of the fact that many women leave and return several times within the process of leaving, not including the post-separation period within the process makes it incomplete. Women's experiences after they have left are important to consider, especially in the context of external resources, to be able to portray a complete picture of the full process of leaving.

One other limitation of the current work on the process of leaving (not addressed by Anderson and Saunders) is the absence in all but one framework of any discussion on how the presence of children impacts the process of leaving. A couple of studies have looked at how witnessing the affect of the abuse on the children can work as a catalyst for survivors in their process of leaving (Campbell et al., 1998; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). However, these studies did not address any other ways in which children influence the process of leaving, such as child specific needs of survivors or the interactions between the different child-specific ecological factors such as the child welfare system, or child custody issues during the process of leaving.

Ecological Factors and the Process of Leaving

As has been illustrated, the majority of the process of leaving frameworks to date are primarily focused on individual level internal changes that women go through as they attempt to leave their abusers and typically ignore the impact of the other ecological levels on this process. Studies which have examined external factors have tended to examine them in isolation rather than within an ecological framework. These studies are reviewed next.

Economic Factors

Barnett (2000), in her review of the literature on why many abused women are unable to leave their relationships, presents the patriarchal structure of society as one of the leading factors impacting women's decisions. Within the patriarchal structure she posits economic factors as one of the primary entities of importance. Barnett presents studies, statistics and policies to demonstrate how it is the sexist practices of the patriarchal structures in society that create, maintain, and perpetuate the economic inequalities between men and women by sabotaging women's economic independence in terms of income, employment and child support. She suggests that these inequalities are what place survivors and their children in economically vulnerable situations such as becoming victims of crime and violence, illness, and homelessness, if they were to leave. Barnett's argument is supported by much of the research documenting the impact of economic factors on whether survivors stay, leave, or return. Several studies have shown that women who are unemployed and lack financial resources are more likely to stay in abusive relationships (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Zink, Regan, Jacobson, & Pabst, 2003). Economic factors not only prevent survivors from leaving, but often contribute to their decision to return after having left (Aguirre, 1985; Campbell et al., 1998; Scott et al., 2002; Walker et al., 2004). Furthermore, in a review of quantitative studies on factors predicting whether a survivor left an abusive relationship, Anderson and Saunders (2003) found that income was one of the most important predictors across the studies. Since economic factors are such an important influence on whether survivors stay, leave or return, it is then important to discuss some of the specifics of these factors such as income levels, individual income, and employment.

Income levels. In a study of 614 AFDC recipients in a welfare-to-work-program it was found that 60% had been physically abused and 70% had been verbally or emotionally abused (Curcio, 1996 cited in Sable, Libbus, & Huneke Diane, 1999). Additionally, the prevalence rates of interpersonal violence were found to be higher in populations of low-income housed and sheltered homeless mothers (91.6%) than in the general population (Bassuk et al., 1996). The rates were also higher among mothers who received welfare in comparison to women in the general population (Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Hence, it appears that poor women, especially mothers, appear to be more vulnerable to interpersonal violence in comparison to other women in the general population. Alternatively, it is also possible that interpersonal violence leads many survivors and their children to poverty.

Individual income. What appears to impact survivors' ability to terminate an abusive relationship is not just income, but their individual income separate from the abuser. Aguirre (1985), in a study with women from a battered women's shelter, found that a woman's financial independence from her husband was a significant predictor of whether at shelter exit she thought she would return to her husband. Lesser (1990) found similar results in a study with shelter women who were also interviewed a year after shelter exit, with women with higher financial independence from their partners being more likely to remain separated from the abuser a year after exiting the shelter. The same study also found that family income was a strong predictor of whether the woman remained separated from her abuser, with higher income being associated with women being more likely to be with the abuser a year later. Other studies, also with women in shelter, have found that whether a woman has her own income is a significant predictor

of her decision to leave the relationship at shelter exit (Hilbert & Hilbert, 1984). Additionally, Okun (1988), in his study with a shelter sample, found that women with incomes higher than their abusers were more likely to terminate their relationships with the abuser either immediately after shelter exit or eventually.

Employment. In addition to personal income levels, actual employment status is also a significant factor that affects women's ability to leave abusive relationships. There is much evidence that survivors of intimate partner violence face many difficulties in obtaining and maintaining stable employment, often due to interference by the abuser (Moe & Bell, 2004; Wettersten et al., 2004). Employment appears to impact women at all different income levels. In one study, women who considered themselves to be middle-class, had higher levels of education and well-paying jobs, reported job-loss and economic-hardship due to the abuse. These survivors also reported that their job loss made them more economically dependent on the abuser, made it harder for them to leave, and when they left it was harder to take care of themselves and their children (Moe & Bell, 2004). Additionally, Frias and Angel (2007), in a two-wave study of low income women across four states, found that full-time employed women in comparison to unemployed or part-time employed women had the lowest rates of abuse, and were least likely to report continuation of abuse (for those who reported abuse during the first wave). This shows the importance of not just income level (all the women in this study were low income) but of actual employment status as an indicator of women's likelihood to experience abuse and, if they do experience abuse, their ability to end the violence. Some other studies have looked at a woman's employment status as a predictor, using samples of women from shelter and/or from the community, and have found that a

woman's employment status is a significant predictor of her relationship status, with employed women being more likely to be separated from their abusers (Frisch & MacKenzie, 1991; I. Johnson, 1992). It has also been found that survivors who are unemployed or those who lack financial resources are less likely to leave their abusers in comparison to women who are employed or have more financial resources (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005). Hence, employment along with level of poverty plays a major role in whether survivors stay, leave, or return.

Often the sources of financial resources available to women are dependent on the social support that is available to them. Consequently, social support, too, has a significant influence on survivors' process of leaving. Hence, in discussing the ecological factors that impact the process of leaving, social support is an important one to explore.

Social Support

Social support can be broken down into two categories: emotional and practical assistance. Emotional social support includes social companionship or belongingness in the form of spending time with others informally or being part of a social network as well as having people in one's life who are empathetic and understanding. Practical support consists of the availability of tangible assistance such as childcare or financial support (Welman & Wortley, 1990).

Social support and leaving. Emotional support has been found to be a critical component for survivors in their process of leaving (Kocot & Goodman, 2003). For example, Davis and Srinivasan (1995), in a focus group study with survivors who were in all three of the different phases (some were living with the abuser, some were in

transition, and some had left) found that the majority of the women who had left reported that the positive emotional support they received from their friends and family was crucial in their being able to leave. Short and colleagues (2000), in their focus group study, found similar results with the exception that only the African American women in their study sample reported social support as being important in their being able to leave. Additionally, practical support from friends and family in the form of money, a temporary place to stay, childcare, or transportation to court or a domestic violence agency, has been found to play a crucial role in women's ability to leave (Goodman, Bennett, & Dutton, 1999).

Social support and re-abuse. There is evidence that positive social support affects women's risks of experiencing abuse and re-abuse, and also works as a buffer against the negative impacts of the abuse itself (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002, 2005; Frias & Angel, 2007; Kaslow et al., 1998; Tan, Basta, Sullivan, & Davidson, 1995; Thompson et al., 2000). For example, Bybee and Sullivan (2005), in their longitudinal study with survivors who had exited shelter, found that women who reported higher numbers of people available to them for practical and emotional social support at the 2-year follow-up were less likely to report experiencing abuse at the 3-year follow-up. Frias and Angel (2007) found similar results in their two-wave study of low-income women, with women who reported lower levels of social support being more likely to report continued abuse at the second wave.

The links between social support and women's risk of experiencing re-abuse is not surprising given the use of isolation strategies by many batterers. Isolation is a key strategy used by abusers to keep their partners from having access to information, advice

and support. Anderson and colleagues (2003) illustrated this isolation strategy through their finding that almost half of their sample of domestic violence survivors reported that their abusers had physically separated them from their friends and family, and 71% reported that they had been emotionally separated, hence creating an atmosphere of dependence and control. Bybee and Sullivan (2005) found similar patterns in which male batterers attempted to isolate their partners by reducing their social interactions in order to remove the positive impact of social networks. However, despite the isolation strategies, almost all the women in their sample had spoken about the abuse to a friend or family member. Levendosky and colleagues (2004) found similar results in their study: 95% of the survivors reported disclosing the abuse to at least one person whom they viewed as a supporter. Hence, in spite of isolation strategies used by batterers, survivors still find ways to reach out for help, illustrating survivor resilience.

Negative social support. When discussing social support in the context of interpersonal violence it is important to note that simply the presence of social networks is not necessarily a positive thing for survivors – whether the people in the social networks are actually supportive of and helpful to survivors is what is of significance (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005). In conjunction with that Bybee and Sullivan (2005) found that higher numbers of people in a survivor's social network who made their life hard at year-2 positively predicted re-abuse at year-3. Additionally, Goodkind and colleagues (2003) found that women who have higher numbers of past separations and women with fewer numbers of minor children living with them tend to get more negative reactions from friends and family when disclosing the abuse. Given this potential for survivors to encounter negative social support it is not surprising that some survivors report fearing

critical or minimizing responses from others as reasons for not seeking help from others (Campbell et al., 1998).

In looking at social support, researchers have also found that women often shift from private strategies for seeking help into more public attempts, as a result of the private attempts not working (J. Brown, 1997; Lempert, 1996). Thus, while social support plays an important role in survivors' process of leaving, women in abusive relationships often have needs that cannot be addressed just by individuals in their social support network. These needs have to be met through community resources since they involve services available from varied community organizations and agencies. Hence, a discussion of ecological factors influencing the process of leaving needs to include the role played by community resources.

Community Resources

The availability of external resources and how women are able to use these resources is an important factor that affects women's ability to leave a violent relationship (N. R. Rhodes & McKenzie, 1998). Survivors tend to seek formal help, typically after having experienced multiple episodes of violence or a high number of injuries (Coben, Forjuoh, & Gondolf, 1999; Tolman, Danzinger, & Rosen, 2002). Additionally, women who experience more severe abuse are more likely to seek out help from formal sources in the community (Goodkind, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2004). Similarly, survivors who experience a higher frequency of abuse seek more help from external resources and survivors who report higher levels of accessing resources are more likely to leave their abusers (Raghavan et al., 2005). Furthermore, as has been discussed earlier, economic factors play a role in whether survivors stay, leave or return. Hence,

community resources that provide financial resources play a major role in the process of leaving.

Survivors of domestic violence have been found to report a plethora of needs that must be addressed through community resources, such as housing, obtaining material goods and services, health related issues, employment, education, legal issues, transportation needs, increasing levels of social support, financial issues and childcare (Allen, Bybee, & Sullivan, 1997; Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catania, 1998; Sullivan, Basta, Tan, & Davidson, 1992). There is also evidence that survivors do not simply express the need for services but actively seek a wide variety of community resources (Allen et al., 1997; Bui, 2003; Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998; Sullivan, 2000). The Violence Against Women Act that was passed in 1994 led to a significant allocation of money for the creation of social service agencies dedicated to serving survivors of domestic violence. As a result, currently many communities have resources geared specifically towards the needs of survivors of domestic violence. Some of the common community resources accessed by survivors of interpersonal violence are discussed below.

Shelter programs and transitional housing. Shelter programs providing temporary accommodation to survivors and their children are a common community resource accessed by many survivors of interpersonal violence. Domestic violence shelters are different from other homeless shelters in that their locations are usually confidential hence providing a level of safety to survivors from their abusers that homeless shelters are unable to. In a report for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Iyengar and colleagues (2008) estimated that in a 24-hour period approximately 48,350 survivors are served by domestic violence shelters (this does not

include hotline calls or community education sessions) across the US. Of these, 14,518 survivors are seeking emergency shelter, and on average about 10% of this demand goes unmet on a daily basis. Based on this unmet need it is not surprising that survivors often report staying with the abuser because they had nowhere to go (M. Anderson et al., 2003).

For some survivors shelters are a temporary respite from the violence, while for others shelters are a stepping stone towards leaving. However, shelters on their own appear to not be enough to help women leave permanently – transitional housing plays an important role in that. In a study with staff, and past and present participants in a transitional housing program, the majority of the survivors reported that they would have returned to the abuser or have become homeless if they had not been able to get transitional housing (Melbin, Sullivan, & Cain, 2003). Furthermore, (Panchanadeswaran & McCloskey, 2007) in a longitudinal study found that among women who used shelters, a little over 80% of the women had permanently left the abuser by the third wave while only 57.8% of women who had not used shelters at all had done the same. Hence, the availability of refuge provided by emergency domestic violence shelters and transitional housing play an important role in whether survivors stay, leave or return.

Non-residential services. In addition to the shelter and transitional housing services offered by domestic violence agencies, most programs also offer a range of non-residential services in the form of counseling and advocacy. These services are usually available to the residents of the shelters and transitional housing as well as to survivors residing in the community. The counseling ranges from individual sessions to group sessions that are both educational and therapeutic. Advocacy services include a range of

types of assistance such as accompaniment to police or medical settings, legal services, obtaining personal protection orders, and assistance in obtaining resources from other public and social services and acquiring housing and employment (Iyengar et al., 2008; Sullivan & Gillum, 2001). The importance of these services has been illustrated through several studies. For example, Bowker (1988),in a study with 1000 women, found that more than 40% of the women reported that in addition to the shelters, women's groups, lawyers, and social services/counseling agencies were very or somewhat effective in reducing or ending their experiences of violence. Donato and Bowker (1984), in their sample of 146 women whose relationships had become violence free for at least a year before the interview, found that participation in a support group was one of the key factors in ending the abuse. In terms of advocacy services, a study on legal advocacy found that women who had worked with a legal advocate in comparison to those who had not, reported less abuse 6 weeks later (Bell & Goodman, 2001). Furthermore, in a longitudinal study of a post-shelter advocacy program, Sullivan and Bybee (1999) found that at the two-year follow-up, the survivors who had advocates were more effective in ending the abusive relationship when they wanted to in comparison to the women who did not have advocates.

Systems Response to Survivors

Survivors of domestic violence, in their attempts to leave, often have to interact with external systems and structures, sometimes by choice and necessity and other times non-consensually. These interactions in the ideal world are supposed to facilitate survivors' attempts to end the violence. However, as the following review documents, in the many cases, they appear to be obstacles that get in the way of survivors as they pursue

safety for themselves and their children.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Depending on the specific definition of abuse being used, approximately 60% of TANF recipients report having experienced interpersonal violence in the past (Raphael, 1999). Furthermore, for survivors who leave, TANF has been found to be a critical economic resource which many of them utilize as they transition to living independently of the abuser (Kurz, 1999; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999). However, welfare reform in the form of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) contributed to the inaccessibility of this potential source of economic independence for survivors, making it even more difficult for them to leave the abuser, in spite of the exemptions provided by the Family Violence Option (FVO) (See Postmus, 2000 for an analysis of the FVO) due to the lack of disclosure of IPV to TANF workers (Lindhorst, Casey, & Meyers, 2010) and the under utilization of the FVO by the majority of survivors (Hetling, 2000; Riger & Staggs, 2004). Given the high prevalence rate of interpersonal violence among TANF recipients, and the previously discussed difficulties that survivors face in maintaining employment, it is problematic to expect survivors to receive TANF for a very short time and quickly enter the labor force. However, TANF mandates that beneficiaries be involved in work-related activities within 24 months of initial enrollment. Hence, survivors face the risk of losing benefits due to obstacles to obtaining work because of the abuser, or worse still, risking physical violence if they try to work (Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Furthermore, considering the fact that concern about childcare is one of the most important reasons for which women receiving welfare report not being able to work (Rice, 2001; Sable et al., 1999), financial concerns for survivors with children are

that much more significant, and perhaps makes it more likely that they will return to an abusive relationship after having left

Criminal justice system (CJS) and police. Barnett (2000), in reviewing factors that prevent women from leaving abusive relationships, suggests that the practices of the CJS are one of the major stumbling blocks in the way of survivors trying to leave their abusers. She further states that the main challenges that women appear to face in their interactions with the CJS are: confusion about the court system; frustration with the CJS (slowness, fear triggered by lack of action, lack of contact with the court); conflict over batterer incarceration; and views of the criminal justice system as racist and oppressive. This characterization of the CJS is not surprising given that many survivors have report experiencing indifferent and inadequate responses from criminal justice personnel (judges, police and court staff) and dealing with interventions provided by them that were burdensome and unsafe (Grauwiler, 2008).

Survivor interactions specifically with the police have also been found to be problematic in many studies. On the one hand, police are more likely to be approached by survivors of intimate partner violence than are social service agencies or therapists (Logan, Shannon, Cole, & Walker, 2006). On the other hand, the services they receive from the police are not always desirable. Survivors' interactions with the police in several studies have been found to be negative. Baker (1997) in her study with women in shelter found that several of the women she interviewed actually stopped cooperating with the police because of past experiences with the police that convinced them that the police were not necessarily going to help them stay safe. Women reported how the police would release the batterer the next day, or not arrest him at all, and eventually experienced more

severe abuse from the batterer as retaliation for calling the police. Brown and colleagues (2005) found similar negative opinions and experiences with law enforcement as well as the legal system.

The negative experiences of survivors with the CJS are as much of a result of inadequate responses as it is of ineffective responses. The CJS has introduced policy changes in some occasions aimed to aid survivors, which have instead led to the further victimization of survivors. For example, changes that have happened in the legal system with the introduction of "no drop" and "mandatory arrest" policies have in many cases, instead of providing protection, actually further jeopardized women's safety (Goodman et al., 1999; Goodman & Epstein, 2005). Goodman and colleagues (1999; 2005) suggest that it is the cookie cutter approach taken by the CJS towards survivors of domestic violence that is the main problem and there is a dire need for the development of more individualized intervention approaches that can work with the complex contexts in which survivors are placed due to the violence.

The specialized needs of survivors are even more apparent when considering the context of survivors with children. The presence of children introduces considerations that are unique to each survivor based on a plethora of factors.

Issues Regarding Children

Many survivors of interpersonal violence are also mothers – for every woman served by a domestic violence agency between 1 and 1.6 of their children are also served by the agency (Iyengar et al., 2008). In their decisions of staying, leaving, returning, women with children have to consider all of the factors discussed so far as well as take into consideration some additional issues that they face specifically because of the

presence of children in their lives. Interactions with the child welfare system, childcare, child custody and visitation, and children's emotional and physical wellbeing are four arenas that are unique to survivors with children.

Child welfare system. The contentious relationship between survivors and the child welfare system is well known (Edleson, 2004; Lyon, 1999). This is because survivors with children have been stigmatized as bad mothers and in many instances blamed for their own victimization by the child welfare system, especially with regards to the impact the violence has on the children. For example, within the legal system, even though only one US state legislation considers exposure to domestic violence to be child maltreatment requiring mandatory reporting (Montana), several other jurisdictions use statutes to place child exposure to domestic violence within child maltreatment provisions for neglect, hence suggesting that guardians who "allow" their children to be exposed to domestic violence are neglecting their children (Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop, & Walsh, 2007). As a result, battered women are not only stigmatized for not leaving their abusive partners, but in many cases are accused of "failure to protect" their children in this context (Magen, 1999). This is illustrated by the frequently cited class action lawsuit in which the City of New York's child protection agency was found to have removed children from custody of their non-abusive mothers after determining that the mothers had "engaged in domestic violence" (Nicholson v. Scoppetta).

Studies have shown that a large number of families in which child maltreatment occur also show evidence of domestic violence (Edleson, 1999; English, Edleson, & Herrick, 2005; Mcguigan & Pratt, 2001). Hence, survivors of domestic violence are inadvertently often also part of the investigations of children's protective services (CPS).

Johnson and Sullivan (2008), in interviews with survivors with CPS involvement, found that the majority of the women reported being mistreated by CPS caseworkers even though 6 of the 20 women interviewed actually contacted CPS themselves hoping to protect the children from the abuser. Most of the survivors also reported being held responsible for the abuse, being treated as though they have a mental illness or substance abuse problems (none of the women interviewed had any history of substance use or mental illness) and were on many occasions tested to prove this. The bright side to these findings is that there is also evidence of some positive interactions between survivors and CPS caseworkers. Shim and Haight (2006) found that many survivors and case workers agree about the utility of help provided/received with regards to housing, financial resources, developing a support network, mental health counseling services, and domestic violence related services. Johnson & Sullivan (2008) found that some women reported having positive experiences where there CPS case workers kept them informed, and held the abuser accountable for his violence. Hence, as several researchers have suggested, there is a need to train CPS workers about the experiences of domestic violence survivors to better prepare them to be able to provide services that are not only focused on children but also towards reducing the victimization of their mothers (Magen, 1999; Mills et al., 2000).

Childcare. For women with children, the logistics and expenses of childcare play a crucial role in their decisions to stay, leave, or return. As mentioned earlier in discussing social support, tangible support from friends and family in the form of childcare strongly influences survivors' ability to leave (Goodman et al., 1999). Also, as discussed earlier, concern about childcare is one of the most important reasons for which

women receiving AFDC reported not being able to work (Rice, 2001; Sable et al., 1999). Hence, in economic terms childcare affects women's ability to have an independent income which has been shown to greatly affect their ability to leave or to not return after having left. The relevance of childcare issues is further illustrated by the fact that at shelter exit, when asked what specific needs they wanted help addressing, 67% of survivors indicated childcare issues as one of the top ones (Allen et al., 1997).

Custody and visitation. For survivors with children, child custody is yet another important factor that influences their decision to leave (Walker et al., 2004). The child custody issue for survivors of interpersonal violence is two-fold: they fear losing their children to the abuser or the abuser uses child-custody as a mechanism for further abuse and harassment post-separation.

When survivors with children try to leave an abusive relationship, the abuser uses many different strategies to prevent them from doing so. It is not uncommon for perpetrators who are biological fathers of the children to use prolonged custody battles to keep track of women (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Saunders, 1994). For example, Beeble, Bybee and Sullivan (2007) found that the majority of the women in their study reported frequent incidents where their assailants had used their children to stay in their lives, keep track of them, harass them, or intimidate them. Slightly fewer than half the women in the study reported that their assailants had tried to turn their children against them, or used their children to convince them to take him back. In addition to using child custody as a tool for intimidation, abusers also use threats to harm the children as a fear provoking mechanism. Threats of child kidnapping, or violence against children have been found to be significant factors in keeping women in violent relationships (Reihing,

1999; Stahly, 1999)

There is also extensive evidence that for women with children, harassment, abuse and manipulation continues after leaving, through the abuser's use of the legal system's mandates on child custody and visitation issues (Beeble et al., 2007; Shalansky, Ericksen, & Henderson, 1999; Walker et al., 2004)**.** Continued abuse by the batterer of women during visitations with children led to the creation of supervised visitation centers in many regions (Oehme & Maxwell, 2004). Furthermore, in states where there are mandatory mediation laws, survivors experience further exposure to the perpetrator during custody negotiations, and often the outcomes of the negotiations result in further endangering both the survivor and the children (N. Johnson, Saccuzzo, & Koen, 2005).

Women have also been found to not pursue sole custody out of fear, pragmatic concerns, and lack of support from the legal system (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006).The lack of support women report from the legal system has been recorded elsewhere too. In a study of court records conducted in the 1990s, it was found that violent fathers were twice as likely as nonviolent fathers to dispute the mother's custody of children (Liss & Stahly, 1993; Stahly, 1999), and violent fathers won custody as often as non-violent fathers. Furthermore, parents are pressured to be "friendly" during separation proceedings, and within this context it is difficult for survivors to raise allegations of abuse because they fear that if they cannot prove the abuse, the survivor will be seen as a 'hostile parent' and thus lose custody of the children (Jaffe, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2003). Given this ubiquitous nature of the child custody issues survivors with children face, it is not surprising that Allen and colleagues (1997) in their study of a post-shelter advocacy intervention project, found that women who had engaged in activities linked to child

related issues were also the women who had significantly more involvement in legal activities than in other activities.

Children's physical and emotional well-being. Women's decisions to stay or leave are often highly influenced by their concerns for their children. In a study of 129 survivors one of the main reasons survivors reported leaving the abuser was for the emotional well-being of their children (Kurz, 1996). Survivors also often mention concerns for the physical safety of their children and the impact of exposure to domestic violence as major influences on their decision to leave (Henderson, 1990). In addition to leaving due to concerns for their children, women often decide to seek help from external sources out of concern for their children's well-being and safety (McCaw et al., 2002).

Given the impact the presence of children has on women's decisions to leave, one can speculate that children play a significant role throughout a survivor's process of leaving. Hence, it is important to consider ecological factors specifically related to children that may impact women's process of leaving an abusive relationship.

The Current Study

This study spoke to the limitations in the literature on the process of leaving in two specific ways. First, it explored how ecological factors such as (but not limited to) economic factors, community resources, social support and systems responses influence survivors' experiences of the process of leaving. The information collected was expected to illuminate the structural constraints that women face within their process of leaving. Second, the study focused on survivors with dependent children in order to explore the unique intersections between children and ecological factors that influence survivors' process of leaving. Hence, survivors were asked specifically to talk about what and how

child-related factors, if any, impacted their movements in and out of the abusive relationship.

Many survivors of intimate partner violence often leave and return several times regardless of whether the relationship eventually is terminated. Hence, the process of leaving involves decisions at many different points – the initial decision to leave, the decision to return, and additional decisions to stay, leave or return. Learning about the impact of ecological factors on women's decisions during these times is important in order to evaluate existing interventions and to create new ones that facilitate survivors' ability to achieve their desired goals. This study accomplished this by interviewing women with dependant age children currently residing in a domestic violence shelter with a previous history of leaving and returning. Since women currently in shelter can vary on whether they will return to the abuser or not, by interviewing survivors currently residing in shelter and inquiring about their most recent departure from the relationship, in addition to other previous separations, this study was able to include the experiences of women who might eventually either choose not to end the relationship or are unable to even if they want to.

Chapter 2: Method

Overall Approach and Rationale

The existing literature on the process of leaving does not include a comprehensive ecological model of this phenomenon, and little is known about the intersections between children and the ecological factors that impact survivors with children across their multiple separations from their abusers. Hence, the purpose of this study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. Descriptive studies aim to document a phenomenon of interest and uncover the salient actions, events, beliefs, attitudes, and social structures and processes that occur within a phenomenon. Exploratory studies aim to take information a step further by identifying important categories of meaning, generating hypotheses for future research, and addressing specific research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These types of study goals merit the use of qualitative methodology because it is uniquely positioned to provide insight and depth of understanding of topics that we currently only understand to a limited extent (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In addition, qualitative methods facilitate the exploration of how context impacts participants' experiences (Banyard & Miller, 1998). This approach to inquiry also allows for the consideration of each participant's response within the appropriate context, which is especially important in distinguishing how individual women's experiences may differ (Patton, 2002; Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Furthermore, being able to capture and understand the viewpoints of different research participants adds new and critical voices to our understanding of the phenomena being studied (Banyard & Miller, 1998). The potential for richness in the data acquired using qualitative methods further substantiates the need for such a method if the aim is to explore how ecological factors impact

survivors across their many attempts to separate within the process of leaving.

Qualitative methods also have the potential to be empowering by providing the participants with an opportunity to share their own stories (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Often, in collaboration with researchers, participants can use their stories as a mechanism of raising awareness or acquiring additional resources (Banyard & Miller, 1998). Hence, by sharing their stories, there is the potential that survivors were able to see their situations in an empowering light.

Research Location

The participants for the study were recruited from a shelter facility that is part of a large, urban, domestic violence and sexual assault program. The majority of the women who reside in the shelter are survivors of domestic violence and come into shelter with their children. This specific program was chosen for several reasons. First, the shelter program is quite large and on average houses between fifteen and twenty women at any one point in time, of whom over ninety percent come in with dependent children. Also, in the three months prior to data collection, approximately 35% of the survivors at the shelter reported at least one previous shelter stay. This means that this shelter had a large enough pool of potential participants, who had left at least once before, to recruit from. Second, I had been working with the larger organization as well as the shelter staff for over a year on a collaboration project and as such had built relationships with them that facilitated access to the participants. Finally, given my history of working with the agency, doing a study with their clients was intended to benefit them by providing them with information about the perceptions, needs, and experiences of their clients.

Recruitment

The participants were recruited in two ways. First, I posted recruitment flyers in different locations at the shelter where residents could see them. The flyer had my contact information as well as directions for them to fill out permission slips at the shelter Resident Assistant desk, if they would prefer that I contact them (See Appendix A for recruitment flyer and Appendix B for permission slips). The shelter case managers and the Children's Program staff also handed out recruitment fliers to the residents during their individual interactions with them.

Participants

Qualitative samples tend to be purposive rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and modified analytic induction, which is the approach to analysis that I utilized for this study (described on pp. 43-45), specifically calls for purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I purposefully sampled survivors from the shelter. All of the women had dependant age children of their own (the children may or may not have been at the shelter with them). All of the women had left and returned at least once before the current departure to come to the shelter. Since the purpose of the study was to explore the ecological factors that impact women's process of leaving, sampling women in shelter with previous experiences of leaving allowed me to learn about their experiences both between the leaving and returning and during the time leading up to when they left each time. Also, by sampling women with dependent age children, I was able to learn about the child-specific factors in their process of leaving.

Additionally, all participants had been at the shelter for at least four days by the time of the interview. This time cut-off was used to avoid interviewing survivors during a

time of acute crisis which is likely to be the case during the first few days in shelter.

I conducted twenty interviews by which point saturation had been reached. Saturation was reached when no new information was being disclosed with additional interviews on the specific topics relevant to this study (i.e., the types of ecological factors women reported that have impacted their process of leaving; the ecological factors with which the presence of children intersect).

Interview Guide and Procedure

The specific qualitative data collection method that was used for this study was individual in-depth interviews. Twenty open-ended interviews were conducted with survivors who were residing in a domestic violence shelter. A woman-to-woman, sensitive style of qualitative interview is valued for "respecting the understandings and experiences of research subjects, and making explicit the politics of knowing and the possibilities of empowerment" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, pp.151). Hence, open-ended interviews were an apt choice for data collection for this study as it allowed me to learn about how survivors "view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348).

Before starting each interview I went through the consent process with the participant, which involved a brief description of the study, and an explanation of the information listed in the consent form. The participants were also informed that participation in the interview involved audio-taping the interview, and confidentiality and privacy protections were explicitly described. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to sign the consent form and given a copy for their own records. None of the

survivors withdrew from the study after or during the consent process.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, using a general interview guide as the specific interview format was most appropriate since it allowed me the freedom to explore, probe and ask questions as is necessary in the context of a conversational style, while keeping the focus on the particular subject of interest (Patton, 2002). Interview guides consist of a list of questions that are to be explored in the course of the interview, followed by probes that can be used to ensure that the same subject areas are explored with all the participants. This permits flexibility in the sequence of the questions and allows for the interview to flow in the natural order in which information is presented by the interviewee.

The interview consisted of a set of semi-structured questions followed by probes on specific areas that were used if those areas were not covered in a participant's natural response to the interview question. The interview started out by asking participants about the relationship history of their most recent relationship with regards to when it started, its current status, and when and how the abuse started. It then progressed to inquire about the survivor's history with regards to attempts to leave. Probes about the specifics with reference to ecological factors such as social support, community resources, and systems responses were utilized to uncover the details of each attempt to leave and the subsequent return. Probes were also used to learn about the specific impact of children. The interview then proceeded into asking about the survivor's current situation, with regards to the resources they were currently accessing, their experiences with these resources, and their plans for the immediate future. Questions were asked about what women thought they would need to successfully meet their future goal of either returning to or leaving the

abuser, and again probes focused on specific facilitators and barriers women expected to encounter and how that influenced their decisions. Survivors were also asked about their children (how many, who the father was, etc.) and the interview concluded with demographic questions. Women were compensated $30 for participating in the interview. The Interview Guide can be found in Appendix C.

In order to ensure that I was collecting rich and relevant data, during and after every interview I engaged in a regimen of activities. First, after every interview I listened to the interview and evaluated it based on the guidelines provided by Charmaz (2006) on how to gather rich data. Accordingly, I checked whether I had collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to be able to understand the full range of the contexts being explored by the study. I also checked whether I had gathered data that enabled me to develop analytic categories. Additionally, I assessed what comparisons I could make across the data and how these comparisons could generate and inform my ideas.

Second, immediately after each interview I wrote up field notes documenting the interview contact and the main topics mentioned in the interview. Based on the information from these activities, I modified my interview guide accordingly for subsequent interviews.

All of the interviews were fully transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The transcriptionist agreed in writing to maintain confidentiality of the information transcribed. I listened to all of the interviews in conjunction with the transcriptions for error checks. All field notes and transcripts were stored in a password protected folder on my computer. All audio files were also stored in password protected folders in password

protected computers. The field notes, transcriptions, and audio files were de-identified and linked using ID numbers and initials. The consent forms and permission to contact forms were stored separately in a different locked file cabinet. Recruitment and data collection started only after approval had been received from the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board.

Data Analyses

Analytic Induction

The general research questions for this study were both descriptive and exploratory, and sought to find out not only what ecological factors mothers perceived as impacting their process of leaving, but also how they did so. Grounded theory, with its focus on inductive theory building from the data, is an approach to analysis that was initially considered to be a good fit for the study. However, in light of the dearth of the existing information available on how mothers perceive ecological factors as impacting their process of leaving, and what all of these ecological factors are, it would be premature to attempt to actually build a full ecological theory of the process of leaving based only on this study. Additionally, theory building would call for the use of a much more varied sample of survivors of domestic violence than that which was being used in this study. Given these limitations, for the proposed study, modified analytic induction was determined to be a more appropriate approach to analysis because its goal is to identify and test qualitative assertions or preliminary hypotheses rather than full theory building. It allows for the creation of assertions by identifying patterns of behaviors and interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Gilgun, 1995) .

Historically, analytic induction stems from the Chicago School of Sociology and

is similar to the grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where hypotheses and concepts are generated and evaluated on an ongoing basis. The two are different because, unlike grounded theory where the initial assertions and concepts are drawn from the data itself, with analytic induction the researcher starts the initial analysis with preliminary assertions based on previous literature, hunches, and assumptions (Gilgun, 1992) and then proceeds to modify the hypotheses based on the analysis of subsequent cases. Originally, analytic induction was described as "a nonexperimental qualitative sociological method that employs an exhaustive examination of cases in order to prove universal, causal, generalizations" ((Manning, 1982, pp.280). With modified analytic induction, there has been a shift away from the goals of discovering universals and causality towards the development of assertions that identify patterns of behaviors and interactions for a phenomenon that is defined and re-defined through the course of the analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Gilgun, 1992; Robinson, 1951). Hence, what are usually generated from the use of the modified analytic induction method are "working hypotheses" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 72) that can be used towards theory building in the future.

The steps of analytic induction as presented by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), based on Robinson's (1951) propositions, are as follows: 1. Early in the research you develop a rough definition and explanation of the particular phenomenon. 2. You hold the definition and explanation up to the data as they are collected. 3. You modify the definition and/or explanation as you encounter new cases that do not fit the definition and explanation as formulated. 4. You actively seek cases that you think may not fit into the formulation. 5. You redefine the phenomenon and reformulate the explanation until a universal

relationship is established, using each negative case to call for a redefinition or reformulation.

Coding and Analyses

First, I utilized Miles and Huberman's (1994) data reduction methods to systematically categorize the data into thematic groups. I used QSR Nvivo 8, a qualitative analysis program for this step. More specifically, based on the research questions for this study I developed a preliminary coding framework. I then content coded the interviews utilizing the coding framework. I added and modified codes in the coding framework as needed during this process and documented all code changes in a detailed audit trail. The themes and codes that emerged through the content coding process, in conjunction with the research questions for the study, were used for developing the initial assertions. By basing the initial assertions on the themes from the content coding, I was able to ensure that the initial assertions were strongly grounded in a systematic review of the data.

I tested the initial assertions on the first interview and shared the detailed audit trail for this with the chair (Sullivan) for review. Once she endorsed the list of initial assertions and the manner in which the testing of the assertions was being documented, I proceeded to test the assertions on the remaining interviews. Interviews were analyzed sequentially and each time the assertions were modified as needed and the specific cases for which the hypotheses held true were revisited. The assertions were used to examine the data from the interviews in a purposive manner, with an eye towards uncovering evidence that disconfirmed the assertions based on the types of inadequacies outlined by Erickson (1986) and the assertions were modified or discarded accordingly. Assertions were modified and tested until I reached a point where only well-supported assertions

remained and these were the final assertions of the study. The final list was composed of eight assertions.

Trustworthiness of the Study Procedures

Standards for evaluating qualitative data are quite different from those used for quantitative data. The crux of evaluating qualitative data has to do with whether the study is "conducted in a systematic and rigorous way" (Barker & Pistrang, 2005, pp.207). One way to judge the rigor of a study is to evaluate the trustworthiness of the data collected and the manner in which it is analyzed. There are several ways in which the trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be demonstrated, some of which are: credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Credibility can be established through prolonged engagement in the study setting, peer debriefing and negative case analysis. Even though I had not had prolonged engagement with survivors residing in the particular shelter where the study was conducted, I had in the past volunteered at other domestic violence shelters where I had ongoing interactions with the residents and their children. Having been engaged in other settings that are very similar to the study setting, I have gained insight into survivors' lives in shelters. I also engaged in peer debriefing with my dissertation chair, and other fellow researchers who are engaged in IPV research [always being careful to maintain the confidentiality of the survivors] as needed, in order to discuss the findings from the interviews, and to refine my thinking about the data. Additionally, my chair (Sullivan) reviewed the analyses for the study, and she has over 25 years' experience working with survivors of intimate partner violence. After I developed a set of assertions that I thought adequately fit for all of the data, I shared these with the chair along with the audit trail

documenting the testing of the assertions. I then modified the assertions according to her feedback and re-applied them to the data. This process was repeated until there was agreement between the chair and myself that the assertions that were formulated were adequate. Furthermore, since part of the steps of analytic induction include the utilization of negative case analysis, using this approach to analysis enhanced the integrity of the analysis with regards to exploring alternative explanations.

Dependability refers to stability over time in the methods used and decisions made by the researcher. It can be illustrated using a dependability audit, which involves keeping written documentation of procedural changes throughout the study. I maintained a dependability audit trail, where I documented the details of any procedural changes that took place in the course of the study.

Confirmability evaluates the extent to which findings are grounded in the data. One way of illustrating confirmability is to maintain a detailed audit trail of the analyses process. I kept a detailed analyses audit trail documenting all case-summaries, substantive themes and all the steps of my analysis and how the conclusions were reached throughout the analysis process. Another step to address confirmability is to explicitly link the conclusions drawn to the raw data. After the final assertions were drawn, I extracted quotations from the raw data to illustrate the link between the assertions and the data.

Chapter 3: Results

Participant Descriptives

The 20 survivors who were interviewed for the study were residing at an urban DV shelter at the time of the interview. One of the 20 interviews was not included in the analyses because the survivor was unable to share her story adequately because of significant lapses in her memory and because I was unable to gain the level of detail from her story that would be needed to draw reasonable conclusions. The final analyses were carried out on 19 interviews.

Of the nineteen survivors, eleven of the mothers were African American, five were White, and one each identified as Hispanic, Native American and Multiracial. The average age across 17 of the participants was 29.1 years old (the age of two survivors was not documented) and the age range was 21-45 years. With regards to level of education, six had attended high school but did not complete it, three graduated from high school or got a GED, and 10 had attended college but did not complete it. Due to the location of the DV shelter from where the participants were recruited, a large portion of the participants were from the inner city areas of the neighboring metropolitan city. As a result, many of the participants grew up in neighborhoods with high levels of community/gang violence, poverty and drug use.

All of the participants were mothers and on average had 3.1 children and 2.9 dependant age children. The children's ages ranged from one year to 21years. Also, three of the participants were pregnant at the time of the interview. For nine of the survivors, the abuser was not the father of any of her children, while for six of them the abuser was the father of all of her children, and for the remaining four, the abuser was the father of some of her children. So for more than half the participants, the abuser was the biological

father of at least one child. At the time of the interview, three of the survivors had all of their dependant age children in CPS custody.

Findings

One way of categorizing survivors' perceptions of barriers and facilitators during the process of leaving (Research Question #1) is using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. Since the focus of this study was to look beyond the individual-level factors that have been emphasized in prior research, the results presented concentrate on micro-, meso- and exo-level factors. All factors were examined through the lens of the survivors as mothers, and focused on how the children – and factors related to the children – impacted her decisions around staying, leaving and returning (Research Question #2). The findings are organized according to the assertions that were developed, which in turn were organized according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. The full list of assertions is presented in Table.1 along with the corresponding research question. Because the assertions were not exclusive to the individual research questions, there is an overlap of assertions across the two research questions. Appendix E summarizes the results of the assertion checks across all the participants and Appendix F provides the frequencies of the individual themes within each assertion.

The rationale for focusing on a survivor's "self-defined" needs was because the needs that survivors define for themselves are not always the same as what others think their needs should be. Needless to say, every IPV survivor wants to end the violence, but at the same time they also have other needs around trying to preserve their family, and maintaining stable sources of income among other things. As described in the literature review, women have many reasons for staying in abusive relationships, and also varying

reasons for leaving. Some want to end the relationship permanently, for example, while others may want to send a message to the abuser or are seeking temporary respite. However, most existing policies of community based services and beliefs held by family and friends do not accommodate these other priorities and are not supportive of a survivor's need to return to or stay in an abusive relationship. Hence, in this study the focus was placed on the needs of survivors as they were defined by them rather than as they were defined by experts and others seeking to help them. By placing the survivor's own needs at the center, all of her needs during the process of leaving, including those that others might not agree with, were legitimized in the analyses of survivor' stories.

Table 1. Research Questions and Corresponding Assertions

Research Question	Corresponding Assertions
1. What are the ecological factors beyond the individual level that influence IPV survivors' process of leaving, either positively or negatively?	1.At the microsystem level, the behaviors of family and/or peers will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 2.At the microsystem level, the abuser's behaviors will hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 4b.At the mesosystem level, the interconnections between the abuser and family/peers will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 4c.At the mesosystem level, the interconnections between the abuser and the survivor's exosystem will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 5.Structural exosystem factors will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 6.Gate keepers of exosystem structures will mediate a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met through structural exosystem factors.
2. What are the intersections between children and these ecological factors?	3.At the microsystem level, the survivor's concerns for her children will influence her self-defined needs during the process of leaving. 4a.At the mesosystem level, the interconnections between the abuser and the children will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 5.Structural exosystem factors will facilitate or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. 6. Gate keepers of exosystem structures will mediate a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met through structural exosystem factors.

One factor that is not presented as a discrete finding but is extremely relevant in this study is the socioeconomic status of the participants and how living in poverty influenced their process of leaving. This is because poverty was a ubiquitous theme that permeated through all the findings within all the ecological levels. And so, the impact of the participants' low income status on their process of leaving was interwoven into all of the findings across all the ecological levels.

Micro/Mesosystem Factors

The microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's model includes an individual's interactions with others in their immediate environment. The microlevel factors that survivors talked about in describing the factors that impacted their process of leaving were the behaviors of family and/or peers, the behaviors of the abuser, and the survivors' concerns about their children. The mesolevel includes the interconnections or linkages among the individuals in the microsystem and among individuals and settings across the micro and exosystems. What follows is a breakdown of how the individual factors within the micro/mesosytems interacted with the survivor's self defined needs and consequently influenced her process of leaving.

Assertion 1: At the microsystem level, the behaviors of family and/or peers will facilitate and/or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met: All 19 of the women confirmed this assertion.

Finding1: Behaviors of family/ peers. The following subsections describe the many ways in which the behaviors of family and/or friends facilitated or hindered a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met during the process of leaving.

Facilitating behaviors. All 19 (100%) of the participants reported at least one

instance during the process of leaving when their family and/or peers behaved in ways that were helpful to them in getting their needs met. The behaviors that survivors reported as being facilitative to them during the process of leaving were the ones that met their self-defined needs at that specific point in time. There were several different types of behaviors that their family and/or peers engaged in that the survivors found to be facilitative during their process of leaving. The main needs that survivors identified as being important during their process of leaving were practical support, emotional support, and protection/safety.

One way that family and friends helped survivors was by providing practical support to them when they needed it. The practical help consisted of many different things. For example, providing a place to stay and transportation was something several survivors mentioned as ways in which family and/or peers enabled them to have their self-defined needs met during the process of leaving. For some survivors, just knowing that they had somewhere to go with their children was a crucial factor in whether they even engaged in the process of leaving. Daisy[1], a 45 year old survivor who had four children with the abuser, exemplified this while describing the first time she left him,

"You know what? My, my sister-in-law knew something was going on and she had called me ….and she said, 'I know something's going on.' and I told her and she said, 'You need to leave and you can come here.' And that was one thing too, I didn't know where I was gonna go with the kids. So when she said you can leave, as soon as she said that we left"

In addition to a roof over their head, having access to transportation was another major need for many survivors, and one in which their family and/or peers played a big role.

[1] Unique pseudonyms have been assigned to each individual participant to protect their identity. Appendix D lists pseudonyms in conjunction to participant ID numbers and basic demographics.

For some survivors, simply having access to transportation to physically leave the abusive home was a major need as these survivors demonstrated,

"I called the kids and said, 'Come and get me now! I've got such and such time', you know, because I knew how long practice was, how far he had to go… if it wasn't for them I would still be there, but it was accessibility to a vehicle."-Donna, (unknown age, 3 children)

"I left one time, one time and I had my granddaddy come get me, and take me over there, over to my brother house and drop me off " –Crystal, (unknown age, 2 children)

For some other survivors, it was transportation not just to leave the abuser, but to move their belongings, or to do the things they needed to do after having left,

*"she [*her godmother*] went and she got me, uh, all my stuff. She got me from the hospital. She come out and got me and took me for the jobs yesterday, the police station, pharmacies, I mean she's done a lot."*- Margaret (38 yrs, 2 kids)

"…my girlfriend helped me move everything" - Dolores (31 yrs, 4 children)

*"They [*her mother and brother*] helped me move in and everything."*- Alicia (27 yrs, 2 children)

For survivors with young children, childcare was an important mode of receiving help from family and/or peers. Shantana, a 27 year old survivor with three children ages 12, 10, and two illustrated this in talking about why it was important for her to find housing close to her family,

" …and I get a lot of help from my mother […] with the kids, you know, my mom she at least comes over my house like three times a week and then I have my other kids' grandma that she keeps the baby like three times a week. So my like support group is there […]my childcare, people that watch my kids while I go to work and, you know, I have to be close to, I can't be way out here"

Christina, a 24 year old survivor with a six year old and a one year old described how having her mother to take care of her children meant she had more mobility to do the things she needed to in order to get back on her feet,

"Right. So that was… help there, you know. If I was living there [in her mother's house] I could just get up and leave and go whenever I want to."

Many survivors also mentioned monetary help from family and/or peers as being extremely helpful. Sometimes this involved situations where family and/or peers gave survivors money, while other times they paid for some of their expenses.

" Um, my last month bill came from a friend that I went to college with in Arizona. He called my phone and it was off and ended up paying the bill for me"-Rhonda (21 yrs, 1 child)

"I have a friend of mine who lives in North Carolina…who knows exactly what I'm going through and was like I will help you if you cannot find a job, I will help you until your baby's born. The extra two twenty-five you need for your rent. He's like it's not a problem." – Tania (30 yrs, 3 children)

"I had to go to my kid's father asking to send me a couple thousand dollars. Which was hard, 'cause I've always done everything. But [Interviewer: But you got some help?] Yeah, I[sic] did." – Stephanie (32 yrs, 5 children)

"They [her family] helped me financially"-Kendra (26 yrs, 3 children)

On other occasions, family and/or peers lent the survivor money to buy a car or to relocate.

"And then two months after I get into my house and I'm all nice [small laugh] and comfy, he comes and finds me and I have to up and leave and go to [name of southern state]. And my mom actually paid for me to go to [name of southern state]."- Alicia (27 yrs, 2 children)

"Um, it was like a hundred dollars down to move, or ninety-nine dollars to move in and she [her mother] gave me the money and she was so supportive. She helped me with all my stuff 'cause that we didn't have money for the rental truck. So she threw it in her truck and was back and forth". – Beverly (22 yrs, 2 children)

"My girlfriend helped me…get it [Interviewer: Buy a car?] Yeah and I paid her back weekly ….she borrowed me $500 and then I paid her weekly." - Daisy (45 yrs, 4 children)

The practical support that family and/or peers provided in the form of transportation, shelter, childcare and monetary assistance enabled survivors to have their self-defined needs met during the process of leaving.

Some survivors also reported getting emotional support that helped them during the process of leaving. For example, Kendra, a 26 year old survivor with three children, described how being able to visit with her family and the emotional support they provided helped her keep her spirits up while she was still living with the abuser,

"But, um, they helped, um, more emotionally I think than anything else because if it wasn't for me being able to have an out and, you know, have a break sometimes where I can go and laugh and just be myself, I probably would just got in the depressed mode where I just shut down, I stayed in a dark room or something. But, instead I, um, you know, I had a out. I was able to go with family and with friends and stuff…"

In another example of how emotional support from family played a role in a survivor's process of leaving, Erika, a 30 year old survivor with two children described how the death of her grandmother gave her strength to leave because of the support her grandmother had given her when she was alive,

"Um, my grandmother passed in March …. After she passed it just like, I got strong. I would hear everything she be saying and she would tell me about my strengths. She'd tell me my family loved me. She'd tell me I'm beautiful, my kids are, and I think she is still with me today. I think that is really why I got strong enough to leave" [through continuing tears]

Another way in which family and/or peers supported survivors during the process of leaving was by providing them with safety and protection from the abuser. In some cases, this involved not telling the abuser where the survivor was,

"And I left. I mean I just up and left while he was at work. And he called around looking for me and my mother wouldn't tell him where I was at."- Kendra (26 yrs, 3 children)

In some other cases it involved being protective of the survivor and making it clear to the abuser that he should leave the survivor alone,

"No, he knows where she lives but my mom and my dad would never let anybody do anything to me…. So my mom always got my back, hundred percent. And my dad already knows, he not gonna let nobody do nothing to me." - Christina (24 yrs, 2 children)

"My friend that came picked me up was way bigger, he's six eight, he's huge. He knew he wouldn't say nothing to him. He was like…leave her alone. She's coming. Don't call her. Don't do nothing. You put your hands on her again you answering to me." - Tania (30 yrs, 3 children)

Here we can see how the protection and safety that some family and/or peers provided helped the survivors avoid being harassed by the abuser.

One other important feature about the facilitative behaviors experienced by survivors through family and/or peers was the help they received both directly and indirectly from other survivors. For example, Margaret, a 38 year old survivor with two children, talked about how a friend who was also a survivor told her about the DV shelter and encouraged her to go there for help,

"…one of my girlfriends and then she's, ah, she's had enough of seeing me do it. She's she's told me many times, ' M you can do it. You can do it by yourself.' 'Cause she did it. You know she went to a shelter. She was in the same position I'm in right now and she ended up getting a Section 8 housing. Getting a job, and she did it. She did it and her kids are older now and she just had another baby, but, you know that it worked out for her. Hopefully it'll work out for me too."- Margaret (38 yrs, 2 children)

Lakeesha, a 23 year survivor with one child who was pregnant with her second child, also described how she learned about the DV shelter from another survivor, and how knowing about her friend's experience at the shelter encouraged her to call them.

"I have a girlfriend that's been in numerous abusive relationships and she told me about the place not too long ago…. she told me how safe she felt when she was here. So I just I called them and I told them what was going on."

In addition to getting help from other survivors to find DV shelters, survivors also reported getting help from other survivors once they were at the DV shelter. Several participants mentioned how it was the other residents at the DV shelters who were most helpful to them at times. Some survivors made new friends at the DV shelter and these

friends provided them with emotional and practical support. For example, Tania talked about how she went to the DV support group because another survivor she had befriended at the shelter encouraged her to.

"so I didn't go to the[sic] DV group the first couple of weeks. I went to one right before I left.
Because my, my friend who I met in here, who I'm still friends with, she's like my best friend now, um, she was like' let's go to group'. And I'm like I don't want to go. And she was like no, let's go to group together. And I said alright. So we ended up going to one of them and it wasn't that bad. I didn't really talk that much I mostly just listened, you know? But, like I could relate to everybody in there….you realize you're not going through it by yourself, there's other people, some people who had it worse, you know?"

This same resident was the one who transported Tania to the hospital when she had a miscarriage during her previous shelter stay. And so, the friendships survivors formed with other survivors created additional social support in their lives. Here Jasmine, a survivor who had reported having no supportive friends and/or family, talks about how these friendships are beneficial during the process of leaving,

"I have good people here this time that are not mean, that are my friends and really, really I can tell they really, truly care about me. And they are supportive and always constantly talking positive to me. My friend [H] here, she say I deserve happiness. And she wants happiness for me and I tell her I got a job and she scream louder than I did. And grabbed me and squeezed me. Feel so good….. And it just feels good to know that I have people that are my friends that care about me. And you see her come ask me to throw my clothes in the dryer for me. And I had kitchen this morning and I woke up late and my other friend, she did clean whole kitchen…"

Participants also talked about how other survivors at the DV shelter were often the most helpful in directing them to the appropriate places for resources, more so than the DV shelter staff, as this statement illustrates,

"it's kind of like the agencies don't help you, it's the other people that have been through what you've been through that help you."-Daisy (45 yrs, 4 children)

Up until this point, I have presented survivor accounts of the different ways in

which family and/or peers facilitated their process of leaving. However, only looking at what the facilitative behaviors are without looking at the consistency and conditionality of the behaviors misses an important part of the story. None of the women in this study felt that the support they received from family and friends was completely unconditional and consistent. However, six of the nineteen survivors (32%) said the support was *overall* consistent and unconditional. These survivors felt that they usually had support whenever they needed it and that is what helped them get their self defined needs met during the process of leaving. For example, Erika described the initial support from her family as,

"Well, yes because they (survivor's family) automatically tried to protect me, but I didn't like the violent part, you know, he hit me so the male men in my family wanted to hit him. That's the only part I didn't like. Um, that is was all turned to more violence and I didn't want that. But I,I feel like my family is helpful and I could count on them for support. [Interviewer: Uh huh. So after the incident, um, like what kind of help do you think you got from them?] More so support as in if he if he'd do it once, he would do it again 'you don't need him'. Um, 'you could come stay with me. You don't have to be there'. Um, just supporting me they was there for me"

When she was later asked about what helped her leave and not return, when that was her self-defined need, one of the things she said was, "It helped me having family that would be there." Additionally, when asked about what she thought enabled survivors to reach their goals, she said,

"*Um, just having strong supports. If you, if I would recommend that people don't have one to get one. Like a support system. […] If you have a, if you have family that you could count on that helps you."*

Some other survivors illustrated the consistency of the support they received from family members through proclamations such as these,

"My family was…was there for me a hundred percent"- Christina (24, 2kids)

"Um, at that point with resources, um, I had a lot of family help. A lot of family support [Interviewer: Um hmm. So even though he had come back and they didn't agree with your relationship, they were still supportive?] Yep"-Kendra

It is important to note, however, that even these six survivors, who in general reported consistent support, also reported at least one instance when they did not receive support or received negative support from family and/or peers.

In contrast, the remaining 13 survivors (68%) shared stories that illustrated how the behaviors of family and/or peers were inconsistent, conditional and/or unpredictable. Some survivors talked about how their family and/or peers were helpful at the beginning, but became less so, when the survivor reconciled with the abuser. For example, some participants noted,

"…in the beginning everybody would help, but, you know, like I said, after a while they just got tired of me going back or us getting back together because nobody, they didn't want us to stay together."-Daisy (45yrs old, 4 children)

"My friends was there. I could talk to them after so long they didn't want nothing to do with me 'cause I was still with him, so, I lost like a lot of my friends […] they come get me or let me spend the night at their house but they see me keep going back they just didn't want no part of it"-Shantana (27 yrs, 3 children)

These illustrate how even though we know from the research that ending an abusive relationship is a "process" and often involves many departures and reunifications, survivors going through this process often experienced diminishing support and a lack of sensitivity from family and/or peers. Here, in speaking about the types of things she heard from family and/or peers when she decided to return to the abuser, a survivor illustrated how the lack of sensitivity often manifested as victim blaming behavior.

*"people [*said*]'Well, just go get a job and' and then that's easier said than done when you have kids just, you know, 'Go get a job and' you know, 'get a car and' you know, it doesn't happen overnight"*- Daisy (45 yrs, 4 children)

Survivors also shared stories that exemplified behaviors from family and/or peers that

were conditionally supportive. In these cases, when survivors were not willing to or were unable to comply with certain conditions, they would no longer receive support. These are some of the stories of conditional support,

And, by this time my son pulls up, my friend pulls up and my cousin pulls up and he [the abuser] takes off running. And, my people was like, 'Get your stuff. Make sure you get everything 'cause you not coming back here. If we see you with him again, we gonna be through with you.' You know, 'Why do you keep going back to him?'"-Tiana (34 yrs, 6 children)

"And my brother said 'ok, well, you can stay here, but you gotta try to find a job and, you know, as long as I see that you're trying you can stay. I'll help you with whatever I can.'"-Nancy (28 yrs old, 4 children)

"And then I called my mom and I told her I was so ready to leave this relationship. Like I was so ready to go away from this man and she said, 'Ok, well, if you're ready to leave then I'm gonna help you.' And she sent me some money to come to[name of east coast city]. Me and my children and that what we did. I had my father pick us up [sniff] and we ended up going there. I come to [there] and my mom has always encouraged me to have abortions, so she was very upset when I had my son. She was more upset when I had my daughter. When I got pregnant with my third child then that's when I went [there]….just basically was like, 'Well you're gonna have to go. You're not having an abortion. You can't stay.'" – Jamila (31yrs old, 4 children)

It is easy to see that the types of conditions friends and or peers placed on survivors were diverse but what was common across them was that all of them involved some sort of value judgment. Similar to the victim blaming that was associated with the diminishing support following reconciliations with the abuser, in these scenarios survivors were being judged for their decisions and being told that if they didn't start making decisions that their family members and/or peers thought were right for them, they would no longer receive support from them.

In addition to the inconsistency in the behaviors of family and/or peers, survivors also presented stories in which sometimes the same individuals in their lives provided help only to then cause hindrances down the road. These are two examples,

"When I came home that morning and my neighbor told me he had been there, I left the house and went over to my mom's house. And she's like 'well, you can't you know you can't stay here. It just a matter of time before he's gonna come over here knocking on the door.' So, she said 'why don't you go and stay with your aunt for a while and maybe it will be better for you down there. You might even decide to stay.' So, it actually was. I really I I went to [name of southern state] and I wasn't even there a week and I had a job. It was like really good [small laugh] employment market there and I had been able to get my own place and I bought another car and everything was going fine. And then my mom, 'Oh, it's been eight months. He's gone on. I haven't heard from him in over six months. It's fine to come home.' She was missing the kids. Not thinking about me, you know what I'm saying? I was perfectly happy [there]. And she just kept talking, 'Oh, I think its fine I, he's gone on. His mom hasn't called, you know, I just want you guys to come back home, you've been gone for eight months.' So, I came back at the end of March."-Alicia (27 yrs old, 2 children)

"My mom told me, 'Come to [name of east coast city] everything's gonna be ok. I just bought this condo so you can live in the condo with the children" and um, you know, "It's a one bedroom, but it will be ok.' It's better than where you are."… So anyway, came back up here, whatever. So, like, after two years of being in the apartment, my mom was evicting me, we were completely at odds. Completely at odds, everything. She's in and out of my apartment. She's jumping in my face. She's, you know, yeah well I dare you to…Like my mom is just off the the hook. So, um, anyway she was putting me out. She's telling me she's gonna evict me and things like that…. and I'm looking for a place in [the city] but I could not find a place that I can afford [there]."- Jamila (31yrs old, 4 children)

For both these survivors, their mothers' behaviors were facilitators that enabled them to move far away from the abuser and have their own home with their children, only to be followed by behaviors that jeopardized their situation down the road.

While the survivors' accounts presented thus far illustrate the many ways in which the behaviors of their family and/or peers facilitated their process of leaving by meeting their self defined needs, we can also see how the inconsistency and conditionality of the behaviors of these individuals presented hindrances during the process of leaving. This was not the only way in which survivors experienced hindrances because of the behaviors of family and/or peers during the process of leaving. In the following section I present the many other ways in which family

and/or peers hindered the ability of survivors to have their self defined needs met during the process of leaving.

Hindering behaviors. For some survivors the biggest hindrance produced by the behaviors of family and/or friends was due to a general lack of support. Over half of the survivors (n=11, 58%) mentioned instances during the process of leaving or a life history of not having any social support at all from family and/or peers. For example, here, Donna, a survivor with three children, describes the absence of supportive women in her life and how men filled this void,

"So, I really have nobody. I don't have sisters. My adopted mom and I never got along. She's another two-face, nasty woman. So, and I've raised myself pretty much. I don't have people, you know, there's things I don't know, a lot. Other than through men."

Jasmine, a 25 year old survivor with five children reiterated Donna's point in talking about her dependence on the abuser,

"And that's a big reason why I keep him involved is 'cause convenience. I feel like I don't have anybody else and I feel like I need him. And people tell me 'no you don't, you can do it on your own.' But without have license or a vehicle and not have day care and not have enough money even when I do work. Minimum wage is not enough for five children and bills and rent and everything it's not enough. I cannot do it by myself. And that is why I do feel like I need him."

These women had little to no social support in their lives, and the absence of social support made them rely on the abuser to have their needs met, which in turn hindered their process of leaving.

In addition to simply not providing support, many survivors (n=14, 74%) also reported that family and/or peers often also engaged in behaviors that either ignored survivors' needs or created problems and consequently new needs in their lives. Here Rhonda, a 21 year old survivor with a 4 year old describes how her mother ignored

her appeal for help when she was in a precarious situation with the abuser, and how this discouraged her from seeking help from her mother during other violent incidents,

"one incident when I seen him acting crazy, I called my mom to come and get me, letting her know, just come and get me please, right now, because he acting crazy and I don't want to be in the same car with him. You can take him home or… your boyfriend can take him home and I ride in the car with somebody else. I don't want to be in the same car with him. 'Cause he's forcing me to do something that I don't want to do and it's gonna get violent….she acted very nonchalant that day. Like, you know she was mad 'cause she had to leave her boyfriend. You know she, she was mad because she had to get in a separate car than her boyfriend….so after that incident, the incident with the blade when he beat me up in the parking lot and the incident with the blade, I didn't even tell her. You know, 'cause I felt like, you know […] It no sense in me telling her."

And so, often survivors stopped seeking help from family and/or peers during the process of leaving because of negative experiences in the past where their needs were ignored.

In addition to ignoring survivors' needs, family and/or peers also frequently engaged in behaviors that further endangered or compromised a survivor's situation. In the case of two of the three survivors whose children had been taken by CPS, it was family members who had gotten CPS involved. In Tiana's case, she had left her four dependant age children in the care of her sister when the abuser physically assaulted her, resulting in her having to go to the hospital. When she did not return to pick her children up at the time that she was supposed to, her sister called the local precinct asking what she should do, and was instructed to bring the children in. Tiana describes here these circumstances that led to the removal of four of her children by CPS,

"She [Tiana's sister] *was supposed to be babysitting….I paid her to babysit. She was only babysitting and some things happened between me and him while I was out and I*

didn't have a chance to get the car to tell her what had happened because I lost my cell phone. And I don't know numbers by heart, I just program 'em all in my cell phone and that's how I dial 'em. So, by the time I did finally get to call her, the first thing I asked was where was the kids and she was like, "They're not here." And I said, "Well, where are they?" and she was like, "Well, I had to go to work and I didn't know if you was coming back or not" and my nine year old supposedly wet the bed and that made her very upset and then something with my, um, at the time I think, let me see if he's fourteen, fifteen, fourteen thirteen. My son at the time I think was like twelve and a half going on thirteen. He has supposed to ate up all her cheese in refrigerator or something. And she called the ninth precinct asked them what is she supposed to do with the kids because I wasn't back yet and they told her to bring the kids in, so, my dad took 'em, dropped them off at the ninth precinct ….And I'm just thinking that I'm a go down there and kinda tell them, 'Look, this is what happened. This man has been abusing me. He found me. He beat me up. I went to the hospital. I didn't abandon my kids.' And they would just gonna give 'em back, but that hasn't happened yet."

And so, in Tiana's case her family, in not being sensitive to or supportive of the abusive situation that she was in, created additional tribulations for her that generated an onslaught of new needs in her life as she tried to get her children back.

In Jasmine's case, it was her grandmother who, instead of helping her and her children during an extremely trying time, caused additional distress for her. As a result of being laid off from her job and falling behind on rent in spite of her best efforts, Jasmine and her abusive partner had to move with their five children into the abuser's mother's one bedroom apartment. Her grandmother, by alerting CPS to this situation, caused her children to be taken away from her. This is how Jasmine described it,

"They are not supportive. They, families try and supposed to try to help you, my family, no. Um, ok, they don't want to help you then that's ok, then don't do anything. No, my family do things to hurt me more….My grandmother is the one that when I need help instead of helping me she pick up the phone and she the one that called protective service on me. And she the one got my kids took away from me"

Here again is a situation where a survivor was in dire need of help and support, and where a family member, instead of enabling her to meet her needs, actually sabotaged her

and caused more problems for her.

In addition to adding distress to the lives of survivors, family and/or peers also sometimes engaged in behaviors that compromised the survivor's safety. For example, in both Crystal's and Alicia's cases, it was friends and family who disclosed the location of their new homes to the abuser, after the women had left the abuser and found their own places.

"I let one of the girls [one of her friends] know where I staying, like I said, all the time she was the info, the third party, you understand what I'm saying? […] But all the time, like I look at it now, she wasn't never my friend. She was his friend because she the one introduced me to him; you understand what I'm saying? So she was never my friend […] [Interviewer: So when you were moving she would know where you were and, and then as a result he would find out where you were staying?] Um hmm." –Crystal (unknown age, 2 children)

"So, I confided in a family member where I lived, 'cause I was really like nobody knew, but me and my mom, where I lived. I would go and visit everybody. And I told a cousin of mine where I lived and he ran into him somewhere and somehow, someway he talked him out of it, you know. And he told him where I live. And he came to my door."- Alicia (27 yrs, 2 children)

Overall, the behaviors of family and/or peers played a very important role in how and whether or not survivors were able to have their self-defined needs met, and consequently impacted their process of leaving an abusive relationship. Additionally, even the facilitative behaviors of family and/or peers did not truly facilitate women's process of leaving, unless these behaviors were consistent and unconditional. However, family and/or peers were not the only actors at the microlevel who had an impact on their process of leaving. Not surprisingly, the other major player at the micro level was the abuser himself.

<u>Assertion 2: At the microsystem level, the behaviors of the abuser will hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met: All 19 survivors confirmed this</u>

assertion.

Finding 2: Behaviors of abusers. During the process of leaving, the role of the abuser is one that is complex and multidimensional. The complexity lies in the manner in which abusers often engage in behaviors guised as positive or supportive when the ulterior motives behind these behaviors are usually power and control. Just like family and peers, abusers on many occasions met the self-defined needs of survivors while on other occasions ignored survivors' needs or created new needs. Unlike the manner in which family and peers sometimes facilitated the process of leaving by meeting the self defined needs of survivors consistently and unconditionally, all of the behaviors of abusers, regardless of whether they met survivors' immediate needs, were hindrances to her process of leaving. The different behaviors that the abuser engaged in that influenced a survivor's process of leaving were:

Promises to change. After a survivor leaves, it is very common for abusers to makes promises to change their behaviors, or seek help. By doing so, the abusers usually convince survivors that things can be different if they return, and hence pose a hindrance to their process of leaving. Most of the survivors in this study (n=16, 84%) described how the abuser did just this on at least one occasion during the process of leaving, and how it influenced them to return. For example, Donna, who at one point had left the abuser and established herself to some extent in an apartment of her own, describes here how the abuser talked her into returning to the relationship,

"And he kept coming over. "I love you. I'll change. Please…I'm going to lose everything," because he had his accident and he tried to work at a factory until the investigative world started to pick up. And I felt sorry for him not to mention I'm thinking I'm really having it rough, you know, trying to make ends meet….On my own. So, ok, we'll give it a try and then it went for there. Then he persuaded me to leave the apartment, and he got me the house on [street name]."

Jasmine's story was very similar as she described the abuser's behavior after the first time she had left and gone to the DV shelter. At the time she had had only two of her five children, and was pregnant with her third one.

"He get on the phone with me and say I am sorry. I will take anger management classes. I will go to counseling with you. I will do anything, whatever it takes you come back home with me and bring my kids back. I'm dying without you guys. And so I told him I don't want to hear it first, I want to see it first. And he said how will you see it if we're not around each other? He asked me if that weekend I could come and spend some time with him and the kids and he will show me. So I did. And he was really good. And really nice and really sweet the whole time. And I leave here and I go back home."

And so, abusers on many occasions engaged in what on the surface appeared to be positive behaviors as they expressed their remorse and pled for forgiveness. However, these behaviors were always a means to an end because in the case of all of the survivors, the abusers resorted back to their old ways soon after the survivors reconciled the relationship.

Stalking and/or threatening behaviors. In contrast to the pleas and promises mentioned above, many survivors (n=14, 74%) also describe how the abusers sometimes engaged in stalking and threatening behaviors with the intent of scaring survivors into returning. On occasion they got what they wanted, where the survivor did return out of fear. Kendra, a 26 year old survivor with three children, experienced this type of behavior on multiple occasions. The first time she left, she was pregnant with her second child and went to her mother's house. Here she describes what ensued as a result,

"*And, um, he showed up at my mom's house, rode up on her grass and got all in her face and you need to let her come back with me, she carrying my child. And, I mean, he really flipped out. And I told my mother, I said mommy, I gotta go back because he's going to tear up your house like he did mine. And I left and I went back and stayed with him."*

Following this, Kendra left again while she was still pregnant, but this time she moved

into a place of her own close to her mothers, knowing that if she stayed at her mother's the abuser would find her. However, even in that instance she was not able to hide from the abuser. Here she describes what happened that time, and why she reconciled with him,

"… he seen me come out of the house one day on his way to my mother's house. And he got so mad and he grabbed me by my clothes, by my shirt to yell and said,' why didn't you tell me that you left?'….and he said that once I had the baby he was taking the baby from me. So, um, he told me that if I didn't do everything that he needed me to do to help him with his drug and alcohol problem, and to stay with him and raise our daughter together, that he would kill me before he allowed me to live on my own. So I told him that he could come move with me."

Many survivors had similar experiences, where the abuser made them so fearful after they had left, that they returned because they thought they would be safer where they could see him rather than being away from him and not knowing when, where and how he might harm her or her children. And so it was quite common for abusers to use threatening and stalking behaviors to hinder a survivor's process of leaving.

Monitoring women's behaviors. Some survivors (n=8, 42%) also described how abusers engaged in behaviors that made it physically difficult for them to leave. A few women gave accounts of being held captive by the abuser and of the abuser constantly checking up on her so that she had limited opportunities to try to leave. Alicia, a 27 year old survivor with twin boys, described her experience with these kinds of behaviors in the following way,

"He was like 'so what? You're gonna leave? Are you gonna leave again?' And then he started like he was always around. 'Cause last time I had left when he was at work you know what I'm saying? So, it was like he was always around. And when he left to go to work he was like calling fifty million times, you know what I'm saying? Or he'd be, um, he wouldn't say that he was sending people over there, but just like out of the blue his sister would pop up, you know what I'm saying? Or or, um, one of one of his friends would pop up and say 'Oh, um, I just came here to get something out of his desk.' Or, you know just to see if I was there I guess."

By constantly keeping tabs on the survivor in this way, abusers made sure that survivors had no respite during which they could either plan to leave or actually leave and consequently hindered their process of leaving.

Another way in which abusers held survivors captive was by keeping them trapped physically and by using their children as collateral. Here, Jasmine, who at the time had four children, describes such a scenario,

"He barricade my door. He put dressers and he put everything and he barricade my door….he would not move that stuff out of the door all night. And he would not let me out of the house all night. After that he not trust me go anywhere 'cause he think I'm going to disappear. And he will not trust me go anywhere with all the kids. If I had to leave and I had…somewhere to go, he would make me leave at least one child with him because he knew I would come back 'cause he knew I would not ever leave any… of my children. He always keep one. And he would not let me go somewhere with all four. Would not let me do that. So I had to stay. I feel trapped. I feel I could not talk to anybody. And I feel, I did not know what to do so I just stay and I just put up with it and I did what he told me to do and I didn't do what he told me not to do. And it just stayed like that."

And so, here we can see how the abuser used the survivor's attachment to and concern for her children to his own advantage. When this happened, the survivors had to wait it out until the abuser let his guard down, and then attempt to leave.

<u>Assertion 3: At the microsystem level, the survivor's concerns for her children will influence her self-defined needs during the process of leaving:</u> All 19 survivors' stories confirmed this assertion.

Finding 3: Concerns for their children. Survivors' concerns for their children shaped their self defined needs during the process of leaving in several different ways. Whether or not this influence turned into a facilitator or hindrance was dependant on the extent to which she was able to have these needs met through other micro, meso and exosystem factors. The particulars of how survivors were or were not able to have these

needs met are covered in the context of Findings 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 and therefore will not be discussed in detail here. Instead, here the focus is on the specific child focused concerns and the particular needs influenced by those concerns during the process of leaving.

When survivors reported instances of the abuser either endangering the physical safety of the children or causing direct physical harm to the children (n=6, 32%), most (n=5, 83%) reported that their concern for their children provoked them to leave because they simply were not willing to tolerate that kind of behavior.

Here Jamila, who had four children with the abuser, talks about how bad she felt when she was sharing with other survivors at a DV shelter support group about why she had left that time,

"and it was just awful because I was telling them when I came in there that I came in there because my baby and my, L was five months and I was holding her one day and, um, you know, [B] hit me. You know, and I'm thinking, 'What if I'd of dropped her?' Like, you know, anything like, what, who in their right mind would do something like that?"

Dolores, who had four children, three of them with the abuser, and Jasmine presented very similar accounts of incidents that had led them to leave and go to a DV shelter,

"I ended up I think I just had [my youngest child]; he was a couple weeks old and he had pushed me. I nursed my children and he had pushed me and I was nursing my son. So, I came here and I was here at [the DV shelter]."-Dolores

"The reason I left him and came here for the first time… is because my second daughter that was born was only an infant and I was holding her in my arms when he repeatedly kept shoving me back into the wall…. And I was holding our baby in my arms when he kept shoving me backwards into the wall. And then he flipped me over the couch with my newborn baby in my arms. So to me that was, I am done. I am, you doing hurt me, but you put my baby at risk. I am done."-Jasmine

Here, it is clear how for some survivors it was the potential physical harm to their children that was the last straw. For some other survivors, it was actual physical harm that was the provocation. Stephanie, a 32 year old survivor with five children (only her

youngest daughter lives with her throughout the year, while the others move between her and their dads) experienced such an incident with her two year old daughter and the abuser, who is not the biological father, which led to her going to the DV shelter this time,

"So, the last straw was when he hit my daughter with a pack of batteries 'cause she was crying over her cup….And he hit her and we got into a big fight… police were called. I called them four times. They never came."

Erika described a similar incident, with her younger daughter,

"I had to get tired you know, to be able to say 'ok, I'm done' and I came to that point when he hit me with the baby in my arms and she fell. And she hurt her arm. And I said after that, this is his child, his blood is running through her. He don't care. He don't care about me trying to get counseling for us. He don't care about me leaving and then giving him a chance coming back. He don't care about anything but hisself and he's never gonna change."

The one survivor who reported not leaving when the abuser started being abusive towards one of her children, did however report sending the child away to live with her mother. She framed this decision as one where she had to choose between sending her son away, and staying with the abuser at a time when she was pregnant versus leaving and having the abuser create havoc in her life. This mother did report leaving later on and mentioned missing her child as one of the reasons for leaving. And so, even when survivors didn't initially leave because their children's physical safety was endangered by the abuser, they did take steps to remove the children from the situation.

The other scenario that many of the survivors (n=13, 68%) brought up was around their concerns about the children witnessing the abuse, and the consequent behaviors of the children. Twelve of the 13 survivors who were concerned about their children witnessing the abuse talked about this being a provocation for them to leave. For example, here Erika and Beverly provide accounts of how their children reacted

to witnessing the abuse, and how that in turn motivated them at the time to end the relationship,

"The first time she actually seen it she never liked him, the relationship was different. 'Til now to this day she don't like him.... And she told me to promise her after that that I wouldn't talk to him anymore, but I did and it hurted her. And that's what made me get strong…. That's why I ended up really just ending the relationship 'cause I didn't want her to feel that way"

"So he would put his hands on me in front of my kids. And my kids would start crying….
And it was just, it was heartbreaking to see them cry because somebody else is putting their hands on me. And it hurt 'em; it hurt the kids a lot… That's when I first kicked him, I kicked him out"

Another survivor, Lakeesha, described her concerns about her daughter witnessing the abuse in the following way,

"I didn't watch my mother get abused and I think that's why I like have a zero tolerance for it. And I'm not gonna let my daughter watch me be abused because I just think that's something that does not need to be that doesn't need to go on. I went through a lot growing up but watching my mother be abused was never one of them. So, you know, I'm not gonna put my daughter in that situation."

The remaining one survivor, who did not leave as a result of her concerns about the children witnessing the abuse, did however talk about sending her children away to live with their biological dad.

Concern around childcare was another influence on survivors' self-defined needs during the process of leaving. Fourteen of the 19 survivors (74%) talked about childcare concerns. Several survivors talked about how difficult it was to get anything accomplished when they had their children in tow. Alicia, who has seven year old twin boys, explained this problem quite succinctly,

"You know, it's hard enough to sit in the Social Security office for an hour and a half. It's even harder to do it with two kids fighting over you"

Margaret, whose children were being watched by their grandmother, exemplifies this

further in describing how helpful it was for her to not have her children with her at the DV shelter, and then talking about what it would be like had the children been with her,

"it helps immensely because I know that my children are taken care of [by their grandmother, the abuser's mother]… If I had my children with me, it would be really, I mean it would, it would be comforting to me because they were with me, but I couldn't get anything accomplished….All I gotta do is make sure that I have a place to stay and then they can come with me. But in the meantime I don't have to worry about my kids"

"Well there's no one to watch your children for you. So, um, if you need to go to the jail and get a police report or, uh, talk to the DA you gotta bring your kids with you. You know and it, I don't want, I don't wanna do that. You know, um, if you gotta go to a job interview they gotta sit out in the car or be on the bus with you. Or you can't go because you can't take your children to a [job] or apply for a job…. You just can't get anything accomplished, you know. You can't go look for a job. You can't go look for a house. You can't, I mean you might be able to go look for a house but it's a lot, it makes it a lot harder. You got a lot more head way if you're by yourself doing it."

Concerns about children specific to being able to meet their material needs was the other major influence on survivors needs during the process of leaving. Many mothers (68%) talked about how they were either afraid to leave or returned after they left because they were concerned about not being able to provide for their children. Daisy exemplified this fear when she described why she was scared to leave and also why she returned each time,

"I thought I could do, you know better on my own with the kids. The only reason and a lot of the time too I was scared to not just of him, but to be by myself with the kids. I didn't know how I was going to do it on my own. You know, and he was, at that time, the bread winner, so, you know, even a little bit of money was better than no money at all.... I think all the times, even the first time, I thought, "I'm not, I'm not going back again." But I always did."

Additionally, sometimes these concerns were exacerbated by fears about having their children removed by CPS if they were unable to provide for the children adequately. Stephanie, who went and stayed in a motel the first time she left with her two year old

daughter, describes here her rationale at the time for returning,

"I was broke. I had to, you know, I didn't have a house. I can't continue to stay in a motel with a two-year-old. 'Cause someone would call on you."

Similarly, Tania described why she probably would not have left if her children's biological fathers had not taken them upon her request,

"I would probably just sit there 'cause I would be scared and I wouldn't want the state take 'em away. I wouldn't want them 'well, you're homeless you can't take care of 'em.' I wouldn't want that to happen."

These fears were not unfounded as we will see later on when I present survivors experiences with CPS.

Thus far, I have presented the three main domains from the microsystem that appeared to impact survivors' self defined needs during the process of leaving. In the following sections I will expand on the mesosystem factors that were influential during the process of leaving.

Assertion 4a: At the mesosystem level, interconnections between the abuser and the children will hinder/facilitate a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met during the process of leaving. Fourteen of the 19 survivors (74%) confirmed this assertion. This assertion was not applicable to the remaining five survivors because their children did not have any significant relationship with the abuser.

Finding 4a. Abuser's relationship with child(ren). Survivors' children have varying relationships with the abuser. For ten women (53%) the abuser was the father of some or all of her children. For four survivors (21%) the abuser was not her children's biological father, but had been a father figure in their lives. And finally, for the remaining five families (26%), the abuser had no significant relationship with the survivor's children. Hence, the majority of the survivors had children who had a relationship with

the abuser, and all of these women (n=14) talked about the ways in which the relationship between the abuser and the children had an impact on her process of leaving.

The relationship between the abuser and the survivor's children for the most part worked as a hindrance for survivors (n=13, 68%) during the process of leaving. This relationship was a hindrance due to two main reasons.

First, for the survivors who legally shared children with the abuser, they were forever bound to the abuser as a result and this worked as a hindrance. Survivors talked about maintaining their relationship with the abuser (both romantic and non-romantic) at times because they were afraid of losing custody of their children. A number of survivors (n=4) talked about trying to keep the peace with the abuser because of their fears around custody issues. For example, Kendra, who shared one child with the abuser, described the basis of her fear of losing custody in the following way,

"I always feared that he would take my daughter. Um, and he would always say it. He would always say if you do anything I'll take you to military court. And, I just, you know, I kinda tried to stay on my P's and Q's because he was technically more stable financially and, you know, he had a better job than me. So if he were ever to take me to court he could have got custody."

Given such concerns it is not surprising that only one of the four survivors who had fears about custody had a legal custody agreement in place.

At other times survivors (n=8, 42%) mentioned maintaining contact with the abuser in the context of the abusers visits with the children. In this scenario, too, only one survivor had a legal visitation agreement in place (the same one as above). All of the other survivors either mentioned having informal arrangements or no arrangement in place with the abuser about seeing the children. This scenario worked as a hindrance to the

survivor's process of leaving because it often created venues for the abuser to continue harassing her. For example, in this exchange Erika speaks to why she was maintaining contact with the abuser after moving to her own place,

"[Interviewer: And you'd be meeting him so he could see [his daughter?]Um hmm. So he could go, he could take her with them. I don't keep them [the abuser and his family] from her."

Here she describes what often happened during his visits to come pick up their daughter,

"[Interviewer: Ok, so he would just come over and leave?] Cause total chaos and then leave"

As a result she talked about how in the future she would not let him know where she is living and would let him pick up their child from her in some sort of public place. Many of the other survivors vocalized this intention of making sure to only interact with the abuser in public areas and not share the location of their homes, because of their past experiences with visitation situations.

Second, for survivors whose children had a relationship with the abuser, this relationship posed a hindrance in the form of the children missing him and wanting to see him. Several survivors (n=8, 42%) discussed how the children were attached to the abuser and so would get upset when the survivor tried to terminate the relationship. Consequently, women often felt pressure to return to the relationship or to maintain a non-romantic relationship so the children could visit with the abuser. Jasmine's story of how her children reacted when she left the first time provides a typical example of this kind of situation in the case where the abuser was the biological father.

"Then my kids keep asking me where is daddy? Where is daddy? Where is daddy? Where is daddy? He hurt me but he always be good dad other than letting them see and hear things that they shouldn't have. Other than that personally to them he has

been good dad…. I want them to see their dad and I want him to see them. I just don't want to. I just didn't want to be around him. And I just felt really bad that's why I called him…to let him say hi to them on the phone…. And that's when he asked me please I do ever it takes come home."

And, Alicia's account is a typical example of the situation with abusers who were father figures to the survivor's children,

"And the first time I came they were like angry at me. Like well, 'why is T not coming?' And we just left him by his self. And they were like sad for him, not realizing like mommy's tired as hell, you know, it's, it's because I never let them see it. And he didn't wanna let them see it, because he didn't want to lose his good guy image with them. He really loves the kids, for whatever reason I guess they, he grew up, you know, they grew up around him, so he's somewhat attached."

While most of the stories shared by women illustrated how the relationship between the abuser and the children worked as a hindrance to their process of leaving, a select few accounts (n=2, 11%) exemplified scenarios where this relationship was a facilitator to the process of leaving. For instance, here Shantana describes how her children's dislike of the abuser facilitated her process of leaving,

"my kids didn't too much like him. So, that's really the reason why I had to leave the relationship 'cause my kids come first ….My kids just up front they'll tell me. 'Hey mom, we don't like him.' And they'll tell him too…. I just, had to get my kids out the situation. Plus myself, but mainly my kids 'cause my life is evolved around them."

Hence, abusers' relationships with survivors' children worked in intricate ways, mostly to create hindrances and on a few occasions to facilitate the process of leaving.

Assertion 4b: At the mesosystem level interconnections between the abuser and family/peers will facilitate or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met during the process of leaving. Thirteen of the 19 survivors (68%) confirmed this assertion. There was insufficient information about the relationship between the abuser and the survivor's family/friends for the remaining six survivors to be able to confirm or disconfirm.

Finding 4b. Abuser's interconnections with survivor's family/friends. The interconnections between the abuser and the survivor's family/friends in some cases was a hindrance while in other cases was a facilitator for the survivor in her ability to get her self-defined needs met during the process of leaving. Of the survivors who mentioned interconnections between the abuser and family/friends, the majority (n=9, 69%) provided accounts where the interconnection between the abuser and her family/friends posed hindrances for her. The interconnection posed a hindrance in three different ways. The most common one was where the abuser was endangering the safety of the woman's family/friends (n=5, 38%). Survivors talked about how they could not get help from family/friends because the abuser was jeopardizing the safety of their family/friends. Here Tiana describes why she had to move out of her adult son's house because of confrontations between her son[2] and the abuser,

"And one particular day he got very upset because I wouldn't leave with him 'cause I was scared of him…. And he was threatening to come and shoot up my son's house and kill my son and all type of stuff like that"

Some women (n=3, 23%) presented scenarios where their family did not help them because they disliked the abuser and did not agree with the survivors' decisions during the process of leaving. Survivors (n=2, 15) also talked about how the abuser's close relationship with their family/friends posed a barrier for them in seeking help from family/friends. Alicia described it in the following way,

"When you're in a relationship like that, especially when you've been in it for years where your families are intertwined, it's kind of hard to go running to a family member's house because they are just as involved with this person as as you are. So, you know, like I said, my mom and my brothers and everybody they've known him since he was fourteen. So, you know, he's kind of like a part of the family"

[2] I classified Tiana's son in this situation as family rather than as children because this was her adult son who was living on his own.

A few survivors (n=4, 31%) described situations where the interconnection between the abuser and their family/friends was a facilitator during the process of leaving. These women shared stories where the abusers had a healthy fear of the survivors' family, and this fear worked in a protective manner and facilitated their process of leaving. Christina provides an example of this here,

"he wasn't gonna come up there and put his hands on me because he already know, you know? That he'll get hurt, regardless to if they wait to call the police or not. So, I felt a hundred percent safe there. Other places where I would leave and like go to his mom's house I will always feel wary like he can come here, if he really want to, you know….he stayed away, but I felt a hundred percent safe at my mom's house on my territory."

And so, the abuser's relationship with the survivor's family/friends worked both as a facilitator and a hindrance to her process of leaving based on the nature of the relationship.

Assertion 4c: At the mesosystem level interconnections between the abuser and the survivor's exosystem will facilitate/hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. Eleven of the nineteen survivors (58%) confirmed this assertion. The remaining eight did not share sufficient information about this to be able to confirm or disconfirm the assertion.

Finding 4c. Abuser's interactions with survivor's exosystem. Several women shared stories of situations where the abuser's interconnections or interactions with the survivor's exosystem impacted her process of leaving.

The most common interconnection that impacted the process of leaving, noted by almost half of the women (n=8, 42%), was that between the abuser and law enforcement. Of the eight, two mentioned not feeling safe to go to law enforcement because of the

abuser's relationship with police and so this link worked as a hindrance for the survivors. For example, here, Nancy talks about why she never involved law enforcement,

"I've never pressed charges. I've never did any of that because I'm that afraid of him. Like I say, he knows people….He, uh, works for the city….and he's worked in several departments with the city so and he know a lot of police officers. A lot of police officers and are his buddies, you know. That's who he hangs out with you know, so it's, it will be almost like a no-win situation if I was to go ahead and press charges…'cause he has friends like in every department, police department. So I'm in a no-win situation as far as it goes with him because they're gonna look at his interest, you know, somebody's gonna look out for him before they look out for me, you know".

The other six survivors mentioned the abuser's existing problems with law enforcement which worked in ways that benefitted the survivor during the process of leaving. In these cases the abuser had warrants out for other crimes and that helped the survivor's process of leaving by limiting the abuser's mobility. As Tania illustrates here,

"*He doesn't cross [name of major street separating cities]. So I'm not worried of him finding me out here in[city name] because….he already knows if you cross it, oh here you're probably going to jail. He ain't got no license. He's got warrants out for him. He's not a good guy."*

In other instances it helped the survivors by creating a situation where he got arrested and jailed and so was temporarily no longer a threat or where bail was posted for him and she got the money as payment for child support arrears.

The other mesosystem factor that was relevant for multiple survivors for their process of leaving was the interaction between the abuser and her employer. Three women described how the harassment at their workplace took place when they had left the abuser and so these interactions between the abuser and their workplace eventually resulted in jeopardizing their financial security and hence hindered their process of leaving. Here Donna describes the job loss that resulted in forcing her to

reunite with the abuser due to financial concerns.

"They were at their wits end and they let me go after my 89th day. Even though I was doing good… I worked my butt off pulled double shifts when, I knew it was all because of him because they had enough".

In addition to police and employers, the other interactions between abusers and exosystem factors that survivors mentioned were her physician (n=1) and her landlord (n=1). In both cases, the interaction resulted in causing hindrances in her process of leaving. The doctor's office disclosed the survivor's appointment times to the abuser, hence jeopardizing her safety, and the landlord evicted the survivor because of the abuser's harassment.

In summary, the manner in which the micro/meso system factors influenced survivors' process of leaving was through bi-directional interactions with the survivor's self-defined needs during the process of leaving. The micro/meso system factors were in some instances either adequately meeting or not meeting the self-defined needs of the survivor during the process of leaving. In other instances they were creating new needs for the survivors, such as when family members divulged the location a survivor's new home to her abuser causing her to have to move or seek safety. The next section will move to the next level, and focus on the individual exosystem factors that influence the process of leaving.

Exosystem Factors

In Bronfenbrenner's model the exosystem includes organizations and social systems. In the interviews, exosystem factors that survivors mentioned can be divided into two main categories, structures in the exosystem and the gatekeepers to these structures. The structures represent the physical entities that exist in the survivor's social

system that provides her with services (e.g., child welfare, domestic violence shelters). Structures also include the policies that these entities have for service provision that impact what survivors can and cannot receive and the conditions for receiving services. The gatekeepers to these structures represent the people with whom survivors have to interact in order to access the services provided by the exosystem structures.

Assertion 5: Structural exo-level factors will facilitate or hinder a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met. All 19 survivors confirmed this assertion.

Finding 5. Structural entities. There were five main exosystem structures that survivors reported interacting with during the process of leaving. These were DV shelters, Department of Human Services (DHS), law enforcement, the child welfare system or Children's Protective Services (CPS), and transportation services. Overall, all of these structures in some cases enabled survivors to have their needs met, while in other cases were inadequate or actually created obstacles or new needs. Here I present each structure and the ways in which each of them facilitated or hindered survivors' ability to have her self-defined needs met during the process of leaving.

DV shelters. Since all of the participants in this study were recruited from a DV shelter, they all spoke about their experience with that specific DV shelter and those who had been to other DV shelters in the past, spoke about those experiences as well. The vast majority of the survivors (n=16, 84%) were at the shelter because they needed a safe place to stay where the abuser could not find them. The remaining survivors were there because they needed a place to stay, but at the time were not in immediate physical danger from the abuser.

In addition to needing a safe place, survivors expressed a plethora of other

needs while at the DV shelter. These included practical support and referrals (n=12), financial resources/access to employment (n=13), transportation (n=17), material goods (n=13), and needs specific to their children (n=10). Here Alicia, who came to the shelter because the abuser would come and find her and harass her at the homes of friends and family, presents all the ways in which the shelter was helpful to her and her 7 year old twins,

"they helped me tremendously, 'cause, like I said, I I left with nothing. So, um, I was able to, um, like rebuild everything that was in my wallet. Like my IDs, Social Security Cards, they had great resources for that because I had at the time I had to leave the car because it was his car. So, um, they gave us like bus tickets and, um, uh, vouchers to ride the community transit, take you anywhere you had to go. And at the time I didn't have a cell phone because I had left it at my mom's because I knew that he would be calling it and I didn't want to let him have any direct connect to me. So, um, they even have phones. So like when we went out to meet landlords or to take care of business, we would have a phone, especially if you had kids because like if something happened at camp you know, they would be able to contact you. And I think that the camp was a really big help to me because it helped my kids deal with what we were going through without actually knowing what was happening. And it also gave me a chance to take care of a lot of things during the day that I wouldn't want to have to drag two kids around with me to do…. on house hunting days the case managers would load anybody up in the van who wanted to go and we would go and look at places…once I found a place they, um, they helped me find a lot of resources to help me pay to get into the place because I wasn't working… with DHS that, um, state assistance, it's not really, you know, enough to relocate with…finding something in my budget and finding something that I could afford to move in was almost impossible. But [the DV shelter] really helped….to get the money I needed to move in. And then when I left, they gave us, um, exiting vouchers to get like everything that I didn't have: pots, pans, blankets, sheets, whatever we needed. Um, furniture if you needed it, beds, couches, tables, even down to a washer and dryer. Whatever you need…"

Alicia's experience at the DV shelter is what would be considered the ideal story in terms of having needs met and facilitating the process of leaving. Also, her account here is a good illustration of the breadth of services and resources survivors received at the DV shelter. However, not all women had experiences such as Alicia's during their shelter stays. Even though many (n=11, 58%) did have similar experiences,

many others (n=8 42%) reported at least one instance during a stay at a DV shelter when one or more of their needs were not met. Women who were not able to have many of their needs met during their shelter stays were often the ones who at shelter exit had not been able to procure stable housing or financial resources. The main limitations that survivors reported facing during their shelter stay were the length of the shelter stay and the lack of transitional housing, the lack of ongoing support after shelter exit, and lack of access to transportation. The issues with transportation will be discussed in detail in the upcoming section on transportation, hence will not be elaborated here.

Many survivors (n=12, 63%) talked about how 30 days is insufficient to get together everything they need to start from scratch especially when there are children involved. As Stephanie expressed here,

"it's a 30-day program and you can't get your life back in thirty days. It's very hard with a two-year-old."

Survivors feared not being able to find a job or affordable housing by the time the 30 days are up, and becoming homeless, or having to return to the abuser. Here Tiana expresses her fears of not having anything when her time at the shelter runs out,

"you only got 30 days. And I guess all the women got the same fear, once your 30 days are over where do you go? So, I still don't know where I'm going when my time is up…. That's the scariest part you don't know….they take you around to look for the jobs and stuff. And that's just you waiting for somebody to call you, but it's almost still scary 'cause it's like you still only got 30 days. So, if your 30 days is up and you're not hired then that means that you're leaving out the same way that you came in…with nothing. It's scary."

Many women (n=12, 63%) mentioned filling out paperwork for Section 8 (government subsidized, low-income) housing. However, they were all on waiting lists, and with Section 8 housing wait lists usually taking at least a year, if they were

unable to secure housing at shelter exit, their options besides being homeless would be to return to the abuser or find a friend or family to live with. Moving in with family and/or friends for some survivors was still not a safe option since the reason they went to the shelter in the first place was because the abuser could find them at the homes of friends or family.

Several survivors (n=6, 32%) talked about the need for a supportive network even after they had left the shelter. Usually, women who talked about this were the ones who had been in a DV shelter in the past and had managed to find housing on their own but then something had happened to jeopardize their situation which led them to be back in the DV shelter again. The survivors who mentioned this were also usually the ones who had minimal or unstable social support from their microsystem. Donna articulated this by comparing the support to an AA sponsor,

"like in NA or AA, do a DV sponsor, domestic violence sponsor. Because if they have nobody to talk to and there they're back in that, they're gonna go back to that same cycle. And I think that's what it was… "cause like say for instance I'm freaking out about a bill or say, um I don't know, like I call and say, 'Ok well, I got this bill, but I don't know…. I don't know what I can do'…. You know, there's got to be a way around this….Like I said, like an AA, you know, you feel you're gonna have that drink or you're gonna do whatever you call that person. They know, give you advice, 'Well, go, go here and read this. Or, maybe you should go there and do this.' You know, like, but, just so that I know that I can get through life. You know what I mean? I know that the lights won't get turned off or, um, I can get my car fixed."

Kendra's situation was an apt example of what survivors often go through when this kind of support is not available. She had secured housing and employment after her last stay at the DV shelter, but she ended up being in a neighborhood with gang violence, and the building she lived in was part of a drive-by shooting. Hence, she wanted to move but her landlord would not let her out of her lease, and as a result she ended up having to go to court. In the course of fighting her landlord in court, she lost

her job because of absences due to having to go to court. This situation was exacerbated when the abuser found out where she lived and showed up and assaulted her. This spiral of events led her back to the DV shelter. However, she felt that had she had some support and help, things would not have gotten this bad again. Here she talks about the help she wishes she had had, that would have prevented her from having to return to the DV shelter,

"…I think if they had a system where after you're gone and you, they know you're on your feet because they helped you get there and then you say, like my my situation with my landlord and I could have say well ok, I'm gonna call [name of DV shelter] when I get home. And I'll call[them] and I say hey, this is [Kendra] and I got a situation. Um, my landlord trying to take me to court … Ok, well, we can't handle that but we have resources for someone who can. And they give me a list of numbers. And now I have somebody that I can talk to and tell them my situation. I think if if every person that leaves there has that, no matter what the situation is or what resources they need, even if [the DV shelter] doesn't have them but they say ok, hey this place has them or that has 'em and can give you that number or tell you hey, well such and such knows about that. Just being able to call somewhere and have somebody tell you that they know who can help you is tremendous."

Common across what all of the survivors who expressed a need for this kind of support said was that the support be provided by someone who understood their situation. They referred to being able to speak to someone who knew what their individual situation was, and with whom they already had an established relationship during their shelter stay. As Tania put it,

"Somebody who knows what you what you been through and watched you go through it and watched you 'til you left."

This illustrates how crucial it is for survivors to have access to ongoing support and resources that are sensitive to their DV situation, in order to enable them to have their needs met on a continuous basis and consequently truly facilitate their process of leaving when that is their desired outcome.

Department of Human Services (DHS). All of the women interviewed for this study reported having interactions with DHS in order to receive TANF either in the past, and/or currently. This is not surprising for two reasons. One, as mothers trying to escape an abusive relationship, TANF is a resource that survivors are automatically referred to by DV services, to help them get on their feet. Two, it is often true that survivors who utilize shelters are those who are also from a low socioeconomic status (SES). The types of DHS aid survivors reported using were food stamps, childcare assistance, State Emergency Relief (SER) cash assistance, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Ten survivors reported receiving DHS cash assistance and three had been approved for SER and these forms of assistance helped survivors to have some but not all of their financial needs met. So, for most survivors, having access to the DHS assistance was really crucial during the process of leaving, but the assistance was usually inadequate on its own. Here Alicia talks about how challenging it was to find housing that was affordable based on the TANF assistance she was receiving from DHS,

"So and, you know, with with DHS that, um, state assistance, it's not really, you know, enough to relocate with, at that time, with two kids, my grant was about $490 a month. And most places want twelve, fifteen hundred dollars, to move in, you know. And then so, you know, finding something in my budget and finding something that I could afford to move in was almost impossible"

"I was living in the shelter, I didn't have a job and I was trying to get in a place and they denied me for state emergency relief."

In Alicia's case she did get cash assistance but she did not get SER, which means she had very little money for finding housing. She was only able to find housing because other exosystem structures such as the DV shelter she was in at the time and other community agencies were able to help her by supplementing the DHS money. Hence,

on its own, TANF rarely provided enough money for survivors with children to find adequate housing.

The other form of cash assistance mentioned by survivors was SSI, for which only two survivors reported being eligible. This form of cash assistance was extremely helpful, but once again, not enough. Erika, who recently had to stop working after being diagnosed with congestive heart failure, explains,

"I get SSI so I get income, that's enough to pay my bills for right now, but it's like it's just enough, you know. It's enough to pay my bills, it's enough for my lights but after that it's nothing. So I'm about that's what I'm saying I'm about to go to work, if I can't do any strenuous work I'm gonna get a telemarketing job, something."

Unlike the cash assistance, survivors who reported receiving non-cash assistance from DHS in the form of food stamps (n=9) and childcare assistance (n=5) thought they were of help and did not say that they were inadequate as is illustrated by Stephanie and Christina.

"I did go to FIA and apply for food stamps…So they gave me food stamps to buy food for my child so I can feed her" -Stephanie

"Um, so I found a job. I started working...my worker turned on my daycare. So I didn't have to worry about the kids. I did have somebody to watch them"-Christina

Having access to food stamps and childcare, therefore, appeared to be extremely beneficial for women receiving them. Childcare assistance was mentioned by many of the survivors as a key aid in helping them with employment especially for some survivors who in the past were dependant on the abuser or his family members for childcare.

However, speaking about DHS assistance without looking at the conditions placed on recipients to be eligible for the assistance would provide an incomplete picture. Some of the conditions placed on recipients of assistance often make it impossible to find affordable housing. Nancy, a survivor with four children,

exemplifies one such condition here,

"you're dealing with DHS and they only wanna give you a certain amount of money but yet they tell you, you know, well you have two boys, two girls; those boys have to be separated from the girls. Well, you're not giving me enough money to afford, you know, separate rooms, for these children. You're not giving me enough money to pay the bills, until I find a job, you know?....how are we supposed to be able if, you know, you're only giving me enough money to be able to afford, a one-bedroom studio and I have four children, you know? How am I gonna make that work? You know and then you're telling me you can't move here because that's only a two-bedroom, you need at least a three; you know a room for the girls, a room for the boys and a room for yourself."

So, even when women do receive assistance for relocation and housing expenses from DHS, conditions such as these make it impossible for them to actually procure housing, unless they receive help from other sources in the exosystem and/or microsystem.

Another condition that comes with DHS assistance is Work First. Work First is designed to establish and maintain a connection to the labor market for those receiving cash and non-cash assistance by placing recipients into employment and occupationally relevant education and training programs. Hence, individuals who receive cash assistance and non-cash assistance such as food stamps, Medicaid and childcare are usually required to attend Work First to remain eligible for assistance. This works for some survivors, which we can see from Dolores' experience,

"I go to school…through [Work First]…they give you a continuing education credit and certification as an Administrative Assistant and they, um, provide you with two, you go shopping and you get two suits, two uniforms, two pairs of shoes and, um, it's it's it's it's a good stepping stone. And especially in today's job market, it's a good stepping stone and it kinda gives you a, sets you up a little bit above the rest"

However, for some other survivors, this condition actually created an unworkable situation. For example, Crystal and Jasmine talked about how it didn't work for them due to transportation issues,

"They send me all the way to a Work First; they don't even have a damn bus route to even go out there."-Crystal

"in order to get cash assistance I need to go to work every day to Work First every day to get cash assistance. They not, um, understand…I have children. I have and plus, at that time, we did not have truck yet and they do not provide transportation to Work First. How am I supposed to get there every day if if I don't have a vehicle or money, how am I supposed to get there every day? I cannot do it. So I not go and I not get no cash assistance."-Jasmine

The key difference here was that Dolores at the time had a car and so transportation was not problematic for her. Also, her Work First set-up included childcare, while Jasmine's did not. Because of these differentials, Crystal and Jasmine were not able to go to Work First, and so became ineligible for cash assistance, which jeopardized their ability to live on their own with their children and consequently hindered their process of leaving. Also, noted later, this also led to Jasmine's children being removed by CPS.

Overall, cash assistance from DHS appeared to be crucial but the amount of assistance was meager on its own, and the conditions for receiving assistance were often insurmountable for survivors, hence making the benefits of the assistance inaccessible unless other micro and/or exosystem entities supplemented the assistance. Women did not mention non-cash assistance (e.g., food stamps, childcare vouchers) as being inadequate to their needs.

Law enforcement. Most survivors (n=15, 79%) in this study had at least some if not a lot of interaction with law enforcement during the process of leaving. Their experiences with these systems and whether they facilitated or hindered the process was mixed bag. Some women (n=5) intentionally chose not to involve law enforcement. Survivors who did this usually talked about previous experiences or experiences of others

that convinced them that calling the police was not going to be helpful. For example, Alicia explains here why she chose to never involve law enforcement,

"I never went to the police….Not not during any of the fights at home, not when I left, not for a restraining order, or any of that. I never involved the police at all….just from my experience and in my opinion, they are so useless to me….the way I grew up and the area I grew up in the police is a bad thing….where I grew up those were the last people you wanted to see….And I do have friends who were in, um, violent relationships and they do involve the police and it's it doesn't benefit them any more than it did me not to call you know. And then like, usually when they do come, they're just very arrogant and nonchalant about the whole thing. Like, well, why'd you let him in here or whatever, well I can't, he lives here you know….they're just very nasty and impolite"

For survivors who did involve the police, in some cases they had positive helpful interactions (n=12) while in other instances the police were unresponsive or they had negative experiences (n=8) with them. The key difference, as the survivors themselves noted, was which county/city the police were from. Here Stephanie contrasts her experiences with police from two different counties,

"County A is not helpful at all. The police officers are overworked, underpaid, they don't care. I really feel in my heart they don't care ….The last time, when he hit my daughter, I called them four times. They never came ….in County B, the police come when you call them….I had to call the sheriff's out there when he said he was going to kill me and my daughter I was, I was freaked that day 'cause you knew everything: what time the doctor's appointment was, what I was going for. That I was, you know, getting on the bus. That I had my two-year-old with me ….They came within ten minutes and he said that he, he apologized. the sheriff. Because it took him so long to get there. I felt you came very right quickly. He took all the information, yeah, and put a police report in…So, um. That was helpful to me"

County A is the county for the large metropolitan city that is located next to the location of the DV shelter from where survivors were recruited, which is in County B. This stark difference between police in County A and other neighboring counties was reiterated by several other survivors (n=7). Hence, whether survivors felt that calling the police was going to be helpful and whether they positive or negative experiences

appeared to depend to some extent on what county they were living in.

In addition to police, the other way in which survivors are often encouraged to seek protection is through obtaining a Personal Protection Order (PPO). A PPO is an order issued by the court, which in situations where there is a domestic relationship, can protect a person from harassment, assault, beating, molesting, wounding, or stalking by the perpetrator. However, five survivors talked about how they didn't think a PPO would keep the abuser away. As Shantana stated,

"he's not gonna care about a PPO. He ain't gonna care, by the time police get there he gonna be gone….By the time he get on my property and realize that I have PPO out on him and I'm gonna call the police, he'll be gone. They'll be searching for him and they not gonna be able to find him."

Of the nineteen participants, five mentioned having had a PPO against the abuser at some time point. Of the five, two mentioned calling the police because the abuser had violated the PPO, and had been arrested as a result. The factor that appeared to impact whether survivors thought they would be safe depended mostly on where they were living and how they thought the police in that county were going to respond to a call about domestic violence or a PPO violation.

Civil legal system. Most divorcing families with children interact with the civil legal system in the course of formalizing agreements about child custody and to receive child support. However, among the survivors interviewed for this study, only one had actually taken steps to get a legal custody agreement. She was also the only woman who had been legally married to the abuser. In the case of the other women, the abuser was either not the biological father of her children, or they had an informal system through family members set up for visitation with the children. With regards to child support, on the other hand, several of the survivors (n=6) for whom the

abuser was the biological father of their children talked about trying to get child support. All but one (the abuser in her case was working for the military) expressed their dissatisfaction with the system in being able to receive child support consistently. The main issue that they had problems with was the fact that when the abuser stopped paying child support, they did not have much recourse. Additionally, two survivors talked about how the Friend of the Court system, through which they had to get child support, jeopardized their physical safety. Daisy, who was one of the many survivors who stopped being able to live on her own with her children because of unstable child support payments, gave an account of how the Friend of the Court system is set up in a way that she felt was unsafe for survivors.

"I don't like going to court at all …when you go to court for Show Cause hearings you're actually at a window, there're like clerks lined up and you have got to be standing right next side to side.…And when they call you up there they ask you, if he's behind, they ask me, "What do you want us to do?" Well, if he's standing right there, I don't want to say, "Well, I want you to put him jail." You know, how intimidating is that? When he's standing right next to you, you know, so I don't, I think that's totally not set up good at all. That's very unsafe. Very unsafe."

Christina, a survivor who had managed to terminate her relationship with the abuser through her previous stay at the DV shelter, talked about how the carelessness of the Friend of the Court system led the abuser to finding out where she was living and resulted in him showing up and assaulting her in her new home. This incident led to her coming into the DV shelter this time.

"I don't know how that happened I just know I had filed for child support and everything and before that I hadn't heard from him. And then all of a sudden it's like, after I got the papers back telling me when I had to go to court, he popped up. Something happened in between there where he got my address"

"they sent him papers is how he found out our address, but I thought when you do that they supposed to like black it out, where you can't see it, but however he found our house"

Overall, then, survivors who were using the Friend of the Court system to collect child support for the most part felt powerless when the abuser stopped paying, and in a few instances felt their safety had been compromised due to their interactions with the system.

Child Protective Services (CPS).Several survivors (n=8, 42%) mentioned interactions with CPS at some time point. For most of them (n=5), these interactions involved an inspection or inquiry, and no further action from CPS. Hence, these survivors had very little to share about their interaction with CPS. However, for the remaining three survivors, their children had actually been removed from their custody. Two were due to abandonment (in both cases the abuser was a major contributor to the circumstances under which the situation occurred) and one because of "failure to provide." Since these three survivors had significant interactions with CPS and shared a substantial amount of information regarding this, the details in this section are based on their stories.

The common obstacle that all three mothers faced as a result of their involvement with CPS was with regards to the impossible financial demands that were being placed on them in order to be able to get their children back. Here Tiana, who has four dependant age children, describes how perplexed she is about the requirements to find adequate housing without being given any assistance to achieve that goal,

"it gets confusing. Because I don't know where to look for a house as a single woman or am I looking for a house big enough for me and the kids 'cause if I have to find a house big enough for me and the kids then I need resources for that. That's like a three, four bedroom. That's gonna run about $900 a month. I can't afford that without any help. Um, if I look for something for just me, then the state'll say well, it's not big enough….So, you can't have the kids, like that either because you need more space so. Some time it gets confusing."

Kendra mirrors this dilemma in describing her problem with the contradictory policies of CPS and DHS,

"Cause that's the same thing even with DHS, with like the money to move into a house. They say all we can do for a household size of one, because you don't physically have the kids. And I was like well, don't physically have the money to move either so [Interviewer: Um hmm. And how am I gonna get the kids?] Right.…If you don't give me the money.…That's where I've run into my problem at."

And here Jasmine, whose children were removed because she had lost her job and consequently was living in the abuser's mother's one bedroom apartment with her five children, describes the demands placed on her to be able to get her children back,

"Everything contradicts itself. I can't get low-income housing without children, but I can't get children without housing. Everything contradicts itself ….And the foster parents are suing me for child support. How can I get a house and do everything else if I have to pay.…I go to court and they tell me they are still my responsibility and they don't care how much money foster parents make. They say I do not care if they are millionaires; the children are still your responsibility. I say what about father? They say he is not sitting in front of me right now, you are. And they order me to pay child support for my children and I cannot. I cannot pay child support and get a house. They…they fight…they try so hard. They not want me to get my kids back. They fight me. They fight me. They fight me so hard. I so exhausted. I just want to go to sleep. [sigh] It does not make any sense."

Jasmine further described how she had no choice but to stay with the abuser because that is the only way she could get the children back,

"I get a minimum wage job, it still will not be enough to get my kids back. I need him to have a job too or I need to have two jobs. If I have two jobs until I get enough and get the kids back that'd be good except once I get them back I would not be able to keep two jobs…Because I would have kids, so I would have to go down to one job and then that would not be…enough money to keep them. So I do not know what to do right now."

Because CPS removed her children, if she was receiving aid from the state, that aid automatically was reduced so that it was only for her and not for her and her children. As a result, her financial resources were cut-off. However, at the same time she was

asked to demonstrate financial stability and the ability to provide adequate housing for her children in order to get the children back. Considering that she was already unable to adequately meet her and her children's needs even when she was receiving aid from the state fully, this seems like an impossible situation that sets her up for failure from the very beginning

In addition to the financial demands placed on them, women also talked about other requirements that they found to be unattainable. Here Tiana describes the impossible set up she had to work with in order to see her children for visitation,

"I didn't have a car, and all four of my kids are in four different places. One is in [city A], one is in [city B], one is somewhere else and another one is somewhere else. And they made me responsible for getting them. Now the thing is if you don't go pick them up for visits, then the state thinks you don't care. But, I don't have transportation to get to the one again one and then you only get a couple of hours with them. So, it's almost like, by the time you pick up everybody, you only see them a little time"

This situation led to her becoming more dependent on the abuser since he was the only one who was being helpful to her with visiting her children,

"So, I think I kinda put up with a lot of the abuse because he gave me a car, which was his, to make sure I got the kids from the visits and stuff. You kinda sorta feel obligated like he did this for me so, you know, I owe him something."

Here Jasmine describes the pressures placed on her during her visitation with her children,

"I only see my kids on Thursdays from four to five. One hour a week that's all I get. The whole hour he throw things and hit and fight and scream and will not behave. And I cannot blame him for that. It's not his fault. I don't know how to stop him. I don't know how to reverse, how to I only get one hour. I don't know what to say, what to do to make him stop it. They look at me like I am bad parent. They they write down tell me my kids are wild and out of control and I can't handle them. They tell judge at court that I can't control my children. I don't know what they expect me to do. I don't want to spend my one hour I get disciplining and and and punishing. I want to spend my hour loving them. And they say that I don't know. I can't control my kids and I don't know how to handle them. That what they tell the judge on me. I

don't know what to do with him, it's not his fault."

These examples illustrate the different ways in which survivors thought that the demands placed on them by CPS were difficult to meet given their individual life circumstances. This is a reflection of the set-up of the system but also of the CPS personnel, which is discussed further in the upcoming section on the gatekeepers of the exosystem factors.

Transportation. The obstacles survivors face during the process of leaving due to the lack of access to adequate transportation was apparent across all of the interviews. For some women, having access to transportation to physically leave was an obstacle. Here Donna describes what she thought would be helpful regarding transportation,

"if there was more access like say, say, a taxi you kind of,um, camouflage. I would say girls I think could get out more if they had uh, transportation Um, if you guys, I know that, you know, our monies is just taken away from us, you know, um, like I said, our cars are taken away from us. I think if women had accessibility to at least a vehicle they would have half a chance. If the state would just help like go pick them up or, you know"

Some DV shelters do provide transportation, but only one survivor mentioned utilizing this kind of service to leave. It seems that many survivors may not know about the availability of this transportation service or simply utilize support from their microsystem to have this need met.

The point at which transportation appears to become a paramount issue is after the survivor has left the relationship. Almost all (n=17, 89%) of the survivors mentioned instances in which access to transportation had created an obstacle for them. Here Jamila, who had four little children, represents what many survivors said about needing access to transportation, especially because getting around with children was

difficult, and describes the importance of the access to transportation to their process of leaving,

"If I would have to say something physically, you know, to, um, to assist, I would definitely say that the, you know, for me myself transportation. If I had some transportation or if there was any way that I could get some trans[portation] … having four children it's very hard to get around."

"cause one you have to do certain things you know, 'cause ladies have to get to court they have to, you know not having, it's just very difficult. I think so and transportation back and forth is, you know, one of the ladies was like, you know, I'm just waiting to see who's gonna take me to court or whatever, but when you have to go around and look for these things and try to find rides or whatever especially like to the, to your court dates and trying to keep these PPOs in place or for, um, child support services and things like that that, you know, yeah I think that that's very important for the ladies to be able to get around so that you can get your assistance or so that you can keep these people away so that you can become self-sufficient you know"

The extent to which survivors were able to address the transportation challenge was highly dependent on whether they had a car, and what was made available to them by other exosystem factors and by family and peers. A select few (n=4) had a car and were able to fill their gas tanks during their current shelter stay, but the majority of them either never owned a car, had to leave the car behind because it was the abuser's, had a car that had broken down, had a car but could not afford gas, or no longer owned a car.

The transportation resources from the exosystem that were mentioned by survivors included the public bus system, Dial a Ride, scheduled rides provided by DV shelter staff, bus vouchers, and gas cards. Whether survivors had access to these resources or found them helpful varied quite a bit.

The public bus system appeared to work for some survivors, but for others it was challenging to utilize and navigate. The main concerns that arose with using the public bus system were with regards to safety, punctuality and getting around with

little children in tow. Here, Lakeesha talks about how using the bus makes her nervous,

"when you get on public transportation, like the regular bus, you don't know who you're gonna run into. I don't know if one of his cousins might be catching the bus that day and they will call him and say, Oh I see…Or somebody might ride past us. All I was thinking yesterday, I hope nobody rides past this bus stop and see me sitting here"

Daisy describes her frustration with the unreliable bus schedule,

"the buses…it really isn't , they don't run on time. They really don't. They make fun of it in movies and stuff, but they really do not run on time. In fact, I think how do people keep their jobs? You know, to ru…and it takes forever to go anywhere, I mean, it's better than walking in the rain but not, not by much. Not by much."

And finally, Dolores describes the ordeals of using the bus with little children,

"It was hard; I mean I took the bus. I didn't have a car; I took the bus. I had to take the kids to day care …. I didn't have a vehicle so everything was the bus. I was pregnant, a kid on each hip getting on the bus, taking everything shopping, any and everything. Um, and it was, it was, it was difficult and it sucked."

One transportation option that was available to survivors when they were at the DV shelter where they were interviewed was the Dial a Ride service. Most survivors found this to be helpful but even this had its limitations. As Donna explains here,

"Dial a Ride is what they call it…But you don't know how long it will be before they get there. You call them it could be 15 minutes, it could be 20 minutes, it could be 45 minutes."

Additionally, the DV shelter where the survivors were interviewed also provided rides every Tuesday, alternating between housing searches and job searches. This was helpful to a certain extent, but for survivors who wanted to search for housing and jobs outside of the immediate area where the shelter was located, this service was of no use. Additionally, some survivors commented on the frequency of the service being insufficient, especially when they only had thirty days at the shelter. Tania

explains the limitations of this service and how it does not adequately meet the needs of some survivors, hence posing a hindrance to their process of leaving,

"they should do it Monday through Wednesday or Thursday. Not the whole week but just, not just Tuesday. Because, you know, people make appointments, people got jobs, people got this, that, that and, you know, kids stuff going on, just got that one day from nine to twelve to go… and if you miss that one week…One week behind. You only have thirty days here. And then you're screwed…That one day for that three hour block it it's it doesn't work for me. 'Cause I haven't been able to make on yet. Between doctor's appointments and running to do this and going to look this and filling out job applications"

Finally, the other main transportation resource provided to survivors by the DV shelter was bus vouchers and gas cards. However, the inconsistency with which these resources were made available was problematic. Several survivors (n=7) mentioned how helpful these were, while some others (n=3) mentioned not being able to receive these. This differential access to the same resource within the same DV shelter resulted in some survivors being better able to have their needs met, while others' needs were marginalized. Alicia, Rhonda, and Kendra through their cumulative stories illustrate this inconsistency,

"So you get, like as far as like me getting around, they give you like a little, they give you like the little bus thing, but that only goes so far. Like me, I been wanting to go everywhere and fill out application or, you know, um, but like that's hard to do when you don't have a car or you don't have, you know the transportation there to take you or something like that."-Rhonda

"I don't have money for gas to go and do what I need to do, a lot of days I leave the car parked in the shelter parking lot and I go and get on the bus because I don't have money for gas. So the car really doesn't make differ."-Alicia

"They've helped with even gas in the car for me to go out to interviews and stuff" - Kendra

Not surprisingly, transportation played a prominent role in whether survivors were able to have their needs met and how their process of leaving unfolded. This is

particularly true for survivors with children, especially when they have several young children. Not having access to a car or reliable public transportation prevented them from being able to access all the other resources they needed to be able to take care of themselves and their children adequately.

Assertion 6: Gate keepers of exosystem structures will mediate a survivor's ability to have her self-defined needs met through structural exosystem factors. All 19 survivors confirmed this assertion.

Finding 6. Gatekeepers. The extent to which survivors were able to have their needs met through exosystem factors was not only dependant on the policies regulating the exosystem entities, but was also highly contingent upon the individual gatekeepers with whom survivors were interacting in order to access services and resources. The gatekeepers are the employees who are meant to facilitate access to resources, but do not always play this role of facilitator the way they are supposed to. The three structural entities where gatekeepers played a key role as intermediaries controlling the extent to which survivors were able to access existing resources and the quality of survivors' interactions with the system were DHS , CPS, and DV shelters. These were the three places where there were stark differences across survivors' experiences based on the individual gatekeepers they were assigned.

DHS caseworkers. Many of the survivors (n=8, 42%), in talking about their interactions with DHS, complained specifically about instances when it took their caseworker too long to get back to them, or when their caseworker simply ignored them. This was especially problematic for survivors when they were trying to access DHS resources after coming to a DV shelter, because of the limited time they had available to

get everything set up. Stephanie illustrated just this in talking about how she could not move forward even though she had found an affordable house and her time at the shelter was almost up, because her caseworker was not responding,

"And we only have till Saturday so I am calling every day because you're not calling me back to tell me what's going on. I feel they're not doing their job, they're not helpful. No one is, is helpful."

Daisy explained how trying to call a supervisor in order to make her caseworker more responsive actually just made things worse,

"I mean, I very, I even have to call supervisors to get my [DHS] case worker to call me back. Um, which I don't like doing because then it's kind of like tattling on them… and they do not…you know, they get mad calling you back."

However, some women (n=6, 31%) also reported instances when they had a DHS caseworker who was helpful in a timely manner and responsive. Here Christina explains how one of her caseworkers really helped her and acknowledges how her experience has been different from most others,

"But my worker, I really never had any problems like waiting for this and waiting for that. When I applied she waited the time that she needed to she turned my case on and that was that… I mean she, when she was turning my food stamps back on, she gave me food to last me until she could get 'em on. And she got 'em on like the next day. You know, so I didn't have a bad experience with DHS. Although I know some people do. They say all the time…like I hate them, they make me wait forever but I didn't."

Nancy's experience illustrated a scenario where the caseworker was sensitive to her DV situation and provided her with resources and information to help her specific situation.

"Finally I just said,… I can't go home. I can't even visit my mom. I can't visit my friends because I'm in a domestic violence situation and really to my surprise she was help, she helped me. She [her DHS case-worker] said ok, you need to get in the shelter … she [her DHS case-worker] actually got on the phone to several shelters while when I got my case turned on. And nothing was available. She told me about [name of DV shelter], we called [the DV shelter], they didn't have a bed they didn't have any beds available for me or four children. My worker said call back every morning until they tell you they have something available. And the next day… I got on the phone. I said 'I need shelter. I'm in a situation. It's only a matter of time before this guy comes to my mom's house looking

for me. I really need shelter' and she said 'we have something available for you and your four kids. You have to be here by six pm then.' I was there and I been at [the DV shelter] since then."

The difference across the responsiveness of caseworkers was not just different from survivor to survivor. Sometimes even individual survivors (n=3) related stories of how they were helped by one caseworker but not by another. Here Erika provides an illustrative example of such a situation as she compares her experiences with DHS caseworkers across two instances. The first time she had left, she was able to find her own place and was doing well until the abuser came to her home to pick up their daughter and assaulted her, resulting in her return to the DV shelter.

"DHS. Now, they help you, but they make you go through so much and sometimes when you really need their help, they can't be there for you. Like a situation now I'm I, um, they helped me. I went to them once before when I told you I left the first time. They helped me with I think 400, $500. And that was just me and the oldest daughter on there. I have those two and I'm in living in a shelter, now, they say they will only help me with $106. And I'm not I'm not understanding what's going on. I know it was a mistake and like sometimes like the workers they be so stuck on they self to where they think they have to treat you mean or treat you less than a person because you need assistance right now, you know. Um, that's the only place that I feel that don't help you like they need to or don't recognize your needs like they need to."

"No, it was fine, I had a different worker… I was so blessed to have him…. He didn't play around. When I needed it, it was there. When he said it was there, it was there. I didn't have to keep calling, right now. I'm a probably have to sign a release for my case manager to keep calling. I have been calling that lady for a month, straight […] Just, I haven't been able to get in contact with her ….they tell you ten days, it's been twenty days over. No response. No call. Leave messages they say they supposed to call you back in twenty-four hours, I have left her five. You know, that's the only thing and I feel that it's so bad because we need them for help and they there, they can help us, but they take their time or they choose to judge, and I'm gonna help you with this and I'm not gonna help you with that."

From this we can see how survivors' experiences with individual case workers impacted their ability to have their needs met during the process of leaving. We can also see how case workers who are actually sensitive to the woman's domestic

violence situation are the ones who better meet their needs adequately.

CPS caseworkers. Even though several survivors (n=8) reported interactions with CPS, only three of them actually had their children removed. Because the others had very brief interactions with CPS and the allegations were not substantiated, I will not focus on the experiences of those survivors here. Instead, I will contrast the experiences of two of the three mothers who had their children removed to illustrate how the extent to which a woman has a CPS caseworker who was sensitive to her DV situation was of great consequence with regards to the outcome of their CPS involvement.

Kendra was a survivor whose three children were removed when the abuser left them unattended in her home. This happened when she had left them there in his care, when he was visiting for a few hours. Kendra's interactions with her CPS caseworker have been positive and she talked about how the CPS involvement had actually connected her to many resources that she was unaware of in the past.

"When CPS came out, they just instantly moved the babies from the house….And I, um, ended up with a CPS case and fortunately I ended up with a really good worker. And she helped me through everything… and she let the kids be placed with my mother….So I, um, ended up losing the kids because of that, but they found a lot of discrepancies. They found out he was AWOL. And they found out that the CPS never did anything to prevent the kids from living, um, with foster care parents instead of my family. So it worked in my favor in court. And I'll be getting them back in October….Um, at first I looked at it like it was a big negative situation because usually when you get involved with CPS you have issues…But, um, CPS has been really helpful. Um, in the beginning my worker asked me she said why did you even let the police in? And I said because police knocked on my door and said can I have a look around? I said of course. I was gonna cooperate with the police…And, um, she had kept saying you didn't even have to let them in because you had been home. You were home in time they showed up to your door…You didn't even have to let them in. I said I didn't know. I was cooperating. And, um, she asked me why did I allow him to come over? Because, by this point, my mother had told her everything that had happened in the past. And, um I told her I said well he seemed like he was doing better so, you know, I trusted he could sit there with the kids for a minute… but, um, she gave me all kind of resources. Before my court my first court hearing, she told me what

all they were probably gonna have me do. So I had started parenting classes and all that stuff. And by the time I was at my first hearing, most of the stuff that I had to do was already done. And the judge was very impressed…she [CPS caseworker] said that once, um, I find a house they will help furnish the house. And, um, they'll help trying to get me…some type of subsidized housing so that the bills wouldn't be so high. And, um, they gave me counseling resources. And, um, actually I got the number for [the DV shelter] from my case manager …And, um, so they've been very resourceful…So I've, um, I found out there's all kind of programs now that help."

Here we can see how as a result of having a CPS caseworker who was sensitive to her DV situation and who was willing to provide her with the resources she needed to enable her to get her children back, Kendra had a positive experience with CPS. The CPS caseworker played a crucial role in this situation and in many ways dictated what Kendra was going to be able to get out of her involvement with CPS. Kendra's experience was a stark contrast to the experience Jasmine had with CPS.

Jasmine's five children were removed when someone reported to CPS that she was living with them in a one bedroom apartment with the abuser and his mother. They had moved to the abuser's mother's apartment as a result of Jasmine losing her job and being evicted when she could no longer pay rent. Jasmine had sought assistance from DHS and other community agencies and was persistently looking for work at the time in order to be able to afford a move to a new place. Her story exemplified how a survivor was on the verge of losing her children as a result of poverty. When CPS removes children due to the parent's inability to provide, they are only supposed to do so if the parents have refused help. In Jasmine's case, she had not refused help. Instead she had turned down help that was inaccessible to her through Work First due to transportation issues (the details of which were presented on the section on DHS). In light of the fact that her children were removed because she was at that time point unable to provide adequate housing for them, one would expect her

CPS worker to try to provide her with resources to help her acquire housing.

However, in Jasmine's case, her caseworker was of no help for her. Here she

describes the circumstances under which her children were removed,

"I lose my job. I lose my apartment. I lose my children. They[CPS} say you have no job. You have no income and you have no home to put a roof over their heads and you have no income to support them. They take my children from me 'til I can get another job and another place to live….And they put them in foster care. His (abuser's) side of family…."

"I get my taxes in January. I told Protective Services the day that they were gonna take my children away I had two thousand dollars on me right there that day at that moment. They still take my kids away from me. They not care. They take my children."

Here she describes her frustrations with the caseworker and the court appointed attorney

who she found to be not helpful,

"[The CPS caseworker] not listen to anything I say to her. I tell her my son, every week my son has bruises, scratches, he has marks on him every week at visit. She not care. She not nothing. My daughter, my three-year old daughter have burns going all way cross her whole hand. Worker, not care. Leave them there with those people and then tell me I am bad mother. They do not care. They don't care. They care about money. They care about finances, how much money you have, how much income, that's what they care about. They don't care about children how they're being took care of emotionally or mentally or physically, only thing they care about is money. That's it. That's all they care about. That's why I don't have money, I am bad and they treat me that way. They have money; they treat them good and take their side on everything."

"I have court appointed attorney, she not care. She not no good. She on worker side instead of my side. They give, they give crack baby and abusive parents children back, good person no money they not give children back. Does not make any sense to me at all. [tears begin]. Why they fight me so hard? All I wanna do is take care of my kids. That's all I wanna do. They won't let me. [crying] I'm sorry."

Kendra's and Jasmine's cases illustrate how individual caseworkers had a monumental

impact on how a survivor fared with the CPS system. Kendra, as a result of having what

she felt was a responsive and helpful caseworker, was scheduled to get her children back

in a few months. Meanwhile, Jasmine, as a result of having what she thought was an

unsupportive caseworker who had not provided her with adequate resources was on the

verge of losing her parental rights in a few months.

DV shelter staff. When talking about the services they received at the DV shelter, many survivors (n=13, 68%) mentioned their interactions with the staff. Some (n=7) reported having only positive experiences with the shelter staff, while some (n=5) had both positive and negative experiences and one survivor reported only negative experiences with the shelter staff. Based on these interviews, it seems that survivors received differential treatment at the shelter, and much of what they received with regards to information and assistance depended on the specific case manager to whom they were assigned, or the specific shelter staff member they approached for assistance. For example, here is a comparison of two survivors' experiences with their individual case managers during their shelter stays. Daisy describes her experience with her case manager,

"they try to help, but I don't think they know, I don't think they, a lot of them, don't know any more than I know…. I don't expect them to know everything, but, you know, like, um, they're not familiar with Friend of the Court issues and things like that. Um, the stuff with the DHS, um, like getting our money, like the first and last month's rent thing. I would think, I don't know anything about that because I've never applied for that before and I would think that is something they would know about because everybody that comes there applies for it to get out… they're all really nice and I think they really try…and they're very compassionate…. but when it comes to actually having to do what I need to do, I feel kind of on my own"

It is clear from her account that her case manager was emotionally supportive but was not able to help her beyond that in figuring out the more practical needs she had. Consequently, she felt she was not able to make progress fast enough to be able to reach her goals within the 30 day time limit at the shelter. On the other hand, here is Christina's experience,

"I have to say just staff being able to point me in the right direction. You know, telling me that, giving me paper saying that ok, this is a listing of all the people that

have subsidized housing. These are numbers that you call and that's the person you talk to, you know? Just having somebody there to point me in the right direction, so I have to say that just being able to have somebody that you can go that'll tell you, they have the resources to tell you what you need to do to get it done."

In contrast to Daisy's experience, Christina's account reflects that the practical assistance that her case manager provided helped her move forward.

Here is another example, across two survivors, that illustrates how the level and type of assistance received during their shelter stay when they were trying to work on job applications on the computer was staff dependent.

"I am very, very computer illiterate and one of the staff members, um, spent an hour pulling up resumes and it looked so professional. Yeah, I…I would want to hire me if I were an employer – seriously." - Margaret

"if I'm on the computer and I need help, they'll help me, but they said they don't want to like if you ask them to make how to do a cov…cover letter they'll give you the instructions to a cover letter, but they won't help you, guide you through it….I don't know too much about computers you could at least start me up and just say after this then go ahead and do it's don't take that long to actually instruct nobody to really do nothing…. Give me some instructionship, set me up on the computer and let me figure it out myself. After you done told me the instructions I should be able to get it." - Shantana

Hence, shelter staff to a large extent controlled how survivors were truly able to benefit from their shelter stay and whether they were able to have their needs met.

Conclusion

Overall, through their stories, survivors illustrated the many intricacies of how their self- defined needs and ecological factors beyond the individual level interplayed continually to influence their process of leaving. At the microsystem level survivors described how certain behaviors of family and peers helped them while others created problems for them during the process of leaving. They also shared accounts of how the abuser used power and control guised as remorse and promises to

change along with direct threats and violence to create obstacles for them when they tried to terminate the relationship. Additionally, they described the numerous ways in which their concerns for their children influenced their needs during the process of leaving. At the mesosystem level, their stories demonstrated the ways in which the abuser's interconnections with their children, family/peers, and exosystem worked either as a benefit or an impediment during the process of leaving. At the exosystem level, their stories illustrated how some community resources helped them, albeit not always adequately, and the extent to which the resources they received was mediated by gatekeepers.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the ways in which ecological factors beyond the individual level can facilitate or impede the process of leaving for IPV survivors with children. The majority of existing theories on the process of leaving propose frameworks that focus on how survivors' internal individual level changes influence their navigation through the process of leaving (D. Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Also, we know from previous studies, external factors such as social support and interactions with public agencies affect the decisions survivors are able to make and carry out throughout their attempts to end their experiences of violence. Hence, the existing theories on the process of leaving have not addressed a key component – the ways in which external factors influence a survivor's process of leaving an abusive relationship. This study sought to take steps towards filling this gap. Additionally, there are only two existing theories on the process of leaving that pay specific attention to the influence of children (Campbell et al., 1998; Khaw & Hardesty, 2007). And so, this study also sought to highlight the experiences of survivors who are mothers, in order to speak to the unique needs of women with children who experience IPV.

Past studies have demonstrated how specific factors from the microsystem (e.g., social support) or from the exosystem (e.g., community resources) are linked to survivors' risk of re-abuse or ability to leave abusive relationships (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Raghavan et al., 2005). However, the existing literature for the most part has failed to comprehensively examine how multiple factors across multiple layers of the ecological system interact to help or hinder survivors. The findings from this study speak to this gap by illustrating how survivors' self-defined needs are constantly changing as they engage

in the process of leaving, and their ability to have these changing needs met is not just dependant on individual factors as much as it is dependent on the extent to which the factors within and across the ecosystems function symbiotically. Also, it shows how the different ecosystem factors have a bidirectional relationship with survivors' self-defined needs, such that ecosystem factors not only address/do not address the needs, but they may also create new needs. The complementary relationship in some instances takes place across ecosystem levels. For example, the study findings present how survivors reported that transportation was a domain in which practical support from family/peers was crucial. At the same time, survivors reported transportation services from the exosystem structural entities to be crucial as well. Survivors who were unable to get assistance with transportation from their microsystem then became dependant on getting it from their exosystem and vice versa. Studies have shown how women shift from seeking help from family/friends to formal sources when their attempts to get help from the informal sources are unsuccessful (J. Brown, 1997; Lempert, 1996). However, as the findings from this study illustrate, women actually go back and forth between formal and informal sources, continuously, in trying to have their needs met, and it is not as unidirectional as the previous research suggests. Survivors whose family/peers made up for the transportation needs the exosystem was not able to provide, or whose exosystem was able to fill in for what her family/peers could not, were the ones who were able to have their transportation needs met adequately. Additionally, when women were highly dependent on the abuser for transportation, the extent to which other micro and exosystem factors such as social support or resources from public agencies could step in to alleviate that dependence, is what helped survivors during the process of leaving.

In other instances, factors within an ecosystem level needed to make up for the inadequacies in another. So, when one exosystem structure could not accommodate survivors' needs, the extent to which another one did affected her ability to have her needs met. For example, when DHS was not able to provide adequate monetary resources to acquire housing, the extent to which another exosystem structure such as the DV shelter was able to compensate for that, is what impacted whether the survivor would be able to attain housing independent from the abuser at shelter exit (when that was a woman's self-defined need).

The symbiotic relationship did not function only as one where one system only had to meet the needs another system could not. It also worked in a way where changes in one system created needs for the survivor which in turn had to be met by factors within that system or from other systems. For example, if a survivor's family disclosed the location of her home without her permission to the abuser, due to this activity in her microsystem, the survivor might now have a new need to seek safe housing. In this instance, the extent to which her family/peers or community agencies are able to then offer her safe housing is what will determine whether she is able to engage in the process of leaving on her own terms.

This interdependency across and within the ecosystems existed across all the different domains of need that the women expressed. This interdependency suggests that individual survivors have unique and altering needs, because at any instance the needs that her ecosystems are addressing as well as generating are different. And so, for her to really be able to engage in the process of leaving on her own terms, she needs to have access to resources and assistance that is specific to her individual situation. This means

that women need to have more voice in the determination of what services and assistance she receives from community agencies, which has been associated with higher satisfaction with service providers and higher likelihood of re-accessing services (Zweig & Burt, 2007).

The second important finding from this study is closely linked to the first in its emphasis on the need for services that are specific to the individual situation of each survivor. This study finding is one that reiterates what has already been skillfully articulated by Goodman and Epstein (2008) about the crucial importance of survivor-centered services. They scrutinize how nowadays "services tend to require survivors to fit their situations into predefined categories, even when their circumstances are quite complex, with the abuse representing just one problem among many" (pp. 4). The findings from this study provide many instances that demonstrate the need for the changes Goodman and Epstein (2008) call for in service provision to and advocacy for IPV survivors. For example, at the microsystem level we saw how the abuser's behaviors created obstacles for a survivor during the process of leaving, which often generated a need for her to return to the abuser. In situations like that, it is important for survivors to be able to receive support that accommodates such decisions rather than the kind of support that pushes the system's agenda, which is often narrowly focused on her ending the relationship with the batterer. Additionally, at the exosystem level the study findings show how survivors have a plethora of needs around housing and basic necessities for themselves and their children that are beyond the scope of what domestic violence agencies can provide. This resulted in women being highly dependent on the welfare system. Hence, survivors' priorities are in many instances focused on trying to get their

needs met from public agencies whose workers are in many cases non-responsive, possibly because of their formidable caseloads. The insensitivity of DHS and CPS caseworkers to survivors' self-defined needs can result in negative outcomes and hinder survivors' process of leaving. In contrast, when workers do recognize women's self-defined needs, women are better able to get those needs met through their interactions with public agencies. Additionally, the extent to which women are then able to have these needs met is reliant on the advocates at women's services agencies and their ability to work with and on behalf of survivors to obtain financial resources, housing, and childcare, among other things. These findings reflect what we already know from previous research - that survivor-centered advocacy is effective in assisting women to have their needs met and in facilitating the process of leaving (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999) and that the extent to which women find the services provided by private victim service agencies helpful is highly dependent on the behaviors of individual staff at the agencies (Zweig & Burt, 2007).

The third key finding from this study illustrates how, in addition to the availability of help/resources from family/peers and from public agencies, the stability and conditionality of the help/resources is of great consequence, because these features affect their adequacy and accessibility. Looking specifically at social support, the study finding that survivors receive both negative and positive social support from family/peers is not a new one (Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Goodkind et al., 2003). However, the findings from this study augments the previous research by illustrating what negative social support looks like visually and highlighting how the abuser's relationship with the survivor's family/peers affects the social support she is able to receive from them. The findings also

demonstrate how even positive social support from family/peers can still be inaccessible or problematic when the support is conditional and inconsistent. These findings speak to the need for changes in how social support is currently measured (e.g. The Interpersonal Support Evaluation Checklist, Cohen & Hoberman, 1983) in the context of the lives of IPV survivors, so that measures are sensitive not only to whether a woman has individuals in her life who helps or hinders her ability to have her needs met but also to how consistent and how conditional these behaviors are. Not taking these into consideration can possibly make it seem that a survivor has more or less support than they actually do. It will also count as support the conditional help that a survivor receives only because she was willing to listen to or abide by what the person providing the assistance decided was right for her.

This importance of consistency and conditionality also played out in women's interactions with the public agencies in their exosystem. The study finding that IPV survivors using shelter services are also interacting with DHS and accessing TANF was not a surprise based on findings from previous studies that found TANF assistance to be critical in survivors' ability to transition to living independently of the abuser (Kurz, 1999; Lloyd & Taluc, 1999). However, the findings from this study illustrate how the conditions placed on TANF recipients based on PRWORA create situations for survivors that make TANF assistance inaccessible or makes it difficult for survivors to remain eligible for TANF. Horwitz and Kerker (2001) found corroborating results when they looked at the intersection of employment requirements of TANF and social support in the presence of IPV and found that moderate to high levels of IPV in conjunction with low levels of socials support made it less likely for women to be able to maintain employment

requirements of TANF. This exemplifies what others have alluded to in the past to be an occurrence due to the inadequate implementation of the FVO by many states and consequent underutilization by most survivors (Hetling, 2000; Hetling & Born, 2006; Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005; Riger & Staggs, 2004). Given the crucial role TANF assistance plays in enabling survivors to have their self-defined needs met during the process of leaving, this kind of obstacle to accessing assistance is unquestionably problematic.

In addition to the conditions for receiving TANF assistance, mothers who had interactions with CPS also reported having to contend with challenging stipulations. We already know that IPV survivors often have negative experiences with CPS due to mistreatment by CPS workers (S. Johnson & Sullivan, 2008) and/or due to CPS policies based on the definition of exposure to domestic violence as abusive or neglectful in state child abuse and neglect statutes and case law (Goodmark, 2010), even when survivors themselves seek out CPS assistance in order to protect their children from the abuser The findings from this study presented additional scenarios at the intersection of DHS and CPS policies where the needs of mothers, especially those who are poor, are marginalized. The incongruent conditions placed on survivors between CPS and DHS created no-win situations for them that would lead to the loss of their parental rights unless they were able to make unachievable, drastic changes in their economic situation. These findings highlight the need for change in the conditions placed on poor IPV survivors with children in order to stop the removal of children from the custody of their non-abusive parent.

The fourth major finding illustrates how child-related concerns during the process of leaving emerged across all three ecosystem levels examined in this study. The study findings regarding the influence of concerns about children's physical and emotional wellbeing on mother's decisions to stay, leave, or return corroborate the findings from previous studies ((Henderson, 1990; Hilton, 1992; Kurz, 1996; K. Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010; Zink, Elder, & Jacobson, 2003). The study findings also support previous findings on survivors' concerns about being able to meet their children's housing, financial and material needs in making decisions during the process of leaving (Logan & Walker, 2004; Moe, 2009).We also know that one in every four homeless women are in that situation due to violence, and women's risk of homelessness increases with the number of dependent children she has (Jasinski, Wesely, Mustaine, & Wright, 2005). The findings from this study illustrate how the mere presence of children in survivors' lives posed added challenges to the already onerous process of leaving. This happened in two main ways. First, having children influenced survivors' other self-defined needs. For example, survivors' safety, shelter, transportation, childcare, financial and material needs were all contingent on the number, age, and gender of their children and the relationship of the children with the abuser. Second, based on whether survivors had access to adequate childcare through family/peers in the microsystem or resources in the exosystem affected their ability to seek employment, housing and other resources, and to work or attend school. Hence, it wasn't surprising that for women with no social support, and lack of access to childcare resources, the dependence on their abusive partners for childcare was one which was difficult to break.

At the exosystem level we know that most divorcing women, including IPV survivors, interact with the civil/legal system during the process of leaving in order to formalize custody agreements and get child support. In this study, only one of the survivors was legally married to the abuser, and so only one survivor was actually going through divorce proceedings during the process of leaving and had formal custody and visitation arrangements through the court. The remaining survivors who shared biological children with the abuser had informal set-ups for visitation. On the other hand, some survivors did utilize the civil legal system to try to obtain child support payments. However, considering that all of the participants had children, and were not living with the fathers of their children at the time of the study, the number of survivors who had utilized or were seeking to utilize the civil legal system to get child support was low. Furthermore, of the few who were utilizing the civil legal system to obtain child support, all but one of them was unsatisfied with the system because they were not receiving child support regularly and had no recourse for it either. This level of utilization of formal systems for child support collection is not surprising given the low-income demographics of the study participants. Waller and Plotnick (2001), in their review of studies on child support, present the reasons why the majority of poor families who are on TANF prefer informal arrangements of support – because they are more likely to receive more in-kind support outside the formal system and because they disagree with the assignment of rights to child support to the state which often result in the mothers actually receiving much less than what the fathers are paying. Additionally, given the low rates of FVO utilization by IPV survivors who are TANF recipients (Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005) the potential risk of utilizing the formal child support collection system to the safety of

survivors is probably another significant deterrent.

Another finding from this study, one that has not been covered in any of the existing literature on social support, is the support survivors receive from other survivors outside of structured support groups. We know from previous research that support groups for IPV survivors are associated with positive psychological outcomes (Tutty, Bidgood, & Rothery, 1993). Additionally, Larance and Porter (2004) illustrated how participation in support groups facilitates the formation of social capital among IPV survivors. They found that through support group participation women were able to add to the support available to them through other survivors outside the group, and women referred other women to resources and helped each other in different ways such as to find a job. This study found similar changes in survivors' social support, but the key difference was that these changes did not happen in the context of a support group. The survivors in this study shared stories illustrating how they received help and support from other survivors in finding resources such as DV shelters. They also shared accounts of the assistance they received from other survivors during their shelter stays, and how what was most helpful was what the others shared based on their own experiences. And finally, women talked about the relationships they built with other survivors during their shelter stays that became new friendships and added to their social network even after they left the shelter. These findings highlight to a certain extent the possible conducive nature within shelter settings of building new support networks for survivors and this is important because many survivors come into DV shelters either with few people in their social network as a result of isolation strategies used by batterers (M. Anderson et al., 2003; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Larance & Porter, 2004) or a severance of their existing

network due to the concealed location of the shelter or other shelter policies around communicating with family/friends (Haaken & Yragui, 2003). The implication of this finding underscores a possible avenue within DV shelters to increase survivors' social support by creating an environment within the shelter that is conducive to and further enables the formation of such relationships among survivors outside the structured settings of support groups.

Taken as a whole the accounts of the nineteen survivors' experienced during the process of leaving revealed the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the different factors across the ecological levels. The extent to which survivors were able to have their self-defined needs met appeared to be dependent on the degree to which the each entity within the ecological levels was able to address the inadequacies of the other entities. Additionally, the accounts shared by the women illustrated how the conditionality, stability and consistency of some of the factors in their micro, meso, and exosystems varied a great deal throughout their process of leaving, and often this constant variation itself created obstacles. Furthermore, the accounts the survivors provided of their experiences with exosystem resources, agencies, and gatekeepers highlighted the importance of keeping survivors' needs at the center, in order to truly facilitate their process of leaving.

The key contribution of this study is in the conceptualization of the impact of survivors' interactions with the different levels of the ecological system on the process of leaving as being bidirectional, in constant flux, and mediated through their self-defined needs. The findings from this study add to our understanding of the intricacies of the many external factors that facilitate and hinder IPV survivors during the process of

leaving and provide a framework for building an ecological theory of the process of leaving. Having a better understanding of the effect of external factors on survivors during the process of leaving can also facilitate the development and improvement of new and existing interventions geared towards assisting women with children who experience IPV to better enable them to have their self-defined needs met.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, the majority of the participants in this study were low-income women and so the conclusions drawn from this study do not include the experiences of women with higher socio-economic status. Second, all of the participants were recruited from a domestic violence shelter, and so the study findings may or may not be applicable to survivors who do not utilize shelter services during the process of leaving. Nonetheless, since we know that low-income women are more likely than their middle and high income counterparts to use shelters (Cattaneo & DeLoveh, 2008) the findings from the study may be applicable to a significant number of low income survivors. Also, with growing recognition of the fact that IPV is more prevalent in poorer communities as a result of complex bidirectional relationships between income levels and IPV (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002), highlighting the experiences of poor survivors with ecosystem factors beyond the individual level gives voice to survivors who have the fewest alternatives and are most in need of assistance from external sources. Also, the majority of the themes that emerged in this study reached saturation among the participants within the study. And so, the findings from this study contributes significantly to our limited knowledge of the experiences poor survivors with children have with different ecosystem factors, especially community agencies such as DV shelter

services, and public agencies such as DHS.

Third, this study looked at how survivors' interactions with their micro and exosystems affected their process of leaving. Yet, the study data only represent the perspective of the survivor and were not triangulated with the perspectives of the actors with whom the interactions take place. These individuals might have had a different take or opinion on the events described by the survivors. However, since this was one small qualitative study, exploring all the other perspectives was beyond the scope of the study and other studies are needed to fill that gap.

Implications for Future Research

Future research can expand on the findings of this study in a few different ways. Though the data from this study did provide sufficient indications of how time is a relevant factor during the process of leaving specifically because of the non-linear nature of the process, this study did not focus on this. Hence, one way to expand the findings from this study would be to extend the analyses of the study data to tie in the ways in which the chronosystem plays a role in how ecosystem factors facilitate or hinder survivors' process of leaving.

Another way to build on this study would be to address its limitation regarding the study sample. Since this study only recruited participants from a domestic violence shelter and gathered stories of low income women, future research can utilize a wider sample in order to include the voices of survivors who do not utilize shelters during the process of leaving and those who come from middle and high income backgrounds. Additionally, a sample that includes women without children would also be beneficial, especially since single women are not eligible for TANF and as a result have limited

financial resources in that aspect. This will allow for the development of a framework that is inclusive of the ways in which a wider range of survivors interact with the different ecosystem levels during process of leaving.

Another way in which future inquiry can build on this study is by expanding the study to include the macrosystem level. This study built on the existing literature by moving beyond the individual level into the micro, meso and exosystem levels. However, in order to build a truly comprehensive ecological theory on the process of leaving, we need to study survivors' process of leaving in the context of all the ecosystem levels.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have many different implications for the numerous individuals, and formal and informal settings that provide IPV survivors with resources as they navigate the process of leaving. Knowledge of the interactive nature of the relationships among micro, meso and exosystem factors and survivors' self-defined needs can be used by advocates in several ways. First, it gives them reason to better gauge the social support dynamics of individual survivors and provide resources and services to make up for the specific inadequacies in the assistance available to individual survivors from friends/peers. In doing this advocates can tailor their assistance to survivors to meet the unique needs of each survivor. Additionally, the understanding gained through this study of the complex ways in which the behaviors of family/peer can hinder and/or facilitate survivors' ability to have their needs met, can be shared with the community. This kind of information sharing has potential to educate family/peers on how they can be more supportive allies to survivors during the process of leaving. Second, the study findings specifically on the impossible conditions placed on poor IPV survivors with

children by public agencies like DHS and CPS provides fodder for advocates to call for policy changes at the macrosystem level, and to push for an integration of anti-poverty work into domestic violence advocacy. Third, the study findings on the different ways in which service providers at women's service agencies and at public agencies are falling short and not coming through for women experiencing IPV can be used for the improvement and development of existing and new interventions. Finally, this study was intentionally focused on the experiences of survivors with children, so the study findings can illustrate the many different child related concerns women have during the process of leaving. These findings can be used by domestic violence advocates as well as child advocates to better serve survivors especially in meeting the intersecting needs of women and their children. Furthermore, the findings can be utilized by child advocates specifically to better understand the constraints under which IPV survivors are parenting and the decisions they are able to make. In this way, child advocates can provide services for children with more sensitivity to their mothers' circumstances.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer

Help Us Learn About the Needs of Domestic Abuse Survivors with Children

Who can participate?

We want to talk to women with children who have been in painful relationships (emotionally, psychologically, and/or physically abusive) and have physically left the relationship two or more times. If you would like to share your experiences to help other women with children in similar situations, we would like to hear from you.

What is involved in participating?

If you volunteer for this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately one hour. The interview will take place at a safe location that is convenient for you. All the interviews are strictly confidential. At the end of the interview you will receive **$30** as payment for your time.

Who do I contact to learn more or to schedule an interview?

If you are interested in participating or would like to find out more about the study:
Please call **Nidal Karim** at **(517)614-0349**
OR
If would like the researcher to contact you, please fill out a "**Permission to Contact"** form at the **RA desk** or from your **support group facilitator**. Once you fill out this form, the researcher will contact you

Appendix B: Permission to contact form

Permission to Contact Form
I am interested in learning more about and/or participating in the study being conducted by Nidal Karim with shelter residents currently at Turning Point. Please contact me in the following manner:

- □ **Call and ask for me at Turning Point Shelter**
    - **Best times to reach you at the shelter:**

      _____

      _____

- □ **Call me on my personal cell-phone number: _____**
    - **Best times to reach you on your cell-phone:**

      _____

      _____

Name:_____ Date:_____

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Participant ID Number _____
Date Interview Conducted __/__ /__ Length of Interview_____
Introduction and Consent:

This interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete. Is there somewhere you have to be after the interview, or is it ok if we run a little bit over?

I am doing these interviews to gain a better understanding of the different kinds of things that help or get in the way for survivors with children when they leave their abusive partners.

I really appreciate your willingness to talk with me today and share your experiences. The information you provide will be extremely helpful.

If it's ok with you, I will be tape recording this interview. It's going to be hard for me to get everything down on paper, so the tape can help me later on filling in anything I might have missed. The only other people who might listen to this tape will be my academic supervisor and a transcriptionist. When the study is done, the audio file will be destroyed. May I tape record our discussion?

Everything we discuss today is private and confidential—your name will not be connected to anything you say. Your name is not on this interview or the tape.

As we're going through the interview, if you need to take a break or stop, just let me know. If there are any questions that you don't want to answer, just say so, and I will move on to the next section. You do not have to answer all of the questions in this interview.

Before we get started I need to get your consent to be interviewed (go through procedures to obtain informed consent).

Do you have any questions before we start?

Section 1: Relationship History and Beginning of Abuse

Q. Let us start by talking about your most recent relationship: can you tell me a little bit about when and how your relationship started?

Probes:

How and when did you meet?

Did you already have children or did you have the children with him?

Q. Can you tell me about the time the abuse started?

Probes:

When did things start getting difficult?

What kinds of things were happening, what was he doing?

When did the abuse start? Was the abuse physical, emotional, economic, and/or sexual?

Was anyone else aware of the abuse?

How did your children react to what was happening?

Q. Did you have or look for any outside help when things started getting difficult e.g. family, friends, outside services?

Probes:

If yes, what kinds of support did you receive and from whom?

Were there instances where you tried to get help from outside sources but they were not helpful? If so, can you tell me about those?

Sources of help to cover: family/friends; health services; civil/legal services; mental health services; social service agencies; domestic violence specific agencies.

Section 2: First Departure:

Q. Sometimes women leave just to cool down or to send a message, while other times women leave with the intention of ending the relationship.

When was the first time you thought about leaving?

Probes:

What led you to think about leaving?

Q. Could you tell me about the first time you left and the types of things that influenced your decision to leave?

Probes:

Was there a specific event that led you to leave? What was different about that event that you decided to leave?

Did you leave with the intention of returning?

Did you bring the children with you when you left?

What were the kinds of things that you thought at that time you needed in order to leave?

What were the kinds of things going on that made it difficult for you to leave?

When you left, what was your overall situation? Were there things that enabled you to leave? Did you have a place to live, money, etc?

What kinds of systems or services did you think would be available to you once you left, and what were your feelings about whether they would be able to help you (e.g. legal

services, police, social services, medical services, welfare, etc.)?

Q. Could you tell me about your experiences with your partner after you left?
Probes:
Did you have contact with him after you left? If so, for what reason (children, money, etc.)?
How did your partner respond to your leaving (e.g. safety, harassment, kids, etc.)?

Q. Could you tell me about your experiences with looking for and getting help after you left?
Probes:
What kind of help/support did you try to get or did you find available to you after you left (e.g. financial support, housing, childcare, legal, family support etc.)?
What kind of support if any, did you need but were unable to get (e.g. financial support, housing, childcare, legal, family support etc.)?
What barriers did you face in trying to get what you needed? What kinds of things got in the way (e.g. interference from assailant, unhelpful interactions with agencies/organizations, etc.)?
Was the support you got satisfactory?
How did family and friends react and/or help or not help?

Q. Could you tell me about how things were with your children after you left?
Probes:
What were your children's reactions during this time? How did this affect you?
What kinds of things specifically related to your children, if any, impacted your situation after you left (e.g. custody, child welfare, childcare, safety of children, their desires about the relationship and their father)?

Section 3: First Return:
Q. How long was it before you went back? What factors impacted your decision to return?
Probes:
Did you feel like you had a choice about your decision to return? If not, what kinds of things made you feel like you did not have a choice (e.g. money, children, housing, feelings for him, safety, etc.)?
Did your children impact your decision to return? If so, how did they impact you (e.g. missing the abuser, custody issues, childcare issues, threats by abuser to hurt the children, etc.)?

Q. What were things like after you returned?
Probes:
How did your partner react when you returned (e.g. levels and type of abuse, changes etc.)?
What kinds of services/help if any did you continue getting after returning? Were these helpful in keeping you and/or your children safe?
Were there services/help you would have liked to have continued to receive after

returning that you did not receive? How did not getting this help impact your situation after returning?
When you returned, how were things different, if at all, compared to before you had left?

Section 4: Subsequent Departures and Returns:

Q. How many more times did you leave before you left this time?
For each departure:
Q. Can you tell me about the times you left and then returned?
Probes:
What were the kinds of things that you thought at that time you needed in order to leave?
What were the kinds of things going on that made it difficult for you to leave?
How was leaving this time different from the previous times?
Did you leave with the intention of returning?
Did you bring the children with you when you left?
When you left, what was your overall situation? Did you have a place to live, money, etc?

Q. What were things like with the abuser after you left?
Probes:
Did you have contact with the abuser after you left? If so, for what reason (children, money, etc.)?
How did the abuser respond to your leaving (e.g. safety, harassment, kids, etc.)?

Q. Could you tell me about the help you got or tried to get this time?
Probes:
What kind of support did you try to get or did you find available to you after you left (e.g. financial support, housing, childcare, legal, family support etc.)?
What kind of support did you need but were unable to get (e.g. financial support, housing, childcare, legal, family support etc.)?
What barriers did you face in trying to get what you needed? What kinds of things got in the way (e.g. interference from assailant, unhelpful interactions with agencies/organizations, child custody issues, etc.)?
Was the support you got satisfactory?
How did family and friends react and/or help or not help?

Q. What were your experiences with your children this time?
Probes:
What were your children's reactions during this time? How did this affect you?
Were there things related specifically to the children (e.g. childcare, child custody, child welfare etc.) that made things harder?

For each return:
Q. When did you return this time? What influenced your decision to return this time?
Probes:
Did you feel like you had a choice about your decision to return? If not, what kinds of

things made you feel like you did not have a choice (e.g. money, children, housing, feelings for him, safety, etc.)?
Was this return different from the previous times? If yes, can you tell me in what way?

Q. How if at all did your children influence your return?
Probes:
Did your children or issues related to your children impact your decision to return? If so, how did they impact you (e.g. missing the abuser, custody issues, childcare issues, threats by abuser to harm children, etc.)?

Q. What happened after you returned this time?
Probes:
How did your partner react when you returned (e.g. levels and type of abuse, changes etc.)?
What kinds of services/help, if any, did you continue getting after returning? Were these helpful in keeping you and/or your children safe?
Were there services/help you would have liked to have continued to receive after returning that you did not receive? How did not getting this help impact your situation after returning?
When you returned, how were things different, if at all, compared to before you had left?

Section 5: Current Departure
Q. What led to your being here now? Can you tell me about how you decided to come to shelter this time and the different things that influenced your decision?
Probes:
What kinds of things enabled you to leave this time (e.g. financial support, social service agencies, family/friends, etc.)?
Do you intend to return this time? What kinds of things are influencing your decision to return or not return?

Q. How did you children if at all impact your leaving and your current decisions now that you are in shelter?
Probes:
What kinds of external factors related to your children (e.g. childcare, custody, child welfare, etc.), if any, impacted your ability to leave this time?
Did concern about your children's well-being impact your decision to leave this time? If so, can you tell me in what ways?
Are your children with you here at shelter? How do they feel about this separation (and how might that impact your future decisions)?

Q. What are the different places or people you are seeking help from now (family/friends, social services, police, legal, welfare, etc.)?
Probes:
Are these resources helpful to you?
What barriers are you facing in getting what you need?
What are the barriers you are facing, if any, especially related to your children?

How are family and friends reacting and/or helping or not helping?

Probes: (If she intends to return)
What is influencing your decision to return? How will the kids respond to this? Concerns?
What kinds of services / support do you think you need to help you and your children stay safe after you return?
Do you think these services are available to you?

Probes: (If she does not intend to return)
What's influencing your decision not to return? How will the kids respond to this? Concerns?
What kinds of services, resources, and support will help you achieve your goal of not returning this time?
Do you think these services, resources, support are available to you?
What barriers do you anticipate in being able to stay away?
Are there barriers related to your children that you think will make it difficult to stay away? If so, what are they, and how will they make things difficult?

Probes: (If she is not sure whether she will return)
What kinds of things will influence your decision to return vs. not return?
Will your kids play a role in the decision? If so, how?
What kinds of services, resources, and support will help you make a decision?
What kinds of services, resources, and support will help you achieve your goal once you have made a decision?
Do you think these services, resources, support are available to you?

Section 5: Demographics

Before we end this interview, I have a couple of demographic questions and a few questions about your children:

Current relationship status: (Check all that apply)
___ Single
___ Have a boyfriend
___ Have a girlfriend
___ Not living together
___ Living together
___ Married
___ Separated
___ Divorced
___ Widowed

Race:
____ Asian or Pacific Islander
____ Black

____ Hispanic
____ Native American
____ White
____ Multiracial
____ Other

Education:
___ Grade school
___ Some high school
___ High school/GED
___ Some college
___ College grad
___ Some grad school
___ Grad school grad

Employment status:
Are you currently employed? Yes ____ No ___
Income: _____ (own) _____ (with abuser)

Age: _____

Total number of children: _____

Age of each child: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

Father of each child:
1. _____ abuser / not abuser
2. _____ abuser / not abuser
3. _____ abuser / not abuser
4. _____ abuser / not abuser
5. _____ abuser / not abuser

Current child custody status of each child (if she is separated or divorced from the father):
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Appendix D

Table 2. Participant ID-Pseudonym Link and Demographics

Participant ID #	Pseudonym	Demographics
1	Donna	W, 3 kids none w/ abuser (21, 18, & 17)
2	Stephanie	MR, 32 yrs, 5 kids none w/ abuser (15, 13, 12, 8, & 2)
3	Daisy	W, 45 yrs, 4 kids all w/abuser (17, 15, 14, & 13)
4	Jamila	AA, 31yrs, 4 kids all w/abuser (8, 7, 5, & 1)
5	Tiana	AA, 34 yrs, 6 kids none w/ abuser (19, 18, 16, 15, 14, & 9)
6	Margaret	W, 38 yrs, 2 kids w/ abuser (10 & 8)
7	Crystal	AA, 2 kids none w/ abuser (19 & 17)
8	Alicia	AA, 27yrs, 2 kids none w/ abuser (7 & 7)
9	Dolores	H, 31yrs, 4 kids, 3 w/abuser (6, 5, 4, & 2)
10	Kendra	AA, 26yrs, 3 kids, 1 w/ abuser (6, 3 & 8 mnths) & currently pregnant
11	Nancy	AA, 28yrs, 4 kids none w/ abuser (11, 9, 8, & 2)
12	Erika	AA, 30yrs, 2 kids, 1 w/abuser (12 & 1)
13	Shantana	AA, 27yrs, 3 kids none w/ abuser (12, 10, & 2)
14	Rhonda	AA, 21yrs, 1 kid w/ abuser (4)
15	Lakeesha	AA, 23 yrs, 1 kid w/ abuser and currently pregnant with 2nd w/ abuser
16	Beverly	W, 22yrs, 2 kids none w/ abuser (5 & 2)
17	Christina	AA, 24yrs, 2 kids (6 & 1) younger one w/ abuser
18	Tania	NA, 30yrs, 3 kids none w/ abuser, and pregnant w/abuser (12, 10, 2)
19	Jasmine	W, 25yrs, 5 kids all w/ abuser (7, 5, 4, 3, & 1)
W=WHITE AA=AFRICAN AMERICAN H=HISPANIC MR=MULTIRACIAL N=NATIVE AMERICAN		

Appendix E

Table 3. Summary of Assertion Checks

Assertion/ Participant	1	2	3	4a	4b	4c	5	6	%
Donna	C	C	C	N/A*	I	C	C	C	75%
Stephanie	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	C	88%
Daisy	C	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	88%
Jamila	C	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	88%
Tiana	C	C	C	N/A*	C	I	C	C	75%
Margaret	C	C	C	C	I	I	C	C	75%
Crystal	C	C	C	N/A*	C	I	C	C	75%
Alicia	C	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	88%
Dolores	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
Kendra	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
Nancy	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
Erika	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
Shantana	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
Rhonda	C	C	C	C	I	I	C	C	75%
Lakeesha	C	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	88%
Beverly	C	C	C	N/A*	I	C	C	C	75%
Christina	C	C	C	C	I	C	C	C	88%
Tania	C	C	C	N/A*	I	C	C	C	75%
Jasmine	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	100 %
%	100%	100%	100 %	74%	63%	58%	100 %	100%	

*Assertion 4a was N/A to these survivors because their children did not have any relationship with the abuser

KEY: C = Confirm; I = Insufficient Information; N/A= Not Applicable

Appendix F

Table 4. Frequency of Participant Endorsement of Themes within Assertions

Theme	**Participant IDs**
Assertion 1: Family/Peer	
No social support	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19
Negative social support	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Assertion 2: Abuser	
After she left, Abuser made promises and pleas	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19
After she left, Abuser threatened /stalking/violence	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17,
Kept her captive making it difficult to leave	1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 19
Assertion 3: Concerns about Children	
Hit children or endangered children's safety	2, 3, 9, 10, 12, 19
-caused her to leave	2, 3, 9, 12, 19
-caused her to send child away	10
Children witnessed violence	4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
-causing her to leave	4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18
-caused her to send child away	17
Childcare concerns	2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19
Material needs of children concern	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19
Assertion 4a: Abuser child relationship	
Abuser child relationship - hindrance	2, 3, 4, 6, 8,9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19
- Hindrance child custody	3, 4, 6, 9, 10
- Hindrance visitation	3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 17, 19
- Children missing abuser	2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12,14, 19,
Abuser child relationship - facilitator	12, 13
Abuser maintained good guy image with kids	8, 11, 12, 14
Assertion 4b: Abuser relationship w/ family peers	3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19
Hindrance- endangering family/friends	5, 7, 9, 10, 11
Hindrance – intermingled close with family/friends	4, 8
Hindrance – family disliked abuser	3, 7, 19
Facilitator – abuser fearful of family	12, 13, 15, 17
Assertion 4c: abuser w/ survivor exosystem	1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19
Employer	1, 13, 16
Police – links to	1, 11,
Police – in trouble with	7, 9, 10,17, 18, 19
Medical	2
Landlord	12
Assertion 5: exosystem structures	
DV shelters (current shelter stay)	
Needed immediate safety from abuser	1, 2 , 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Needed practical support/referrals	4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19
Needed financial resources/ job access	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 19

Table 4 (cont'd)

Needed transportation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19
Needed material goods	2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 , 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Needed child specific resources including childcare	2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19
Did not have all needs met (all DV shelter stays)	1, 2, 3, 4, , 9, 12, 13, 16
30 days not enough	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19
Section 8	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 17, 18, 19
Need for ongoing assistance after shelter	1, 4, 9, 12, 17, 18
DHS	all
-Cash assistance (FIP)	2, 3,4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18
-SER	2, 3, 16
-SSI	2, 12
-Food Stamps	2, 3, 6, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
-Childcare assistance	6, 10, 13, 15, 16
-Medicaid	2, 3, 6, 8, 15, 16, 17, 18
Police	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19
-Unresponsive or negative	2, 4, 7, 9, 10 [neighbor called), 17, 18. 19
-Responsive and helpful	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19
-County A vs. other county	2, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18
-Intentionally didn't involve police	8, 10, 11, 13, 15
PPO	
PPO – doesn't think will protect	2, 6, 8, 11, 13
PPO – got one at some point	4, 5, 7, 9, 12
PPO worked (police arrested when he broke it)	7, 12
Child Support	
Child Support – doesn't get or unstable from abuser	3, 9, 11, 14, 17
Child Support – did get consistently from abuser	10,
Child Support – doesn't think abuser will pay	4, 7
CPS	
Had involvement at some point	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 19
Fearful to disclose DV in fear of CPS	2, 17
CPS removed children	5, 10, 19
Assertion 6: Exosystem structure gatekeepers	
Shelter positive	1 , 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18
Shelter negative	2, 3, 4, 9, 13, 16
DHS worker unresponsive or late	2, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16
DHS worker responsive or prompt	8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17
CPS caseworker positive	5, 10
CPS caseworker negative	5, 19

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